

Research on the Model and Pathways for Border Tourism Development and Poverty Alleviation in Ethnic Regions — A Case Study of the Northwest Yunnan Region

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization and regional economic integration, border tourism, as a unique form of tourism, is increasingly emerging as a significant driving force for promoting economic development in border regions, fostering cultural exchange, and strengthening international cooperation. The northwestern Yunnan region, located in China's Southwestern frontier, is a key area bordering Southeast and South Asian countries, endowed with abundant border tourism resources. This article delves into the border tourism models and pathways for border development and prosperity in ethnic regions, using a case study of the Northwest Yunnan region to analyze the mechanisms and influencing factors of border tourism in promoting local economic development, social progress, and cultural heritage. This provides empirical evidence for further understanding the development patterns of border tourism and also contributes to strengthening ethnic unity and maintaining harmony and stability in border regions. This study addresses the current research gap in exploring the development models and pathways of border tourism in specific regions, offering valuable references and insights for future related research.

Keywords: Border tourism; Border prosperity and people's well-being, ethnic regions; Models and pathways

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1. Introduction

Luo *et al.* conducted a study based on panel data from 2009 to 2021 on border counties in Guangxi and Yunnan provinces. They found that the "Prospering the Border and Enriching the People" initiative has achieved significant results in border counties, and the development of tourism has a positive impact on the initiative, with a nonlinear relationship between the two ^[1]. The tourism industry primarily drives the prosperity of border

regions through economic benefits and market scale, with regional heterogeneity. Guangxi exhibits a nonlinear effect, while Yunnan demonstrates a linear promotional effect. Zhao and Zhang conducted a visualization analysis of relevant literature, pointing out that China's border tourism research achievements are abundant, focusing on themes such as the spatial structure of border tourism and cross-border tourism^[2]. Wen argues that border regions, as the frontline of national sovereignty, possess unique geographical locations that make them natural tourist attractions. Border tourism not only promotes common prosperity among ethnic groups in border areas, reduces regional development gaps, and mitigates perceptions of "marginalization," but also facilitates cross-border ethnic exchanges and interactions between inland and border ethnic groups, fostering an emotional connection of "the Chinese nation as one"^[3]. Jiang Lujuan *et al.* propose that border tourism serves as an open window and a "grassroots bridge" for cross-border cooperation, facilitating border trade and cultural exchange^[4].

2. Current status of border tourism development in Northwest Yunnan

The Northwest Yunnan Region is located in the Northwestern part of Yunnan Province, China, at the southeastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, serving as an important gateway to China's Southwestern frontier. Its unique geographical location borders the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and shares a border with Myanmar to the west. It is a region inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, with a rich and diverse ethnic composition, including the Naxi, Bai, Tibetan, Lisu, Nu, and Dulong ethnic groups.

2.1. Development of tourism resources

The development of natural landscape tourism resources in Northwest Yunnan has achieved certain results, with numerous famous attractions drawing large numbers of visitors^[5]. For example, the "Three Parallel Rivers" region, a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site, attracts many adventure enthusiasts and natural ecology researchers with its unique geological landforms and rich biodiversity. Yulong Snow Mountain, with its magnificent snow-capped peaks and unique alpine ecosystem, has become a popular tourist destination in Northwest Yunnan, with the number of visitors continuing to grow each year. Lugu Lake is renowned for its picturesque lake and mountain scenery and unique Mosuo culture. Tourism development allows visitors to fully appreciate the charm of highland lakes and ethnic minority customs. In terms of ethnic cultural tourism resource development, Lijiang Ancient Town, as an outstanding representative of Naxi culture, has preserved the architectural style and traditional cultural customs of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Dali Ancient Town showcases the architectural art, religious beliefs, and folk customs of the Bai people. Visitors can tour the Chongsheng Temple Three Pagodas to experience the Buddhist culture of the Bai people and participate in their traditional festivals to immerse themselves in the unique ethnic customs.

2.2 Development of tourism infrastructure

The Northwest Yunnan region has made remarkable progress in the construction of transportation infrastructure^[6]. Highway construction has been continuously improved, and a highway network connecting major scenic spots and cities has basically taken shape. For instance, the expressways from Dali to Lijiang and from Lijiang to Shangri-La have been put into operation one after another, which has greatly shortened the travel time between cities and enhanced the travel convenience for tourists. There have also been new breakthroughs in railway construction. The opening and operation of the Lijiang-Shangri-La Railway has integrated Shangri-La into the railway network,

further improving the transportation network in Northwest Yunnan. This not only facilitates the travel of local residents but also provides a more convenient transportation option for tourists. In terms of aviation, the Northwest Yunnan region is home to multiple airports, such as Lijiang Sanyi International Airport, Dali Huangcaoba Airport, and Diqing Shangri-La Airport. The number of air routes has been increasing, and direct flights to major domestic cities and some international cities have been realized, offering convenience for tourists to enter and exit the region. Regarding accommodation facilities, the number of tourist hotels has been on the rise, covering high, medium, and low grades. These hotels are capable of meeting the needs of different types of tourists.

2.3. Development status of the tourism market

In recent years, the number of tourists visiting the northwest Yunnan region and tourism revenue have shown a growing trend. With the development of tourism resources and the improvement of infrastructure, an increasing number of tourists are choosing to travel to the northwest Yunnan region. The tourism market is developing in a diversified manner. In addition to traditional sightseeing tourism, forms of tourism such as leisure and resort tourism, ecological tourism, and cultural experiences are gradually gaining popularity among tourists. However, the development of the tourism market in Northwest Yunnan also faces some challenges. Marketing methods are relatively limited, with some tourism enterprises primarily relying on traditional advertising and cooperation with travel agencies, while insufficiently utilizing emerging marketing methods such as new media marketing and online marketing. The tourist market is narrow, with the current tourist base in Northwest Yunnan primarily concentrated in the eastern developed regions of China and neighboring provinces, while international market development remains insufficient. The region's appeal to international tourists is relatively weak, primarily due to factors such as low internationalization of tourism products, inadequate internationalization of tourism services, and limited international marketing channels.

3. Border tourism development model for prosperity in the Northwest Yunnan region

3.1. “Scenic Area + Community” collaborative model

The “Scenic Area + Community” collaborative model is one of the key development models for border tourism in the Northwest Yunnan Region, with the integrated development of Lijiang Ancient Town and surrounding rural areas serving as a typical example of this model^[7]. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lijiang Ancient Town boasts rich historical and cultural resources and unique ethnic customs, making it one of the core attractions of tourism in Northwest Yunnan. Surrounding villages such as Baisha Ancient Town and Yuhu Village are located in close proximity to Lijiang Ancient Town, complementing it in terms of natural landscapes and cultural characteristics, and thus possess a solid foundation for collaborative development. Lijiang Ancient Town, leveraging its high profile and substantial tourist traffic, has brought a significant influx of visitors to the surrounding villages.

Under the “scenic area + community” linkage model, residents in surrounding communities have gained more employment opportunities and income channels. On one hand, residents can directly participate in tourism operations, such as running farmhouse restaurants, homestays, and selling specialty agricultural products and handicrafts, achieving a transition from traditional agriculture to tourism. On the other hand, the development of tourist attractions has also driven improvements in surrounding infrastructure and public service levels, creating better living conditions for villagers. This collaborative model has also promoted cultural heritage and protection.

With the development of tourism, rural culture has received more attention and importance, and villagers' sense of identity and pride in their own culture has continued to grow, leading them to participate more actively in cultural heritage and protection efforts.

3.2. “Tourism + Industry Integration” model

Taking the tourism industry as the core driving force, this model deeply integrates the rich ethnic culture, specialty agriculture, handicrafts, and ecological resources of the Dianxi Northwest region. Through the penetration, overlap, and restructuring of industries, it forms a regionally distinctive composite tourism product and industry system. This model breaks through the limitations of traditional single-industry development, using the “Tourism +” approach to achieve industrial synergy and upgrading. It not only enriches the supply of tourism products to meet the diverse needs of tourists but also drives the development of related industries, promoting regional economic growth and increased income for residents. It is an important pathway to achieving prosperity and development in border areas. Through the integration of tourism and the cultural industry, the ethnic culture of Northwest Yunnan has been better preserved and innovated. Industrial integration has also driven regional infrastructure construction and improvements in public services, improving the living environment of local residents, promoting the overall development of the northwestern Yunnan region, and laying a solid foundation for the realization of the goal of enriching the border areas and improving the livelihoods of the people.

4. Optimizing the pathway for border tourism development and prosperity in Northwest Yunnan

4.1. Strengthening infrastructure construction and improving tourism service quality

Increasing investment in transportation infrastructure for border tourism in Northwest Yunnan is a key measure to improve transportation conditions ^[8]. The government should actively promote the coordinated development of various transportation modes, including highways, railways, and aviation, to enhance the coverage and accessibility of the transportation network. In terms of accommodation and catering facilities, efforts should be made to improve quality and diversify types. Encourage tourism enterprises to increase investment in accommodation facilities, and construct a batch of high-end, high-quality resort hotels to meet the diverse accommodation needs of tourists. Improving public service facilities is a crucial guarantee for enhancing tourists' travel experiences ^[9]. Increase efforts to build and renovate public service facilities such as parking lots, restrooms, and tourist service centers in border tourism scenic areas. In addition, the signage system within the scenic area should be improved by installing clear and accurate tourist signs to provide clear guidance to visitors.

4.2. Precisely target the tourism market and innovate tourism product development

Deeply exploring the cultural essence of the various ethnic groups in the Dianxi region is the foundation for developing distinctive tourism products ^[10]. By researching and organizing ethnic cultural elements, these elements can be integrated into tourism products to create tourism products with unique ethnic characteristics. In addition to traditional sightseeing tourism products, efforts should be made to develop a variety of tourism products, including leisure and resort tourism, ecological tourism, cultural experience tourism, educational tourism, and health and wellness tourism. In the development of leisure and resort tourism products, leverage the natural landscapes and ethnic cultural resources of Northwest Yunnan to build a series of leisure and resort tourism destinations, such as resort hotels around Erhai Lake and leisure fishing villages around Lugu Lake, providing visitors with one-

stop services for leisure, resort stays, and entertainment. In terms of ecological tourism product development, strengthen the protection and development of nature reserves and ecological scenic areas, and launch ecological tourism projects such as ecological sightseeing, hiking adventures, and bird watching, allowing tourists to enhance their ecological conservation awareness while enjoying natural scenery. In terms of cultural experience tourism product development, deeply explore the essence of ethnic culture and develop more interactive and experiential cultural experience projects, such as ethnic traditional festival experiences and folk life experiences, allowing tourists to personally feel the charm of ethnic culture. In terms of educational tourism product development, combine the historical and cultural, natural science, and other resources of the Dianxi Northwest region to develop a series of educational tourism bases and courses.

5. Conclusion

This article conducts an in-depth exploration of the border tourism model and pathways for border development and prosperity in the Northwestern Yunnan region. In terms of effectiveness, border tourism has played a significant role in promoting border development and prosperity in the Northwestern Yunnan region. In terms of economic growth, it has driven the development of related industries such as catering, accommodation, and transportation, thereby increasing local economic income; in terms of job creation, it has provided numerous employment opportunities for local residents, effectively alleviating employment pressure; In terms of cultural heritage and exchange, it has promoted the dissemination and display of ethnic cultures and strengthened cultural exchanges with neighboring countries and regions; in terms of ethnic unity and social stability, it has enhanced exchanges and cooperation among ethnic groups, maintained social stability, and strengthened the cohesion of border regions.

In the future, border tourism in the Dianxi Northwest region is expected to develop in a more diversified, internationalized, and intelligent direction. As people's tourism needs continue to evolve, emerging tourism forms such as leisure and resort tourism, cultural experience tourism, and health and wellness tourism will develop more rapidly. The Dianxi Northwest region should fully leverage its abundant tourism resources and intensify efforts to develop these emerging tourism products to meet the increasingly diverse needs of tourists.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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