



A Study on the Current Situation, Existing Problems and Countermeasures of Rural Tourism Development in the Eight Villages of Chengyang, Sanjiang County

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Abstract. This study investigates rural tourism in Chengyang Eight Villages, Sanjiang County, Guangxi. Despite advantages such as convenient transport, rich Dong culture (bridges, towers, festivals), and 4A scenic spot status, problems persist: poor infrastructure, a simplistic sightseeing-ticket model, over-commercialization of intangible heritage, and loss of traditional architecture. Countermeasures include upgrading infrastructure, shifting to leisure-vacation tourism, integrating “ICH + tourism + e-commerce + poverty alleviation”, regulating new buildings, training staff and inheritors, and enhancing cooperation. With proper protection of culture and ecology, Chengyang Eight Villages can achieve high-quality rural tourism and support rural revitalization.

Keywords: Chengyang Eight Villages; Rural tourism; Problems and countermeasures; Dong culture; Rural revitalization

1 Introduction

Rural tourism is key to poverty alleviation in ethnic regions. Chengyang Eight Villages, rich in Dong culture, suffer from poor infrastructure, a ticket-based model, over-commercialization, and loss of traditional buildings (only 26% remain). Existing studies lack systematic solutions integrating heritage protection with community engagement. This paper contributes: (1) field-based problem diagnosis; (2) an “ICH + tourism + e-commerce” framework; (3) regulatory measures (architectural standards, training) and a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism. The findings offer practical guidance for sustainable rural tourism while preserving cultural identity.

2 Basic Overview of Chengyang Eight Villages, Sanjiang County

2.1 Location Analysis

Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County lies in northern Guangxi at the junction of Hunan, Guangxi and Guizhou. Chengyang Eight Villages (As shown in Figure 2), in Linxi Town along the Linxi River, is 19 km from the county seat. Formed 400 years ago, it became a national 4A scenic spot in 2009. It is 180 km from Guilin Airport and close to major highways.^[1]

The area covers 30 km², with 2,265 households and about 10,000 people. The eight villages belong to three administrative villages. The climate is mild and humid, suitable for farming. The scenic area features 9 wind-rain bridges and 11 drum towers, preserving authentic Dong culture and earning the title of “China’s First Landscape Villages”^[2] (As shown in Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Scenic Views of Chengyang Eight Villages



Fig. 2. Aerial Top View of Chengyang Eight Villages

2.2 Social Structures

Historically, each village was governed by an Elders' Council, with inter-village alliances (Kuan confederation). Today, the eight villages fall under three village committees, but traditional self-governance and the Elderly Association remain active in dispute resolution and ritual organization^[3].

2.3 Spatial Layout

Villages vary in size (100–500 households), scattered close to each other. Settlements lie along rivers and roads, with stilted buildings clustered around drum towers, forming single- or multi-core layouts^[4]. This vernacular landscape holds high historical and cultural value.

2.4 Sources of Household Income

Before tourism, locals relied on rice farming and forestry. Currently, only a small fraction work in tourism; 41% are migrant laborers, 40% farm, and less than 2% engage in tourism business^[5].

2.5 Research Background and Motivations

Rural tourism has emerged as a key strategy for poverty alleviation and rural revitalization in China, particularly in ethnic minority regions with rich cultural assets but lagging economic development. Chengyang Eight Villages, as a representative Dong ethnic settlement, faces a dual challenge: preserving its unique intangible cultural heritage (e.g., wind-rain bridge construction techniques, Dong Grand Chorus, hundred-family feast) while improving local livelihoods through tourism. The central government's "rural revitalization" strategy (2018–2035) emphasizes industrial development, ecological protection, and cultural inheritance as integrated goals. However, many rural tourism destinations, including Chengyang, have fallen into a low-end, ticket-dependent model that underutilizes digital tools and fails to engage local communities equitably. Therefore, this study is motivated by the need to diagnose current problems and propose a sustainable, technology-enabled pathway that aligns cultural preservation with economic growth..

3 Current Situation and Advantages of Rural Tourism Development in Chengyang Eight Villages

3.1 Current Situation of Tourism Landscape

Vegetation: High coverage but monotonous species and spatial forms; farmland lacks ornamental design.

Water: Rivers and ponds, combined with wind-rain bridges, create scenic views and support irrigation.

Architecture: Includes 7 wind-rain bridges (e.g., Yongji Bridge), 8 drum towers, opera stages, and stilted buildings. However, concrete is replacing wood. Traditional drum towers serve as communal cores; new construction follows traditional techniques, preserving overall village texture.

3.2 Advantages of Tourism Development in Chengyang Eight Villages

Distinctive products: Authentic Dong culture (As shown in Figure 3) (song, dance, hundred-family feast, handicrafts) remains relatively intact.

Favorable market: Growing tourist arrivals and revenue, promising future development.



Fig. 3. Cultural Activities in Chengyang Eight Villages

3.3 Market Environment Analysis

The market for rural and ethnic tourism in China has expanded steadily. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, domestic tourism trips reached 4.41 billion in 2024, with rural tourism accounting for approximately 30%. In Guangxi, tourism revenue grew by 18% year-on-year in 2024, and Sanjiang County received 8.6 million tourists, generating RMB 7.2 billion in revenue. Within Chengyang Eight Villages, tourist arrivals increased from 620,000 in 2020 to 1.05 million in 2024, with an average annual growth rate of 14%. However, the average tourist stay is only 0.8 days, far below the national rural tourism average of 1.6 days. Per capita spending is RMB 120, of which 65% is on tickets and meals, leaving little for accommodation, handicrafts, or other cultural experiences. The main visitor segments are domestic leisure travelers (72%) and educational tour groups (18%), with international tourists accounting for

less than 3% after the pandemic. Online reviews (Ctrip, Meituan) show that while scenic beauty is highly rated (4.6/5), infrastructure (2.9/5) and cultural activity depth (3.1/5) score poorly. These data indicate a market demand shift from sightseeing to immersive, experience-based tourism, yet the destination's supply side remains underdeveloped.

4 Problems

4.1 Infrastructure

Only 12% of visitors rate transportation as “convenient” . During peak holidays (e.g., National Day), traffic congestion lasts up to 3 hours on the 8 km road from the county seat to the scenic area. There are zero formal restaurants; the sole hundred-family feast serves dinner only, leaving 78% of tourists reporting “difficulty finding breakfast/lunch.”

4.2 Tourism Project Deficiencies

Extensive “sightseeing-ticket” model; short stays (“dining only, no accommodation”). Some ICH projects are over-commercialized or altered, losing authenticity; others are too expensive, limiting participation.

4.3 Architectural Dilution

Traditional wooden structures increasingly replaced by concrete. The evolution has four stages: original all-wood → pure concrete → composite (concrete lower, wood upper) → post-2019 regulations requiring wood-dominated construction and height limits (≤ 15 m). Yet regional character is fading.

5 Suggestions

5.1 Infrastructure, Tourism Products and Architectural Standardization

To address infrastructure and tourism product deficiencies, a range of integrated measures should be implemented^[6]. The tourism model should shift from sightseeing to leisure-vacation, developing ponds, orchards, hiking trails, and rest pavilions to enrich experiences and extend stays^[7]. An integrated cultural tourism platform featuring intangible cultural heritage (ICH) shall be established, combining exhibition, sales, and innovative design of traditional Dong handicrafts, with regular ICH fairs held during festivals^[8]. The “ICH + tourism + e-commerce + poverty alleviation” model should be pursued to develop ICH-themed homestays, creative products, performances, and museums. Additionally, architectural styles must be standardized following the principle

of “restoring old as old, building new as old,” with strict specifications on facade, materials, craftsmanship, color, and function to preserve vernacular character.

5.2 Talent Cultivation and Multilateral Cooperation

To strengthen human resources and cooperative mechanisms, cultivation of professional talents and ICH inheritors is essential. Targeted vocational training should address shortages in tourism planning, management, and service. Deepened cooperation between universities and local governments, as well as enterprises and governments, can build teaching bases, introduce professional instructors, and recruit high-caliber practitioners^[9]. Finally, deepening multilateral cooperation for mutual benefits requires a sound multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism among village committees, villagers, and scenic area operators in development, conservation, inheritance, and ecological protection. Active linkage with government and external resources should follow the philosophy that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets^[10].

6 Conclusion

This study finds that Chengyang Eight Villages has rich Dong culture but suffers from poor infrastructure, short stays, loss of traditional buildings (only 26% remain), and over-commercialization. Solutions include upgrading facilities, shifting to leisure tourism, and implementing an “ICH + tourism + e-commerce + rural revitalization” model with stricter architectural rules and better training. The study offers practical steps for local managers. With proper action, the area can achieve sustainable rural revitalization while preserving its cultural heritage.

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