

Study on the Innovation Path of Ethnic Traditional Festival Culture Based on the Integration of Culture and Tourism

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Abstract: The integration of culture and tourism is an important national strategy to promote cultural prosperity and the high-quality development of the tourism industry. As a concentrated embodiment and key carrier of China's excellent traditional culture, ethnic traditional festivals embrace a historical opportunity for innovative development against the backdrop of the integration of culture and tourism, while also facing challenges such as diluted connotations, homogeneous competition, and inheritance gaps. This paper focuses on the research of the innovation path of ethnic traditional festival culture from the perspective of the integration of culture and tourism. Firstly, it analyzes the inherent logical alignment between the integration of culture and tourism and ethnic traditional festivals in terms of value goals, functional needs, and experience forms. Then, it points out the problems existing in the current tourism development of ethnic traditional festivals, including superficial cultural connotations, homogeneous forms of expression, marginalized subject status, weak industrial linkage, and rigid application of technology. Finally, it proposes transformation strategies from five dimensions: concept, content, form, technology, and industry. It advocates a conceptual shift from "resource plundering" to "value symbiosis", content innovation from "form replication" to "connotation interpretation", form optimization from "single viewing" to "diversified experience", technology application from "mechanical superposition" to "intelligent empowerment", and industrial upgrading from "ticket economy" to "industrial ecology". The purpose is to realize the coordinated development of the inheritance of ethnic traditional festival culture and the tourism industry, and enhance its cultural value and market competitiveness.

Keywords: Integration of culture and tourism; Ethnic traditional festivals; Cultural innovation; Tourism development; Path research

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1. Introduction

With the in-depth advancement of the strategy for the integration of culture and tourism, ethnic traditional festivals, as crucial carriers for bearing ethnic culture and highlighting regional characteristics, are occupying an increasingly important position in tourism development. Ethnic traditional festivals not only embody the historical memories, values and lifestyles of various ethnic groups, but also serve as vital resources for attracting tourists and driving local economic development. However, in current development practices, ethnic traditional festival tourism is confronted with numerous challenges. Problems such as the gradual loss of cultural authenticity and the rigidification of development models have become increasingly prominent, restricting its sustainable development. Against this backdrop, in-depth exploration of the inherent connection between the integration of culture and tourism and ethnic traditional festivals, analysis of existing problems

in the development process, and proposal of practical and feasible innovation paths are of great theoretical significance and practical value for protecting the diversity of ethnic cultures, promoting the high-quality development of the tourism industry, and advancing the coordinated progress of regional economy and culture.

2. The Inherent Logic Between the Integration of Culture and Tourism and Ethnic Traditional Festivals

The integration of culture and tourism is not a simple combination of culture and tourism, but a deep penetration and reorganization of the two at the levels of value, function, business form and market. There exists a natural and in-depth alignment between ethnic traditional festivals and the tourism industry.

2.1. Consistency in Value Goals

Although cultural undertakings and the tourism industry differ in form, their essence is to enhance people's well-being. Traditional festivals more represent people's aspirations for an ideal life, such as health and happiness, adequate food and clothing, and family joy; modern tourism focuses more on leisure and pleasure, cultural communication, and spiritual enlightenment. Under the coordinated development of culture and tourism, positive concepts and mindsets in traditional cultural activities—such as environmental protection, collaboration, and gratitude for life—can be presented in a way that tourists can perceive, participate in, and communicate with. This enables the application of traditional wisdom to modern contexts and promotes the dynamic expression of traditional culture^[1].

2.2. Complementarity in Functional Needs

The development of culture is not merely about simple protection, but more about people's support and acceptance. If protection is pursued in isolation, traditional culture will gradually fade from people's awareness. However, the tourism industry boasts a large number of tourists and strong passenger flow diffusion. As such, it provides an excellent platform for showcasing festival culture, further promoting it to the public, and enriching people's understanding and application of traditions. Moreover, this irreplaceable, unique, and profound cultural heritage, together with its distinctive sense of experience^[2], can effectively enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of tourist destinations. It avoids a "one-size-fits-all" approach and helps form unique brands of tourism products or services.

2.3. Coupling in Experience Forms

Modern tourism is a type of participatory tourism that places greater emphasis on the sense of experience. Festival activities, precisely, create such an overall cultural context—tourists are not just onlookers, but more importantly, participants^[3]. They can taste local specialty foods, wear ethnic costumes, learn and practice traditional folk handicrafts, enjoy lively dance performances, and even directly participate in festival rituals. This dynamic and all-round experience is more appealing to tourists than exhibition-style displays or symbolic stage performances, as it meets the travel needs of modern tourists for authenticity and in-depth participation.

3. Major Problems in the Current Tourism Development of Ethnic Traditional Festivals

3.1. Superficial Cultural Connotations and Excessive Commercialization

A prevalent and critical issue at present is the distortion of culture caused by the over-pursuit of economic interests. Many practitioners, driven by short-term gains, have reduced traditional celebrations to mere commercial activities. Originally solemn sacrificial ceremonies have been turned into entertainment programs to cater to tourists; folk traditions with

profound meanings have been commercialized and priced; and festival venues are filled with various commercial stalls. The cultural connotations have gradually lost their original solemn nature and transformed into tools of consumerism, ultimately leading to the “emptiness” and “formalization” of cultural connotations^[4].

3.2. Homogeneous Forms of Expression and Lack of Innovation

From a national perspective, numerous ethnic festivals exhibit highly similar operation models: leader speeches at the opening ceremony, large-scale cultural performances, float parades, snack markets, commodity fairs, etc.^[5]. This “standardized template” completely ignores the unique cultural essence and regional characteristics of different festivals, resulting in similar experiences for tourists between Dai festivals and Miao festivals. This greatly undermines their unique charm and brand effect.

3.3. Marginalized Subject Status and Insufficient Community Participation

The authenticity of traditional festivals is rooted in the in-depth and independent participation of local residents. However, in the process of tourism commercialization, the identity of local residents has gradually changed from “leaders” to “outsiders” or “employees”. The planning, implementation and benefit distribution of festival projects are mostly controlled by external capital or administrative forces, and local groups lack effective channels for participation. This situation not only weakens their cultural identity and motivation for inheritance, but also deprives festivals of their original life texture and emotional connection.

3.4. Weak Industrial Linkage and Short Industrial Chain

The current development focus is overly concentrated on “ticket income” and “booth operation” during festivals, while the in-depth development and sustainable operation of the deep value of festival cultural IP are obviously insufficient. When the festival activities end, the tourism attractiveness drops sharply. The coordinated development of festival culture with surrounding scenic spots, characteristic accommodation, agricultural experience, cultural and creative products, film and television animation and other industries has not been realized. It is difficult to build a full industrial chain of “accommodation, food, transportation, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment”, resulting in the insufficient release of economic value and social benefits^[6].

3.5. Rigid Application of Technology and Failure to Empower Culture

Although emerging technologies such as VR, AR and Metaverse have been adopted, in most cases, they only manifest as superficial applications of “technology supremacy”, with mechanical copying and formal display overriding content expression^[7]. These technical means have not effectively served the in-depth interpretation of cultural connotations and the creation of immersive experiences; in some cases, they even dilute the original cultural charm of the festivals.

4. Transformation Strategies for Ethnic Traditional Festival Culture from the Perspective of Culture-Tourism Integration

4.1. Conceptual Innovation: From “Resource Exploitation” to “Value Symbiosis”

The key to transforming the development mindset lies in shifting from a “resource-consuming” logic that prioritizes short-term economic gains to a “value co-creation” concept that emphasizes the long-term inheritance of culture and coordinated regional progress. First and foremost, the principle of “protection first” must be established. All development activities should be premised on safeguarding the authenticity and integrity of culture. A comprehensive inventory of core festival elements—such as rituals, taboos, and craftsmanship—should be conducted, and digital archives should be built to define the “bottom line” for cultural protection^[8]. Secondly, the idea of “win-win for hosts and guests” should be implemented. Local residents must be recognized as the true owners of the culture, not mere performance tools. Their dominance should

be ensured throughout the entire process, including planning, decision-making, operation, and benefit distribution, enabling them to genuinely reap the dividends of tourism development. This will activate the internal motivation for cultural inheritance and build an interactive mechanism of “cultural conservation - tourism development - community benefit”^[9]. Finally, the concept of sustainable development should be upheld. Festival tourism should be integrated into the overall regional planning, with greater emphasis on ecological protection and rational control of tourist volume to avoid impacts on the local social ecology. This ensures the intergenerational inheritance of festival culture.

4.2. Content Innovation: From “Form Replication” to “Connotation Interpretation”

Innovation does not emerge out of nowhere; it should be carried out on the principle of exploring and re-expressing traditional values while endowing them with modern expressions. First, efforts to interpret content should be strengthened. Experts from various fields—including anthropologists, folklorists, and historians—should be invited to collaborate in refining the origin, development context, symbolic significance, and philosophical implications of festivals. Universal values that are easily recognized and accepted by modern people should be identified, such as nature worship, family harmony, and affirmation of the value of life^[10]. Secondly, the mode of expression should be optimized to form a coherent story thread. Disconnected stories within festival activities should be woven into a contextualized, emotional, and logical narrative. Through the design of a “story chain,” key nodes in the tourist destination—such as scenic spots, inter-scenic activities, and goods and services—can be connected. For example, the story thread of the “Torch Festival” can be structured as “seeking the fire seed, worshipping the fire god, playing with firelight, and bidding farewell to the fire god,” which elaborates on the relationship between fire and humans, as well as fire and nature. Additionally, educational experiences should be enhanced. Targeted “festival exploration” tourism products can be developed for families and school-age children. Cultural and heritage interpretation centers can be established, and intangible cultural heritage inheritors can be employed to explain the making of handcrafted products, folk dances, and festival foods to tourists. This encourages tourists to transform from onlookers to participants, deepening their understanding of festival culture through hands-on engagement.

4.3. Form Innovation: From “Single-viewing” to “Diversified Experience”

It is necessary to break the old model of “visiting temples during the day, sleeping at night, and watching performances during festivals” and build a new pattern of “all-weather, all-age, and multi-dimensional experiences”. First, festivals should no longer be limited to a few days of celebration, but rather feature continuous and multi-directional activities throughout the year. On one hand, fixed ethnic cultural experience sites, museums, and theater squares can be built to integrate festival customs into regular tourism experiences. On the other hand, activity venues can be expanded to villages, rural courtyards, and pastoral courtyards, creating an omnipresent environment for experiencing festival traditions. Second, the “festival +” strategy should be strongly promoted. For instance, “festival + agriculture” (developing products with festival characteristics), “festival + sports” (holding ethnic festival sports events such as wrestling, horse riding, and horse racing), “festival + health preservation” (festival-specific diets and folk healing methods), and “festival + wedding” (promoting ethnic wedding experience). This strategy can expand the product coverage, extend consumers’ stay time, and stimulate their consumption desire^[11]. Finally, full use should be made of the lively atmosphere of festivals to create nighttime cultural experiences. For example, various themed lantern shows, ethnic processional performances, camping bonfire feasts, and outdoor music festivals can be held. This enables the cross-boundary integration of culture during the day and night, and promotes the development of the night economy.

4.4. Technological Innovation: From “Mechanical Superposition” to “Intelligent Empowerment”

With the development of new technologies, we should use modern technology to endow ancient stories with new means of expression, rather than confining them to “display cabinets” as lifeless machines.

In specific applications, AR technology can be used: when tourists view the real environment through smartphones or

AR glasses, restored historical sacrificial scenes, background knowledge of cultural relics, and scenes of ancient people's daily lives can be presented simultaneously. This achieves the goals of "spatial restoration" and "in-depth experience"^[12]. Another example is the use of 5G, holographic projection, 3D sound, and other technologies to build immersive performance spaces or on-site stages. This allows tourists to no longer be mere spectators of performances, but to engage in and interact with them, creating a strong visual impact and emotional resonance^[13]. In addition, 3D scanning and digital modeling technologies can be applied to conduct highly restorative digital protection of endangered festival activities, costumes, and artifacts. Meanwhile, short videos, live streaming, and VR online experience can be used to transcend time and space, enabling potential tourists around the world to "be interested online" (a popular term meaning to develop a preference for something through online content) and then "support offline" (a popular term meaning to participate in or endorse something in person).

4.5. Industrial Innovation: From "Ticket Economy" to "Industrial Ecology"

We should build a new cultural economic system centered on festival IP. The top priority is to cultivate core IP assets: we need to carry out systematic brand building and visual identity design (including logos, slogans, brand ambassadors, etc.) for traditional festivals, and conduct multi-dimensional commercial development based on IP value^[14]. Cultural and creative products must break through the limitation of simple pattern replication and achieve the organic integration of cultural connotation, artistic aesthetics and practical functions. In terms of industrial chain layout, the upstream links with the cultivation of characteristic agricultural products (to provide raw materials for festival-specific foods); the midstream strengthens links such as cultural immersive experiences, performing arts and creative planning; the downstream extends to supporting service fields to activate related industries including catering, hotels, transportation and retail^[15], and ultimately forms an industrial ecosystem featuring mutual promotion and positive interaction. In business operations, we should break through traditional paths and try the light-asset expansion strategy of "capital operation - management output - IP authorization". When local festival brands mature, their standardized operation systems, creative content resources and professional teams can be replicated across regions to fully release brand premium and commercial potential.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the integration of culture and tourism has brought new opportunities for the development of ethnic traditional festival culture, and the inherent alignment between the two at multiple levels has laid a foundation for coordinated development. However, a series of problems existing in the current tourism development of ethnic traditional festivals, such as the loss of cultural connotation and homogeneous forms, have seriously affected its development quality and potential. The five innovation strategies (concept, content, form, technology and industry) proposed in this paper provide directions and ideas for solving these problems. They are conducive to realizing the transformation of ethnic traditional festival culture from resource-consuming development to value symbiotic development, and building a positive ecosystem where cultural inheritance and tourism development promote each other. In the future, it is necessary to further combine practical situations, continuously optimize and improve these strategies, promote ethnic traditional festival culture to radiate new vitality in the wave of culture-tourism integration, and better play its important role in cultural inheritance, economic growth and social harmony.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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