

China Adopts Rural Tourism as a Development Tool

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Abstract

In recent years, rural tourism has become ever more prominent as a tool to increase visitors' awareness and as an attraction to a destination as well as a tool for economic development in the countryside of China. Rural tourism is a new type of tourism industry, which makes rural communities as its sites, rural distinctive production, living styles and idyllic landscapes as its objects. The writer aims to analyze the theory of tourism life cycle proposed by Butler, current problems, types, modes in China rural tourism, and finally puts forward some measures in developing rural tourism in China.

Key words : rural tourism, theory of tourism life cycle, development, measures

Introduction

Rural tourism can be traced back to the middle of 19th century. It became a large-scaled tourism activity in late 1980's. Rural tourism means to make rural communities as its sites, rural distinctive production, living styles and idyllic landscapes as its objects. Its theme is tourism involved in agriculture, which mainly depends on natural landscapes, idyllic scenery and agricultural resources around cities, so as to satisfy the needs of urban residents - "To be back in nature". Facts and figures show that rural tourism is getting more and more favor, and more and more popular domestically and internationally.

Rural tourism in China is classified into two, one is traditional rural tourism, another is modern rural tourism. Traditional rural tourism came into being after the Industrial Revolution. It comes from the form - "For salary men to go to native home villages". Such traditional rural tourism activities take place in holidays and at weekends, which cannot make effective development in local economy. Nor can it increase opportunities for employment or improve local financial condition. Modern rural tourism came into existence in 1980's, which is a new type of tourism modes. Modern rural tourism activities take place not only in holidays but also at weekends. Besides, rural tourism makes full use of rural scenery, natural environments, local architectures, cultural resources and so on and so forth, whose contribution to rural economy reflects the increasing income in public finance as well as increasing employment for local farmers. At the same time, rural tourism has input new vigor in traditional economy, which diminishes the outflow of rural population. Rural tourism is a second income for farmers in the countryside, thus, the goal for farmers to have employment and make profit in native places has come true. What is discussed in this paper is modern tourism in China.

China occupies an area of nine million six hundred thousand square kilometers. It is rich in natural scenery, various farming styles and traditional customs, which are greatly influenced by seasons

and climates. Thus, rural tourism is characterized by variation of time. Such changes in seasons and climates are endowed with different scenes and features, which can better meet the needs of people of different tastes. In the meantime, regional decentralization of rural tourism resources results

in decentralization of rural tourism. Quite different from the congestion and disorder of urban tourism, this special decentralization can relax tourists from the tension in tourism activities and motivate their passion to the maximum.



Map of China

Folk culture in China is long in history and abundant in culture, which makes rural tourism of high taste from cultural point of view. Folk programs, industrial arts, folk architectures, folk music and dances, marriage tabu, folklores all have their cultural origins. They are of strong temptation to urban tourists, due to its simplicity, un-sophistication and mystery.

As is known, rural tourists are mainly salary men, urban residents and intellectuals who pay attention to the quality of their life. Popularity lays stress on differences of participants and their pro-

fessions as well as the similarity of their income and consumption. They have the tendency for delight of their life and consumption. As rural tourism occurs in the countryside, receptionists are mainly local farmers. This tourism style is focused on experiencing rural life and customs, which makes the cost relatively low, compared with other styles of tourism. Accordingly, the cost of rural tourism is somewhat low and workable, therefore, the price that farmers charge urban tourists is at a reasonable and mutually acceptable level.

Rural tourism consists of not only sightseeing, but also excursion, health keeping, custom experiencing, investigation, visits to forefathers and other tourism activities. The multi-functions of rural tourism result in universal participation of tourists, such as fishing, boating and farming. Personal experience is its key. Tourists experience customs and morals of rural people and the joy of farming while purchasing agricultural by-products and folk workmanship to their taste, which is so called "to kill more birds with one stone."

Statistically, about seventy million poverty-stricken people, which is one third of all poverty-stricken population in China have got profit over the past 25 years by developing tourism. For example, in Guizhou Province, about seven hundred thousand people have got rid of poverty by way of developing rural tourism.

Background

With increasing income and more leisure, people in China have more desire for tours, and their desirous types are more than ever before, which has forcefully pushed the development of rural

tourism. As has been academically reported, when GDP reaches \$300 per capita annually, people have need for domestic tours; when GDP reaches \$1000 per capita annually, people have need for short excursions to foreign countries; when GDP reaches \$3000 per capita annually, people have need for international tours and so on. In other words, when GDP reaches from \$300 to \$1000 per capita annually, it is the period in which developing tendency for rural tourism becomes increasing. Take Hunan, China as an example, when GDP reaches \$300, reports from media and academic field show that there is an increasing demand for tours in Zhangjiajie, whose tourism resources are of the world grade. When GDP reaches \$650, traditional custom tourism resources and suburban tourism resources will have much attraction to tourists, such as Zhangguying village in Yueyang, Tong cultural village in Tongdao, South Great Wall in Fenuang, etc. When GDP reaches \$1000, places once hotly argued as elite Zeng Guofang's home village, and ancient cottages in remote areas as Hongjiang traditional cottages and other sites are visited by more people.

Table 1 Relationship between GDP per capita in China and Visits to Scenic Spots in Hunan

year	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
RMB	460	853	1634	4854	7063	7517	7972	9030
USD	<300	300		650				≥1000
places of tourism development	Zhangjiajie	Mengdong River	Dehan Miao Village	Tongdao Cultural Village	Fenghuang South Great Wall	Zeng Guofang's Home village	Hongjiang ancient cottage	Xinhua Zique terrace
grade	+++++	++++	+++	++++	++++	++++	+++	+++

Note: ①Figures of GDP from China Statistic Yearbook and China Statistic Communique

②GDP figures from China Statistic Bureau in 2003 (Xinhua Net)

③Figures of tourism resource development from Hunan Daily and other media in 2003

④Grade of tour visits by questionnaire and investigation

sources: Que Fudong 2004

In China, most poor regions are situated broadly in the countryside. It is the major strategic task of the Chinese Communist Party and the government to reduce poverty for all the farmers. Historic facts show that traditional agricultural cultivation in China can't make rural economy gallop, therefore, rural development needs a way out in a newly-emerged industry in developing modern economy. Tourism industry is characterized by its broad opening, close connection with other industries and good revenues of its investment. Under the drive of tourism, some poor regions in the countryside have got rich quickly. Those regions have not only made economic profit and sustainable development, but also offered chances of employment in a big scale, so as to motivate regional development.

With the development of human being as well as science and culture, people's daily life is not confined to only needs for wearing, eating, living and walking. Needs for spiritual improvement, moral uplift, health keeping are increasingly imperative. Evidences in tourism-developed countries show rural tourism can meet the needs of urban residents to be in nature physically and spiritually, thus to enrich tourism industry and to boom rural economy and culture as well.

Rural tourism is a new practice of tourism industry in China as well as new exploration for transformation for tourism developing style. Rural tourism has approached the aim to combine agriculture and tourism industry closely to each other. In addition, development of rural tourism makes full use of agricultural resources, adjusts and refines agricultural structure in

China. Meanwhile, it expands market shares of agricultural products and pushes the development of industries concerned. Besides, it protects and improves agricultural and ecological environment, improves people's living standard and environmental quality. In rural tourism, tourists know more of agricultural production, experience farmers' daily life, enjoy bumper harvest, extend the vision in tourism industry and related fields, all of which alleviates congestion in urban tourism spots.

Problems

At present, due to the impact of traditional thoughts and concepts, some rural tourism investors in China think that their investment is for the purpose of economic performance under the guidance of local government. Firstly, tourism enterprises invest in developing tourism resources as the start-up fund, they get profit after they receive tourists. In view of this purpose, once they find out there is a place rich in tourism resources, they will blindly invest and imitate the construction of other regions. Thus, most investors operate in a simple and extensive way in order to minimize investment cost. As soon as attraction of local rural resources weakens, they are apt to shift their investment. As a result, short-term investment is rather obvious.

Besides, owing to the ignorance of comprehensive development for agricultural tourism resources, projects of rural tourism such as sight-seeing sites are few. Fruit gardens are only for visitation and fruit picking while fishing gardens

are for fishing only. Custom tourism products are confined to cultural custom villages, custom festivals, custom museums, all that lacks further development. Many tourism resources worth developing haven't been made good use of, which fails to keep pace with the variety and individuality in modern tourism markets. In China, not many rural tourism projects are characteristic of local features and developing modes are almost the same. In construction of custom cultural tourism, many regions made their investment blindly without market investigation, or analysis on custom tourism resources. Everything is not in good order, while duplication in construction is universal and common. Thus, landscape construction and project development need proper planning. Tourists are greatly disappointed when they come to make tours, therefore, re-travel ratio is very limited.

Additionally, due to land decentralization and small-scaled management, types of rural tourism are numerous while industrial chain, like visitation, purchasing, sightseeing, has not yet formed. At the same time, basic facility distribution is improper. In some backward regions, relaxing facilities are scarce as well as necessities for rest, entertainment and restaurants. As we know, traffic confinement is a main factor for development in remote and poor regions. Places like Jinggangshan, Tunxi of Huangshan, etc. are rich in tourism resources, yet they are situated in remote areas with poor traffic condition. To get to the destinations, tourists have to change buses several times so as to let urban tourists down.

Destination Life Cycle Analysis

One method to evaluate distribution of costs and benefits of tourism resources is through the framework provided by a destination life-cycle model. The evolutionary nature of the tourist industry is marked by distinct stages of development, and the changing characteristics of tourism in the diverse stages lead to anticipation of varying economic and social impacts. Although several life-cycle models have been offered to explain tourism's evolutionary nature, the one most referred to and discussed is that of Butler [1980]. This model consists of six stages of development and essentially involves the familiar "S-shape" curve typical of life-cycle representations, which demonstrate the birth, growth, decline (and possible rejuvenation) of the product or industry in question.

Although the participation of this model is not without controversy, it does provide a framework for analysis. Charles Stansfield [1978] notes how closely the model fits the experience of Atlantic City even the first two stages were bypassed. After a conspicuous decline stage, the resort experienced a rejuvenation with the introduction of gambling. David Weaver [1990] also observed a reasonably close fit in the Cayman Island, although the development and involvement stages seems to have been transposed, followed by what is best described as a period of stable maturity due to the placement of limitations on growth and the protection of "foundation" assets.

Table 2 The Bulter Model

Stage	Characteristics
1. Exploration	Limited and sporadic visitation by a few adventuresome people. High degree of contact with locals and use of their facilities, but with very little social and economic impact.
2. Involvement	Increasing visitation induces some locals to, offer facilities primarily or exclusively for visitors. Contact with locals is still high, and many adjust their social patterns to accommodate the changing economic conditions. A tourist season emerges, and advertising is initiated.
3. Development	Outside investment is attracted to the destination as a well-defined tourist market emerges. Accessibility is enhanced, advertising becomes intensive and extensive, and local facilities are displaced by more elaborate and up-to-date ones. This results in a decline in local participation and control. Man-made attractions supplant original ones. Imported labor and auxiliary facilities and services may be necessary to support the rapidly growing tourist industry.
4. Consolidation	The major portion of the local economy is tied to tourism and dominated by major chains and franchises. Visitation levels continue to increase but at declining rates. Marketing and advertising efforts are further widened to extend the tourist season and attract more distant visitors. Older facilities are now second-rate and mostly undesirable.
5. Stagnation	Capacity levels for many relevant factors are reached or exceeded, resulting in environmental, social, and/or economic problems. A peak number of possible visitations are achieved, forcing facility managers to rely on repeat visitations and conventions for business. Artificial attractions supersede the natural or cultural ones, and the destination is no longer considered fashionable. Surplus capacity exists.
6A. Decline	Tourists are drawn away by newer destinations; those remaining are mostly weekend or day visitors. Tourist facilities are replaced by non-tourist ones as the area disengages from the tourist industry. This reduces even more the attraction for visitors, and the remaining facilities become less viable. Local involvement probably increases again and the price of facilities drops along with the decline in the market. The destination either becomes a tourist slum or finds itself devoid of tourist activities altogether.
6B. Rejuvenation	A dramatic change in the resource base is established. Either a new set of artificial attractions is created or a previously unexploited natural resource is utilized.

Although the model lacks certainty of outcome, it offers a framework from which the evolutionary nature of tourism can be observed or anticipated. An exploration stage may be difficult to perceive, and decline may not be inevitable, but involvement and development stages were observed in all the previous examples. These and the consolidation stage clearly emphasize the significance of tourism growth rates and the degree to which the industry can dominate an economy. Further, the transi-

tion to stagnation highlights the importance of capacity limitations as a consideration.

Once thresholds of capacity begin to be approached or exceeded, then the visitor experience and tourist industry become potentially less viable, resulting in the inability to sustain growth or even in declining rates of growth. Carrying capacity is therefore a significant concern requiring planning and management of growth and resource allocation so that the negative aspects of

tourism can be minimized while the economic, social, and natural health of the resort can be maintained.

Thresholds or capacities can exist in different forms. One is physical capacity or tangible resource limits. These can represent (1) obstacles to be overcome, such as limited facilities or services; (2) obstacles that cannot be reasonably overcome given current levels of input (financial or technological) such as new transportation links; and (3) natural resources that might be destroyed or degraded unless limits to use are imposed [Getz 1983].

Another threshold to be considered is the perception (psychological capacity) of the visitors. At what point are they no longer comfortable? One cause of discontent is congestion (although some leisure activities are not diminished by the presence of crowds). A similar problem is social capacity. When will the tolerance for tourism by the host population be exceeded? After a certain point, locals may no longer want tourism because they have been crowded out of local activities, their culture may have been damaged, or their environment has been degraded [Getz 1983].

Despite the difficulty in defining and measuring these thresholds, there is an interrelationship between them and the various stages of life cycle. By means of planning and control at each stage, a desired position can either be maintained or an unacceptable one could be improved. Whenever one of these capacities has been exceeded, regardless of the stage, a measure of decline will have occurred. The destination life cycle approach, therefore, offers some insight into the probable

course of change and the knowledge that different stages require different methods of control [Martin and Uysal 1990].

As a matter of fact, the stages are closely related to certain economic foundations. The present rural tourism in China is now from involvement to development, while consolidation has emerged in some large and medium sized cities or relatively developed regions. Nianfen Village in Dongguan, Guangdong province, Modern Agricultural Park in Zhuhai City, Agricultural and Forestry World in Taihu, Rural Economic and Comprehensive Zone in Beijing, etc., are typical examples of consolidation.

Basic Types of Rural Tourism in China

Types represent different regional performances with different distances from cities at the same period of time, which reflects regional distribution of tourism resources of openers and their market strategies. By comparison, regional classification is explained in Table 3.

Modes of Rural Tourism

Successful experiences of rural tourism from other countries have driven China to develop its own rural tourism over the past twenty years. All these years, projects of rural tourism have been made and landscapes built up. Based on resources and conditions of rural tourism development, here the writer classifies modes of rural tourism as follows:

Table 3 Comparison between Types Dependant on Cities and Nature

Type	Type dependant on cities (within 20 km of a city)	Type dependant on nature (over 20 km of a city)
characteristics	characteristic of the countryside and farm,natural and technological	dependant on minority culture or landscape resources, stress on rural cultural taste
function	as a second house for urban residents, to satisfy tourists with eating, living and touring at weekends	assistant tourism products for grand landscapes, tour projects characterized by folk customs, the countryside, e.g. meals and entertainment activities
condition	dependant on cities, convenient traffic, good rural vegetable landscapes, quite different from cities	unique landscape resources and resources characteristic of the countryside and minority
case	Nongjiale in Sichuan and Hunan	Tianlongtun in Guizhou

sources: Zou Tongjian 2005

(1) Nongjiale Rural Tourism

Nongjiale is a key product of rural tourism in China, whose receptionists are local families. Nongjiale makes use of idyllic landscapes and natural ecological environment, rural culture and farmers' daily life as tourism resources, and that is characteristic of agricultural experience, such as eating what farmers eat, living in farmers' cottages, doing farming work, enjoying happiness that farmers enjoy.

Nongjiale is a newly-emerged and widely adopted tourism form all over the countryside in China. Due to features of "Agriculture", Nongjiale reflects its essence incisively and vividly, which has finally formed its own individuation.

①Diversified Features of Different Regions

In Yiyang city, Hunan Province, rural resources are characterized by regional styles, different charming landscapes, which own boundless bamboos in Tao Huajiang and plentiful reeds in Dongting Lake. Different counties have developed a series of brands for Nongjiale according to local distinctive rural resources. For instance, farmers' gardens and cottages in Haoshan, fishing villages

with lakes of Yuanjiang city, bamboo villages of Tiaojiang county, etc. All these have formed a series of Nongjiale brands. In Changji, Xinjiang, Nongjiale is full of minority and regional features. In addition, it offers "Mujiale" (tour on horsebacks). Tourists can enjoy riding on horses with pure minority style, shooting arrows, and such kind of health-keeping and sports activities. Take Nongjiale in Shanghai suburban areas as an example, Chongming Qianwei village is characteristic of farming, Yingyong village (is characteristic of) fishing, and Fenxian (is characteristic of) fruit gardens, which has thoroughly presented their own features.

②Season features

Nongjiale in Nanhui, Shanghai has "Three tastes" in different seasons and different periods of time, namely, peach taste, watermelon taste and orange taste; "Three enjoyments", namely, flower enjoyment, jade enjoyment and forest enjoyment; "Three tours", namely, tour to the Century Pond, tour to harbors of "sea, land and sky" and tour to green forests; "Three adventures," namely, adventures in animal kingdom, adventures in

walking along the seashores, solitary mountains, and islands with rare stones. At the same time, there are fishing sites by ponds, flying kites on the seaside, sun-rise watching by the sea, Dragon Boat Festival, Mooncake Festival, Spring Festival in farmers' houses, and other activities related to the theme – Nongjiale. Therefore, in different seasons all through the year, Nongjiale has different tourism activities, which is surely of great attraction and abundant connotation (Wu 2004).

③Distinctive styles.

There are lots of Nongjiale in different districts and counties in Shanghai. Farmers in Chuanming Qianwei Village make tourists have a look at their stoves, experience farming in fields, and relax themselves on beaches. They hold activities such as “Tourists live in farmers' cottages, have meals at farmers' houses and enjoy happiness farmers enjoy”. Nanhui holds activities to show fruits and forests for tourists; farmers in Zhujing, Jinshan pay close attention to their own cultural brand. So tourists come to the countryside to enjoy beautiful scenery in the wild open, entertain themselves in climbing high mountains, cross caves and holes. They can also participate in farming in the fields, experience climbing and picking up fruits, field cultivation, fishing and other interesting rural activities as well.

(2) Cultural Custom and Minority Rural Tourism

There are 56 minorities as well as 56 customs in China, with long history and colorful folk culture, which are valuable treasures in developing rural tourism. Customary rural tourism is based on unique custom features, taking the countryside as

its carrier. It is the product under certain environmental situation and traditional custom. Rural tourism aims at entertaining people with traditional culture, being in nature and in harmony with nature.

Due to different minorities and regions, custom rural tourism is characterized by different traditional culture, local conditions and customs and things alike.

①Minority Village Tourism

Minority villages with distinctive characters in China are mainly situated in the Southeast and Southwest. They are characterized by geographical situations, cottages of farmers, products of agriculture and handicraft, festivals, wearing and food.

②Unique Village Tourism

Unique residential architectures (eg. garden-like residences with courtyards, stockaded villages of Yunnan, bamboo buildings), peculiar geographical surroundings (eg. Zhangjiajie, Hunan), distinctive flavored delicacies which impresses tourists a great deal and makes them ponder over what they have witnessed and experienced.

Measures

In developing rural tourism, rural tourism resources should be integrated, rural tourism developing projects should be properly designed in order to enhance cultural tastes and grades. In the meantime, to keep rural culture with its specialty and characteristic is vital as well as to protect raw and original styles in order to represent the whole glamour of rural tourism. Therefore, the writer thinks, rural tourism should be administrated

under the guidance of the local government, scale efficiency should be formed in the form of groups so as to set up brands and increase competitive ability in tourism markets. Only in this way can rural tourism in China develop on a large scale and in industrial way, and approach the aim of sustainable development. In developing rural tourism in China, the following things are to be done.

Firstly, the theme to alleviate poverty is always made clear in developing rural tourism, which is considered different from other themes of tourism projects. At the same time, universal development and farmers' general participation must be represented in rural tourism development. The government is supposed to guide farmers to participate in developing rural tourism. In this way, farmers are subjects to alleviate poverty and become major force. As a result, they will be the actual beneficiaries.

In order to make rural tourism vigorous, large-scaled and efficient, farmers are to be encouraged to take part in rural tourism administration, that is, "profit priority". Meanwhile, farmers are supposed to be trained and instructed, inspired to be active participants. As a matter of fact, the key for rural tourism sustainable development lies in local farmers. Only when they come to realize the cultural values of their own, and take action in inheriting and safeguarding the culture, can they be practical beneficiaries and become the strong back-ups and forces in rural tourism. In the end, the goal of poverty reduction will be achieved. If there is no universal participation of local farmers, China's rural tourism is of little significance in implementing poverty alleviation strategy. That is, universal

participation of local farmers is the prerequisite of poverty reduction in the countryside, and the cornerstone to make China's rural tourism large-scaled, powerful and vigorous. As a result, rural tourism will improve economic development and function well in reducing poverty as soon as possible.

Secondly, while developing rural tourism, attention is to be paid to resource development and environmental protection co-ordination to avoid environmental pollution and resource destruction. The principle "Protection first, rational development, sustainable utilization must always be carried out, namely, sustainable developing strategy must be executed properly.

It is essential to make sure rural resource protection should be implemented here and there in developing rural tourism, what's more, to further protect and improve ecological environment, and to enforce the proper combination with ecological resources. We should stick to the principle-"Protection first, development second" and make sustainable development in rural tourism.

Thirdly, China is an old civilized country and an agricultural one. As modernization is advancing day by day, development in various fields in rural districts lags behind towns and cities. In fact, cultural sense of quality of rural people has become the core to deal with in building up "Well-to-do" society. As we all know, agricultural cultivation culture of long standing and refulgence is the nuclear factor to attract tourists and develop rural tourism industry. To make full use of agricultural cultivation, manpower resources in the countryside play a vital role. Rural residents have great

affection for their own land, so they have great passion to do everything well related to them. Rural residents have sufficient facilities, proficient skills and harmonious relationship with their neighbors, which are the basic foundations for doing everything successfully. Developing rural tourism is conducive to economic growth, environmental improvement and community harmony, therefore, rural residents have the motivation to implement their mission.

However, all the enthusiasm, motivation and dynamics require residents' high sense of quality. What's more, thoughts of abandoning the old and accepting the advanced, courage of attempting the new, capability of administrating tourism are needed, which can only be obtained by learning, training and practicing. Knowledge, professional training, high comprehensive sense of quality are keys to turn advantages of rural human resources into advantages of resources of local residents with ability. Therefore, the writer holds the view that we should jump at the opportunity to develop rural tourism, enrich cultural connotation of rural tourism products, enhance cultural sense of quality so as to make great contribution to the construction of "Well-to-do" society in China.

Conclusion

Foundation of rural tourism is the fine cycle and ecological rationality of interior function of agricultural system. As a big agricultural country, China has been developing rural tourism, changing traditional agricultural production design, speeding up steps for scientific and technological cultivation

administration as well as dealing in green food and special crop production, in order to meet people's demand for harmless food. Thus, agricultural products in China are competitive and benefit will be doubled in agriculture and the goal of tourism will finally be obtained.

Regional features presented by the coordination between tourism and ecological agriculture are characterized by regional ecological agriculture and regional agriculture. Based on the situation of China, developing tendency of rural tourism should be firmly grasped, China's culture and its connotation should be fully reflected as well. Meanwhile, China's culture and its connotation should be immersed in harmonious and balanced development in ecological environment in order to advance sustainable regional development in economy speedily and steadily. Development of rural tourism should focus on agricultural and humane environments. Additionally, close attention should be paid to economic, ecological and social efficiency. No doubt, the special function of relaxation and holiday entertainment of rural tourism greatly tempts tourists domestically and internationally. In developing rural tourism, present rural land resources and manpower resources are supposed to be properly collocated, and anti-poverty strategy be carried out, which is a workable way to stick to and a practical tool to use in rural China. The days will come soon when rural tourism obtains more market shares and have a brighter future.

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