



Achieving Rural Sustainability through Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

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Abstract: The pursuit of rural rejuvenation transcends its role in fostering inclusive growth in developing countries, as it has become an inevitable response to global industrialization and urbanization trends. Achieving sustainability in rural areas through community-based tourism has become a pivotal approach toward realizing this overarching objective, necessitating conceptual and empirical investigations. Drawing on a case study of the Longji Terraces in Guangxi, China, this study critically examines the revitalization of ethnic communities through community tourism to foster rural sustainability. The findings underscore the significance of strategic, operational measures, including adopting a community tourism model for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, establishing a comprehensive and inclusive development framework, and cultivating narrative symbolism and performative platforms. Furthermore, it is recommended that governmental entities undertake proactive tourism initiatives to facilitate greater participation of rural tourists. Ultimately, the conclusions derived from this research endeavor contribute to advancing regional economies and creating expanded employment opportunities.

Keywords: Rurality Sustainability, Ethnic Village, Community-Based Tourism, Longji Rice Terraces.

1. Introduction

Rural revitalization is undergoing a profound and multifaceted transformation worldwide, primarily driven by the rapid and continuous progress of urbanization (Long et al., 2019). Tourist activities in rural areas serve as a nexus that intertwines the economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions of remote communities. These activities are intrinsically linked to the local inhabitants, geographical features, and resources, exerting significant implications on both economic development and natural environments (Nepal, 2007; Xia et al., 2011). Within the broader context of global sustainability, the achievement of cultural sustainability stands as a pivotal objective. It has been identified as a core millennium goal by the United Nations for the forthcoming decades, highlighting its crucial role in fostering sustainable development (Campbell, 2017; Kemoni & Ngulube, 2008).

An examination of China's economic development trends reveals that the Chinese government has actively promoted industrial restructuring, innovation, and the adoption of new concepts for industrial upgrading and economic growth (Nishimura, 2020). Within China, community-based tourism has emerged as a pivotal sector contributing to the economic revitalization and transformation of rural areas (Gao et al., 2019). The changing economic landscape has also influenced the growth trajectory of the tourism industry, particularly through the convergence of cultural and tourism sectors, which has opened up new avenues for mutual development. Notably, the establishment of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism has provided a platform for further exploration and development of community-based tourism, leveraging the synergistic potential between cultural and tourism industries (Siriphon & Zhu, 2018). Community-based tourism prioritizes sustainability, and local community involvement and benefits the neighborhood (Pramanik & Rahmanita, 2023). The integration of these two sectors has not only extended their respective value chains but also facilitated the optimization and upgrading of industrial structures, significantly contributing to the sustainable growth of China's tourism sector and the expansion of its cultural industry. As China's national economy continues to thrive, people's enhanced quality of life has engendered a growing demand for culturally enriching activities (Shu & Zhu, 2009). However, despite the remarkable growth of community-based tourism in recent years, it has encountered various developmental challenges. Existing facilities and services in rural areas are insufficient to meet the cultural and tourism needs of visitors. At the same time, local communities struggle to generate adequate revenue from tourism to improve their living standards. Consequently, it is crucial to delve deeper into integrating cultural and tourism elements in rural China, seeking innovative solutions to overcome these barriers and unlock the full potential of this paradigm (Su, 2011).

In pursuit of this objective, this study delves into the revitalization of ethnic villages through the development of community-based tourism, to discern efficacious strategies that ensure the preservation of cultural sustainability. It endeavors to proffer pragmatic measures, encompassing the establishment of an operational model for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, the formulation of comprehensive and targeted marketing strategies, the innovation of promotional media and channels, the utilization of modern technology to

enhance visual presentation, and the creation of narrative platforms or performative conduits. These operational measures constitute potent approaches for revitalizing ethnic and cultural heritage. The paper's structure unfolds as follows: the introduction section accentuates the significance of community-based tourism in upholding and rejuvenating ethnic settlements, followed by an exhaustive literature review that scrutinizes the nexus between cultural heritage and cultural tourism, as well as the intricate interplay of cultural sustainability and cultural heritage. Subsequently, the research methodologies employed and the study's specific locale are meticulously expounded upon. The study's findings are presented comprehensively to facilitate scholarly discourse. Lastly, the conclusion section amalgamates the theoretical and practical contributions of the paper while also acknowledging its limitations and proposing prospective avenues for further research.

Cultural heritage embodies a collective human legacy that has been created, utilized, and preserved throughout history, carrying immense value that should be transmitted across generations (Manley et al., 2020). It encompasses two distinct dimensions: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage comprises immovable cultural artefacts, such as ancient sites, tombs, architectural structures, cave temples, stone sculptures, murals, significant historical landmarks, and representative contemporary buildings (Vecco, 2010). It also includes portable cultural objects spanning various historical periods, such as significant artefacts, artworks, manuscripts, papers, and library resources (Jokilehto, 2017). In certain historical and cultural cities, physical heritage holds exceptional universal significance due to its architectural style, uniform distribution, or integration with the surrounding landscape (Shamsuddin et al., 2012). These tangible legacies are often evident in historic cities, neighborhoods, villages, and towns that possess remarkable architectural forms, cohesive spatial layouts, or harmonious integration with the natural environment. In the subsequent sections, we delve into a comprehensive exploration of sustainable heritage conservation within community-based tourism endeavors in ethnic communities across China.

Cultural sustainability holds a paramount position within the framework of a sustainable social structure, representing the fourth pillar alongside environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Huang et al., 2019; Zhang, 2016). As Memmott and Keys (2015) explain, the discipline of cultural sustainability is a guiding theory in scientific research. It is a distinct yet interconnected concept within the realm of social sustainability, encompassing cultural and heritage-related issues, as well as ecological, sociocultural, architectural, and commercial considerations (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015; Laine, 2016; Zhang, 2016). These studies highlight the need for further scholarly exploration of cultural sustainability, particularly within the context of tourism. Moreover, it is crucial to foster stakeholder engagement, including government officials, businesspeople, and local communities, as cultural sustainability cannot be achieved without the active involvement of these key actors (Bischoff, 2021). In this scenario, cultural sustainability will not be realized without stakeholder engagement.

To achieve cultural sustainability through community-based tourism, various strategies can be implemented. These include establishing mechanisms for the protection and preservation of intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional crafts, performing arts, and oral traditions, ensuring their transmission to future generations. Moreover, systematic and refined marketing plans can be devised to promote the destination's cultural offerings in a responsible and sustainable manner, targeting specific market segments interested in cultural immersion and heritage experiences. Innovations in publicity media and channels can enhance the visibility of the destination's cultural assets. At the same time, the utilization of modern technology can optimize the visual presentation effects, creating engaging and interactive experiences for tourists. Furthermore, the development of story carriers or performance channels can serve as an effective means of revitalizing and showcasing ethnic and cultural heritage. By creating narrative experiences and performances that reflect the unique cultural identity of the community, tourists can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local culture. These initiatives not only contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage but also generate employment opportunities and stimulate the local economy.

To effectively integrate China's culture and tourist sectors, it is vital to elevate the significance of cultural resources throughout the development process. Traditional handicrafts, historic villages, and towns form the cornerstone of China's community-based tourism industry, enabling the integration of cultural resources into commercial entertainment and leveraging catering and shopping to enhance the profitability of community-based tourism. As China's social system rapidly evolves and people's material living standards improve, there is a growing demand for spiritual and cultural experiences, leading to an elevated expectation among modern tourists. Integrating cultural and creative industries within community-based tourism helps accentuate their unique characteristics and advantages. This entails carefully exploring and revitalizing the cultural value embedded in historical buildings, creating new cultural practices that resonate with contemporary values, and employing modern advertising techniques to reflect more current aspects.

To foster the distinctive and humanistic development of China's community-based tourism industry, it is crucial to underscore traditional cultural characteristics. Government agencies should provide substantial support and leverage indigenous cultural heritage in resource extraction and development. By safeguarding and showcasing traditional cultural elements, China's community-based tourism industry can offer visitors a unique and authentic experience that celebrates the country's rich cultural heritage.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted in the Longji Rice Terraces, located in Guilin city, China. The Longji rice terraces, also known as Longsheng terraces, are developed on Longji Mountain in Pingan Village, Guangxi (Zhu & Siriphon, 2019). The Longji Mountain, situated in Pingan Village, Guangxi, is approximately 22 kilometres from Longsheng county and 80 kilometers from Guilin City. The terraced fields in this area were among the earliest rice fields established in the Highland Mountain region and were constructed during the Qin and Han dynasties. Longsheng played a pioneering role in agricultural practices, promoting the use of terraces. The terraced fields expanded significantly during the Tang and Song Dynasties and reached their current scale during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. With a history of at least 2,300 years, the Longsheng terraced fields are renowned worldwide (Miao et al., 2020).

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the discourse substance and norms governing national rural tourist development, focusing on the case of Longji Rice Terraces as the research setting. Additional methodologies, such as public policy analysis and literature review, are utilized (Dunn, 2015; Fischer & Miller, 2017; Wijesinghe et al., 2019). Subsequently, the vast majority of previously published works, such as papers and dissertations, on the subject of the continuation of Chinese cultural traditions were included. For instance, precedential literatures on the issues of a roadmap of cultural sustainability (Li et al., 2016), a harmonious development model for Chinese cultural sustainability (Xu & Zheng, 2021), a space approach to understand Chinese residence and cultural sustainability (Huang et al., 2019), a spatial art approach to revitalize traditional villages (Liu et al., 2019), and the Chinese socio-cultural sustainability approach to understand conservation planning (Chen & Yang, 2018). The study includes a comprehensive review of previously published works, such as papers and dissertations, related to the continuation of Chinese cultural traditions. This paper specifically focuses on the preservation and transmission of Longji farming culture in the context of rural regeneration efforts. It examines the meaning, characteristics, and heritage value of Longji farming culture, and analyzes its integration into high-quality community-based tourism for cultural resource transformation and development within the framework of China's rural rehabilitation policy. The objective is to achieve the creative transformation, value enhancement, and revitalization of cultural resources (including agricultural culture) in the context of community-based tourism.

In the Longji Scenic Area, a comprehensive field study was conducted by the authors, engaging with a diverse group of individuals to gather insights into the impact of ethnic cultural resource owners on development and conservation efforts. A total of 35 local villagers and key stakeholders were interviewed, including employees from various sectors within the region. Among the interviewees were the director of Huangluo Yao Village, the secretary of Dazhai, the owner of the Longji Tea Ethnic Enterprise, and the inheritors of the intangible cultural property of the Zhuang Village. All interview participants belonged to the Zhuang community, providing valuable data for drawing relevant conclusions. A detailed breakdown of the number of individuals interviewed is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Interview participants' demographic profile

General Information	Gender		Age			Identity		
	Male	Female	Under 30 years of age	30-50 years of age	Over 50 years old	Local villagers	Government officials	Longji Tourism Company
Interviewed participants	15	20	10	19	6	21	7	7
Total	35		35			35		

3. Results and Discussion

Stakeholders in Community-Based Tourism in The Case of Longji Rice Terraces Fields

The integration of the culture industry and tourist industry has significantly influenced the development of tourism in ethnic minority communities, distinguishing them from other regions due to their unique natural and cultural landscapes and diverse ethnic cultures. This integration not only elevates the tourism industry to new heights but also facilitates the growth of the cultural industry within these communities. By promoting cultural heritage tourism, the cultural industry of ethnic minorities can experience substantial growth, offering opportunities to establish robust tourist and cultural brands. Chinese cultural workers have made continuous efforts to preserve and promote ethnic minority cultures, resulting in the inclusion of more ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage in the catalogue of human intangible assets. In the process of integrating culture and tourism among Chinese

ethnic minorities, a significant amount of ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage can be leveraged for the development of the cultural industry. One of the participants in the interview expressed the following ideas.

The continued existence of tourism is dependent on the availability of several resources. Increasing the preservation of our community-based tourism resources in Longji is an unavoidable decision for the continuation and growth of tourism, as well as a definite approach to achieve sustainable development of tourism. This is because both things are essential to the tourism business in our village (PLJ, aged 55, village chief in one of the villages in Longji Scenic Area, interviewed in 2022).

The paradigm of protective development holds the potential to safeguard cultural assets for future generations, thereby ensuring their preservation and contributing to the growth and sustainability of ethnic minority cultures in China. By adopting this approach, cultural heritage can be effectively conserved, allowing for its continued transmission and utilization. Moreover, the involvement of multiple stakeholders in community tourism introduces complexity to the decision-making process and necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the concerns and perspectives of the local community. Therefore, the subsequent section of this study will delve into an in-depth examination of the diverse concerns expressed by the stakeholders within the local community context.

Proper Government Guidance to Develop A Community Tourism Model for The Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

In the Chinese context, government-led tourist development has been firmly established as a guiding principle and primary objective, ensuring the sustainable and balanced growth of community-based tourism (Zhou, 2009). The protection of intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of tourist development requires the involvement of three key stakeholders: governing managers, the local community, and the government. To prevent the loss and extinction of intangible cultural assets, the Chinese government has implemented various measures aimed at enhancing the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

The transmission of intangible cultural heritage through tourist development is manifested through various means, such as government commitment, coordinated planning, and innovative development approaches. Adequate government attention to the conservation of intangible cultural heritage, supported by advancements in science, technology, and education, can significantly contribute to the preservation of local intangible cultural heritage. Longji's intangible cultural heritage legacy has witnessed the historical impact of this approach. Additionally, the commercialization of certain intangible cultural assets by tourist developers has facilitated the acquisition and preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Within the community of intangible cultural heritage inheritors, there exists a prevailing belief that their acquired ethnic minority skills possess distinctive qualities that should remain concealed. Such a perspective poses a hindrance to the advancement and preservation of tourism built upon intangible cultural resources. Furthermore, some inheritors perceive the development of intangible cultural heritage preservation tourism as the sole responsibility of the state, government, and the tourism industry. However, it is essential to recognize that the development of intangible cultural heritage preservation tourism necessitates the active engagement of all stakeholders involved.

The Inclusive Development Model Facilitates to Develop a Systematic Development Mode

The implementation of intangible cultural assets largely rests upon the participation of local ethnic minority villagers, giving rise to several challenges in the actual development process. Firstly, there is a lack of market-oriented operations, as local individuals often lack standardized plans that align with market demands. Their reliance on simplistic and direct operation techniques often results in detachment from the market, impeding tourism growth. While many businesses express interest in participating in intangible cultural heritage preservation tourism, they often rely on government assistance. Secondly, there is a scarcity of funds and guidance, with most individuals involved in intangible cultural heritage development lacking cultural literacy due to limited economic growth and education in minority regions. This deficiency in professional development guidance and financial support leads to the underutilization of tourism products and a waste of tourist resources. Consequently, the development of the tourism model for intangible cultural heritage requires further strengthening.

The development of rural tourism should prioritize the concept of community benefit, aiming to stimulate local economic growth and increase the income of local farmers. This perspective underscores the significance of rural tourism development in Longji's villages, fostering local enthusiasm while maximizing resource protection. (TLX, aged 29, Staff in the Longji Tourism Company, interviewed at the entrance of the scenic area of Longji in 2021).

Based on interviews conducted by the researchers in various ethnic minority regions of China, it was observed that in many areas, the custodians of intangible cultural heritage are predominantly elderly individuals. In contrast, the participation of ethnic minority youths in inheriting such cultural heritage is disproportionately low. The convergence of the cultural and tourism industries has notably contributed to the advancement of the tourism

sector in ethnic minority regions. However, the tourism market has also had detrimental effects on the overall landscape of cultural and tourism integration.

The Local Villagers Constructing Storytelling Vehicles or Performance Channels

Community participation in community-based tourism development is crucial for the well-being of the local communities. The Longji cultural heritage, which is the core curation of tourism development, is the result of generations of work by the local Zhuang and Yao ancestors. The demonstrations of Zhuang and Yao culture is dependent on the participation of the community. As one of the main stakeholders in tourism development, the villagers are entitled to enjoy the benefits of the tourism development process. In this special case of Longji Rice Terraces, the villagers have their own perspectives on the sustainability concepts with the development of community-based tourism in the hamlet.

A key component of rural ecotourism focuses on human-nature coexistence and highlights the interdependence of human and natural systems. To make rural tourism more economically viable, in-depth research of the area's ecotourism resources is required. Increasing the number of tourists and raising the earnings of rural residents are all possible outcomes of promoting high-quality rural economic development. This will allow for excellent tourism services to be provided in the area (TMJ, aged 35, hotel manager in one of the hamlets in Longji, interviewed in the working hotel by 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic).

In the process of tourism development and management, the key to gaining community support for tourism is to introduce mechanisms for community participation and to ensure that community residents have the right to benefit from tourism development. It is only when villagers can reap the benefits they expect from tourism development that they will support tourism operations. In this way, the long-term sustainability of the destination will be achieved. Taking Huangluo Yao Village as an example, it is the only Yao village in the thirteen villages of Longji. It is home to the whole Red Yao population. It is referred to be the world's No. 1 Long Hair Village in the world. When visitors visit Huangluo Yao Village, Yao females dressed in vibrant national costumes greet them with beautiful folk melodies. They will perform unique dances and traditional sports activities, as well as showcase Yao women's long, black hair in a live performance (see Figure 1 below). Their musical and dance performances include the Long Hair Show, the Red Stick Dance, and the Umbrella Dance. This is the finest illustration of how intangible cultural heritage is being commercialized in Chinese minority settlements and how the local stories are formulated as a tourist performing event.

A comprehensive knowledge of the morphological and social development of Longji Rice Terraces required careful research of a variety of metrics. They were chosen as building indicators, while the proportion of rural employed people in non-agricultural tourist service providers was used as a criterion for quantifying the social structure shift. The tourism output values were chosen as economic development indicators for the revitalization of the phenomenon under investigation (see Figure 1 below).

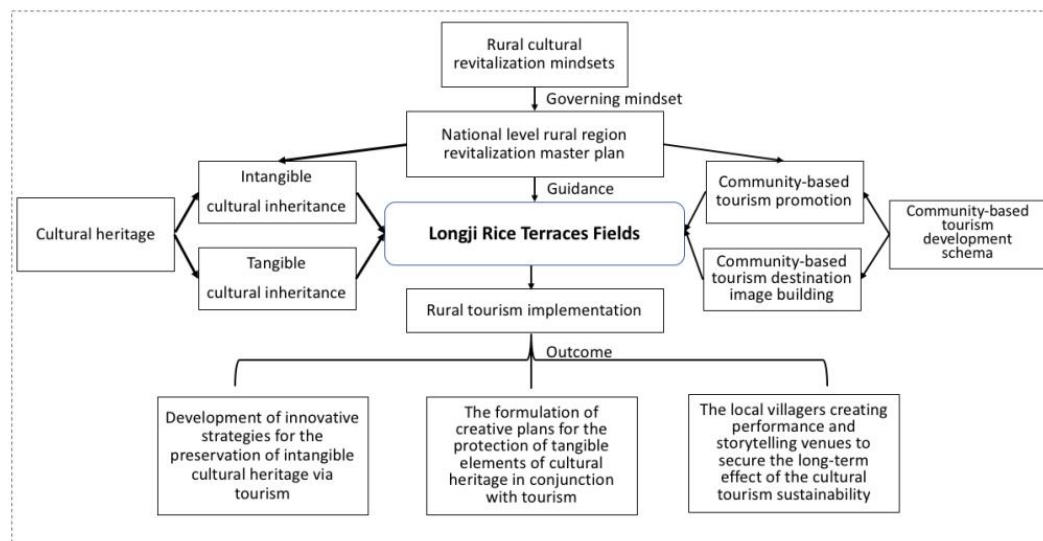


Fig.1. The overarching research schema for the current academic investigation

The discussion revolves around the issue of innovation in the implementation of protective tourism for ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage. The development and utilization of intangible cultural heritage play a pivotal role in addressing this challenge (Lemelin et al., 2015; Tagowa & Hunohidoshi, 2015). The development of personalized, diversified, and high-end intangible cultural heritage is the key to satisfying the needs of tourists. At present, in minority areas, there is always shallow development and unitary development of intangible cultural

heritage tourism development and innovation. For intangible cultural heritage, its tourism value lies in its cultural connotation (George, 2010; Orbashi & Woodward, 2009). To effectively meet the needs of tourists, the key lies in the development of personalized, diversified, and high-end intangible cultural heritage experiences. However, in many minority areas, the development and innovation of intangible cultural heritage tourism remain superficial and limited. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the concept of intangible cultural heritage protection tourism is often constrained by traditional tourism development thinking, neglecting the profound cultural connotations it holds. To address these challenges, stakeholders should emphasize the unique ethnic and cultural characteristics and adopt effective branding strategies for the cultural heritage site. In the case of the Longji area, it is suggested that the rich ethnic and cultural diversity should be fully explored and showcased in tourism development, highlighting its ancient charm and distinct ethnic group characteristics. By differentiating itself from neighboring villages with similar terraced landscapes, the Longji area can embark on a sustainable tourism development path.

Innovative market publicity strategies and expanded promotional activities are essential for the expansion of intangible cultural heritage preservation tourism and provide opportunities to stimulate the development of ethnic minority tourism enterprises. The development of rural tourism in China's rural areas should leverage their unique resource advantages and integrate modern commerce, production, tourism, and leisure in a coordinated manner (Zhu et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2021). The adoption of new media marketing plays a crucial role in this process. Local governments play a significant role in supporting the long-term growth of the rural tourism industry.

The integration of culture and tourism is a crucial aspect of the development of cultural heritage tourism, particularly in the context of community-based tourism (Dela Santa & Tiatco, 2019; Rocharungsat, 2008). It is imperative to prioritize the preservation of cultural assets during the process of tourism development, as ethnic heritage and cultural tourism resources are often non-renewable and require sustainable management. In the case of Longji, it is recommended that the community focuses on unearthing and preserving its traditional ethnic culture, ensuring its transmission to future generations. By integrating intangible cultural heritage with tourism, the development of ethnic minorities' cultural heritage can generate new tourism products that cater to the demands of visitors, thus enhancing their tourism experience. Furthermore, promoting tourism in ethnic minority communities can provide opportunities for the growth of cultural industries.

Therefore, it is paramount to emphasize the development of protective tourism for ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage through the integration of cultural and tourism industries. As such, the integration of culture and tourism in the development of cultural heritage tourism is essential for preserving cultural assets and promoting sustainable tourism practices. By unearthing and preserving traditional ethnic culture, developing new tourism products, and fostering the growth of cultural industries, community-based tourism can be enhanced. However, it is vital to ensure the protective development of intangible cultural heritage alongside tourism activities, thereby achieving a harmonious balance between economic development and cultural preservation. The integration of cultural and tourism industries is instrumental in promoting the optimization of the ethnic minority tourism economic structure and facilitating the long-term inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, especially in the present era.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has employed a qualitative research methodology to examine the concept of cultural sustainability in the context of community-based tourism (Zhu et al., 2022), using the Longji Rice Terraces as a case study. The study highlights the importance of building a perception of sustainable tourist development among all stakeholders and emphasizes that community-based tourism is crucial not only for economic reasons but also for political, ecological, environmental, and cultural sustainability. The paper emphasizes the need to regulate and control uncontrolled and irresponsible tourist development to ensure the smooth implementation of intangible cultural heritage protection tourism. It proposes optimizing the operation mode, formulating a comprehensive publicity plan, and establishing effective communication mechanisms among stakeholders. Tourism development requires the involvement of stakeholders to ensure the optimization and sustainability of tourism management (Rahmanita et al., 2022). This study contributes to understanding cultural sustainability and its application in community-based tourism. It highlights the potential risks and challenges associated with unregulated tourism development and recommends promoting harmonious growth and cultural preservation. The proposed strategies for optimizing the development of intangible cultural heritage protection tourism can guide future initiatives in ethnic minority communities. Future research should focus on the construction of a virtuous promotion system to sustain the tourism development of intangible cultural assets of ethnic minorities. It is recommended to gather sociodemographic information at the local level to enhance precision in evaluating the development paths of different villages. Within the context of cultural and tourism integration, further studies could explore topics such as financial support and expert oversight for the development of cultural assets, overcoming obstacles in the

protection and innovation of cultural assets, increasing market awareness, and adapting to tourist preferences. Comparative studies across diverse regions and in-depth investigations are also needed to obtain more comprehensive and complex research outcomes in the field of community-based tourism and cultural heritage development.

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