

The Importance of Strengthening the Cultivation of Ethnic Tour Guides in Liangshan Area

Jing Huang

International Institute of Business Administration
Jilin International Studies University
Changchun, China

Abstract—Tourism has gradually become one of the pillars of economic development in Liangshan, Sichuan Province. However, the tourism services in Liangshan fail to be matched with the increasing number of tourists each year. There is a large supply imbalance between the number of legal tour guides and the market demand in Liangshan, which provides an opportunity for illegal tour guide services. At present, few scholars pay attention to and study this research field. Therefore, this paper proposes the viewpoint of strengthening the cultivation of ethnic tour guides in Liangshan, and discusses its importance and development strategies in detail.

Keywords: *Liangshan area, cultivating ethnic tour guides, the importance of ethnic tour guides*

I. INTRODUCTION

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (hereinafter referred to as Liangshan Prefecture), located in the southwest of China, has rich and diverse tourism resources. It is the largest settlement of the Yi people in China, and also the home of over a dozen of other ethnic groups such as Han, Tibetan, Mongolian and Naxi, and thus has rich ethnic cultural resources. Liangshan Prefecture covers an area of more than 60,000 square kilometers and has a variety of topographic features, including canyons, basins, plains, hills, karst caves and other topographic features, with an elevation drop of 5,653 m. Liangshan Prefecture belongs to the subtropical monsoon climate, enjoys abundant sunlight all the year round, little rain, dry and warm, and has rich natural landscape resources and ecological agricultural resources.

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing industries in the Prefecture in recent years, and has gradually grown into a pillar economy of the Prefecture. During the period of the "11th Five-Year Plan", the development of Liangshan tourism industry has achieved initial results. The completion of the electrification of Chengdu-Kunming Railway, the completion of the opening of the Xichang-Panzhihua Expressway, and the addition of air routes to Qingshan Airport provide infrastructure guarantee for the further development of Liangshan tourism. Star-level hotels, guesthouses, and catering industries have been established and improved one after another, and existing scenic spots such as the Qionghu Scenic Area and the Yi Ethnic Customs Garden have been transformed and improved. A Liangshan

tourism scenic line with the theme of "humanistic Liangshan, ecological Liangshan, and red Liangshan" has been created.

At the same time as the rapid development of tourism in Liangshan Prefecture, the problems hindering development have gradually become apparent. At present, the Prefecture has not formed a tour guide training institution with a certain scale. In the territory, only one undergraduate institution has tourism major. There are nearly 300 students in Xichang University's tourism management major, which is still far from the market demand. It can be seen that the problems of Liangshan tourism are concentrated in three aspects: the lack of professional tourism talents, the few exquisite tourism routes, and the weak competitiveness of the tourism product market. Among them, the lack of professional tourism talents is the most significant problem. Survey data show that there are currently only 173 legal tour guides in Liangshan Prefecture. [2] In the face of an annual average of 12.54555 million travelers · time (2006-2010), it can be clearly seen that there is a serious shortage of legal tour guides in the area. As a result, some residents around the scenic area pretend to be tour guides and engage in illegal tour guides to obtain benefits. On the one hand, illegal tour guides have seriously affected the legal and fair operating environment of the market of guides. On the other hand, illegal tour guides have never received professional training so that they have low professional level, low vocational competencies, and poor interpretation skills. In the process of serving tourists, they tend to promote tourist consumption to obtain a commission for profit. This case has seriously damaged the image of tourist guides in Liangshan area. Li Yuzhen's questionnaire survey (2009) [3] shows that tourists have high expectations for the commentary system and tourism consultation provided in tourism services, but often get low satisfaction. At the same time, unlicensed employment of illegal tour guides makes it difficult to monitor them, increases the safety risk factor for tourists in Liangshan and leads to an increase in the hidden dangers of tourists' personal safety in the territory.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING THE CULTIVATION OF ETHNIC TOUR GUIDES IN LIANGSHAN AREA

As Professor Wang Lianyi, a tourism expert, said, "A tour without guide is a tour without soul. Internationally, tour guides are generally recognized as the soul of tourism

industry, the backbone of travel agencies, and the directors of tour activities". [4] The whole Prefecture is featured by the unsound tour guide training mechanism, the shortage of legal tour guides and many illegal tour guides. After field investigation, it is found that among the illegal tour guides, the proportion of ethnic minorities was relatively large. During the interview, some illegal tour guides said that the most fundamental purpose of engaging in the work of illegal tour guides is to solve the problem of employment and earn for a living. They have not thought carefully about a series of issues such as the legality, safety, and sustainability, but they all expressed their willingness to participate in formal training to completely change and enhance their professional skills and competencies. Notwithstanding illegal tour guides have had a certain adverse impact on the tourism industry in Liangshan, disadvantage coexists with development potentials. Such disadvantage can be transformed into advantage. The transformation is also an opportunity to develop and expand the tourism industry in Liangshan. Furthermore, enhancing the cultivation of ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area has the following advantages:

First, it can provide employment opportunities and promote the transfer of surplus labors in ethnic minority areas. China's rural population mobility is large, and the main body is rural surplus labors featured by "the flow direction is relatively the same, generally flowing from the northwest to the southeast, and from rural area to medium, especially large coastal cities". [5] With the recent slowdown of China's economic growth, employment opportunities provided by large and medium-sized cities such as the coastal cities have decreased. Consequently, some migrant workers begin to return to the countryside and become surplus rural labors. The increase in number of rural surplus labors increases local employment pressure and also brings hidden dangers to local public security. To this regard, cultivating ethnic tour guides provides a new way for the transfer of surplus labors in ethnic minority areas. On the one hand, it eases the current shortage of legal guides in Liangshan's market, provides more jobs and alleviates the employment pressure on society and the government as caused by the surplus labors. On the other hand, the increase in number of stable jobs is conducive to the stability and solidarity of ethnic minority areas, weakening and even eliminating hidden dangers to social stability.

Second, it can protect the inheritance of the ethnic culture and promote the spread of the culture. To a certain extent, the development of global economic integration contributes to the deconstruction of minority culture. While vigorously developing economy, standard system can be introduced into the area as a reproducible model so as to gradually decompose and melt the local ethnic culture. The inheritance of any national culture is mainly carried out by people. Other media used in the inheritance of ethnic culture can only serve as the media for recording ethnic culture. The best way to inherit an ethnic culture is to cultivate it through education and spread it continuously through communication. Therefore, cultivating ethnic tour guides can protect the local ethnic culture and promote the inheritance of the ethnic

culture. Taking Yi people's culture in Liangshan area as an example, Bimo culture is a typical representative of Yi people's culture, and its scriptures are important instruments for carrying out religious sacrifice events of Yi people. However, the scriptures are handwritten copies handed down from generation to generation. It has been difficult to see a complete set of the scriptures today. As the older generations of Bimo passed away, gradually no one could understand the scriptures, and some family members even sold it as scrap. This shows the urgency of protecting ethnic culture.

Third, it enhances the local characteristics of tourism in Liangshan area. From the perspective of tourists, the reason why they choose a tourist attraction is that they hope to experience the natural landscape, humanistic landscape and local customs of the attraction. Tour guides become the first window for tourists to experience the local humanistic landscape and local customs. The development of ethnic tour guides can reflect the local tourism characteristics. Because the ethnic tour guides grew up under the influence of their own culture, and have a deeper understanding of their own culture. In the process of explaining to tourists, they can sincerely and thoroughly explain the culture and history of the ethnic group to tourists. The personal experience and more vivid and detailed explanations are exactly what tourists expect. In this way, while increasing the local characteristics of tourism in Liangshan area, they also become the spokespersons of the ethnic culture, always propagating the unique culture of the ethnic group.

Fourth, it is conducive to constructing a tour guide training mechanism in Liangshan and promoting the normalized development of Liangshan tourism. At present in the whole prefecture, there has not been a tour guide training institution with certain scale. The training of tour guides mainly depends on the Sichuan Tourism University. Taking this opportunity to build a self-sufficient tour guide training system in Liangshan can promote the improvement of Liangshan's tourism system construction and the normalized development of tourism.

III. STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING THE CULTIVATION OF ETHNIC TOUR GUIDES IN LIANGSHAN AREA

Cultivating ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area is a multi-win approach. In the specific implementation process, it is needed to formulate strategies based on the characteristics of Liangshan area. In general, having a deeper understanding of the importance of cultivating ethnic tour guides is the prerequisite. Ethnic tour guides are the most direct inheritance objects of their own culture. They can present the ethnic culture in form of people and is the most intuitive "living culture" of the ethnic group; meanwhile, they are also the "live card" of the tourism image of Liangshan, bearing the mission of constantly spreading the ethnic culture to the outside. Specifically, the strategies can be divided into the following aspects:

The first is to increase the propagation on the training of ethnic tour guides. All administrative regions in Liangshan should issue relevant propagation policies. Increasing the propagation on training of ethnic tour guides is the first step

to realize such training. There are 17 administrative regions in the territory of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, including 16 counties and the autonomous prefecture center Xichang City. All administrative regions should increase the propagation on the training of ethnic tour guides and treat it as an important task conducive to the building of the tourism image of the region and solving the employment of surplus labors. The issue of relevant publicity policies is to ensure the successful completion of this work. By increasing the publicity, it is possible to fully tap and sort out the surplus labor forces in the ethnic area so as to minimize the employment pressure and hidden dangers caused by the surplus labor forces.

The second is to adopt government-lead school-enterprise cooperation model to expand the training of tour guides in Liangshan area. Enterprises in Liangshan area have a relatively obvious policy-oriented tendency. Therefore, the local government should take the lead in promulgating relevant policies to guide and encourage local enterprises to set up ethnic tour guide training institutions from the perspective of supervising the industrial development. In addition, it is also necessary to make full use of the existing teaching resources in Liangshan area, and mobilize the enthusiasm of relevant schools to participate in the training of ethnic tour guides. The school-enterprise cooperation model is in line with the current laws of social and economic development. Operating it in business model is conducive to optimizing the combination of existing resources, and the market environment of survival of the fittest can stimulate enterprises to continuously grow and make progress to maintain their competitiveness.

The third is to make full use of existing resources and further study the local ethnic culture. Taking Yi people as an example, the basic unit of Yi community in Liangshan area is a family branch formed by patrilineal kinship. Each family branch has its own fixed range of activities, clothing standards, and language habits. This formed the different Yi family branch culture in each administrative area. The Yi family branch culture has a strong regional and historical significance, and is of great practical significance for the study of the cultural development of ethnic minorities in China. Thereby, it is necessary to make full use of the existing resources to conduct in-depth research on the cultural evolution and local history of the Yi family branch in Liangshan area.

The fourth is to maintain the training content having the pure nature of ethnic culture while meeting the practical requirements for modern tour guides. The purity and uniqueness of ethnic culture is both the key to inheriting the culture and an important part of the market competitiveness. Due to the use of commercial operation mode, customer experience and satisfaction directly affect the sustainable development of tourism industry. Hence in the process of tour guide training, it is needed to enhance quality education, business etiquette, and civilized communication and the like aspects of training and evaluation. In this way, it can both maintain the cultural customs of ethnic minorities and fully enable tourists to get modern and home-like tourist services.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, strengthening the cultivation of ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area is one of the key steps to update the tourism image of the area. This step will not only help to construct the tourism industrial system in Liangshan, but also bring economic benefits and ease the employment pressure and hidden dangers of social order caused by surplus labors in minority area. This shows that it is important to cultivate ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area.

REFERENCES

- [1] The People's Government of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Liangshan Prefecture's "Twelfth Five-Year" Tourism Development Plan [EB/OL]. <http://www.lsz.gov.cn/2011xxgk/ghjh/24d611b7-34a9-466b-8345-a086d5fe3ddf>, 2011-09-28. (in Chinese)
- [2] Wang Guanying, Xu Qiaoyun. Study on the Status Quo of Liangshan Tourism Development and the Countermeasures [J]. *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 2010 (7): 223-227. (in Chinese)
- [3] Li Yuzhen. From the Margin to the Center: A Study of the Transformation of National Traditional Festivals in the Tourism Background: Taking the Torch Festival of Yi People in Liangshan of Sichuan as an example [J]. *Academic Forum*, 2009 (2): 90-93. (in Chinese)
- [4] Tan Zhiman, Liu Qiong. Ethnic Culture Accomplishment of Tour Guides in the Minority Areas and Sustainable Development of Tourism Economy [J]. *Journal of Anhui Agricultural Sciences*, 2009, 37 (21): 10226-10227, 10238. (in Chinese)
- [5] Wu Shinan. Discussion on Eliminating Rural Surplus Labors [J]. *Academic Forum*, 2001 (01): 45-48. (in Chinese)