

## PRESERVING XISUO VILLAGE: A DELICATE DANCE BETWEEN ETHNIC TOURISM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

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**Abstract:** The recent surge in rural tourism development has presented unique opportunities for ethnic villages, allowing them to leverage their distinct cultural characteristics for tourism. As the scope of tourism development and infrastructure construction continues to expand, the efficiency of the tourism industry has experienced considerable growth and enhancement. The tourism sector has yielded significant benefits, but it is not without challenges and risks. Striking the right balance between preserving the ethnic identity of these villages and fostering their development remains a complex challenge. Overprotecting them may hinder growth, while excessive development can lead to the erasure of their ethnic character. Ethnic villages play a multifaceted role, serving as the shared homes for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and as physical spaces for interaction, communication, and integration among various ethnic groups throughout history. Xisuo Village, situated in Ma'erkang City, Sichuan Province, stands as a pivotal protected entity among ethnic villages and faces both opportunities and challenges in its tourism industry. This paper, rooted in the historical development and ethnic distinctiveness of Xisuo Village, adopts the interaction, communication, and integration among various ethnic groups as its primary research focus. It delves into the issues confronting its tourism development and explores strategies for sustainable tourism development in the region.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Tourism, Rural Tourism Development, Xisuo Village, Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Ethnic Identity Preservation

### Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of rural tourism, many ethnic villages have ushered in new opportunities in the development of tourism by virtue of their own ethnic characteristics. The scale of tourism development and construction continues to expand, and the efficiency of the tourism industry continues to improve and upgrade. The tourism industry has brought certain dividends in terms of data, but there are also some problems and risks. Excessive protection of ethnic villages is difficult to meet the needs of development, and excessive development is the destruction of ethnic villages. Ethnic villages are not only the common production and living homes of compatriots of all ethnic groups,

but also the physical space for association, communication and integration of various ethnic groups in the historical development. Xisuo Village in Ma'erkang City, Sichuan Province, as a key protection unit of ethnic villages, its tourism industry is also standing at the forefront, with both opportunities and challenges. Based on the historical development and ethnic characteristics of Xisuo Village, this paper takes the association, communication and integration of various ethnic groups as the main line of research, analyzes the problems faced by its tourism development, and explores the sustainable development strategy of tourism.

## 1. Introduction to Xisuo Village

Xisuo Village is located in Ma'erkang Town in the southeast of Ma'erkang City (the administrative area of Zhuokeji Town was assigned to the jurisdiction of Malkang Town in 2019), about 7 kilometers away from the center of Ma'erkang City, with an average altitude of about 2700 meters, an area of about 95 square kilometers, and a population of 349 people <sup>[1]</sup>. The main ethnic groups in Xisuo Village are Tibetans, among which Jiarong Tibetans are the main ones. It is the main place of Jiarong Tibetan chieftain culture. The village has a national key cultural relic protection unit - Zhuokeji Tusi chieftain official village, provincial cultural relic protection unit - Xisuo folk houses. At present, there are 63 households in the village, and about 36 households with reception capacity.

## 2. Introduction to Jiarong Tibetan Chieftain Culture

As for the definition of chieftain culture, Chinese scholars generally agree that the integration of chieftain system and nationality produce that. Through the review of relevant literature, the culture of Zhuokeji chieftain culture can be summarized as follows: Zhuokeji chieftain culture is the sum of material culture and spiritual culture formed and developed by Jiarong Tibetan and other ethnic groups living in Zhuokeji area under the background of the chieftain system in the 600 years of history. Zhuokeji chieftain culture is an important content of Jiarong Tibetan culture and a major feature that is different from other Tibetan cultures. Based on the understanding of the cultural connotation of Zhuokeji chieftain culture, it can be subdivided into the following three parts: first, the space carrier of the construction of the chieftain culture - the chieftain architectural complex; second, the chieftain cultural inheritance mode - the religious folk custom activities; third, the natural resources in Zhuoki.

### 2.1. Chieftain Architectural Complex Culture

The national cultural relics protection unit in Xisuo village, known as "a pearl in the history of oriental

architecture" – Zhuokeji Chieftain Official Village has always been the research object of many architectural scholars, which reflects the architectural characteristics of Jiarong Tibetan culture: taking bluestone, yellow mud, wood as the main building materials; the hierarchical using attributes of ground floor corrals, middle floor dwellings, and top floor sutra halls; corridors and cloisters connect each functional area and meet the lighting needs. Its Han cultural characteristics are also very significant, such as imitating Chinese railings and lattice windows, which fully show the architectural characteristics of Han and Qing Dynasty <sup>[2]</sup>. The blending of Han and Tibetan architectural culture in Zhuokeji official village is evident, and the folk houses in Xisuo Village also show this characteristic. The fortress-like buildings with well-arranged and distinct heights are the main characteristics of Xisuo folk houses, which constitute the real space of multi-ethnic association, communication and integration.

### 2.2. Religious and Folk Activities

As an important carrier of Jiarong Tibetan culture, the religious culture in Xisuo village also presents the characteristics of pluralism and symbiosis, with Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, Benbo religion and other religious sects co-existing. In many temples in the Zhuokji area, including the Dandalun Temple in Xisuo Village, the annual ten-day "Skurynchimpo" ritual (celebrating the festival to commemorate the emperor's awarding of the chieftain) is very grand, where chieftains and headmen wear official robes and hats given by the emperor to celebrate with the common people, including acrobatics, lion dances, circle dances, etc<sup>[3]</sup>, which has strong characteristics of the association, communication and integration between Han culture and Tibetan culture.

### 2.3. Abundant Material Conditions

Ma'erkang City is located in the southern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, in the northwest of the Sichuan basin. About 2700 meters above sea level, Xisuo village has less extreme climate, known as "natural oxygen bar". Rich in natural resources, it is one of the largest coniferous forests in China, and it is

also rich in medicinal plants such as Fritillaria, Notopterygium root, Gastrodia elata Blume and Cordyceps sinensis. Its grassland is abundant and can be grazed in all seasons<sup>[4]</sup>. The rich material resources constitute the material basis of Xisuo Village's production and life, and are also the necessary conditions to attract the Han and Hui ethnic groups to trade and exchange, and the realistic basis for the formation of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups.

### **3. The Development of Xisuo Village Tourism Industry**

#### **3.1. Introduction to Tourism Resources**

Xisuo folk houses in Xisuo Village, as cultural relics protection units in Sichuan Province, have become the primary viewing places for tourists with their scattered and colorful buildings. The turning bridge connecting the two sides of the Xisuo folk houses and the Zhuokeji chieftain official village on the other side of the river are also the necessary viewing places for tourists. The Dandalun Temple with a history of 600 years in the village is a holy place for many tourists and local residents to worship and pray for blessings<sup>[5]</sup>. With the development of new types of tourism in recent years, interactive tourism experiences such as Buddha painting, textile learning, and Tibetan brewing have come into being, which is of great significance in realizing the sustainable development of the Jiarong Tibetan culture. It can be said that the strong Jiarong Tibetan culture, architectural culture and Buddhist culture in Xisuo village constitute the uniqueness and pluralism and inclusiveness of Xisuo Village tourism.

#### **3.2. The Development of Catering and Accommodation and Handicraft Industry**

Xisuo Village currently has a reception capacity of about 30 lodging hotels, of which about 24 are logged on the network booking platform, including Xayang lodging, Xiaoguanzhai lodging and other lodging with the integration of Han and Tibetan cultures, as well as lodging with a strong Jiarong Tibetan cultural flavor, such as Ajiana, Alang Tibetan and Mosibu lodging. There are about 20 catering enterprises with reception

capacity, which are dominated by Jiarong Tibetan catering, including Kangba hot pot and Tibetan morning tea. There are about 5 national cultural goods stores in Xisuo village, mainly dealing with some Tibetan Buddhist jewelry, small souvenirs of Jiarong Tibetan culture, Tibetan clothing, Tibetan cloth and so on. With the increase of foreign tourists and the arrival of foreign businesses and self-employed people in recent years, the two cafes and bistros have also added new content to the restaurant scene in Xisuo village.

### **4. Existing Problems of Tourism Development in Xisuo Village**

#### **4.1. The Elements of Tourism Development are not Complete**

##### **4.1.1. Outdated Supporting Infrastructure in Xisuo Village**

With the upgrading of tourism consumption, whether the local living facilities or the infrastructure are perfect, has become one of the main considerations for travelers to choose a tourist destination. Xisuo village, as an important part of tourism in Ma'erkang city, still has a lot of room for infrastructural development. Among them, the fire safety problem is more prominent. For example, fire facilities are backward, fire escape is strewn with debris and private cars and other serious problems. As the first floor of Xisuo folk houses is mainly livestock breeding, the pollutants and excrement of livestock are directly expose, which affects the tourist experience and the respiratory health of local residents and tourists. The project of human and animal separation is promoted slowly. The environment of public toilets in Xisuo village is poor, the degree of cleaning cycle is low, and the tourist experience is worse. These problems not only affect the vast majority of tourists, but also affect the sense of living of local residents.

##### **4.1.2. Lack of Professional Talents**

In the era of digital information explosion, it is necessary to use the Internet to change services, brands and content in a timely manner. However, most of the tourism practitioners in Xisuo village have

low educational qualifications, and some even have problems in Chinese communication, not to mention the operation of self-media. Although the Ma'erkang Municipal Government have held labor skills training for tourism practitioners for many times, the lack of training time, the limited number of trainees, and the lack of training content are also difficult to balance, which leads to the improvement of talent skills at the surface stage. Although there are foreign operators, the core elements are mastered by foreign operators, and local people are mostly engaged in basic catering services, residential cleaning and other basic work, with low income and strong substitutability. There are cases of young people returning home, but the lack of talent is a long-term problem for the scale of tourism development.

#### ***4.1.3. Insufficient Capital Volume of Tourism Development***

The capital cost of tourism investment and development is high, and the return cycle is long, so it is difficult to achieve breakthrough development by relying only on the government and local residents. Only with the participation of multiple elements such as social capital and large tourism enterprises can the upgrading and development of tourism be realized. At present, several homestays, restaurants and handicraft shops in Xisuo village are small in scale and simple, with weak anti-risk ability. If the development only relies on government planning and the owners' own funds, the risk is high and the return is small, which will not only make it difficult to recover funds, but also cause the phenomenon of poverty.

#### ***4.2. Solidified Publicity Model of National Culture and Chieftain Culture***

In the era of self-media outbreak, the traditional publicity model has been unable to meet the needs of the new tourism model. The tourism development of Xisuo village is mainly advertised by highway advertisement and Ma'erkang government. Although the tourism development of Xisuo village has also been promoted on social platforms due to the publicity of Xiaohongshu and Douyin expert account,

it is obviously not enough to rely only on the recommendation of several platforms.

#### ***4.3. Incomplete Management of Tourist Areas***

The hygiene standard, safety standard and industry standard of accommodation and catering in Xisuo village are all lack of unification and are more arbitrary. The large fluctuation of accommodation prices, the big difference between online booking and offline prices, and the poor service attitude of relevant practitioners have a negative impact on the standardized management of tourist attractions and the healthy development of the tourism industry. The lack of institutional norms and industry norms for the scenic spot industry by the government and other subjects will eventually lead to passive situations such as chaos in the tourism industry, low price war, and poor service.

### **5. Countermeasures for High-Quality Tourism Development from the Perspective of Ethnic Association, Communication and Integration**

#### ***5.1. Increasing Government Support***

##### ***5.1.1. Increasing Infrastructure and Supporting Facilities***

First, the government should strengthen infrastructure construction and improve the reception capacity of Xisuo village. The investment in fire safety and the transformation of lighting engineering should be increased; the improvement of the "human-animal separation" project and the renovation of toilets should constantly be followed up in order to provide a comfortable, safe and healthy space for local residents and tourists. Second, the government should continuously improve the policies related to the demolition and construction of residential buildings and protect traditional buildings. Third, the level of modern facilities in Xisuo village and optical fiber data network in Xisuo village should be improved; the rules and regulations of the tourism industry in the village should be optimized; the medical conditions and levels of the village health center and the emergency incident handling capacity in the village should be improved. Fourth, the skill level of tourism

operators needs to be improved; skills training in service level, language communication and other aspects can regularly be carried out, and completion certificates and certificates of qualification or other forms can be issued to enterprises or individual.

#### **5.1.2. Introduction of Capital and Enterprises**

With the continuous development of rural tourism market, various industries such as catering industry and accommodation industry in ethnic villages have gradually changed from individual management to enterprise management. The introduction of professional technology, operation and development of tourism companies is not only conducive to expanding the development of local tourism, but also provides new ideas for the diversification of local industries. Various modes of cooperation, such as “government + enterprise + individual”, “enterprise + individual”, “enterprise + collective economy + individual”, will provide more references for achieving sustainable development of tourism.

#### **5.2. Upgrade of Publicity Mode**

The richness and diversity of self-media categories are enough to prove the high yield brought by self-media. By means of multi-platform union such as Wechat, Douyin, Twitter, and Kuaishou account, we can tap the potential customers of different platforms, cultivate the potential traffic, guide the traffic to pay attention to the relevant short videos, and attract consumers to the offline tourism with short videos.

#### **6.3. Enhancing Multicultural Sustainability**

The discussion of the sustainability of national culture is first based on the physical space of national culture, and the protection of national architecture is the focus of cultural sustainable development. When emphasizing the dividends brought by tourism development, we should also emphasize how much our impact on tourist destinations has been reduced. Protecting ethnic buildings, optimizing the residential space management of Xisuo folk houses with the concept of management units, and making appropriate planning and development are important contents for realizing the sustainable development of architectural culture [6]. Intangible cultural heritage is not only the

core of local culture, but also the core of the development of local tourism. The classification and management of cultural heritage through the systematic sorting out of the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups in the form of song and dance dramas, poems, film and television scripts, etc. is an important part of the intangible cultural heritage to realize sustainable development.

#### **6.4. Digitalization of Tourism Promotes Association and Communication and Integration Among Ethnic Groups**

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has brought many opportunities and challenges to mankind, and the good use of artificial intelligence can provide more convenience and reference for the development of tourism. Through AI analysis, visitors can be provided with differentiated travel and convenient experiences. At the same time, tourism industry practitioners can timely adjust the operation content based on data analysis, timely update and upgrade tourism products, and provide more convenient exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups.

### **6. Conclusion**

The sustainable development of tourism industry in Xisuo Village is not only the need for the preservation and inheritance of traditional buildings and temples in Xisuo Village, but also the need for sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage. Digitalization, modernization and capitalization empower Xisuo Village tourism industry is not only the only way for local economic growth, but also a realistic way for local residents to increase their income.

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