

Research on the Sustainable Development of Villages in China's Minority Regions Promoted by Cultural Factors

—A Case Study of Changyang Tujia Autonomous County in China

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Abstract

The harmonious and sustainable development of countryside is the key topic of current rural area development in China. The heterogeneity of the geographical environment results in the basis of diversified development modes of villages, besides, the regional differences of culture formed various “regional gene” in rural development. Under the background of cultural highlights and rural revival, cultural tourism has become a key factor of rural area development in minority regions, which featured by minority culture exhibitions and folk culture experiencing activities. Due to the impetus of the cultural tourism, both the introversive developing pattern in traditional rural areas and the social organization structure of these villages have been changed; nevertheless, this mode is bringing uncertain factors to rural areas development. This paper takes the villages of Tujia Autonomous County in Hubei Province as an example. Based on the historical development information of this region, the research tries to figure out the connotation of the Tujia culture; thereafter, the author attempts to generalize the core competitiveness of rural tourism through the activity planning of characteristic culture, which combined with rural industry development, social interaction, environmental renovation and rural reconstruction, to establish a sustainable development framework of the countryside. The study attempts to provide useful experience through this case to give some ideas on how to make breakthroughs on rural development in minority areas.

Keywords

Minority Regions, Rural Tourism, Culture of Tujia, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

At the present stage of social transformation in China, the social culture which includes urban culture, rural culture, traditional culture, regional culture is experiencing many challenges and selections. Rural culture is the sum of all existence and phenomena created by the natural interaction between the humanity and the country (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999). It is characterized by nature, productivity and vulnerability. The essence of rural tourism is the combination of rural culture, rural cultural image and tourism services, which contributed to the growth of rural tourism in China, especially in minority regions. The rural culture has specific cultural characteristics and value, therefore the tourism industry formed by rural culture possesses strong regional characteristics. Meanwhile, China is undergoing rapid urbanization, the sustainable development of rural cultural tourism is somehow facing many challenges (Jiang & Ping, 1999). The homogenization of the rural culture concept and the rural culture characteristics are becoming increasingly notable, and the characteristics of rural culture in minority regions are gradually extinguished. Generally, the rural tourism driven by rural cultural elements lacks the excavation and connotations of regional cultural characteristics. Simultaneously, the market-oriented arrangement of culture tourism paid too much attention to the feelings of tourists and ignored the cultural adaptability of the residents in the field (village), which leads to the deviation of value orientation in cultural tourism.

2. The Relationship between Rural Culture and Rural Tourism

2.1. The Connotation and Gradation of Rural Culture

The rural culture is created by the rural residents in specific countryside environment, it is the sum of all physical and spiritual products created by the rural residents during their interaction with nature (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). It includes the rural architectural culture which contains the beauty of humanity, the massive farming culture, the natural-oriented rural food culture, the colorful rural folk culture and so on (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Kneafsey, 2001). The complicated rural culture can be divided into four grades: the surface—rural material culture, the inner layer—rural behavioral culture, the deeper layer—rural hierarchical culture, the core—rural spiritual culture (Figure 1).

2.2. The Relationship between Rural Culture and Rural Tourism

2.2.1. Rural Culture Is the Intrinsic Driving Force of Rural Tourism Development

The intrinsic driving force of rural tourism development is the pursuit of distinctive rural culture, whereas, the rural tourism development and the regional culture are mutually promoted and restricted by each other simultaneously. Rural tourism can promote the development and protection of rural culture, in the meantime, it may also cause shock and destruction on original rural culture

(Sharpley, 2002). The real impact may depend on the development scale and the value orientation of rural tourism, the vision and experience of the developer, the funds and measures that invested in rural culture protection, and the culture protection regulations implemented by the local governments.

Firstly, rural tourism cannot be isolated from rural folk culture, mutually, the rural folk culture has to rely on rural tourism to obtain the opportunity to be recognized by people from outside. Rural tourism development will make certain optimization and reformation on the original rural culture, and it is acceptable if this reformation is within the allowable range, otherwise, it is unacceptable. “Appropriate reformation” is very important but very difficult to handle (Figure 2).

Secondly, the rural culture is native, latent, routine and scattered, but the rural culture suitable for rural tourism should be concentrated, strong, and showable, which is a contradiction. Thus, rural tourism must cope with this contradiction, so that, tourists would be attracted, and the protection and development of rural culture would be promoted.

Thirdly, because of the impact of heterogeneous culture shock, the attitude of local residents towards the rural tourism is changing (Hottola, 2004). As shown in Figure 3, with the intensity and frequency of foreign culture shock increases,

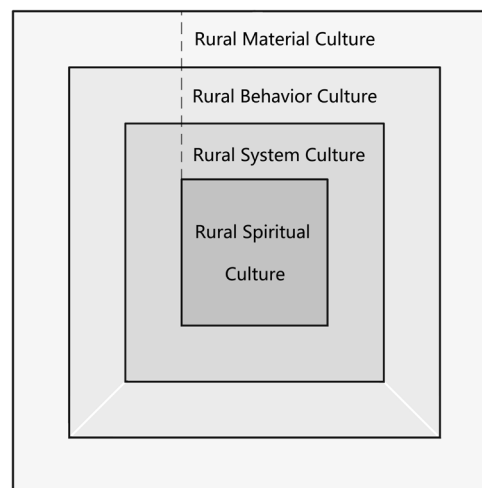


Figure 1. Rural cultural structure.

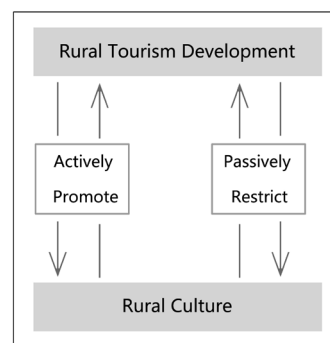


Figure 2. The interactive relationship between rural tourism development and rural culture.

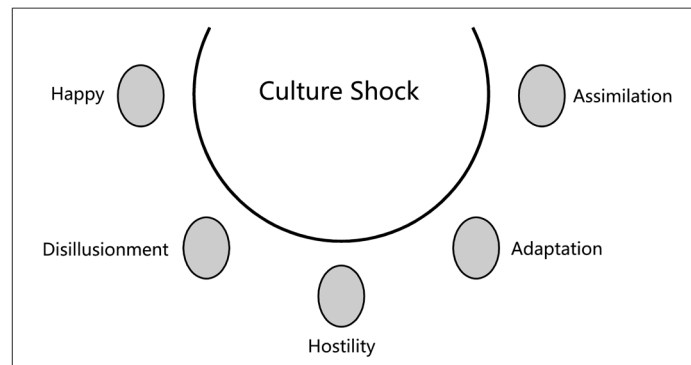


Figure 3. U-shaped chart of cultural shock.

the attitude of local residents towards rural tourism has been gone through a process of “cheerfulness - disillusionment - hostility - adaptation - assimilation (or optimization)”. This process could result in two effects: the first one is the tourism experience which impacted by the local residents’ manners. Friendly manners and enthusiasm of the local are important parameters for tourists to have wonderful rural tourism experience. Local people should be managed and guided to be “not hostile” or to be rapidly “adaptive”, after jumping out from the “hostile” status. The second one is the rural tourism development impacted by the transformation of regional culture whose main carrier is the local residents. The invasion of foreign culture may eventually shape a cultural “assimilation” phenomenon, which would result in the lost of original cultural characteristics, then, the rural tourism would be unsustainable due to the lack of cultural connotation. However, it is possible to have “optimization” phenomenon, of which new, characteristic, vivid attractions are formed by absorbing the essence of foreign culture, promoting their own cultural advantages and appropriate guidance.

2.2.2. Rural Culture Is the Internal Driving Force of Rural Tourism Development

Chinese scholars have analyzed the demand of rural tourism, and found that tourists’ demand for cultural feelings during the rural tourism is gradually increasing, and summarized the demands of rural cultural tourism as following: returning to nature, seeking for knowledge, revisiting once familiar places under the sense of nostalgia and the growing awareness of participation (Pan, 2012; Hua & Shao, 2013).

Firstly, the tourists would gain satisfaction of returning to nature when they percept the rural culture. The main customers of rural tourism is the inhabitants in big cities, who live in the crowded and noisy environment with air pollution and dull sights, moreover, the tensive living rhythm and intense social competition drive people generating strong desires to return back to nature, to feel the nature and relax themselves in a quiet, beautiful, clean and open environment.

Secondly, the tourists gain satisfaction of knowing new things during their exploration of the rural culture (Yan & Yong, 2007). Nowadays, most of the people live in metropolitans lack the knowledge about countryside, agriculture and na-

ture. The beautiful pastoral scenery in countryside, the architectural culture full of the beauty of humanities, massive farming culture, nature-based rural food culture and the rural art culture with strong local characteristics, would strongly shake them, these would also expand their horizon and cultivate their sentiment during their exploration of rural culture.

Thirdly, the tourists gain satisfaction of revisiting once familiar places through the emotional communication with rural culture (Zhai & Ling, 2016). Many people lived in big cities would have direct or indirect relationships with the countryside and farmers, by visiting the old villages, people could experience the humanity, folklore, dialects through emotional communication with the countryside, and would generate a sense of pride and hospitality towards rural culture.

Finally, the tourists gain satisfaction of participation during their experiencing of rural culture (Hu, 2009). With the growing maturity of tourists, they appeal for active participation instead of passive visiting, and rural tourism services usually reflect the characteristics of active participation. The tourists could not only enjoy the idyllic scenery and taste the local specialties, but also could experience farming work, learn to make handicrafts and participate in the folk activities. People could not only learn the knowledge of rural culture, but also gain extraordinary experience in this process (Figure 4).

3. Status Quo of Rural Cultural Tourism in Changyang Tujia Autonomous County

3.1. Overview of Changyang Tujia Autonomous County

Changyang Tujia autonomous county located in Wuling Mountain area which is in the southwest of Hubei province, it is a minority inhabitation region of Tujia. The terrain is high in the west and low in the east, the Qingjiang river flows from east to west. There are mountains, hills and basins in this region, it is a typical mountain town of basin type. The population of Changyang county is 402,000, and the population of Tujia is 286,000, which accounts for 71.30% of the total population. Changyang county consists of 11 towns, the land area is 3430 square kilometers and the population density is 117 people/km². The per capita GDP is 3703 US dollars in 2013, which is lower than the average of Hubei Province (Figure 5, Figure 6).

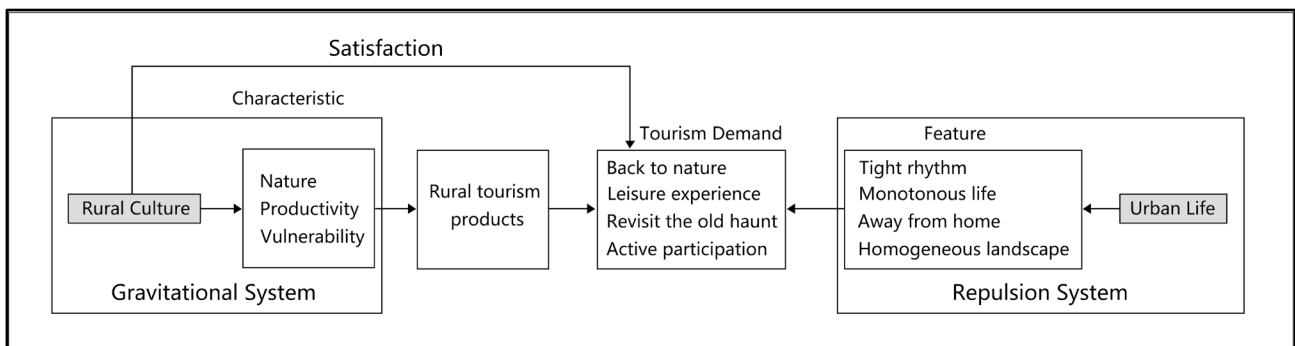


Figure 4. Dynamic model of rural tourism.



Figure 5. Administrative map of Changyang county.

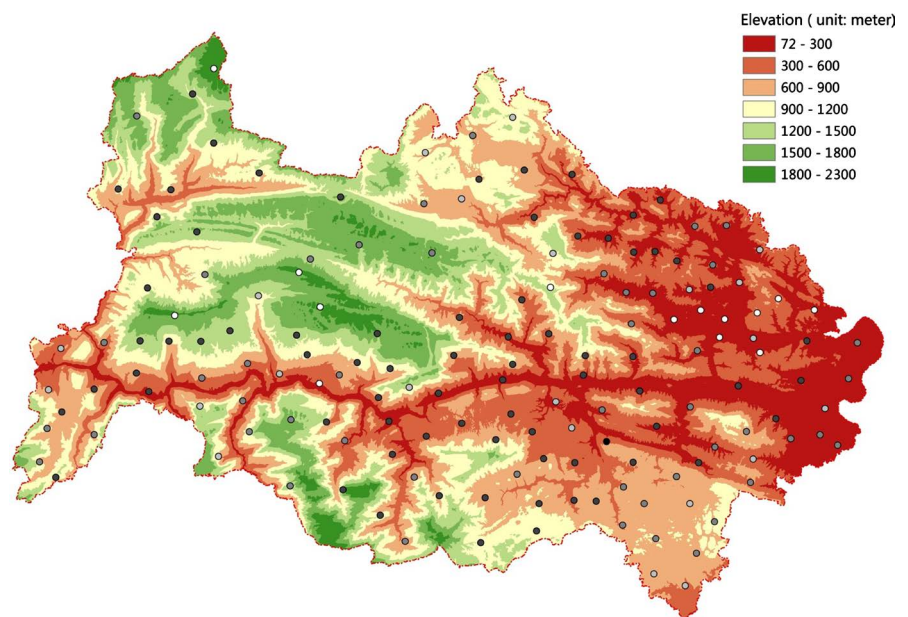


Figure 6. Elevation analysis chart of Changyang county.

3.2. An Analysis of the Cultural Characteristics of Changyang County

According to the history, Changyang county is the key channel from Jingchu to Bashu since ancient times, it is still one of the main channels of the western Hubei mountain area so far (Figure 7).

3.2.1. Cultural Analysis of Human Origin

Changyang is one of the earliest regions of ancient Chinese civilization. Early in the Paleolithic Age, they made important contributions to the rise of Chinese

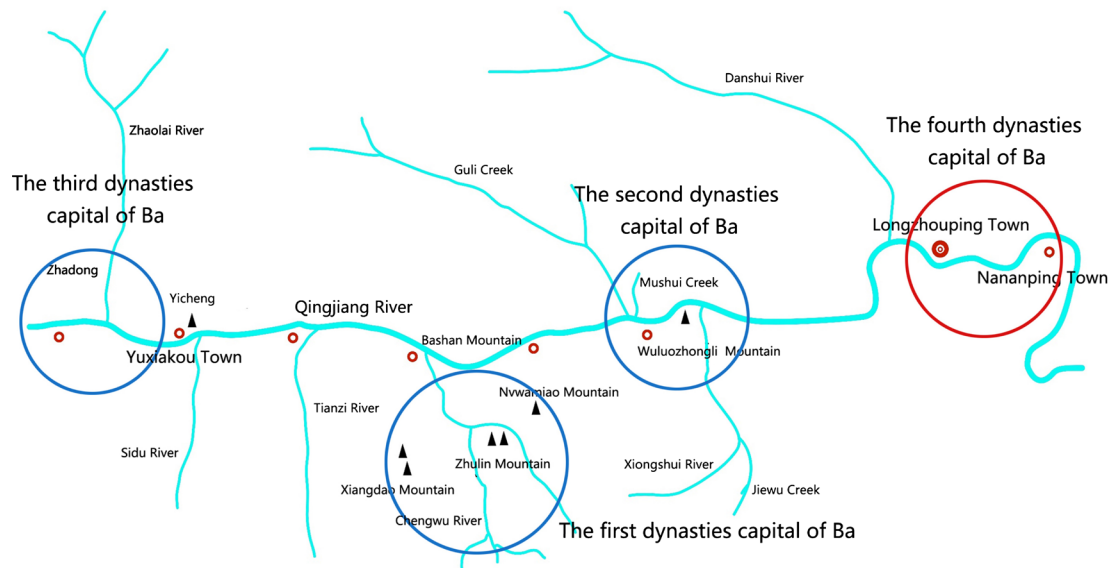


Figure 7. Historical changes of Ba.

nation in the Oriental. Chinese archaeologists found that there are evidences of human activities along Changyang Qingjiang river in ancient times, the “Changyang People” which was found in 1956 was a typical representative. With their hard-working and wisdom, these human ancestors had created highlights of the ancient Chinese civilization during the period from 6000 years ago to 4000 years ago.

3.2.2. Analysis of the National Culture Development

The excavation of human and animal remains the unearthed cultural relics of the Neolithic Age, have fully revealed the ancient history of Changyang County. The excavation of the censer stone cultural relic site confirmed that current people of Tujia lived in the Qingjiang River is the descendants of the ancient Ba nation based on physical objects for the first time, and it provided abundant physical materials to study the mysterious relationship between the origin of Tujia ethnic and the hometown of the Ba nation which has not come to a conclusion for a long time in the academic community.

3.2.3. Analysis of the Theme of Tujia Folk Culture

Tujia folk culture is mainly presented through the unique living customs and the spiritual forms of the Tujia ethnic in Changyang County, this section selects the “ethnic distribution” and the “distribution of folk culture resources” to make specific analysis.

Changyang County is a multi-ethnic inhabitation region, there are more than 20 ethnic groups in the county, with Tujia and Han counts for the main part. Ever since a long time ago, the Tujia and Han people lived together and married with each other, along with the migration and other historical reasons, they gradually formed a national distribution situation of “widely distributed living, partly congregate settlement”. Yuxiakou, Ziqiu, Yazikou and Duzhenwan which

located in the west of the county are agglomerations of Tujia ethnic, Tujia people generally consisted 60% - 70% of the whole population (**Figure 8**). Hejiaping, Langping, which located in the northwest of the county, and Moshi, Dayan, which located in the southeast of the county are Tujia/Han people mixed-living regions, the proportion of Han and Tujia people accounted for half and half respectively. Longzhouping and Gaojiayan which located in the east of the county are the regions with the highest percentage of Han population, Tujia people only accounted for 7% - 8%.

The folk culture of Changyang County is rich and vivid, which includes folklores, folk songs, southern tunes, percussion music, funeral dance, traditional gongs and drums. It showed the charm of the Ba culture with strong national characteristics and distinctive regional style. Among them, folk songs, southern tunes, and traditional gongs and drums are known as the “three treasures” of Changyang culture (**Figure 9**).

3.3. Current Situation and Characteristics of Rural Tourism in Changyang County

3.3.1. Natural Environment Characteristics

Changyang county located on the edge of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. It belongs to the second stage of transition zone towards Jiangnan Plain, and inclines from west to east, with mountains in the west and hills in the east. Bengjianzi mountain in the southwest of Duzhenwan is the highest point of the county, of which elevation is 2259.1 m; and the Moshi town in the southeast is the highest point of

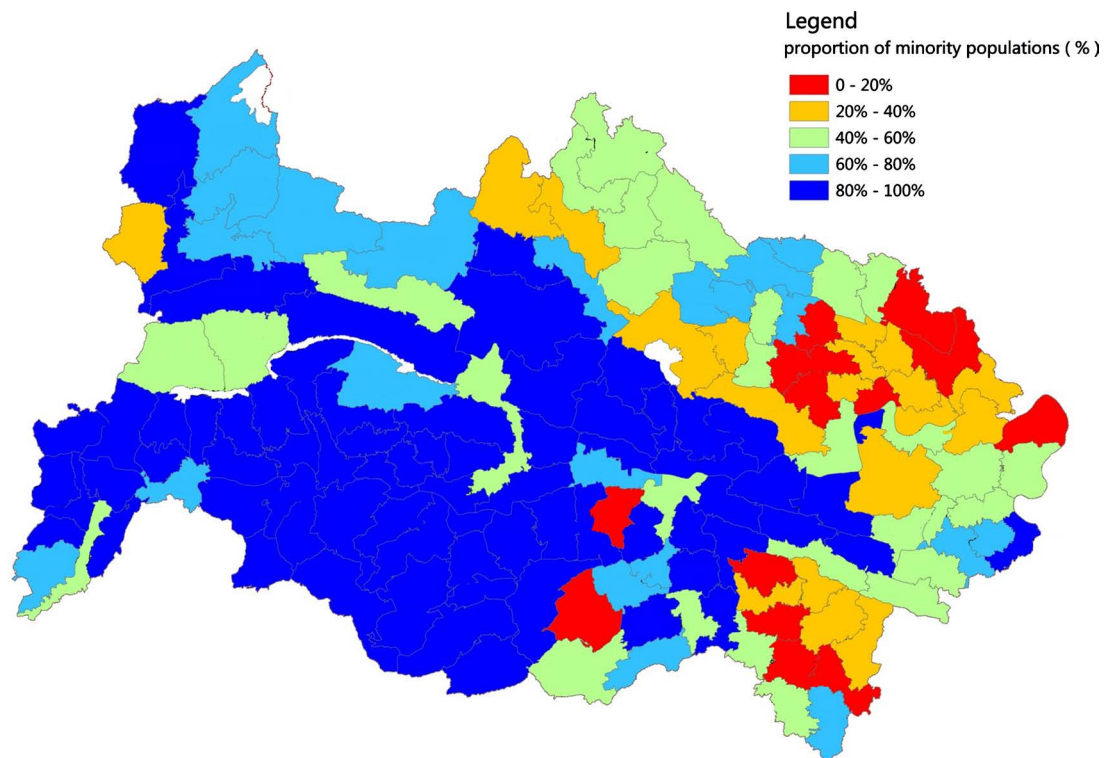


Figure 8. Proportion of ethnic minorities in Changyang county.

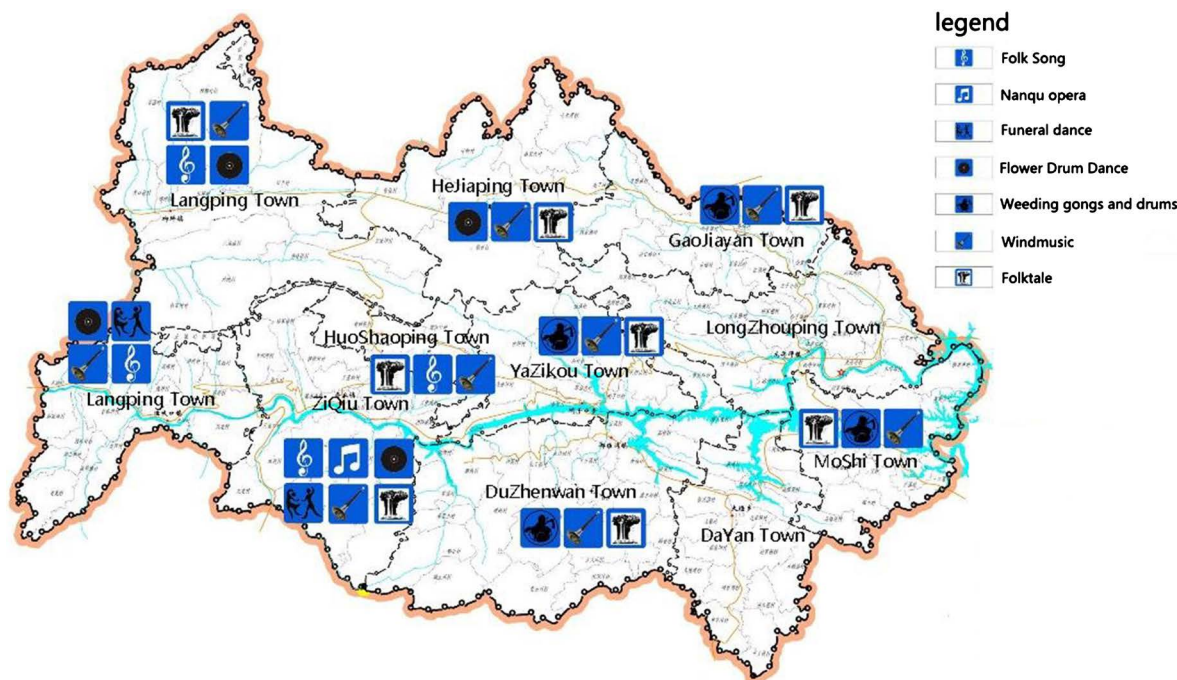


Figure 9. Folk culture distribution in Changyang county.

the county, of which elevation is 48.7 m. It is obvious that the mountains are important components of the geomorphy of Changyang County, and the construction of the whole county is built along with the mountains, thus the mountain terrain has a significant impact on the inhabitation and production distribution in Changyang County.

Besides, the county has 428 rivers that formed the Qingjiang river system, among which 43 rivers are the main tributaries of Qingjiang river. The rivers of which watershed area is above 100 square kilometers mainly include Qingjiang, Dan water, Zhaoyi River, Zhizhe River, Linxiang creek, Yaozhan creek, Dongliu creek, Nancha creek, Yantou creek, Siyang creek, Qu creek, Tianchi river, Luo river and so on. Due to the impact of Qingjiang river-split stone and the Gao-bazhou dam, upper and lower reservoirs are formed, therefore, 200,000 acres of water and 108 islands have formed a natural landscape of high canyons and flat lake. Changyang County cultivated a unique culture within the nature environment of mountains and rivers.

3.3.2. Cultural Tourism Resources

Changyang tourism originates from folk culture, the county government strongly promoted the Qingjiang Gallery to become the national 5A-class tourism scenic spot, and attracted cultural industries including the ancient city of Qingjiang, Tujia culture park to settle down in Changyang County. Moreover, the local government launched new business such as Qingjiang unique stones, bonsai and root craft. At the same time, they also built the Machi ancient village, the ancient capital city of Ba nation and numbers of new cultural theme parks (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Rural folk custom cultural event in Changyang county.

3.4. Problems Occurred in the Development of Rural Cultural Tourism

3.4.1. The Operators' Understanding of the Value of Cultural Resources Is Limited, Which Leads to the Limitation of the Scope of Rural Tourism

The operation concept of local farmers in rural tourism area is relatively closed and conservative, which makes the abundant cultural resources in rural areas of China have not been effectively developed and utilized, therefore the value of rural culture has not been realized. What's more, the mode of rural tourism in China is still limited to sightseeing, picking activities in orchards and rural residence, of which the cultural connotation is not profound, the regional cultural

characteristics are not prominent, the available tourism projects are very limited, and all these could not satisfy tourists' demand of experiencing unique natural life and human activities.

3.4.2. Under the Impact of Urban Culture, The Rural Tourism Is Becoming too "Commercial", Which Leads to the Heteromorphosis of Essence of the Culture

Under the impact of modern urban culture, the form of culture resources and the cultural connotation have been separated from or contradictory with each other after rural tourism development. The rural tourism is becoming too "commercial", and the customs and beliefs contained in cultural resources gradually faded or disappeared. Tourism development is overheated in some rural areas, this made the rural tourism development become superficial and assimilative, moreover, there are loads of low-quality souvenirs with high price in the market, above all have made the original rural culture vary.

3.4.3. The Lack of the Sense of Protection and Inheritance of Cultural Resources Has Obstructed the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism

The cultural resources would have value to develop and utilize only with good inheritance and protection mechanism. While the majority of developers of rural tourism have not taken the rational exploitation and utilization of cultural resources as a necessity for the sustainable development of rural tourism, they have not established the concept of the integration of economic development and cultural protection, they did not realize the importance of the coordinated development between the tourism and the protection of cultural resources. These factors make use the available cultural resources in rural tourism industry become exhausted, so that, the sustainable development of rural tourism is hindered.

4. The Path of Sustainable Development of Rural Cultural Tourism in Changyang County

Taking 7 villages along Yantou creek in Changyang County as examples, the sustainable development path of rural cultural tourism is proposed from four aspects based on current natural ecological environment of these villages: the integration of cultural resources, the thematic design of cultural space, the design of tourism routes and the optimization of tourism space.

4.1. Integration Path of Cultural Resources

The formation of rural culture tourism system is based on the integration of regional cultural resources. The status quo of cultural resources determines the direction of tourism development. The rural cultural resources along the small watershed of Yantouxi creek showed a high degree of integration of nature and humanity. With the regional lore and biography, the objects with pictographic meanings of Longyuan culture can be found in this landscape of minor wa-

tershed topography. Meanwhile, as the descendants of the ancient Ba nation, Tujia people lived highly concentrated together in several geographical units, so that, the rich folk custom combined Tujia and Han culture has been inherited intact. The basic form current folk culture is mainly focusing on two aspects: social folk and spiritual folk.

Therefore, the integration of cultural resources in Changyang Tujia Autonomous County should focus on the re-aggregation of multi-cultural resources, which is, how to combine the folk activities and tourism market together to form a cultural tourism project with regional characteristics. Meanwhile, a new mode of thematic culture tourism would be formed in the process of the resource integration. Classification and guidance have been done in the process of cultural resources integration to help form three cultural element clusters based on their different themes, which are Tujia-Han folk culture, Taoism culture and Bachu culture (Figure 11, Figure 12).

4.2. Creating the Theme of Cultural Space

Before organizing rural tourism projects, the developers should sort out the rural cultural resources, scientifically evaluate the importance of the existing cultural



Figure 11. Rural Taoist theme culture planning.

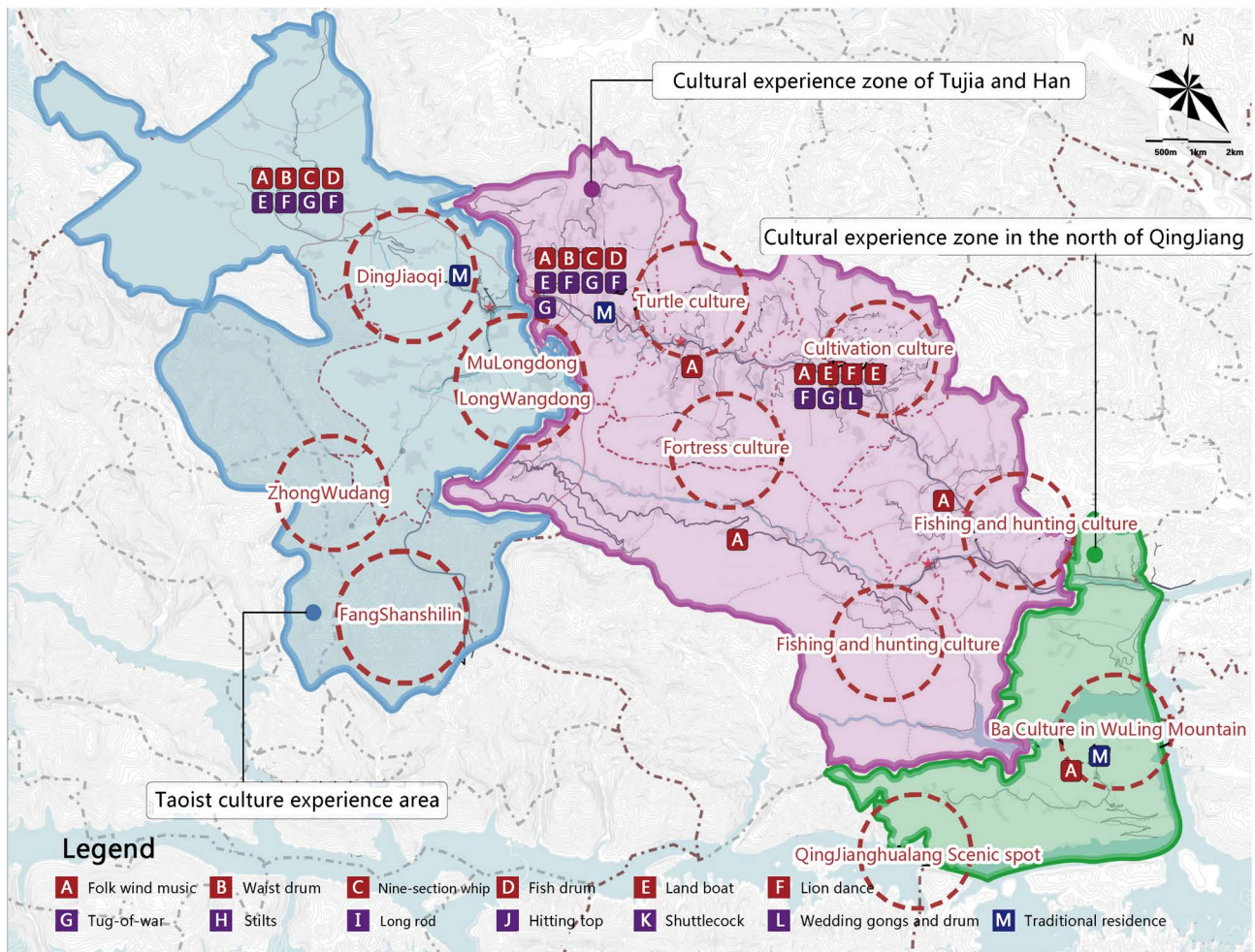


Figure 12. Rural folk culture planning.

resources, to form several cultural trails. The generation of cultural trails is of great significance to the promotion of regional cultural tourism. Combined with the cultural trails in the physical space and environment, the rural tourism system which carried by cultural elements and featured by thematic culture tourism experiencing activities, is built on basis of connecting various cultural theme tourism spots by the optimization of tourism routes.

As mentioned above, all the cultural elements in villages along the small watershed of Yantou creek in Changyang County are clustered by Tujia-Han folk culture, Taoism culture and Bachu culture. As surrounded by Qingjiang gallery national scenic spot and Qingjiang Fangshan national scenic spot, five types of thematic culture areas are formed based on rural culture tourism system, which are Tujia-Han culture exhibition area, Taoist culture area, Longyuan culture experiencing area, Taoist healthcare area, Bachu culture exhibition area (Figure 13).

4.3. Tourism Route Planning

Rural cultural tourism is a kind of physical space planning contains cultural

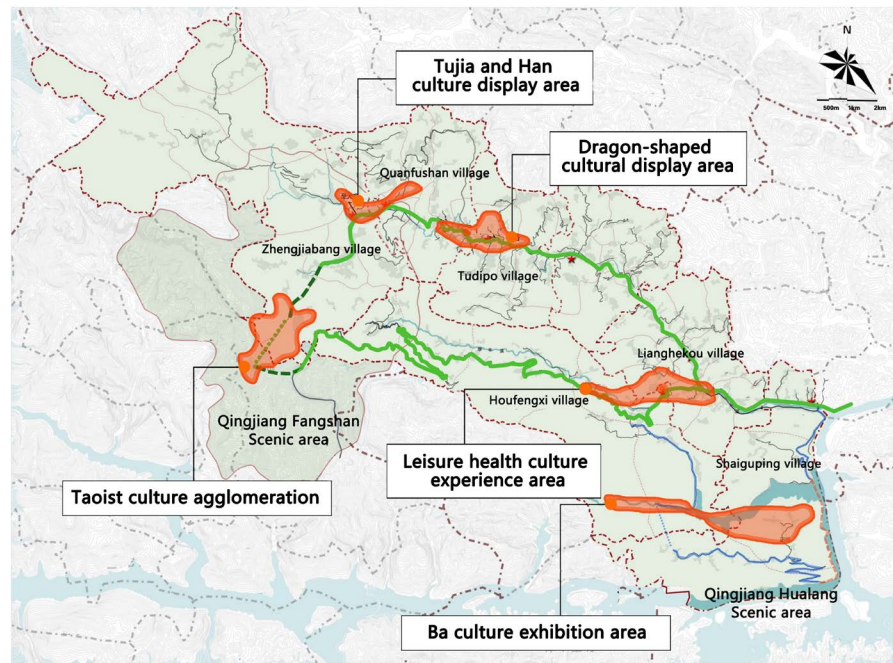


Figure 13. Rural thematic cultural space planning.

experiencing activities, which is driven by the combination of non-physical cultural space and environment, that is, cultural space should combine with physical environment to form a synthesized tourism product that can be visited, experienced and participated during the sustainable development of rural cultural tourism. Therefore, the cultural space planning should be firmly implemented in specific tourism products, and, then coherent and interesting integrated cultural tourism areas would be built up through the continuous planning of tourism routes.

From the status quo of the tourism resources along the small watershed of Yantou creek, the steep valleys, plain landscape along the riverside, historical relic sites, and part of the leisure experiencing tourism projects together formed thematic cultural resources. Therefore, during the planning of the whole tourism routes system, the perfection of main traffic system should be done to connect the two significant scenic spots, together with numbers of secondary rural tourism resources along the route to be closely connected with the main route, so as to form secondary tourism service spots.

It is necessary to point out that the ideal design of tourist routes is the circular automobile routes, to ensure the consistency of the tourism, however, due to the restriction of the mountain topography, it is not suitable to build roadways in part of the west side, thus, the combination of ropeway and circular-routed shuttle bus is designed to solve the traffic connection problem, meanwhile, this design could bring extra interest during the tourism. In addition, the culture connotations are designed to be merged with the whole regional rural tourism by granting different cultural themes to different routes, which are the ancient post road route, the Tujia-Han folk culture route, etc. (Figure 14).

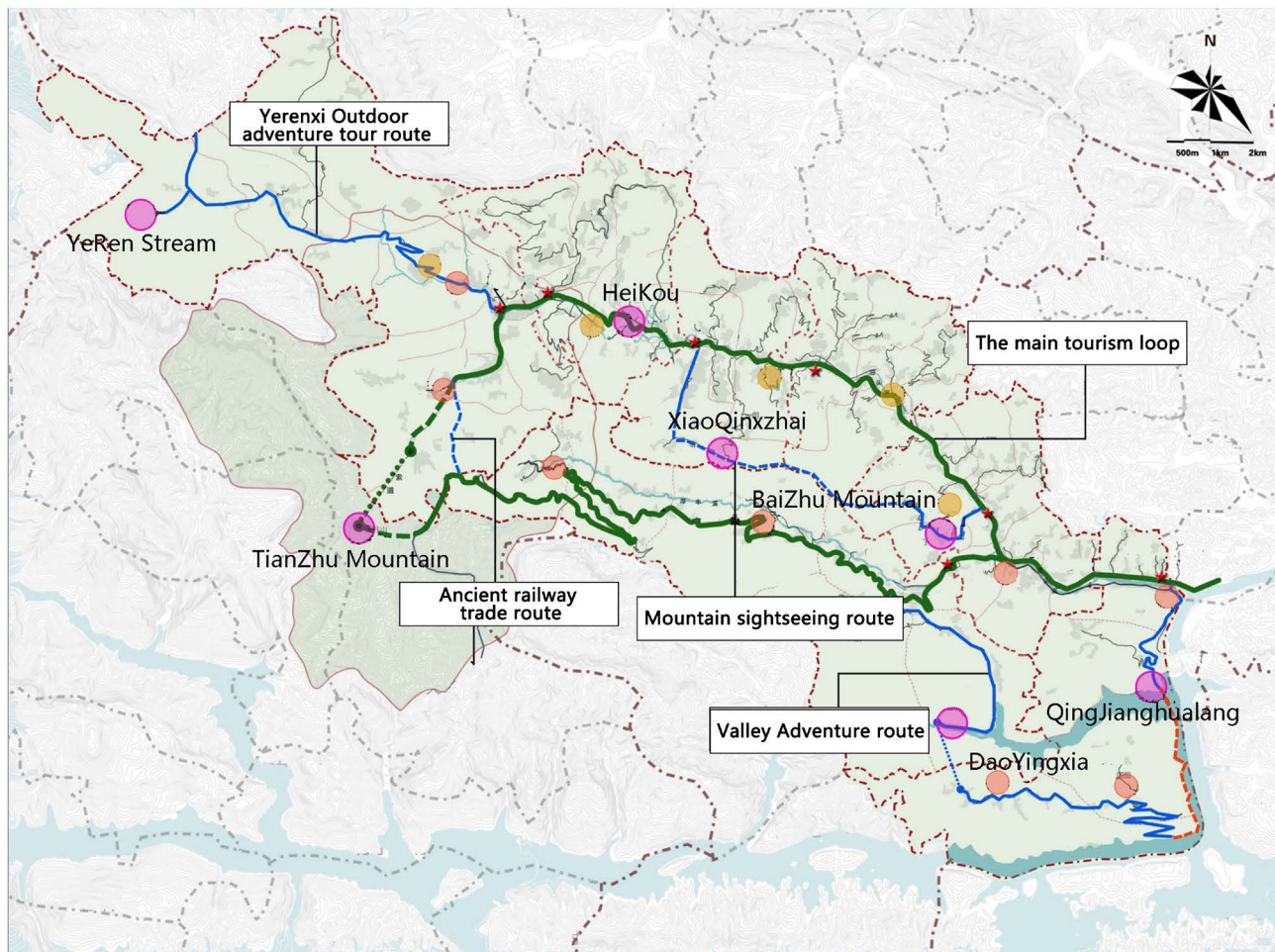


Figure 14. Rural tourism route planning.

4.4. Optimization Method of Tourism Space

Rural tourism space is a set of all tourism resources space, the optimization of tourism space should not only consider the majorization of scenic elements and tourism elements, but also solve the problems of the positioning of tourism resources and the direction of tourism development on a larger geographical scale. The change of tourists' demands leads to the dynamic change of tourism projects macroscopically, that is, to develop new tourism projects which catered to the demands of modern people, to integrate the tourism projects with regional environment comprehensively on basis of constant cultural resources. These actions could accurately promote the sustainable operation of local tourism industry, what's more, it could also possibly establish local tourism brands, and facilitate the sharing of regional tourism service infrastructure. The optimization of tourism space needs to define the main carrier of the tourism space, and demonstrate the functional structure of the tourism space, to construct the "core to periphery" type tourism space structure.

In practical cases, the planning of tourism space system should expand its vision over the watershed of Yantou creek, it should integrate the scenic spots

along the watershed with the following two national scenic spots which are Qingjiang gallery and Qingjiang Fangshan. The key position of Qingjiang gallery and Qingjiang Fangshan should be clearly assured. The rural tourism along the watershed is featured by cultural experiencing activities as their main function, which would act as complements for the above two national scenic spots, and finally, this would form numbers of diversified tourism products with complex tourism functions (Figure 15, Figure 16).

5. Suggestions on the Sustainable Development of Rural Cultural Tourism in Ethnic Minority Regions

5.1. The Development of Tourism Market Should Pay Attention to the Excavation and Extraction of Regional Culture Characteristics

The developers of rural tourism should explore the connotations of local culture, utilize corresponding abundant tourism resources from different aspects, such as diversified folk customs, diversified crops, diversified seasons and so on, in this way, to achieve the sustainable development of rural tourism. The folk customs

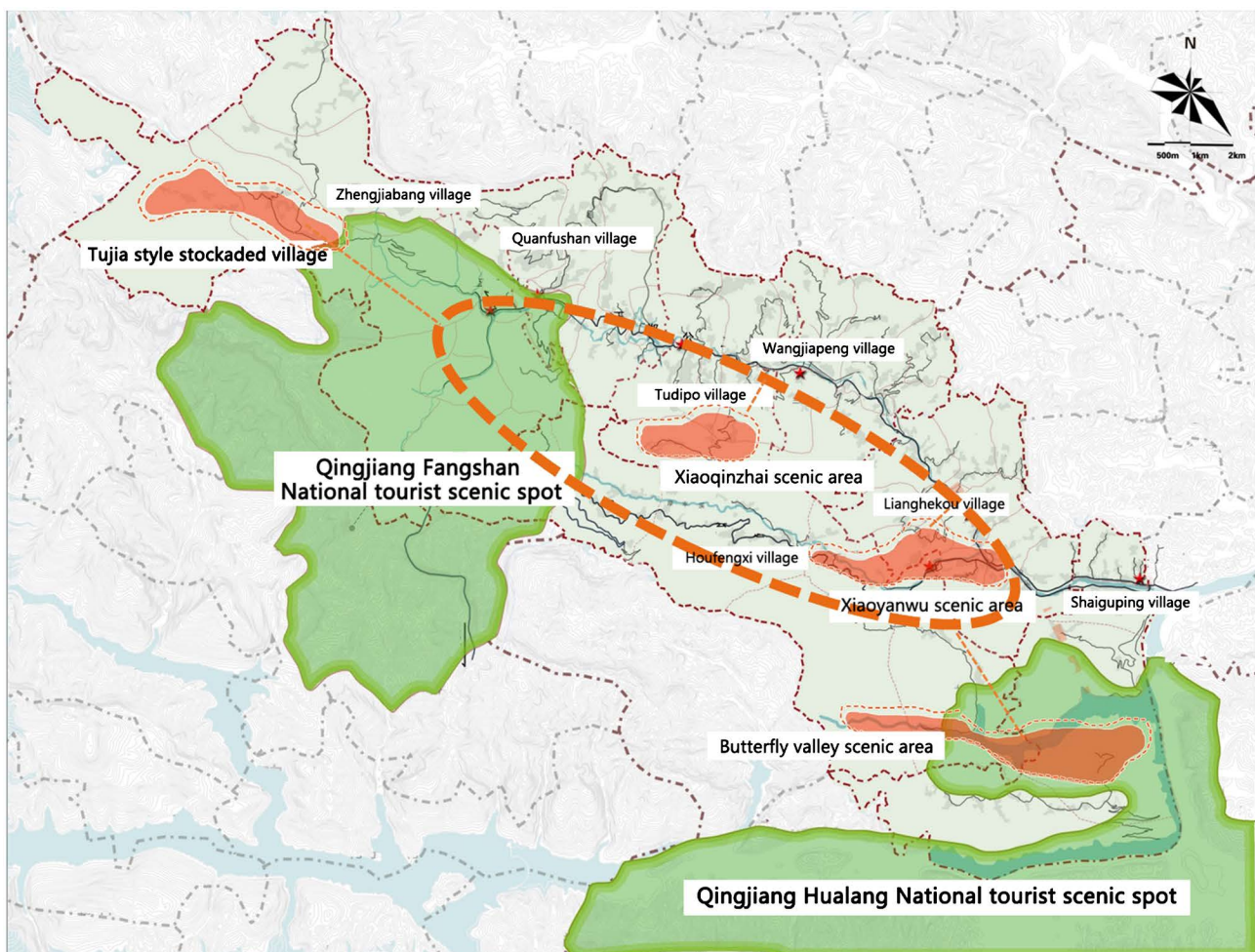


Figure 15. Spatial structure of rural tourism.

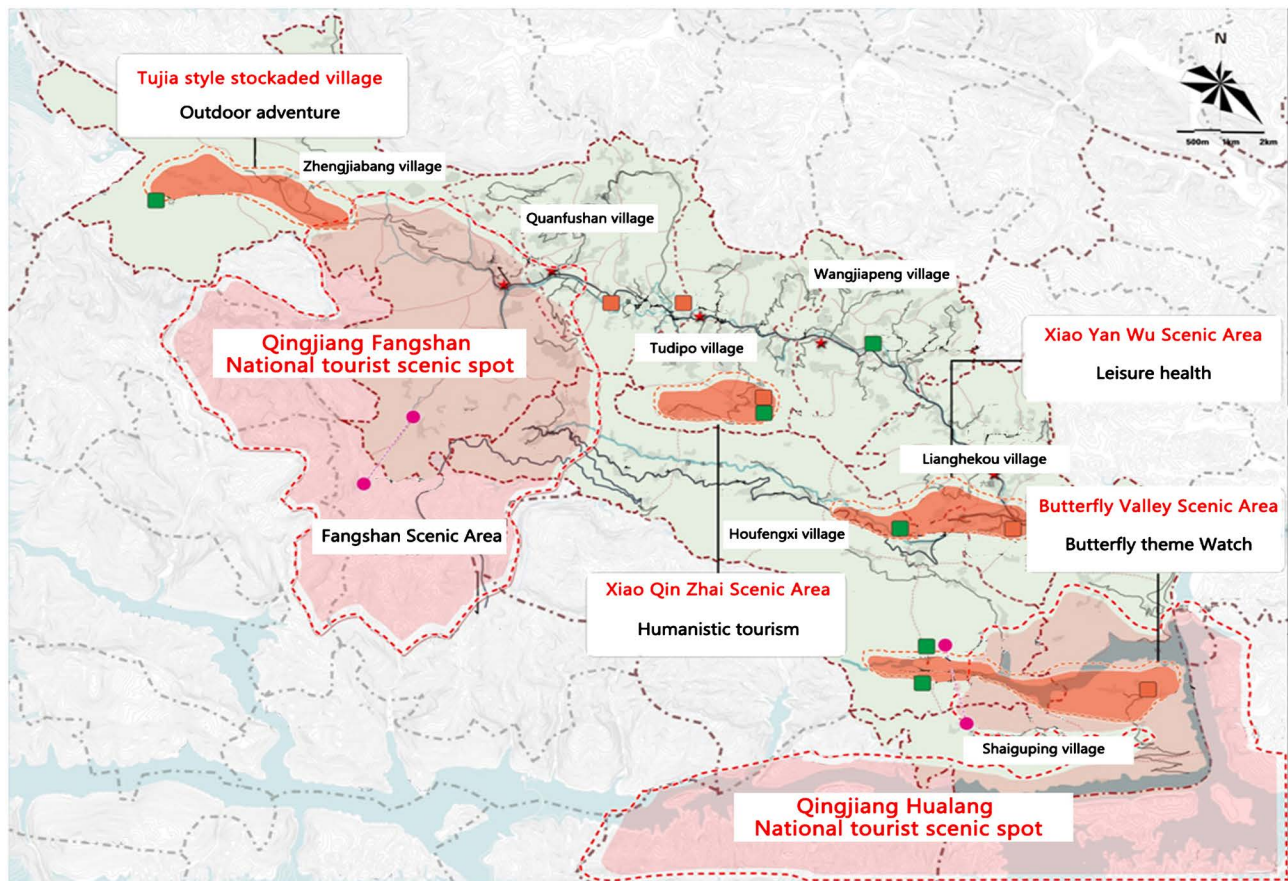


Figure 16. The planning of rural tourism.

like the wedding customs, the “February 2nd” could be served as the highlights of the rural tourism experiencing activities. Furthermore, it would be attractive for both domestic and foreign tourists to experience the daily life of local people and participate in the local folk custom tours.

5.2. The Development of Cultural Tourism Should Follow the Principle That the Development, Utilization, Protection and Inheritance of Cultural Resources Should Coexist with Each Other

All villages across the minority regions should follow the principle of “appropriate protection, rational development”. Based on the advantages of cultural resources and developing ability of each minority regions, the tourism development should introduce industrial consciousness and originality to select their own best development path. On the aspect of culture development, incentive mechanisms should be built up to encourage the independent innovation of rural residents.

5.3. The Sustainable Development of Rural Culture Tourism Should Combine with the Protection of Ecological Environment

The target of rural tourism is to maintain the stability of the local ecological en-

vironment and further optimize the environment. In the process of developing the rural cultural resources, we should start with market research to better integrate rural culture with rural tourism. The transformation from folk performance to relic visiting, from selling handicrafts to creative cultural development, the cultural values would be developed from various aspects to achieve a benign circle of cultural protection and economic benefits of rural tourism.

6. Conclusion

Overall, great progress has been made in the sustainable development of rural tourism in China's ethnic minority areas, but at the same time, three suggestions still need to be paid attention to: first, for implanting regional brand to the sustainable development of rural tourism, it is important to mine the regional cultural characteristics in ethnic minority areas through developing corresponding tourism resources projects in different local customs, crops and seasons; second, it is necessary to balance the relationship between project construction and protection inheritance, and introduce the best suitable tourism project through evaluating the development ability of regional cultural resources. Third, the sustainable development of rural cultural tourism industry needs to be combined with ecological environment protection to maintain the stability of the local ecological environment.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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