

Research on the Current Development Situation and Countermeasures of Rural Tourism in China

Zheng-Ke Yang^{1,a} and Xue-Mei Zhang^{1,b,*}

¹ Business School, Chengdu University, China

^acolinyoung@126.com, ^b276863381@qq.com

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Rural tourism, Problems, Countermeasures, China.

Abstract. China is a big agricultural country, it is an important mission to solve the problems of agriculture, countryside and farmers. As an important part of modern agriculture, rural tourism has experienced 40 years of development in China, and now has become an important pillar of the strategy of rural revitalization. Firstly, this research explored the development history of rural tourism and the definition of rural tourism in academia. Secondly, it analysed the current situation and problems of developing rural tourism in China. Finally, on the basis of field visit to the typical case of rural tourism, the corresponding policy recommendations were put forward.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism originated in Europe in the 1930s. In 1865, the establishment of the Italian Agricultural and National Tourism Association marked the birth of rural tourism. But the actual popular rural tourism originated in Spain in the 1960s.

Rural tourism in China was introduced from Europe, America, Japan and Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. And in 1998, with the launch of “China’s urban and rural tourism” activity led by the national Tourism Administration inspired the first wave of rural tourism.

After entering the 21st century, with the booming development of China’s new rural construction, rural tourism in China has becoming more popular. Under the influence and promotion of internal and external factors, China’s rural tourism has made gratifying achievements, no matter in development scale, theoretical research, model innovation, or effectiveness and its positive impact on Rural Revitalization and urban-rural integration[1].

2. Research Method

With the methods of field investigation and literature analysis, the characteristics and problems of rural tourism in China are analyzed, and the countermeasures of developing rural tourism are also discussed.

3. The Conception of Rural Tourism

3.1. Definition of Rural Tourism by Foreign Scholars

Rural tourism is defined by the European Union (EU) and the Organization for World Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as tourism activities occurring in rural areas.

Lane believes that some cities and scenic spots are not limited to urban areas, but also extended to rural areas, while others are not rural, such as theme parks and leisure hotels[2].

Dernoi made a clear distinction between rural tourism and non-urban regional tourism. He believes that a remarkable feature of rural tourism is that there must be economic activities directly related to land (such as agricultural activities), and there must be continuing human activities in the region.

Rural tourism is a kind of tourism mode and economic development activity relying on rural regional environment and resources, centering on rural character and rural image, and taking urban residents as the main tourist source.

3.2. Definition of Rural Tourism by Chinese Scholars

Fang Jia believes that rural tourism is a kind of tourism mode which take rural environment and human activities as attractions, farmers as the main business service subjects, and urban residents as the main target market. The main purpose is to meet the needs of tourists for sightseeing, leisure, entertainment, vacation, study, shopping and so on[3].

However, rural tourism generally includes two aspects: one is that the destination of this kind of tourism is rural areas; the another is that should be both natural landscape of the countryside and humanistic landscape containing the traces of farmers' life in the scenic spot.

According to the opinions of the experts who attended the International Forum on Rural Tourism held in Guizhou in 2004, Luo Yan believes that China's rural tourism should include at least three points. To start with, the quality and richness of rural tourism should be improved by taking the unique rural folk culture as the soul. On the second, farmers should be the main body of management, and fully embodying the folk characteristics of "living in farmhouse, eating farm food, doing farm work and enjoying farm pleasure". The last but not least, the main target market of rural tourism should be urban residents who have the desire of enjoying rural scenery and returning to simple folk customs[4].

From what we have talked above, because of the complexity of the concept, scholars have not come to an agreement about the coincident definition of rural tourism. But they basically agree that *rurality* is the basis of attracting tourists and is the most important symbol of defining rural tourism.

4. Development of Rural Tourism in China

Compared with European and North American countries, rural tourism in China started late, but there are many opinions about its germination. The first is that in the 1950s, Shijiazhuang Village in Shandong Province took the lead in creating rural tourist attractions for the needs of foreign affairs. The second is that since the reform and opening up, the strategic deployment of building a new socialist countryside has opened the prelude of rural tourism. The second opinion is generally accepted by scholars in China, and the development of rural tourism in China after the 1980s is divided into four periods[5].

4.1. Germination Period (1980-1990)

This period is in the early stage of China's reform and opening up. In order to promote their fruits and vegetables, a small number of farmers in the urban-rural fringe spontaneously organized activities such as the Litchi Festival and the Fruit and Vegetable Festival to attract tourists from cities to come and watch and buy.

4.2. Start-up Period (1990-2000)

During this period, the urbanization in China has accelerated, residents' income has improved and the consumption structure has changed. When urban residents solve the problem of food and clothing, the leisure needs such as sightseeing and travelling appeared. Some peasant households who live near large and medium-sized cities take advantages of their unique agricultural environment and special agricultural products to set up recreational agricultural parks or agritainment, which attracted a large number of urban residents to spend holidays by visiting, picking and gathering in rural areas.

4.3. Growth Period (2000-2010)

In this period, people's living standard has changed from being barely fed and clad to a more comfortable life. And as a result, the demand for leisure tourism began to expand from large and medium-sized cities to small towns. During this period, rural tourism has developed rapidly, and the number and scale have increased sharply. A large number of agricultural sightseeing and leisure parks have emerged.

4.4. Acceleration Period (after 2010)

In August 2011, the Ministry of Agriculture issued the "Twelfth Five-Year Plan for National Leisure Agriculture Development" and signed a framework agreement on cooperation between leisure agriculture and rural tourism with the National Tourism Administration. This signifies that the competent government departments have begun to intervene, which has played a positive role in promoting the standard-setting and standardization of leisure agriculture, optimizing policy environment and guiding the healthy development of the industry.

5. The Types of Rural Tourism in China

5.1. Agritainment Tourism

Agritainment tourism is based on experiencing rural life, tasting rural dishes and being close to local culture. The functions of agritainment tourism has changed from eating and living in a traditional way to a series of travel activities including travel, shopping and entertainment[6]. At present, the agritainment tourism has realized the integration with the surrounding agricultural production and natural attractions. The agritainment has also gradually evolved into a miniature landscape of local rural tourism.

5.2. Rural Folklore Tour

China has a vast territory, there are rich resources for folk tourism development as many minorities have their own distinctive characteristics. In recent years, relying on the unique style of ethnic folklore, dietary habits, special clothing, agricultural landscape and agricultural activities, a large number of ancient towns and rural folklore tourist attractions with cultural originality, participation, simplicity and strong folk customs have been developed[7].

5.3. Rural Red Tour

In order to meet the development needs of political, social, economic and cultural construction in current China, most of the old revolutionary areas have created rural tourist attractions with red theme and developing patriotism education based on red tourism resources[8]. In the past few years, a number of old revolutionary areas with unique natural scenery resources and red tourism resources have made great efforts to tap the potential of red tourism under the guidance of the national tourism poverty alleviation policy, and have made certain achievements, and the income level of local farmers have been greatly improved.

6. Problems in the Development of Rural Tourism in China

6.1. Inadequate Infrastructure

Rural tourism, as its name implies, is a tourism model that takes the countryside as the place of activity. Although the developers of scenic spots will spend some money to strengthen the infrastructure construction, this part of the facilities can only meet the most basic needs of tourists, and higher-level needs can not be satisfied.

6.2. Homogenization of Products

China is rich in rural tourism resources, but most of the products of rural tourism are similar. Apart from a small number of villages can build scenic spots based on local characteristics, most of the other rural tourist attractions are either seeing flowers and picking seasonally or eating farmhouse meals and living in farmyards on holidays.

6.3. Emphasizing Tourism over Agriculture

In order to develop tourism, some villages upgrade their plans blindly. They usually neglect the inherent resources of rural areas and fail to incorporate agriculture into the overall planning of rural tourism. Such a result not only led to the incompatibility of the whole rural landscape, but also formed

a contradiction between farmers and developers. As a result, the whole rural landscape is incompatible and contradictions arise between farmers and developers.

7. Model Analysis and Countermeasure Suggestions on Promoting Rural Tourism in China

7.1. The Rural Tourism of Mingyue Village in Chengdu

In order to put forward effective suggestions for the problems above, the author visited Mingyue Village in Chengdu, which is known as "one of the best rural tourism destinations in China".

Mingyue Village is located in Pujiang County, about 90 kilometers away from downtown Chengdu. It is a common village along the ancient Southern Silk Road and Tea Horse Road. In 2009, Mingyue Village was one of the poor villages in Chengdu, and there were no tourists until 2014. But in recent years, through the development of rural tourism, Mingyue Village has won a series of honors, such as "the National Civilized Village", "China's Most Beautiful Village in 2018", "the Top 100 Rural Tourism Destinations of China" and "the Demonstration Base China's Rural Tourism Creator".

In fact, Mingyue Village is just an ordinary village in Chengdu, a city with rich tourism resources. The reason why Mingyue Village still thrives in the development of rural tourism under the condition of insufficient natural and human resources is that it grasps the core of rural tourism development: farmers, countryside and agriculture; and accurately identifies the resources of local rural tourism development: the tea, a kind of bamboo shoots known as *Leizhu*, and Mingyue Kiln. The development path of rural tourism in Mingyue Village can be summarized as the following three points.

7.1.1. Grasp the Core of Rural Area and Upgrade its Appearance

With the development of society, the pace of working in city is faster and faster. Rural areas usually represent simplicity and ease, which naturally become the place people who under a lot of pressure yearn for.

Traditional rural areas are poor in the infrastructure conditions and sanitation, which can't really meet tourists' needs for a better rural life. In order to create a utopian paradise and ideal home, Mingyue Village grasped the core of rural areas[9]. The abandoned cottages and pigsty in the village were renovated and decorated into beautiful houses, domestic garbage have been effectively disposed of and the villagers also consciously maintain environmental hygiene.

As a result, Mingyue Village has restored the pure and beautiful countryside atmosphere that the village should have. At the same time, its environment has also won the favor of tourists.

7.1.2. Integrate Cultural Creativity and Create Innovative Brand

The brightest spot of the tourism in Mingyue Village is the integration with cultural creativity. For example, the Mingyue Kiln with the burning technology in Tang Dynasty was innovatively developed into tourism products.

Mingyue Village has renovated four local old kilns and started the "Mingyue International Ceramic Village" program with the government's promotion and capital participation. By combining traditional pottery making with creative pottery, Mingyue Kiln has regained its vitality after sleeping for 1500 years.

Mingyue Village also rely on the "Mingyue International Ceramic Village" program, build new ceramics museum and masters' studio. At last, the brand of "Mingyue Kiln" has been reshaped, and the resources of rural tourism in the village has been enriched.

7.1.3. Promote Agricultural Transition and Industrial Integration

One of the ideas of developing rural tourism in Mingyue Village is to rely on agriculture closely. They develop the function of agricultural products vigorously, and carry out various thematic tourism activities based on local characteristic agricultural products. As what have been mentioned above, tea and *Leizhu* are the two main resources for the development of rural tourism in Mingyue Village. The ecological garden of tea in Mingyue Village can not only produce tea, but also carry out programs

such as experience activities of picking tea, building tea rooms, holding parties about the tea and other projects[10].

Traditional agricultural cultivation is mainly self-sufficiency, and as the added value of products is low, farmers' income by growing agricultural products is not very high. Mingyue Village takes full advantages of the *Leizhu*, besides selling the bamboo shoots, the "Spring Bamboo Shoot Art Festival" has also been held. A series of activities such as digging bamboo shoots, watching performances and experiencing pastoral life are held. These activities also associate with making pottery, tie-dyeing and tea tasting.

Through this method, the development artery of the local economy has been opened up, and the synergetic development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries has been realized, the transformation and upgrading of agriculture has been promoted, the industrial chain has been extended and the value chain has been upgraded.

7.2. Suggestions on Developing Rural Tourism in China

Through the overview of the development of rural tourism in Mingyue Village, it is not difficult to see that the key reason why Mingyue Village can become the leader in rural tourism is to develop rural tourism based on agriculture, countryside and farmer. Therefore, in view of the common problems of rural tourism in China, this paper puts forward the following countermeasures and suggestions.

7.2.1. Improve Infrastructure and Build Beautiful Countryside

To a great extent, infrastructure construction affects tourists' satisfaction with scenic spots. At present, the infrastructure construction of most rural scenic spots in China is relatively lagging behind, most of them are unable to meet the needs of tourists, and even some basic facilities are unusable and idle[11]. Local governments should increase investment in infrastructure construction, and focus on improving village roads, walkways and parking lots. To improve visitors' experience comprehensively, "new infrastructure" such as wireless network and charging facilities should be introduced into the scenic spot[12].

7.2.2. Rely on Local Characteristics and Innovate Development Ways

The main reason why a place can become a tourist attraction is that it has resources that other places do not have, which we call "characteristics". Similarly, in the development of tourism in rural areas, we should also pay attention to characteristics. Therefore, in the process of developing rural tourism, all localities should accurately identify the unique resources, grasp the supporting resource of developing rural tourism, and plan a layout based on local characteristics or unique history and culture[13].

On the basis of identifying local unique resources, we should inherit in innovation and protect in development. In the process of propaganda and creation, it is difficult to attract tourists' attention if we only reflect the original functions of these characteristic resources[14]. It requires the team members to change the traditional thinking mode and think as much as possible about the format that these characteristic resources can radiate.

7.2.3. Strengthen the Leading Industry and Promote the Integration of Three Industries

To develop rural tourism, we should not avoid agriculture but only talk about tourism. Most villages in China are still dominated by the primary industry. Therefore, in the process of developing rural tourism, agriculture should not be abandoned. On the contrary, large-scale cultivation of agricultural products are the important thrust, or even the breakthrough for the development of rural tourism. The processability, ornamentality and seasonality of agricultural products make it an important part of rural tourism. Many successful cases have shown that the deeper the integration of primary, secondary and tertiary industries, the more prosperous the local rural tourism is[15].

8. Summary

Although the development of rural tourism will inevitably have problems, with the increase of experience, problems will gradually be conquered. At the same time, successful examples such as Mingyue Village provide many inspirations and reflections for the development of rural tourism. Under the background of rural revitalization, we should attach importance to the problems of farmers, agriculture and rural areas in rural tourism. By considering the problems of the three, we can explore the ways to solve the problems of tourism development, so as to make the Strategy of Rural Revitalization come true.

9. Acknowledgement

This research was supported by a Chengdu Philosophy and Social Science Planning Program in 2019 named *the Effectiveness Evaluation and Long-term Mechanism of Precision Poverty Alleviation in Chengdu* (NO.2019Z07) .

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