

Study on the Rural Tourism Development in China

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ABSTRACT

The development and innovation of rural tourism meet the diversified needs of tourists. Based on the development model and product direction of rural tourism, the development of rural tourism has gone through five stages: agritainment is the low-end leisure tourism products mainly operated by individual farmers; pastoral sightseeing experience is a tourism model integrating sightseeing and experience; the experience tour of ancient villages and ancient towns is a unique development model of rural tourism combining humanistic connotation with landscape resources; manor (leisure) economy is in the initial exploration stage in China, which is a new tourism format under the background of industrial integration; rural leisure (recreation) vacation, as an experiential (immersion) tourism, meets the needs of consumers at present and is the major trend of rural tourism development in the future. This paper mainly analyzes the problems existing in the development of the above five stages, in order to provide reference for the further development of rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Development stage, Leisure, Health care.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural areas play an important role in the tourism industry. Rural tourism originated from western countries in the mid-19th century, started in China in 1980s, and began to show vigorous development momentum in the suburbs of some cities with rapid economic development and the marginal areas of famous scenic spots in 1990s. China's rural tourism developed under the background of stable national economic environment, development of cultural tourism, prosperity of science and technology, change of agricultural structure, urbanization process, increase of people's income, change of consumption structure and improvement of road traffic. At the same time, it was affected by developed countries and guaranteed by national policies [1]. Nowadays, the connotation of rural tourism is constantly expanding, and its development mode and corresponding tourism products are becoming diversified [2].

2. OVERVIEW OF RURAL TOURISM

Theoretically speaking, rural tourism refers to a form of tourism in rural areas, which taking rural, natural and characteristic landscapes, customs and

various experience activities as tourist attractions, provides tourists with leisure and relaxation, and can also achieve the goal of promoting the development of rural areas. The functions and characteristics of rural tourism are shown in Table 1.

At present, rural tourism is booming in various regions of China. Promoting the development of rural tourism resources not only fully taps the rural value, but also meets the contemporary people's yearning for leisure and relaxation and diversified needs for tourism forms. Especially under the background of building a well-off society in an all-round way and rural revitalization strategy, developing rural tourism is one of the important measures to solve the problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers [3].

With the rapid development of economy and the improvement of people's living standards, tourism activities, as a form of pursuing the enjoyment of spiritual life, are more and more popular among people, especially the poetic rural tourism has become one of the choices for people to relax. 2016 is a "blowout year" for the development of China's rural tourism. The leisure agriculture and rural tourism in China received nearly 2.1 billion tourists and the business income exceeded 570 billion yuan [4].

Table 1. Functions and characteristics of rural tourism

Characteristics		Functions	
Rural	ancient, original, true and native	Economic function	catering, accommodation, sales of agricultural and sideline products
Diversity	vast rural areas with different styles	Recreation function	sightseeing, entertainment, folk custom, vacation, science popularization, etc.
Health	natural ecological environment and green health food	Social function	promote urban-rural communication and narrow the gap between urban and rural areas
Economy	low economic consumption and investment in development and construction	Education function	learning farming knowledge through farming experience
Participation	multifunctional tourism activities	Environmental protection function	strengthen the awareness of environmental protection and improve environmental quality
Sustainability	protecting ecological environment and promoting agricultural development	Medical function	fresh air, mountain stream, spring, etc.
Clear objectives	For urban residents	Cultural function	folk customs and traditional cultural activities

As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the number of leisure agriculture and rural tourists in China increased continuously from 2012 to 2018. It accounted for more than 50% of domestic tourists from 2015 to 2017, and reached 3 billion in 2018, accounting for 48.39% of domestic tourists. In the first half of 2019, there were 1.51 billion rural tourists in China, with a total income of 0.86 trillion yuan. By the end of June 2019, there were 8.86 million rural tourists employed in China. With the increasing number of tourists and people’s enthusiasm for rural tourism, the income from leisure agriculture and rural tourism in China has been increasing. In 2018, China’s 3 billion rural tourists generated a total tourism income of 800 billion yuan [5].

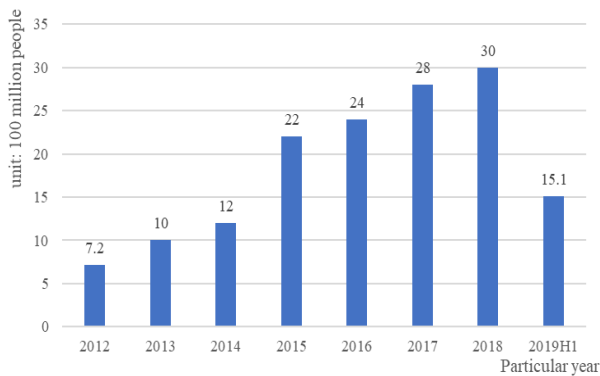


Figure 1 Statistics of leisure agriculture and rural tourism from 2012 to 2019

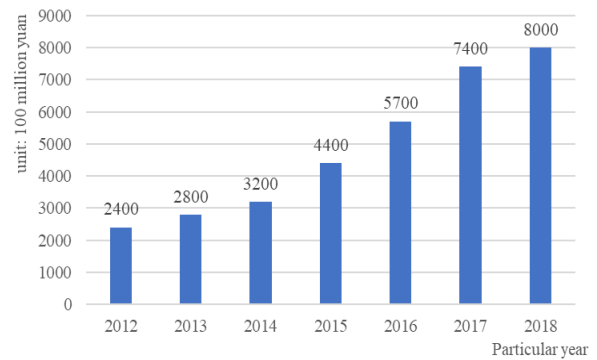


Figure 2 Leisure agriculture and rural tourism income from 2012 to 2018

3. ANALYSIS OF THE STAGES OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Rural tourism is a process of constant change and development. From the perspective of tourism products, it has gone through five stages: farmhouse music era, rural sightseeing experience era, ancient village and ancient town experience tour era, manor (leisure) economy era and rural leisure (recreation) holiday era. Different development stages have their own different characteristics and problems. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Five stages of rural tourism development

Tourism model	Characteristics	Existing problems
agritainment	Eat farm food, live in farmhouse, do farm work, buy agricultural products and enjoy farmhouse happiness	Deviation in understanding of agritainment; Lack of supervision system and characteristics
pastoral sightseeing experience	Based on the beautiful rural scenery and taking the rural life experience as the core, it brings visitors a feeling of being there	Undesirable infrastructure construction; homogeneous projects; lack of participation
experience tour of ancient villages and towns	Relying on good rural scenery, antique architectural relics, profound cultural heritage, simple folk customs, etc., it takes the inheritance of innovative culture and art industry as the core	Threats caused by commercialization model; Weak awareness of protection; Alienation of traditional culture
manor (leisure) economy	Based on agriculture and tourism, it integrates various functions such as agricultural production, sightseeing and leisure, science education, health care and vacation, and business meetings	Slow return of investment, lack of proper operation mode and characteristics, inaccurate understanding of manor economy development
rural leisure (recreation) vacation	It makes use of the ecological environment, combining cultural customs, leisure vacations, health preservation, etc.	As an important form of business, the definition of B & B is vague; the business is homogeneous; and it lacks effective supervision

3.1. Rural Tourism 1.0-Agritainment

Agritainment originated from rural tourism at home and abroad, as a leisure place on the edge of China's urban and rural areas, it appeared in the 1980s [6]. On the definition of agritainment, different scholars have different views based on different research perspectives, but basically, they all reflect the idea of getting fun from agriculture, that is, connecting tourism with farming. In the early stage, people who live in city came to the countryside to stay for a night and have the farm food in order to relieve the pressure, while in the later stage, agritainment gradually developed into eating the farmhouse meal, living in the farmhouse, doing farm work, buying agricultural products and enjoying the farm life. The diversification of modern people's demand for tourism and the fatigue caused by living in cities for a long time promote the development of agritainment as a form of rural tourism. It can be said that it is the 1.0 era of rural tourism, the initial form of transition from traditional sightseeing tour to leisure vacation tour, and a new tourism project produced by the combination of agriculture and tourism, which connects cities and villages and gives urban people the opportunity to feel local life.

3.1.1. Characteristics of Agritainment

From the perspective of tourism industry, the emergence of agritainment has given a new direction to the development of tourism, breaking the limitations of traditional tourism forms. As a service industry, agritainment provides tourists with new choices and experiences, and also shows a novel tourism culture. From the perspective of social development,

agritainment is to make full use of rural natural resources, agricultural resources, folk customs and other characteristic resources to make the best use of everything and promote the economic development of rural areas. The development of agritainment needs to improve the corresponding infrastructure construction and promote the optimization of rural environment. The operation of agritainment needs managers, service personnel, etc., which provides employment opportunities for some rural surplus laborers, and at the same time has higher requirements for rural laborer, thus improving their quality. From the perspective of tourists, agritainment provides them with the opportunity to get close to the natural scenery of the countryside and engage in agricultural work, and it is affordable. In a word, as a form of rural leisure tourism, agritainment plays an important role from many angles.

3.1.2. Problems in the Development of Agritainment

According to relevant data, the total number of agritainment in China has exceeded 2 million since 2017, and the industry is developing rapidly. At the same time, however, there are some problems existing in the development of agritainment. First, the agritainment has changed. With the increase of tourists, operators will consider how to expand their business. In this way, the transformed agritainment becomes a rural hotel and village villa, which leads to the loss of "agriculture flavor" [7]; Secondly, it is lack of characteristics, and there is an increase of farmers who blindly follow the trend to develop agritainment. The attraction of tourism products is declining because of the same business means, experience activities and

accommodation conditions; Third, it costs more money, and there are full of fake products. Relying on low price and original taste, the early agritainment attracted a lot of urban people. At present, it costs more money to eat and live here. In addition, the taste of farm dishes is also poor. At the same time, they will ask higher prices for foreigners, low prices for acquaintances and locals, or sell counterfeit specialty agricultural products. These behaviors of cheating customers have affected the development of agritainment. Finally, there is a lack of corresponding system to guarantee the management of agritainment, and there are some illegal problems [8], associated with hygiene, food safety, and pricing.

3.1.3. The Core of The Development Of Agritainment Model

The key to the development of once-popular agritainment is to grasp the profound meanings of agriculture, home and happiness. Agriculture is the soul of agritainment, which deeply excavates the rural natural scenery, the characteristics of rural life, rural customs and habits, etc., and embodies the characteristics of native and original agriculture, countryside and farmers. Home is the carrier of agritainment. It is unnecessary to make it luxurious and grand, but it should have its own characteristics. The key lies in making tourists feel the breath of life and the intimacy of family atmosphere. Happiness is the purpose of agritainment, which aims to have fun and relax from body to mind. Although leisure vacation is becoming popular, and agritainment is facing transformation and upgrading, it is the foundation and the key to maintain and promote the concept of agriculture, home and happiness, which cannot be changed.

3.2. The Upgraded Version of Agritainment - Rural Sightseeing Experience

With the arrival of the experience economy era, the traditional sightseeing tour focusing on taking pictures and shopping is not enough to attract customers, and the single model of agritainment is difficult to meet people's individualized and diversified needs. Therefore, based on beautiful rural scenery, sightseeing tour, taking rural life experience as the core, brings tourists a feeling of being immersed in the countryside. It has become a new form of rural leisure tour, or an upgraded version of agritainment, which aims to provide customer with a diversified, comprehensive and leisure experience on the basis of agritainment.

3.2.1. Characteristics of Rural Sightseeing Experience

Generally speaking, rural sightseeing tourism has a specific theme design [9]. For example, rural

characteristic towns rely on the beautiful rural scenery to let tourists feel the natural agricultural ecological beauty, and do a series of agricultural work, so that they can experience a different life, including the farming culture, the characteristic folk customs, and the charm of rural traditional culture and the accommodation with regional characteristics [10]. Agricultural sightseeing park, agricultural education experience park, etc., take agricultural resources as the basis for development, integrating sightseeing, education, experience, shopping and entertainment; Some sightseeing villages characterized by folk customs own unique artworks, which are mainly aimed at promoting the understanding, learning and inheritance of humanistic culture of tourists.

3.2.2. Problems in the Development of Rural Sightseeing Experience

First of all, rural areas or suburban areas are the main areas for developing the rural sightseeing experience tour. Generally speaking, compared with foreign countries with developed rural tourism, some places where China develops rural sightseeing experience tour are relatively backward in infrastructure construction, especially in the most basic aspects such as transportation, water, electricity, network and sanitary conditions. Secondly, the development projects and forms of the rural sightseeing experience tour are lack of originality and features. Although there are some sightseeing parks, agricultural education experience parks and other modes in various forms, many local projects are monotonous and homogeneous. Under the background of experience economy, the rural sightseeing experience tour is to create different themes according to different rural characteristics. Finally, some developers' concerns in planning and design can't meet the personalized and participatory needs of current tourists.

3.2.3. The Development Strategy of Rural Sightseeing Experience Tour

The key to the development of rural sightseeing tour is to guide tourists to experience in person and integrate themselves into the process of tourism. Therefore, product development should be unique. Traditional leisure and entertainment projects such as fishing, picking and farming have no originality and novelty, which is not enough to attract tourists to experience it. Therefore, in the development of pastoral sightseeing experience, the innovation of experience forms should be given priority [11]. On the one hand, we should enrich the diversity of experience activities, such as inviting tourists to join the special folk activities, making traditional handicrafts, picking vegetables and cooking by themselves; On the other hand, in term of system construction, we should put tourists first, and

implement standardized tourist service management, so that tourists can fully participate in the sightseeing process and their individual needs can be met [9]. In addition, the rural sightseeing experience should make great efforts in landscape planning, designing on the basis of maintaining the natural ecological landscape, fully tapping the rural landscape resources and combining local characteristics to give tourists a new feeling.

3.3. The Unique System of Rural Tourism-the Experience Tour of Ancient Villages and Towns

Ancient village and town tourism is a very popular tourism mode in China, and it is also a unique type of rural tourism. Ancient villages and towns are the embodiment of history, the source of traditional culture. They are of great value and belong to scarce resources. Therefore, the core of tourism development in ancient villages and towns lies in profound culture, simple folk customs and ancient architecture landscape.

3.3.1. Overview of Tourism Development in Ancient Villages and Towns

The development of tourism in ancient villages and towns has experienced three stages [12]. The first stage of sightseeing mainly focuses on still life landscapes such as ancient buildings, museums, and former residences of celebrities. In this stage, the form is single and there is no characteristic. It is mainly characterized by the most primitive cultural relics and cultural features, which cannot attract tourists to stay for a long time only by simple cultural value. In the second stage, the single sightseeing is integrated into the business to form a leisure model, and catering, accommodation and entertainment are introduced to attract consumers in combination with the unique environment of ancient villages and towns; In the third stage, it develops into an experiential tourism mode, which combines with tourism on the basis of the traditional culture of ancient villages and towns, pays attention to the sustainable development of cultural tourism and ancient villages and towns, and introduces other elements to meet the diversified needs of tourists.

3.3.2. Problems in Tourism Development of Ancient Villages and Towns

There are three key problems in the development of ancient villages and towns under various development modes. First, the commercialization mode will lead to the deviation of its development direction. Excessive commercialization will lead to the aggressive entry of businessmen who pursue interests, resulting in the loss of charm of original cultural values and even the falsehood of local culture [13]. Second, the protection of

ancient villages and towns is gradually weakened or even they may be damaged in the development process. Some developers may destroy their original appearance for the sake of coordination of scenic spots, which will limit the sustainable development of ancient villages and towns. Third, traditional culture is alienated in its development, gradually losing its cultural connotation, or serious homogenization occurs because of various products with backward creativity and lack of personalized characteristics.

3.3.3. Tourism Development Strategy of Ancient Villages and Towns

The development of experiential tourism in ancient villages and towns is full of challenges. It is necessary to find a way out between seeking the maximum protection of ancient villages and towns and pursuing the maximum benefit. It should protect the original appearance of history and culture, attract tourists to learn and inherit traditional culture, and at the same time bring into play the economic benefits of tourism. Therefore, on the one hand, when introducing commercial activities in the development of ancient villages and towns, it should create a leisure culture atmosphere and pay attention to the high integration of culture and tourism on the basis of ancient villages and towns [14], which should not only meet the needs of tourists, but also pay attention to the protection of the surrounding environment without destroying local humanities and customs. On the other hand, it should have brand awareness, building unique tourism brands of ancient villages and towns, and further strengthen the maintenance of brands through continuous protection measures. Finally, it is important to establish a sense of protection and put the protection of ancient villages and towns in the first place, including buildings, landscape resources, folk customs, cultural resources, etc. [15].

3.4. The Advanced form of Rural Tourism-Manor (Leisure) Economy

Originated in medieval Europe, manor used to be a symbol of nobility, wealth and status. Nowadays, with the rapid development of society and the diversification of people's needs, the organic integration of manor, tourism and agriculture has become a new compound rural tourism development model-manor (leisure) economy. The development of China's manor (leisure) economy is still in the exploratory stage, which was born in the background of industrial integration and the country's promotion of agriculture, rural areas and farmers.

3.4.1. Characteristics of Manor (Leisure) Economy

Manor (leisure) economy is an advanced model of rural tourism based on agriculture. It takes tourism as the core and integrates various functions such as agricultural production, sightseeing and leisure, science education, health care and vacation, business meeting, etc., meeting the needs of urbanites returning to nature and countryside, and emphasizing the experience of tourists [16]. It involves many factors such as land, capital, management and management subjects. Modern manor economy makes full use of modern production factors, and pays attention to the development of secondary and tertiary industries on the basis of developing the primary industry, thus forming a relatively complete agricultural industrialization system, which not only innovates the agricultural production mode, but also improves the added value of the agricultural industry. The key is to understand the development characteristics of the times and form a leisure mode featured by fashion, characteristics and multifunction.

3.4.2. Problems in the Development of Manor (Leisure) Economy

Manor economy is towards the direction of comprehensive, creative and leisure development. At the same time, it is also the development trend of agriculture in the future, but there are still some problems in the development process. First, it takes agriculture as the development foundation, which is an industry with slow cost recovery. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve the expected profit goal; Secondly, the management mode of the manor cannot adopt the backward management means of traditional agricultural projects; Third, investors and developers are limited by many factors in the process of manor construction, which may turn manor construction into real estate projects; Finally, it is a common problem, that is, copying other manors blindly. As a result, there is no special features to attract tourists.

It can be seen that the development of manor, whether it is catering, sports, experience, health care and business, should have their own theme positioning, and plan and design according to various resource elements, the key of which is to be unique and create brand effect [17]. At the same time, the development of the manor should be oriented to more tourists, not limited to middle and high-end customers.

3.5. The Future Trend of Rural Tourism-Rural Leisure (Health Care) Holiday

The ultimate goal of rural tourism is leisure vacation, which is different from the traditional way of

tourism. As a comprehensive tourism development model, rural leisure vacation will be the major trend of rural tourism development in the future.

3.5.1. Characteristics of Rural Leisure (Recreation) Vacation Tour

In today's era, more and more urban people are under pressure from work and life, and the traditional tourism mode can no longer meet people's travel demands. As a new mode of modern tourism, rural leisure vacation and recreation tourism can provide tourists with a personalized and leisure travel experience. The process of rural leisure and holiday tour is full of life atmosphere, which is the key factor to attract tourists to stay here for a long time. In addition, the contemporary people's desire for health, happiness and longevity is getting stronger and stronger. Especially under the influence of COVID-19, the development of recreational tourism with rural ecologic advantages and health care functions is favored by many tourists.

The characteristic rural residence is the key to reflect the rural leisure and holiday tourism. B&B has played a very important role in rural leisure tourism in recent years. As the carrier of rural tourism, B&B can integrate beautiful rural scenery, folk customs, farming culture, delicious food, various experience entertainment projects, etc., drive the economic development of surrounding areas, and implement the rural revitalization policy. At present, B&B is developing towards the direction of leisure vacation and healthy tourism, which is also the unique characteristics of rural residential buildings. The countryside not only has infinitely beautiful sceneries, but also has many healthy functions. For example, its fresh air, clear springs in mountains and rivers, and organic food are all good for the health of people. The slow food, slow city, and slow life, is the way of living that people are pursuing nowadays.

3.5.2. Problems in the Development of Rural Leisure (Recreation) Vacation Tour

With the rapid development of rural leisure and holiday accommodation, some problems have emerged. The definition of B&B format is the most important problem. Some businesses, under the guise of B&B, are actually country hotels or villas. Luxurious construction means high accommodation prices, which cannot attract more tourists to experience. Secondly, the design planning is unreasonable, and there are no characteristic elements because of mutual imitation. In addition, due to the lack of relevant policies, regulations and government supervision, there are some problems in the operation of B & B, which do not have good service

quality and cannot ensure the right of consumption and privacy of tourists.

4. CONCLUSION

As one of tourism modes, rural tourism has become a new way of life for people with its unique charm of rural, ecological, cultural and experiential. By expounding the characteristics, problems and development direction of the five stages of rural tourism, the main conclusions are as follows:

(1) Based on the overall overview of rural tourism, it can be seen from the theoretical and practical demand level that China's rural tourism has a broad prospect and a good development trend, and plays an extremely important role in promoting rural development.

(2) This paper reviews the five stages of rural tourism development in China. The development process of rural tourism in China has developed from the original single sightseeing type to experiential type, and then to the present comprehensive leisure and recreation tourism mode. China's rural tourism has developed to a relatively mature stage.

(3) There are some problems in the five stages of China's rural tourism development, but the problem of homogenization is widespread, which should be paid attention to in the planning and development of rural tourism. Only by combining the characteristics of rural resources, can personalized and novel rural tourism products attract more tourists.

(4) In the future, the demand market for rural tourism will continue to be vigorous, with great development potential. Rural leisure (recreation) holiday tour will become an important way to improve the lifestyle of contemporary people and promote the high-quality development of rural areas.

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