

Cultural Internal Gaze and Cultural Symbol Alienation in Chinese Minority Cultural Tourism: A Case Study of the Yi Culture in Chuxiong

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Abstract

Ethnic minority cultural tourism in China plays an important role in economic development and cultural preservation and has become a common choice for economic and cultural development in minority regions. However, these regions do not possess entirely homogeneous ethnic and cultural backgrounds, so the cultural connections within local communities also deserve attention. Researchers collected samples in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, including 641 participants (535 registered residents of Chuxiong and 106 tourists). They used the Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale to measure cultural identity among different groups and supplemented other variables with four focus groups comprising 54 participants. Through the analysis of survey data and on-site observations, the study explored why cultural tourism has not ideally protected and transmitted the Yi ethnic culture in Chuxiong.

The research result revealed that individuals from diverse identity backgrounds hold varying understandings of the same ethnic culture, which can significantly impact cultural heritage and tourism experiences. The interaction between cultural internal gaze and symbol alienation intensifies cultural differences and conflicts, impacting the interaction and understanding among local residents from different backgrounds and affecting the quality and sustainability of ethnic cultural tourism. To meet the needs of modern consumers, cultural heritage institutions should innovate by using new perspectives and expressions to create unique cultural symbol systems with complex cultural logic, which can help the development and revitalization of ethnic culture, regional culture, and historical heritage.

Keywords: Chinese Minority Cultural Tourism; Cultural Gaze; Cultural Authenticity

Introduction

As one of China's major ethnic minority autonomous prefectures, Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture boasts a long history and a unique Yi culture. Its rich cultural tourism resources attract numerous visitors. However, with the rise of the cultural tourism industry, Chuxiong Yi culture is also at risk of cultural symbol alienation. In this research, cultural internal gaze refers to local residents examining and evaluating their own ethnic minority culture from different perspectives. Cultural symbol alienation occurs when ethnic minority culture is misinterpreted during the development of the tourism industry, leading to its expression becoming simplified, exoticized, and commercialized, thereby detaching it from its original context. Compared to a single cultural association, local identity aligns better with the research context of ethnic minority cultural tourism. Local identity, a significant concept in psychology that examines human-place relationships, focuses on individuals' cognitive connections with a place. It encompasses people's memories, feelings, attitudes, preferences, values, and behavioral tendencies toward the places they inhabit. This connection is formed through intentional and unintentional complex interactions between individuals and their environment, leading to psychological bonds with the physical environment that become part of self-identity (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983).

As an important branch of the tourism industry, cultural tourism has rapidly developed over the past few decades, becoming a key driver of economic growth and cultural exchange for many countries and regions. Against this backdrop, cultural tourism in China's ethnic minority regions has gradually attracted domestic and international attention due to its uniqueness. These regions are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, distinctive ethnic charm, and beautiful natural scenery. However, in the specific context of cultural tourism, ethnic minority cultures also face challenges and pressures.

According to a search on CNKI, from 1990 to the completion of this article, there were a total of 1,979 studies focused on ethnic minority cultural tourism in China. Among them, 52 articles focused on intra-regional group relationships, with 3 discussing identity and group interactions. These studies have provided a theoretical foundation and practical suggestions for the effective development of cultural tourism, offering theoretical guidance and management advice to cultural development departments and tourism enterprises. They have also explored the impact of tourism

behavior on the culture of tourist destinations. However, they have yet to address the issue of gaze among different local cultural groups.

According to the “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention” (1999, 2002, 2005), heritage value verification is closely related to the authenticity of heritage. The guidelines clearly state that heritage projects should undergo an “authenticity test” and satisfy requirements concerning design, materials, craftsmanship, background environment, character, and constituent elements. In addition, UNESCO has issued a series of documents aimed at protecting intangible cultural heritage, including the “Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore” (1989), the “Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” (1997), and the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” (2003). In 2015, UNESCO adopted 12 “Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage” to counteract commercial, consumer-oriented, and decontextualization tendencies that conflict with the spirit of the Convention.

However, the actual situation shows that culture is embedded in the process of symbolization and symbolic production across supply, distribution, and demand channels. Among these, consumer perceptions and discoveries typically represent higher value outcomes. Under the dominance of a market-based economy, with technological updates and the substitution of machines, many Chinese ethnic minority cultures face the issues of cultural homogenization and the loss of their distinctive cultural essence.

This research paper proposes viewing ethnic minority cultural tourism as a complex social system where various forces related to cultural symbols are adjusted and defined. The analysis of these environments often revolves around two interrelated aspects: the interaction between actors within the tourism field and cultural symbols, and the relationships between different fields of interest. Local groups are categorized into local cultural participants, local cultural observers, and non-local cultural groups. These categories can be further subdivided into complex identity definitions, such as out-of-town businessmen operating locally and culturally active individuals who have moved to the area. These groups have varying degrees of interest relationships that determine the production of cultural representations, fundamentally shaping the direction of cultural evolution. This presents a new perspective for future research on cultural tourism.

Research Objectives

1. Research the phenomena of cultural internal gaze and symbol alienation within the Chuxiong Yi culture tourism industry. Analyze the cultural symbol alienation experiences of Yi culture during tourism development, the causes of these phenomena, and their impacts on Yi culture.
2. Derive the manifestations of this complex gaze in the tourism industry through case studies, revealing the complexity of these issues and their potential impact on ethnic minority cultures.

Literature Review

Concepts and Theories Related to Cultural Internal Gaze

The concept of gaze can be traced back to Lacanian psychoanalysis's early theory of the "mirror stage," which refers to the period between 6 and 18 months of age when infants begin to recognize their own existence and interpersonal environment by observing their reflection in a mirror. Through this process, they gradually develop self-awareness and awareness of interpersonal relationships. By observing their reflection, infants become aware of themselves as seen through their own eyes and also as seen through the eyes of others. Additionally, they begin to recognize the differences and complementary relationships between their mother and father in terms of appearance and physiology. This awareness of their own incompleteness leads to a desire for self-improvement (Lacan, Sheridan & Bowie, 2001).

In the context of 20th-century globalization, the critical politics shifted from race to ethnicity, from skin color to identity. The focus of globalization perspectives and postmodern theory has been on the politics of difference and, crucially, identity. Consequently, in the practice of gaze critique, issues of identity, as well as the associated topic of "identification," have emerged as significant subjects of study.

In 1992, British sociologist John Urry introduced the concept of the "tourist gaze" into tourism research, building on Foucault's theory of "gaze." Urry argued that tourism involves people leaving their usual environment to visit an unfamiliar place, where they gaze upon landscapes and cultural symbols they cannot experience in their everyday lives. The aim is to achieve a sense of pleasure, explore new knowledge, and seek adventure and excitement, thus making the tourist gaze inherently "counter-social."

During the process of cultural and population exchange, ethnic culture may become the main theme of cultural symbol expression in a particular region, yet it may no longer encompass everything. Place is an environment endowed with human experiences, relationships, emotions, and thoughts (Wang & Chen, 2015). This environment includes not only the physical environment but also the activities, social processes, and psychological processes that take place within it. It is a product of social construction, and its meanings can change with social and historical shifts, as well as people's understanding, imagination, and experiences of the place (Gao, 2012). Therefore, research on China's ethnic minority cultures should consider these identity variables.

Based on this actual situation, the author proposes a variation of the concept of cultural gaze: internal cultural gaze. Members of an internal culture possess different identities due to their origin culture, family culture, and survival culture, and they gaze upon each other from different perspectives. The balance of this gaze is an essential factor for a culture to live healthily, naturally, and in line with the progress of the times.

Concepts and Theories of Cultural Symbols

As tourists engage with the physical and cultural landscapes of a destination, differences in roles, cultural levels, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic status between tourists and local residents determine that tourist gaze possesses characteristics of “inequality,” “dominance,” “variability,” and “sociality.” The process of tourist experience is also a process of symbol collection, indicating that tourist gaze has “symbolic” characteristics. This involves research on the development of cultural resources and regional cultures.

On the one hand, this includes studies on the application of cultural symbols in arts and designs such as clothing and architecture. Unique ethnic clothing and architecture often embody the historical imprints and colors of an ethnic group, serving as outward expressions of ethnic style and spirit. For example, the high-frequency keywords for cluster, “tourism resources,” include “ethnic minority areas.”

On the other hand, this includes research on the application of semiotics in the coordinated development of regional tourism. The high-frequency keywords include “industry integration” and “tourism industry.”

Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction emphasizes various social relationships involved in reproduction activities, thereby revealing the mechanisms of reproducing dominant power within these relationships. The core of his theory revolves around the concepts of “field,” “capital,” “habitus,” and “symbolic violence” (Gao, 2004).

Based on the theory of cultural regeneration, international applications primarily involve heritage reproduction, particularly exploring how modern digital technologies and high-tech innovations can provide users with rich knowledge and multisensory visualized heritage experiences. The application of cultural reproduction theory in tourism reproduction focuses more on tourism innovation, such as creating innovative tourism projects and developing innovative tourism products, as well as the relationship between tourism and social reproduction, with particular attention to the reproduction of tourism communities or villages. The theory of cultural reproduction plays a significant role in promoting and driving the revitalization of heritage tourism.

Conceptual Framework

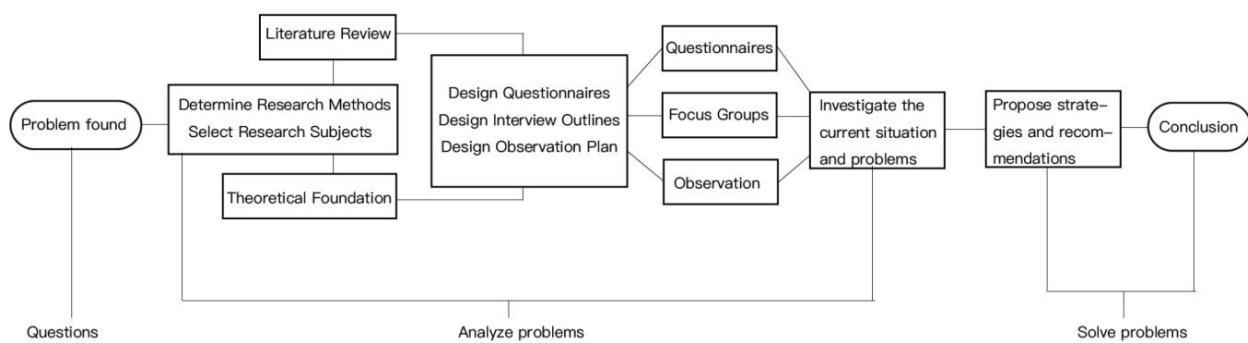


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

(Source: Created by researchers, 2024)

Research Methodology

This study employs a combination of various research methods:

Literature Review: Conduct a systematic review of existing research on cultural gaze, cultural symbol alienation, and ethnic minority cultural tourism both domestically and internationally to understand the current state and development trends in the research field.

Field Observation: Carry out field observations at cultural tourism sites in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, documenting the interaction and cultural experiences between tourists and local residents in cultural tourism activities.

Questionnaire Survey: Collect data on tourists' and local residents' opinions and attitudes towards Yi culture tourism. The questionnaire design covers perspectives on cultural internal gaze, cultural symbol alienation, and the protection and inheritance of Yi culture.

Focus Groups: Conduct in-depth exploration of tourists' and local residents' cognition, attitudes, and interaction methods toward Yi culture through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interviewees include tourists, local residents, cultural research experts, and tourism professionals.

Data Analysis: Perform comprehensive analysis of the above data to uncover specific manifestations and impacts of cultural internal gaze and cultural symbol alienation.

For the study involving children, participants will be selected from those residing in Yi ethnic communities. Under the supervision of their attending schools and with the cooperation of teachers, the research will be carried out. During the research process, utmost care will be taken to ensure the privacy and rights of the participants are fully protected. With the participants' consent, all personal information will be treated as confidential. The study will adhere to relevant ethical guidelines throughout its duration.

The materials implemented in this research consist of the following:

1) Phase One: Questionnaire Survey

–Group No.1 (Control group): 82 Chuxiong cultural tourism industry staff (21–32 years old)

–Group No.2 (Test group): 118 Yi people residing in Yi communities (20–62 years old)

–Group No.3 (Test group): 177 non-Yi people residing in Yi communities (23–69 years old)

–Group No.4 (Test group): 158 children residing in Yi communities (3–12 years old)

–Group No.5 (Test group): 106 tourists (6–73 years old, all Chinese nationals)

–Yi Culture Symbol Questionnaire (Cultural Symbol Identification Scale):

Respondents will fill out the same questionnaire regarding their visual perceptions of attractions, awareness of cultural elements, etc. The questionnaire design will integrate existing literature and the theoretical framework of this study. (To facilitate understanding for younger children, the questionnaire for children includes explanatory images.)

2) Phase Two: Focus Groups

–Focus Group No.1: 8 Yi people residing in Yi communities (20–41 years old)

–Focus Group No.2: 15 non-Yi people residing in Yi communities (19–56 years old)

–Focus Group No.3: 20 children residing in Yi ethnic communities (3–12 years old)

–Focus Group No.4: 11 tourists (26–56 years old, all Chinese nationals)

Qualitative data from focus groups and on-site observations will undergo qualitative analysis using methods like thematic analysis and pattern recognition to delve into individual experiences and insights.

3) Phase Three: On-Site Observations

Author will conduct on-site observations of tourists and children's behavior and interactions at cultural attractions to capture their visual experiences in real-life settings.

Research Results

Cultural Internal Gaze and Symbol Alienation in Chuxiong

(1) Yi Culture Symbol Questionnaire

According to the relevant literature records related to Chuxiong Yi ethnic group and the consistent tradition of cultural development in the Chuxiong Yi ethnic community, there is unanimous agreement among government institutions, tourism companies, and experts and scholars to designate black, yellow, and red as the representative colors of the Chuxiong Yi ethnic group. These three colors are extensively used in street decorations. Additionally, common totems in Chuxiong Yi culture include the tiger, sun, camellia, ox, and fire. The cultural symbol identification scale for Yi culture inquires about the respondents' knowledge in terms of Yi colors, patterns, animal totems, plant totems, representative festivals, and cultural landmarks. Respondents are provided with options to select one or more answers or fill in their responses. The research results for different groups are presented in the following table (displaying only the top five chosen option).

Table 1 Group No.1 (Control group) –Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale (82)

Answer Question		Option 1 st /%		Option 2 nd /%		Option 3 rd /%		Option 4 th /%		Option 5 th /%
Color	Black	100%	Red	100%	Yellow	100%	Blue	19.5%	Pink	13.4%
Motif	Flame	100%	Circle	98.7%	Triangle	20.7%				
Animal totem	Tiger	100%	Cock	86.6%	OX	80.5%	Eagle	20.7%	Leopard	13.4%
Plant totem	Red Camelia	97.6%	Rhododendron Camara ¹	97.6%	Pomegranate flower	15.9%				
Festival	Torchlight Festival	100%	Yi New YEA	93.9%	Costume Festival	76.8%	Flower arrangement Festival	75.6%	Rhododendron Camara Festival	67%
Scenic spot	Ten-month solar calendar park	96.3%	Yi Ancient Town	95.1%	Yi ethnic villages	79.2%				

Table 2 Group No.2 (Test group) Yi people –Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale (118)

Answer Question		Option 1 st /%		Option 2 nd /%		Option 3 rd /%		Option 4 th /%		Option 5 th /%
Color	Black	78.8%	Red	69.5%	Blue	68.6%	Pink	52.5%	Yellow	44.9%
Motif	Flame	90.6%	Circle	77.1%	Triangle	61.0%				
Animal totem	Tiger	95.8%	Eagle	73.7%	Cock	61.0%	Leopard	51.7%		
Plant totem	Rhododendron Camara	89.8%	Red Camelia	82.2%	Pomegranate flower	66.9%				
Festival	Torchlight festival	94.0%	3 rd March	66.1%	Costume Festival	57.6%	Rhododendron Camara Festival	46.6%	Yi New Year	41.5%
Scenic spot	Yi ethnic villages	69.5%	Ten-month solar calendar park	61.0%	Natural landscape ⁶²	47.4%	Prefecture museum	34.7%	Yi Ancient Town	28.8%

Table 3 Group No.3 (Test group) Non-Yi people –Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale (177)

Answer Question		Option 1 st /%		Option 2 nd /%		Option 3 rd /%		Option 4 th /%		Option 5 th /%
Color	Black	91.0%	Red	78.0%	Yellow	50.3%	Blue	44.1%	Pink	38.4%
Motif	Circle	75.1%	Flame	54.85%	Triangle	49.1%				
Animal totem	Tiger	88%	Leopard	50.3%	Coke	23.1%				
Plant totem	Camelia	57.6%	Rhododendron Camara	51.4%	Pinaster	43.5%				
Festival	Torchlight festival	94.4%	Yi New Year	88.7%	3 rd March	51.4%	Costume festival	48.0%		
Scenic spot	Yi ancient town	92.7.5%	Ten-month solar calendar park	69.5%	Yi ethnic villages	53.1.2%	Natural landscape	46.9%		

¹Rhododendron delavayi Franch.

Table 4 Group No.2 (Test group) Children –Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale (158)

Answer Question		Option 1 st /%	Option 2 nd /%	Option 3 rd /%	Option 4 th /%	Option 5 th /%
Color	Red	79.7%	Pink	77.8%	Blue	77.2%
Motif	Circle	94.3%	Triangle	70.3%	Flame	62.7%
Animal totem	Tiger	83%	Deer	79.7%	OX	77.2%
Plant totem	Cherry	79.1%	Pinaster	76.5%	Camelia	69.6%
Festival	Torchlight festival	95.6%	Yi New Year	85.4%	3 rd March	1.3%
Scenic spot	Yi Ancient Town	93%	Dinosaur Valley	71.5%	Ten-month solar calendar park	39.2%
					Yi ethnic villages	8.2%

Table 5 Group No.3 (Test group) Tourists –Yi Cultural Symbol Identification Scale (106)

Answer Question		Option 1 st /%	Option 2 nd /%	Option 3 rd /%	Option 4 th /%	Option 5 th /%
Color	Black	99%	Red	95.2%	Pink	93.4%
Motif	Flame	87.7%	Triangle	46.2%	Circle	83%
Animal totem	Tiger	82%	Dinosaur	59.4%	OX	58.5%
Plant totem	Camelia	79.2%	Pinaster	77.4%	Fern	23.6%
Festival	Torchlight festival	99%	Yi New Year	24.5%	Costume festival	12.3%
Scenic spot	Dinosaur Valley	98.1%	Yi ancient town	96.2%	Ten-month solar calendar park	79.2%
					Yi ethnic villages	63.2%
					Natural landscape	12.2%

Focus Groups

Focus group discussions focused primarily on differences in responses from the control group. The following describes only the more specific focus group discussion results.

1) Focus Group No.1: 8 Yi people residing in Yi communities (20–41 years old)

As the natural inheritors of Yi culture, local Yi residents' cultural identity was found to be similar to that of the control group, with minimal differences in responses. The only notable distinction was the prioritization of cultural symbols, which was largely in line with the overall perception of the Chuxiong Yi cultural tourism industry. The respondents noted that the cultural tourism industry selects and simplifies Yi culture for easier comprehension by tourists, but the authentic Yi culture is more complex and profound. For example, in terms of color, in Yi culture, colors are associated with traditional Chinese Five Elements and directions. Black, yellow, and red were predominantly used for noble dining ware and warriors' weapons in ancient times. Yi people in the Chuxiong region seldom use these colors in clothing. Instead, blue and pink are more commonly used in their attire. As for other categories, local Yi residents displayed a preference for

historically established choices, indicating a lower level of recognition for newly built sites such as the Yi People's Ancient Town.

2) Focus Group No.3: 20 children residing in Yi ethnic communities (3–12 years old)

Cognitive understanding was established through daily observations of street decorations and Yi ethnic costumes in the scenic areas. Generally, systematic education in Yi culture is received after the third grade. Before this stage, although children participated in Yi ethnic activities, they could only remember partial knowledge, mainly focusing on details such as the colors of clothing worn, foods consumed, and games played. Regarding color-related responses, the differences with the control group were primarily observed in the options of pink and blue. This is because children observed that most Yi ethnic costumes in the scenic areas had blue and pink as base colors, often featuring floral patterns in pink.

In response to questions about Yi ethnic animal totems, the inclusion of deer and peacock in their answers was explained by the extensive use of deer sculptures and green promotional posters in the urban area of Chuxiong. These animals are regional elements of Chuxiong rather than specific to Yi culture. Similarly, the children's perception of representative plants was determined based on the variety of landscape trees in the city. For instance, the city's roadside trees are winter-flowering cherry blossoms, and bamboo is often planted in public parks. These local visual elements are considered by the children to be part of Yi culture.

3) Focus Group No.4: 12 tourists (6–56 years old, all Chinese nationals)

Tourists also share the perception that Yi ethnic costumes in the Chuxiong region predominantly use blue and pink, believing these colors are popular among the Yi people. Regarding animal totems, the misunderstanding arises from the placement of dinosaur skeleton fossil sculptures, deer sculptures, and decorations featuring green peafowl in public places such as the airport. This has led tourists to a misconception about the representation of these totems in Yi culture.

On-Site Observations

Combining the results of the author's actual observations, it was found that, despite receiving explanations from tour guides, the majority of tourists still rely primarily on visually acquired information during the actual sightseeing. This pattern resembles the learning mode observed in children. The study identified instances of misinterpretations and symbolic confusions. Two groups' misconceptions stemmed from the presence of visual elements in public spaces, such as color, animal totem, which are not specific to Yi culture but contributed to a skewed

understanding. Addressing such misinterpretations is crucial for fostering accurate cultural representation in the tourism context.

Chinese Yi ethnic cultural tourism provides a platform for tourists to gain in-depth insights, experience, and appreciation for this unique culture. However, the complex and extensive nature of Yi ethnic culture makes its visual representation challenging. Taking Chuxiong Prefecture as an example, the visual construction of cultural tourism in the region has not evolved into a comprehensive visual system and has not effectively conveyed information in a visually clear, simple, and intuitive manner. The situation worsens with the inclusion of modern elements and non-Yi cultural visual elements. Yet, changing this scenario through individual or small-group actions proves challenging. A clear, cost-effective solution is needed to protect and appropriately pass on these culturally valuable traditions.

The findings hold implications for cultural tourism management in Chuxiong and similar contexts. Strategies for enhancing cultural understanding among tourists should consider the impact of urban elements, emphasize accurate representations of cultural symbols, and acknowledge the role of formal education in cultivating cultural awareness.

Impact on The Cultural Tourism

1) Yi Culture Symbol Alienation in Chuxiong

In the cultural tourism of Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the phenomena of alienation of Yi culture symbols are mainly manifested in the following aspects:

Commercialization of Symbols: Traditional totems, clothing, music, and other symbols in Yi culture have been excessively commercialized, leading to the loss of their original meanings and transforming them into tourist commodities.

Dulling of Symbols: Some tourist attractions treat Yi culture symbols with dulling effects, neglecting their uniqueness and intrinsic value. This may lead to misunderstandings of Yi culture by tourists.

Externalization of Symbols: To cater to the tastes of external tourists, some tourism activities may overly incorporate cultural symbols from other ethnic groups or regions, causing Yi culture symbols to lose their original uniqueness.

Fragmentation of Symbols: The impact of symbol alienation may cause certain traditional symbols in Yi culture to gradually disappear, resulting in interruptions in cultural heritage.

Fusion of Local and Ethnic Culture: Local identity has functions similar to other forms of identity and plays an important role in people's living conditions in a particular region

(Zhuang & Zhang, 2011). Concepts such as sense of place and hometown feelings have significant meanings for people (Moore, 2000). As a result, topics related to place and local identity attract the attention of scholars across multiple disciplines, including psychology. Over time, the fusion of original ethnic elements and later-introduced cultures occurs, making it difficult for younger locals to distinguish whether a particular cultural symbol stems from ethnic history or regional history.

2) The Impact of Cultural Internal Gaze on Chuxiong Yi Culture

Compared to the influence of tourist gaze, cultural internal gaze has a greater, more direct impact and a wider scope. Differences between Tourist Information and Authentic Culture. The information tourists receive may differ from the authentic culture, and this may also differ from the perceptions of local people.

In Chuxiong, people of different identities and classes may perceive and practice Yi culture differently. This variation may lead some groups to lose confidence in their local culture, feeling the pressure of external gazes. Due to differences in social class and identity, the heritage of Yi culture may vary. Wealthier or better-educated groups may place more emphasis on preserving traditional culture, while poorer or less-educated groups may pay less attention to cultural heritage. Under the internal gaze of different identities and classes, the development of cultural tourism may become unbalanced, leading to some areas or groups benefiting more while others may become marginalized.

(3) The Interaction between Cultural Internal Gaze and Cultural Symbol Alienation Cultural internal gaze may lead to misinterpretation of cultural symbol alienation. Tourists or local residents' perceptions of Yi culture may be influenced by external cultural symbols, resulting in bias or misunderstanding.

The interaction between cultural internal gaze and symbol alienation may lead to a conflict between cultural preservation and commercialization. While meeting tourist demands, traditional cultural symbols may become overly commercialized.

The interaction between cultural internal gaze and symbol alienation may challenge the diversity and identity of Yi culture, impacting its uniqueness and heritage.

The interaction between cultural internal gaze and symbol alienation may result in a disconnect between policy and actual tourism practice, affecting sustainable tourism development and cultural preservation. In regions with deep-rooted ethnic culture, local identity is especially important (Tang, 2007). As local identity is a crucial component of personal identity and related to

attachment, it has attracted the attention of fields such as environmental psychology and geographic environment studies.

As advocates for the healthy and prosperous development of ethnic culture, it is important to recognize that the pursuit and imitation of external cultures have altered the logic of cultural evolution. However, cultural alienation enables traditional culture to be more favored in the tourism market and attracts greater participation from local youth.

Conclusion

Research shows that there are differences in the understanding and acceptance of ethnic cultures among people of different identities, classes, and backgrounds. This gaze can have varying degrees of impact on cultural heritage and tourism experiences, leading to phenomena such as the generalization, heterogenization, superficialization, and discontinuity in the application of ethnic cultural symbols in the tourism industry. These challenges pose a threat to the inheritance and protection of ethnic cultures. Cultural internal gaze may exacerbate symbol alienation, and symbol alienation may also intensify cultural internal gaze. This interaction can deepen cultural differences and conflicts, affecting positive interaction and cultural understanding between tourists and local residents, while also impacting the quality and sustainable development of ethnic cultural tourism.

This is an emerging trend with the new consumer society, where the cultural significance carried by cultural products determines that they are not just commodities satisfying material needs but also vehicles for cultural transmission. Some cultural heritage units have gradually realized that cultural products that simply transplant cultural elements can no longer meet the demands of contemporary consumers. Only by fully utilizing new perspectives and new expressions to construct distinctive symbol systems can regional culture achieve significant development and the revitalization and inheritance of historical heritage.

Suggestions

The research results indicate the necessity of enhancing local residents' understanding and awareness of ethnic culture, particularly by establishing a comprehensive, accurate, and clear cultural framework. This would promote a more holistic cultural understanding among people with different educational backgrounds, emphasizing the unity of regional and ethnic cultures without selective representation or differentiation, thus reducing internal cultural gaze. The research

recommends measures to strengthen the protection of ethnic cultural symbols, avoiding excessive commercialization and heterogenization to maintain the uniqueness and integrity of the culture.

The scope of this study is limited and may not fully represent the overall situation of the Chuxiong Yi people. Additionally, some data were derived from focus groups and field observations, which may contain subjective biases. Future research could expand the sample size for more comprehensive data and conduct long-term studies on the phenomena of internal cultural gaze and symbol alienation, observing their trends over time. Alternatively, research could explore the cultural tourism phenomena of other ethnic groups in China to compare the similarities and differences among different ethnicities. It is hoped that this study will promote further research on the issues of internal cultural gaze and symbol alienation in ethnic cultural tourism.

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