The Importance of Strengthening the Cultivation of Ethnic Tour Guides in Liangshan Area

Jing Huang
International Institute of Business Administration
Jilin International Studies University
Changchun, China

Abstract—Tourism has gradually become one of the pillars of economic development in Liangshan, Sichuan Province. However, the tourism services in Liangshan fail to be matched with the increasing number of tourists each year. There is a large supply imbalance between the number of legal tour guides and the market demand in Liangshan, which provides an opportunity for illegal tour guide services. At present, few scholars pay attention to and study this research field. Therefore, this paper proposes the viewpoint of strengthening the cultivation of ethnic tour guides in Liangshan, and discusses its importance and development strategies in detail.

Keywords: Liangshan area, cultivating ethnic tour guides, the importance of ethnic tour guides

I. INTRODUCTION

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (hereinafter referred to as Liangshan Prefecture), located in the southwest of China, has rich and diverse tourism resources. It is the largest settlement of the Yi people in China, and also the home of over a dozen of other ethnic groups such as Han, Tibetan, Mongolian and Naxi, and thus has rich ethnic cultural resources. Liangshan Prefecture covers an area of more than 60,000 square kilometers and has a variety of topographic features, including canyons, basins, plains, hills, karst caves and other topographic features, with an elevation drop of 5,653 m. Liangshan Prefecture belongs to the subtropical monsoon climate, enjoys abundant sunlight all the year round, little rain, dry and warm, and has rich natural landscape resources and ecological agricultural resources.

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing industries in the Prefecture in recent years, and has gradually grown into a pillar economy of the Prefecture. During the period of the "11th Five-Year Plan", the development of Liangshan tourism industry has achieved initial results. The completion of the electrification of Chengdu-Kunming Railway, the completion of the opening of the Xichang-Panzhihua Expressway, and the addition of air routes to Qingshan Airport provide infrastructure guarantee for the further development of Liangshan tourism. Star-level hotels, guesthouses, and catering industries have been established and improved one after another, and existing scenic spots such as the Qionghu Scenic Area and the Yi Ethnic Customs Garden have been transformed and improved. A Liangshan tourism scenic line with the theme of "humanistic Liangshan, ecological Liangshan, and red Liangshan" has been created.

At the same time as the rapid development of tourism in Liangshan Prefecture, the problems hindering development have gradually become apparent. At present, the Prefecture has not formed a tour guide training institution with a certain scale. In the territory, only one undergraduate institution has tourism major. There are nearly 300 students in Xichang University's tourism management major, which is still far from the market demand. It can be seen that the problems of Liangshan tourism are concentrated in three aspects: the lack of professional tourism talents, the few exquisite tourism routes, and the weak competitiveness of the tourism product market. Among them, the lack of professional tourism talents is the most significant problem. Survey data show that there are currently only 173 legal tour guides in Liangshan Prefecture. [2] In the face of an annual average of 12,54555 million travelers · time (2006-2010), it can be clearly seen that there is a serious shortage of legal tour guides in the area. As a result, some residents around the scenic area pretend to be tour guides and engage in illegal tour guides to obtain benefits. On the one hand, illegal tour guides have seriously affected the legal and fair operating environment of the market of guides. On the other hand, illegal tour guides have never received professional training so that they have low professional level, low vocational competencies, and poor interpretation skills. In the process of serving tourists, they tend to promote tourist consumption to obtain a commission for profit. This case has seriously damaged the image of tourist guides in Liangshan area. Li Yuzhen's questionnaire survey (2009) [3] shows that tourists have high expectations for the commentary system and tourism consultation provided in tourism services, but often get low satisfaction. At the same time, unlicensed employment of illegal tour guides makes it difficult to monitor them, increases the safety risk factor for tourists in Liangshan and leads to an increase in the hidden dangers of tourists' personal safety in the territory.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING THE CULTIVATION OF ETHNIC TOUR GUIDES IN LIANGSHAN AREA

As Professor Wang Lianyi, a tourism expert, said, "A tour without guide is a tour without soul. Internationally, tour guides are generally recognized as the soul of tourism..."
industry, the backbone of travel agencies, and the directors of
tour activities”. [4] The whole Prefecture is featured by the
unsound tour guide training mechanism, the shortage of legal
tour guides and many illegal tour guides. After field
investigation, it is found that among the illegal tour guides,
the proportion of ethnic minorities was relatively large.
During the interview, some illegal tour guides said that the
most fundamental purpose of engaging in the work of illegal
tour guides is to solve the problem of employment and earn
for a living. They have not thought carefully about a series of
issues such as the legality, safety, and sustainability, but they
all expressed their willingness to participate in formal
training to completely change and enhance their professional
skills and competencies. Notwithstanding illegal tour guides
have had a certain adverse impact on the tourism industry in
Liangshan, disadvantage coexists with development
potentials. Such disadvantage can be transformed into
advantage. The transformation is also an opportunity to
develop and expand the tourism industry in Liangshan.
Furthermore, enhancing the cultivation of ethnic tour guides
in Liangshan area has the following advantages:

First, it can provide employment opportunities and
promote the transfer of surplus labors in ethnic minority
areas. China's rural population mobility is large, and the
main body is rural surplus labors featured by "the flow
direction is relatively the same, generally flowing from the
northwest to the southeast, and from rural area to medium,
especially large coastal cities”. [5] With the recent slowdown
of China's economic growth, employment opportunities
provided by large and medium-sized cities such as the
coastal cities have decreased. Consequently, some migrant
workers begin to return to the countryside and become
surplus rural labors. The increase in number of rural surplus
labors increases local employment pressure and also brings
hidden dangers to local public security. To this regard,
cultivating ethnic tour guides provides a new way for the
transfer of surplus labors in ethnic minority areas. On the one
hand, it eases the current shortage of legal guides in
Liangshan's market, provides more jobs and alleviates the
employment pressure on society and the government as
caused by the surplus labors. On the other hand, the increase
in number of stable jobs is conducive to the stability and
solidarity of ethnic minority areas, weakening and even
eliminating hidden dangers to social stability.

Second, it can protect the inheritance of the ethnic culture
and promote the spread of the culture. To a certain extent, the
development of global economic integration contributes to
the deconstruction of minority culture. While vigorously
developing economy, standard system can be introduced into
the area as a reproducible model so as to gradually
decompose and melt the local ethnic culture. The inheritance
of any national culture is mainly carried out by people. Other
media used in the inheritance of ethnic culture can only serve
as the media for recording ethnic culture. The best way to
inherit an ethnic culture is to cultivate it through education
and spread it continuously through communication.
Therefore, cultivating ethnic tour guides can protect the local
ethnic culture and promote the inheritance of the ethnic
culture. Taking Yi people's culture in Liangshan area as an
example, Bimo culture is a typical representative of Yi
people's culture, and its scriptures are important instruments
for carrying out religious sacrifice events of Yi people.
However, the scriptures are handwritten copies handed down
from generation to generation. It has been difficult to see a
complete set of the scriptures today. As the older generations
of Bimo passed away, gradually no one could understand the
scriptures, and some family members even sold it as scrap.
This shows the urgency of protecting ethnic culture.

Third, it enhances the local characteristics of tourism in
Liangshan area. From the perspective of tourists, the reason
why they choose a tourist attraction is that they hope to
experience the natural landscape, humanistic landscape and
local customs of the attraction. Tour guides become the first
window for tourists to experience the local humanistic
landscape and local customs. The development of ethnic tour
guides can reflect the local tourism characteristics. Because
the ethnic tour guides grew up under the influence of their
own culture, and have a deeper understanding of their own
culture. In the process of explaining to tourists, they can
sincerely and thoroughly explain the culture and history of
the ethnic group to tourists. The personal experience and
more vivid and detailed explanations are exactly what
tourists expect. In this way, while increasing the local
characteristics of tourism in Liangshan area, they also
become the spokespersons of the ethnic culture, always
propagating the unique culture of the ethnic group.

Fourth, it is conducive to constructing a tour guide
training mechanism in Liangshan and promoting the
normalized development of Liangshan tourism. At present in
the whole prefecture, there has not been a tour guide training
institution with certain scale. The training of tour guides
mainly depends on the Sichuan Tourism University. Taking
this opportunity to build a self-sufficient tour guide training
system in Liangshan can promote the improvement of
Liangshan's tourism system construction and the normalized
development of tourism.

III. STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING THE CULTIVATION
OF ETHNIC TOUR GUIDES IN LIANGSHAN AREA

Cultivating ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area is a
multi-win approach. In the specific implementation process,
it is needed to formulate strategies based on the
characteristics of Liangshan area. In general, having a deeper
understanding of the importance of cultivating ethnic tour
guides is the prerequisite. Ethnic tour guides are the most
direct inheritance objects of their own culture. They can
present the ethnic culture in form of people and is the most
intuitive "living culture" of the ethnic group; meanwhile,
they are also the "live card" of the tourism image of
Liangshan, bearing the mission of constantly spreading the
ethnic culture to the outside. Specifically, the strategies can
be divided into the following aspects:

The first is to increase the propagation on the training of
ethnic tour guides. All administrative regions in Liangshan
should issue relevant propagation policies. Increasing the
propagation on training of ethnic tour guides is the first step
to realize such training. There are 17 administrative regions in the territory of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, including 16 counties and the autonomous prefecture center Xichang City. All administrative regions should increase the proportion of the training of ethnic tour guides and treat it as an important task conducive to the building of the tourism image of the region and solving the employment of surplus labors. The issue of relevant publicity policies is to ensure the successful completion of this work. By increasing the publicity, it is possible to fully tap and sort out the surplus labor forces in the ethnic area so as to minimize the employment pressure and hidden dangers caused by the surplus labor forces.

The second is to adopt government-lead school-enterprise cooperation model to expand the training of tour guides in Liangshan area. Enterprises in Liangshan area have a relatively obvious policy-oriented tendency. Therefore, the local government should take the lead in promulgating relevant policies to guide and encourage local enterprises to set up ethnic tour guide training institutions from the perspective of supervising the industrial development. In addition, it is also necessary to make full use of the existing teaching resources in Liangshan area, and mobilize the enthusiasm of relevant schools to participate in the training of ethnic tour guides. The school-enterprise cooperation model is in line with the current laws of social and economic development. Operating it in business model is conducive to optimizing the combination of existing resources, and the market environment of survival of the fittest can stimulate enterprises to continuously grow and make progress to maintain their competitiveness.

The third is to make full use of existing resources and further study the local ethnic culture. Taking Yi people as an example, the basic unit of Yi community in Liangshan area is a family branch formed by patrilineal kinship. Each family branch has its own fixed range of activities, clothing standards, and language habits. This formed the different Yi family branch culture in each administrative area. The Yi family branch culture has a strong regional and historical significance, and is of great practical significance for the study of the cultural development of ethnic minorities in China. Thereby, it is necessary to make full use of the existing resources to conduct in-depth research on the cultural evolution and local history of the Yi family branch in Liangshan area.

The fourth is to maintain the training content having the pure nature of ethnic culture while meeting the practical requirements for modern tour guides. The purity and uniqueness of ethnic culture is both the key to inheriting the culture and an important part of the market competitiveness. Due to the use of commercial operation mode, customer experience and satisfaction directly affect the sustainable development of tourism industry. Hence in the process of tour guide training, it is needed to enhance quality education, business etiquette, and civilized communication and the like aspects of training and evaluation. In this way, it can both maintain the cultural customs of ethnic minorities and fully enable tourists to get modern and home-like tourist services.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, strengthening the cultivation of ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area is one of the key steps to update the tourism image of the area. This step will not only help to construct the tourism industrial system in Liangshan, but also bring economic benefits and ease the employment pressure and hidden dangers of social order caused by surplus labors in minority area. This shows that it is important to cultivate ethnic tour guides in Liangshan area.

REFERENCES

[1] The People's Government of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Liangshan Prefecture's "Twelfth Five-Year" Tourism Development Plan. [EB/OL]. http://www.lsz.gov.cn/2011xxgk/gzdh/24d61b7-34a9-466b-8345-a086d5fc3dd7, 2011-09-28. (in Chinese)

[2] Wang Guanying, Xu Quanyun. Study on the Status Quo of Liangshan Tourism Development and the Countermeasures [J]. Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities, 2010 (7): 223-227. (in Chinese)

[3] Li Yuzhen. From the Margin to the Center: A Study of the Transformation of National Traditional Festivals in the Tourism Background: Taking the Torch Festival of Yi People in Liangshan of Sichuan as an example [J]. Academic Forum, 2009 (2): 90-93. (in Chinese)

[4] Tan Zhiman, Liu Qiong. Ethnic Culture Accomplishment of Tour Guides in the Minority Areas and Sustainable Development of Tourism Economy [J]. Journal of Anhui Agricultural Sciences, 2009, 37 (21): 10226-10227, 10238. (in Chinese)

[5] Wu Shinan. Discussion on Eliminating Rural Surplus Labors [J]. Academic Forum, 2001 (01): 45-48. (in Chinese)