

# Confusions of Tourism Development in Minority Villages: Subjects' Appeals and Space Power

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**ABSTRACT.** Under the background of the integration of culture and travel, all localities gradually strengthened the excavation and utilization of local and characteristics culture. The fragility of minority cultures has led to multiple puzzles and paradoxes of development or protection. This paper takes Qianhu Yaozhai in Liannan as a case study, through in-depth interviews, participatory observation and other methods, analyzes the appeals and expectations of different subjects in tourism development, and tries to find the confusion of tourism development and the root of conflicts of interest in ethnic villages from the perspective of space power. The research results show that the appeals of the government, residents, operators and other subjects, all of which are misplaced and even conflicted. The binary opposition between protection and development is the contradiction focus of the conflicts and developmental confusion of different subjects. In the process of tourism development in Qianhu Yaozhai, the discourses and appeals expressed by different subjects have responded to spatial justice or spatial injustice. This research can provide a new theoretical perspective for the development of ethnic village tourism.

**KEYWORDS:** Minority villages, Development confusion, Subject appeal, Space power

## 1. Introduction

At present, most ethnic minority villages face many problems, such as natural decline, constructive destruction, aging, hollowing out, cultural breaks, and loss of values<sup>[1-2]</sup>. In recent years, the development of the integration of cultural tourism has promoted the revitalization and re-engineering of villages. Most scholars believe that effective development, community participation, and appropriate development of tourism can promote the protection of traditional cultures<sup>[3-4]</sup>. But tourism also brings a series of problems, such as the commercialization of culture, the impact of foreign culture, and the materialization of society. Regarding the social and cultural influence of tourism, the relevant research results are mainly characterized by pessimism, optimism and neutrality. The pessimistic believes that the development

of tourism leads to the packaging of goods into commodities for sale and performance, leading to commercialization and distortion<sup>[4-5]</sup>. The optimistic believes that the increased demand for tourism promotes the protection and inheritance of culture<sup>[5-6]</sup>; the neutral is the combination of the former two, and that the inheritance and protection of culture requires appropriate commercialization<sup>[7-8]</sup>. In summary, it is not difficult to find the paradox and confusion for most ethnic villages: poor and backward→bad traffic→unspoiled landscape and living space→preservation of traditional culture; development of tourism poverty alleviation → commercialization → commercialization of culture, unbalanced authenticity, and multi-party conflicts of interest. Based on this, whether development or protection, this is the first confusion. And in the process of tourism development, different subjects have different appeals for tourism development. For example, the government and experts are more inclined to protect, and the villagers hope to increase income through development. So we should follow whose logic of the development of the village? This is the second confusion.

Current related research involves many disciplines, such as ethnology, sociology, architecture, and tourism, but the research focuses on the development of villages, problems and countermeasures<sup>[1-2]</sup> and development models<sup>[9-10]</sup>. As well as the impact of tourism on the village<sup>[11]</sup>, community participation and village development<sup>[12]</sup>, there is no theoretical understanding and analysis of the paradox and confusion in the development. The research perspective remains in community participation, architecture and landscape protection<sup>[3]</sup>. In the process of tourism development, most villages cannot avoid the above two puzzles. It is essential to further analyze the actual cases and explore new theoretical perspectives to break through this confusion. To this end, this article takes the Qianhu Yaozhai as a case study, analyzes the “confusion” of the tourism development by combing and interpreting the development appeals of different subjects, and tries to explore the theoretical breakthrough from the perspective of space power. In order to explore the above issues, the author went to the Qianhu Yaozhai for field investigations from October 01, 2019 to November 18, 2019 (up to a total of 29 days), using in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. Participatory observation and other methods to collect first-hand data (field notes, interview recordings, photos, etc.), we interviewed villagers, business owners, the government (the county government and the village committee) and tourists. At the same time, it also refers to the statistics and planning texts provided by relevant government departments.

## **2. Confusion of Development: Subject Appeals and Expectations**

Youling Qianhu Yaozhai is located in the southwest of Sanban Town, Liannan County, Qingyuan, Guangdong, about 12 kilometers from the town government. The entire ancient village covers an area of about 58 hectares. It was built in Tang Dynasty and expanded in Song Dynasty. It flourished in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The whole village is built on the mountainside. It is an ancient Yaozhai with the most vivid style, the largest historical preservation and the highest popularity. In recent years, the tourism development of the Millennium Yaozhai has

been in full swing, and the tourism of the Qianhu Yaozhai has not yet been formally developed. The gap between the rich and the poor in the two places is large, and the contradiction between protection and development is more prominent. Tourism resources in Youling and Nangang are similar, but the development situation is far from each other. In this regard, different stakeholders have given their own interpretations. In order to solve the mystery of the tourism development of ethnic villages, this article will explore the appeals of various subjects and the contradictions between them from the perspective of various stakeholders.

### ***2.1 Local Villagers: the Development Like the Millennium Yaozhai***

The villagers, living in Youling Qianhu Yaozhai, are one of the most important interests in the development of tourism. At present, Youling Yaozhai has not been officially developed, but there are still a large number of tourists. The participation of the villagers in Youling is very low, mainly at the level of economic participation, informally selling national embroidery crossbody bags agricultural products. Moreover, there are very few villagers participating (about 12 households), and other villagers still rely on crop cultivation as the main source of income. It can be seen that the current tourism industry in Youling is only benefiting few villagers, and most of them do not even have opportunities. The tourism development of Millennium Yaozhai is in full swing, and it also provides some tourism employment opportunities for the surrounding villagers. However, most of the young villagers in the Youling Yaozhai can only choose work outside. The villager TBW said: "I am muddy water worker in the country. I also want to stay at home to make money, to accompany the elderly and children, but there is no chance." Currently in the village, the rest are old, women and childrens." (G-02)

Many villagers in the Millennium Yaozhai rely on local tourism to make money at home while the villagers of Qianhu Yaozhai can only go outside. The villagers do not only envied the Millennium Yaozhai, but also complained there are no investors in Qianhu Yaozhai. "Our resources are better than the Millennium Yaozhai, and before there was investment. But the investors are angry with the stealing of some villagers, the government took away the investment. Since then, they do not try to look for investment" (V-02). It can be seen that the villagers mainly think from their own perspective. They are not very concerned about whether over-exploitation will be carried out in village, like buildings, Yao culture and other issues, but whether their income has increased. In addition, when talking about tourism, the villagers often talk about Millennium Yaozhai, which has become a benchmark in a certain sense and also the object of envy and alignment of many villagers.

### ***2.2 Local Tour Operators: Differential Development***

At present, there are no foreign operators in Youling. They used to work in major cities such as Dongguan, Foshan and Guangzhou. They basically quit their jobs and then returned to hometowns, where they run businesses such as Yao dance groups, long table banquets, homestays and restaurants. As the villagers reflect the slow

development of the tourism industry in Youling, most of the operators think so, which leads to poor business. Restaurant owner TDY said: "There are too few tourists, so we still rely mainly on farming and raising chickens. Occasionally, when tourists call to say that they want to come to eat, we must always contact, afraid that tourists will not come." (O-2)

However, no matter which understanding and attitude, most operators believe that the Qianhu Yaozhai needs further development of tourism. As for how to develop, they expressed different appeals and expectations from the villagers, and they emphasized that they should not take the road of the Millennium Yaozhai, which is too commercialized and homogenous, and it is necessary to take a path of distinctive differentiation. The operator of the song and dance team TGLM said: "We have to develop, but we don't want to be commercialized like the Millennium Yaozhai. Commercialization is not going to develop for a long time. We have to keep the ancient village and the original ecology." (H-06)

### ***2.3 Local Government: Development and Protection in Parallel***

The village committee and county government are directly related to the development of its tourism. As mentioned above, many villagers and business households attribute the failure of tourism development to the government's inaction (such as not planning publicity and not actively attracting investment). In the opinion of the county government, this is attributed to the special cultural factors of Qianhu Yaozhai : as an important part of the Yao culture in Guangdong Province and the construction lasting for thousands of years. So far, it has preserved the relatively complete architectural style and customs of residential buildings. The first is to protect and inherit the culture. ZL of Liannan County Wenguang Tourism Bureau said: "Qianhu Yaozhai belongs to the limited construction zone and cannot be developed on a large scale. Over the years, no large investment has been approved to come. Before the parking lot was built at the village entrance, but it was later photographed by satellite and has now been demolished." (G-02) And the government made a protective plan for Qianhu Yaozhai. It is suitable for tourism development with appropriateness and suitability, but not suitable for large-scale and large-scale development.

Different from the protection emphasized by the county government, the village committee hopes that Qianhu Yaozhai can rise rapidly and change the current difficult situation. On the one hand, the Committee is under the pressure of the upper-level government policy, and understands the significance of cultural protection for the village. It needs to perform a lot of protective work, but on the other hand, they also understand the villagers, they want to make achievements and change the predicament. Besides, many of the staffs are natives. The leaders of the village committee said: "We also want to develop tourism but limited by the policy." (G-06) . It can be seen that the appeal of the village committee is to further develop. Parallel protection and development is the understanding and appeal of local governments in the development of tourism.

## 2.4 Tourists: Avoid Commercial Development

The main groups of tourism consumption in Youling include group tourists and self-help tourists. They are concerned about the architectural landscape and traditional culture, not the economic benefits. For the group of tourists, Qianhu Yaozhai is very original. A tourist from Guangzhou said: "It is a good place and still retains so many ancient houses, which are completely different from the commercialized places of Lijiang and Fenghuang Ancient City." (T-03). Self-help tourists think that Qianhu Yaozhai is a village with a special atmosphere of life and Yao culture. One said: "Qianhu Yaozhai has Yao culture, and we can see the ancient buildings, the Yao women wearing national costumes and chickens." (T-08) Expectations for the future development, many self-help tourists said that the village should not only retain the traditional residential buildings, but also preserve the cultural elements such as Yao culture, sing-song and hand-embroidering. In addition to worrying about the commercialization, self-help tourists also noticed the issue of cultural protection. In general, unlike the development appeals of villagers and business households, tourists' demand is mainly based on their own tourism gaze and experience needs, and it is considered to avoid excessive commercial development and preserve traditional landscape and culture.

## 3. Contradictory Focus of Connotation and Reflection on Space Power

It can be found from Figure 1 that the appeals of different subjects are often misplaced, divergent and even conflicting. Then, we should follow whose logic and appeals of the development of tourism in Youling? To further understand and solve the development confusion, it is necessary to clarify the contradictions of different subject appeals and what are the differences between them.

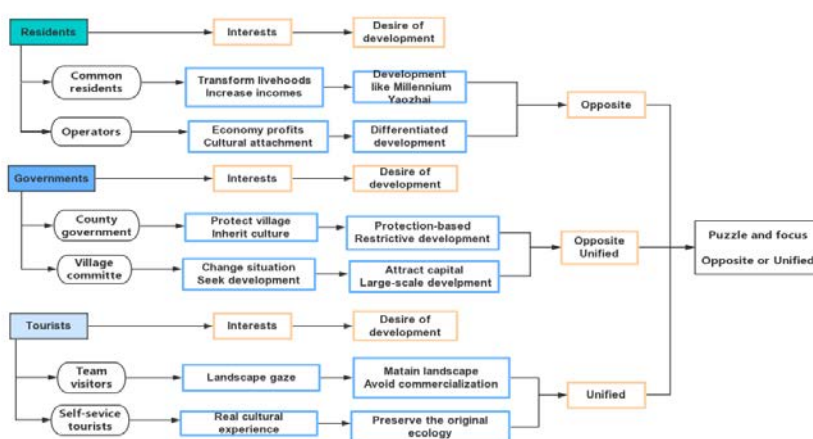


Fig.1 The Appeals and Contradictions of Different Subjects in the Development of Village

It is found that appeals of different subjects are centered on the contradiction between protection and development. The focus of divergence is whether to continue protection or further development. The county government and foreign tourists believe further developed will take more tourists, who will bring the homogenization of the local ecology and the cultural destruction is difficult to recover. In the eyes of village committees, villagers and operators, continuing protection will make it difficult to change the current stagnant situation. Therefore, the contradiction between the protection and development of binary opposition has led to the multiple confusions of the current development. To break through this confusion, we need to change our perspective, from the previous dual opposition of protection and development to the unity of protection and development, that is, to maintain the balance between originality and economic development in the process of commercialization. Many studies have also pointed out that the protection between village protection and tourism development is not a contradiction, but a mutual promotion relationship. The protection of villages is often achieved through moderate development, while the sustainable development of tourism depends on the basis of protection. When we regard protection and development as unity, the developmental confusion faced by the minority villages such as Qianhu Yaozhai (follow whose logic of the appeals) is solved. Because the development appeal of each subject ultimately leads to protective development or developmental protection. But at the same time, another problem arises: how to achieve the unity of protection and development, and finally to achieve sustainable development? Past stakeholder theory, tourism life cycle, and community empowerment theory provide some answers and inspirations for the above problems. The tourist destinations are in different development cycles, and the mentality of local residents on tourism development and commercialization is different in different periods. There is no ready-made model for the relationship between cultural authenticity and commodification. All stakeholders regard the protection and inheritance of culture as the gathering point of the greatest interests, and find the balance point and the greatest common denominator to achieve sustainable development.

To find the greatest common divisor that balances the interests of all parties, we need to borrow the theory of spatial power and spatial justice<sup>[13]</sup>. When analyzing the spatial justice of cities, Harvey pointed out that the problems in the distribution field are often the reflection of deeper production methods and power problems and whether justice in space distribution depends on whether space production methods and power are fair and just<sup>[14]</sup>. It can be understood that the problem of injustice of space power is caused by the production of injustice in a deeper level of space. In the process of tourism development, vulnerable groups (communities) enjoy the space power of the village. So in particular, space production of justice should take them into account, including their interests, community participation, and distribution of benefits. If their appeals are ignored, this is the unjust village space. It can be seen that the spatial justice reflection on the tourism development of ethnic villages will eventually lead to a power analysis. We need to think carefully about whose village this is, who has the power of this village space, who is using, transforming, and creating this space and other more fundamental power issues. We should learn from the “City Power” theory and develop the “Minority Village Power”

theory, including the power of obtaining village space, participating in village management, and having village life. Only by clarifying the issue of space power can we better understand and solve the above-mentioned confusion and contradictory focus, and finally realize the space justice of village development and protect the “Minority Village Power” of community residents.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Through the above analysis and discussion, this paper reveals the contradictory focus of different subject appeals and multiple puzzles in the development of ethnic village tourism; and combines space power and space justice theory to think beyond the previous stakeholders and community participation theory, enriching the analytical perspective and understanding the perspective, which can provide theoretical guidance for the development practice of China's current minority villages. Future research can use specific cases to empirically analyze issues related to space power, spatial production justice, and spatial distribution justice in the development of ethnic villages.

#### **5. Comment**

(1)Data Was Updated to December 2019, from the Liannan County Government.

(2)The interview data appearing in the article encodes V for local villagers, G for government, O for local tour operators, and T for tourists. The number after the letter indicates the number of the interviewee.

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