

**The sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in  
Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture**

Dissertation

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## Abstract

With the development of economy and society and the gradual improvement of people's living standards, once ecotourism was proposed it received a worldwide response and has become more and more popular. Ecotourism is an important segment of the global tourism industry (Eren & Özari, 2016). Dowling and Page (2001) also argued that cultural tourism is a branch of ecotourism. Therefore, the original ecological culture of ethnic areas is one of the important resources of cultural tourism, and it is the basis of tourism development in ethnic areas.

Xiangxi is rich in tourism resources, with beautiful natural landscapes and rich folk customs, and has great development potential. The eco-cultural tourism industry has begun to take shape. In the past 10 years, the Chinese Government has repeatedly proposed the promotion of the integration of cultural industries and tourism industries, which provides an important opportunity for the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi.

Although there is a large amount of literature on the study of ethnic tourism from various perspectives, there are few studies that comprehensively analyse the external environment and self-development status of ethnic regions, which is significant for the development of the eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. This dissertation first summarises the natural resources, history, economy, society, cultural conditions and development of tourism in Xiangxi. Then, through thematic analysis and SWOT analysis, the data related to ethnic eco-cultural tourism in China and Xiangxi over the past 10 years are analysed to identify the problems existing in the development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. Finally, from the five dimensions of scientific planning, environmental optimisation, brand building, investment promotion and talent training, suggestions and strategies for the sustainable development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi are confirmed.

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## Acknowledgements

As a housewife, I chose to complete my master's degree part-time. This year of writing my dissertation was a very fulfilling year in my life, although it was full of hardships. When this learning career came to an end, I felt I had achieved a lot and I am very grateful.

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The last thanks to myself. I have been away from school for 16 years, so from my initial hesitation, and then with the encouragement of my family, I walked out of the comfort zone and re-entered the campus. I finally proved that I am not only a housewife, but I can also challenge myself in other areas and become a better self.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Jin Xie

Jin Xie

Date 16/03/2020



## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

With its unique natural landscape and abundant natural tourism resources, Xiangxi has gradually become a famous tourist destination in China. In recent years, tourism has become the pillar of local economic development. In addition, Xiangxi is also a residential area for ethnic minorities with a long history and an attractive ethnic culture, which contains deep and high-quality ethnic cultural tourism resources. However, after comparisons with similar tourist attractions in China, it has been found that there are still some problems in the development of tourism industry in Xiangxi, such as the relatively backward tourism development, and the lack of strategic planning and effective management which could threaten its tourism competitiveness.

In 2009, *Several Opinions of the State Council on Further Promoting the Development of Minority Culture* proposed by the State Council (2009) provided important opportunities for the integration and development of ethnic culture and the tourism industry in Xiangxi. In addition, the *Administrative Measures for the Management of National Cultural and Ecological Protection Areas* issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2018) established 21 national cultural and ecological protection areas, such as Xiangxi, providing clear policy support for the development of Xiangxi. It also closely linked cultural protection and ecological construction, bringing sustainability to local development.

Developing ethnic eco-cultural tourism is an important way to improve the quality and expansion of the tourism industry. If Xiangxi's tourism industry wants to become an important pillar industry driving economic and social development, it is necessary to change from a single natural scenery sightseeing type of tourism to multiple types of tourism such as ecological tourism, cultural experiences, and leisure. It needs to integrate the development of local ethnic culture with tourism, and develop a comprehensive tourism industry that perfectly integrates cultural landscapes and natural scenery.

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Developing ethnic eco-cultural tourism is a choice for cultural heritage and protection. Xiangxi is famous for its spectacular natural scenery and strong ethnic customs. However, the knowledge and understanding of tourism resources of the local people in Xiangxi still have limitations; they lack a global vision and strategic thinking and this has limited the inheritance, protection and spread of the eco-culture of Xiangxi. At present, the best choice to solve this problem is to arrange and plan ecological and cultural tourism resources and enhance the increasing power of the its ethnic culture.

Developing ethnic eco-cultural tourism is the leading trend in excavating the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities (Gui, 2016). As the area where the Tujia and Miao people live, Xiangxi has ethnic customs, food, and architecture that make up a splendid and colourful ethnic culture. Fully exploring these unique ethnic cultures is an important part of the development of the tourism industry. Xiangxi needs to pay attention to the status and role of ethnic culture in the development of the tourism industry, and continuously increase the exploration, organisation and innovation of ethnic cultural tourism resources.

Based on this background, the development of Xiangxi's tourism industry must seize the characteristics of the ethnic eco-cultural tourism industry, and build a sustainable ethnic eco-cultural tourism industry. Judging from the current research in China, there is currently no comprehensive analysis on the study of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. This dissertation systematically conducts a comprehensive review and evaluation of the eco-cultural tourism resources system in Xiangxi, in order to explore its current basic status, main problems and solutions, and provide a theoretical basis for the development of sustainable eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

## **1.2 Research significance**

### **1.2.1 Theoretical significance**

This research can improve the theoretical construction of the eco-cultural tourism industry in ethnic regions. Meanwhile, these theoretical constructions combine the situation in Xiangxi, so they will provide strategic guidance for the development of the ethnic eco-cultural industry in Xiangxi and find new ideas for it. Therefore, it has a particular

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theoretical significance for the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

### **1.2.2 Practical significance**

China's national policy requires that tourism be built into a pillar industry. Tourism is also an important part of modern service industry. Therefore, the development of tourism has become the focus of research. This dissertation carried out a SWOT analysis on the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi, verified the necessity and feasibility of its development, identified its competitive advantages, disadvantages, and existing problems, and proposed a system and policy recommendations for the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi. In practice, not only does it have practical significance for the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi, but it also has a certain practical guidance value for the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in other ethnic regions.

### **1.3 Research aims**

The purpose of this research is to explore the problems in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi by analysing various factors that have an impact on the tourism industry, including nature, history, culture, ethnic society, politics, economy, and competition, and then develop a strategy suitable for the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi to promote the sustainable development of its tourism. The research aims are as follows:

- 1, To assess the general situation of Xiangxi and the development status of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.
- 2, To analyse the difficulties and problems in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.
- 3, To formulate the strategy suitable for the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

### **1.4 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation consists of six chapters. This first chapter has elaborated the background

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to the research, and briefly introduced the research object, aim and significance. The second chapter gives a detailed overview of Xiangxi in terms of history, politics, economic profile, ethnicity and population, geography, resources, and culture. The third chapter is a literature review, which reviews the concept of ethnic ecological culture and the research on the development of ethnic tourism, and compares China with other countries' research. Then the gap of the research on ethnic tourism in Xiangxi has been found. The fourth chapter is about the methodology of the research. It summarises the interpretation of ontology and epistemology, and explains the research paradigm and application of research methods in this research. The fifth chapter on findings and discussion analyses the data from the internal and external environment of the development of tourism industry in western Hunan, draws out the existing problems in the development of the tourism industry in Xiangxi, and uses a SWOT analysis to make suggestions. The last chapter is the conclusion. The significance and recommendations of this research, as well as its limitations and future research directions, are presented.

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## Chapter 2. Contextual Background

Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, referred to as Xiangxi Prefecture or Xiangxi, is an autonomous prefecture under the jurisdiction of Hunan Province of the People's Republic of China. It is named after the western part of Hunan Province which referred to as “Xiang” (Figure 1). Xiangxi has a total area of 15,500 square kilometers and a population of 2.98 million, and ethnic minorities account for 80% of the total population. It is a settlement of Tujia and Miao nationalities, mainly Tu and Miao. Xiangxi has a subtropical monsoon humid climate with obvious continental climate characteristics (“Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture,” n.d.).



Figure 1: Location of Jiangxi (yellow) within Hunan Province of China.  
Adapted from *Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture* (n.d.).

### 2.1 History

Xiangxi has a long history. Tens of thousands of years ago, there were human beings living in Xiangxi which can be seen from some local human creation myths. In the legends of the Tujia “Tima Gods” and the Miao “Old Words”, there were footprints made by the

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Xiangxi ancestors during ancient times, and these legends are supported by archaeological work. Archaeologists have discovered many sites of Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts in Xiangxi. For example, the old stone tools found in Sangzhi County and Tunxi County, which are located in the southeast of Xiangxi, have a history of more than 50,000 years. Neolithic Dynasty ruins in Xiangxi are located in the drainage basin of the Yuan River, You River and Li River, which were areas of ancient activity and the birthplace of the historical and cultural history of Xiangxi (Li, 2014). Xiangxi traveled through the tunnels of time, and went through various dynasties in China. From the Shang and Zhou Dynasties to the Wei and Jin Dynasties, from the Tang and Song Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, records on the Xiangxi region can be found (The People's Government Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, n.d.). In modern times, Xiangxi has also played an important role in the Chinese Anti-Japanese War and the liberation war. The people of Xiangxi have made great contributions to the victorious outcome of the war (Liu, 2007). After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Xiangxi Miao Autonomous Region was established in August 1952. Then the title was changed to the Xiangxi Miao Autonomous Prefecture in 1955. In September 1957, the Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture was officially established and this title continues to the present day. In 2015, Xiangxi included one county-level city, seven counties, and one provincial-level economic development zone; the Xiangxi Prefecture People's Government is resident in Jishou City (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2017).

## **2.2 Economic profile**

Since the reform and opening up, Xiangxi has established and implemented the strategy of common development of agriculture, industry and tourism. By opening up to the outside world and accelerating development, the national economy and social development have achieved remarkable results. In 2017, the gross product was 58.26 billion yuan, an increase of 7.6% over the previous year. The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was 22,094 yuan; the per capita disposable income of urban residents was 22,728 yuan, and the per capita disposable income of rural residents was 8,273 yuan, increases of 9.2% and 11.6% respectively ("Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous

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Prefecture,” n.d.).

In regard to industry, the three major industries operating in Xiangxi in 2017 were the manganese-zinc-based mineral processing industry, the liquor-based food processing industry, and the Chinese medicine processing-based bio-pharmaceutical industry. In agriculture, the characteristic industries are the growing of citrus, kiwi, tea, tobacco, vegetables and Chinese medicinal materials. In 2017, the output of citrus, kiwi, tea and tobacco leaves were 707,000 tons, 69,000 tons, 0.4 million tons and 27,000 tons respectively. In terms of tourism, Xiangxi has developed four major tourism sectors: Phoenix, Jishou, Furong Town and Liye. In 2017, Xiangxi received 44.5 million domestic and foreign tourists, achieving a tourism income of 32.15 billion yuan; these represented annual increases of 16.5% and 23.4% respectively (The People’s Government of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, 2018a).

### **2.3 Ethnicity and population**

The study of the origin of the Tujia ethnic group started late, with articles published in the 1930s. In the national identification of the 1950s, a number of monographs and investigation reports on the origin of the Tujia people appeared. In the 1980s, a wave of research on the origin of the Tujia people was set off. In the 1990s, the study of the origin of the Tujia people became more comprehensive and deepened. There are many stories about the ethnic origin of the Tujia people in Xiangxi, among which the Ba people legend is the most famous. It is said that the Tujia people were descendants of the ancient Ba people. The Ba people established the Ba country in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties and this was later occupied by the Qin State. After becoming a county of the Qin State, called Ba County, the Ba people had entered the Chinese civilisation. Today, the Tujia people in Xiangxi called themselves “Bitzka”, which is similar to the pronunciation of the ethnic names of the Ba people in history. In addition, both the Ba people and the Tujia people have stories and myths about the tiger and worship the white tiger god. Referring to ancient books, Huang (1999), Yang (2001) and Bai (2004) found that Tujia people and Ba people shared some of the same surnames. Although there are other arguments coexisting,

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one thing is certain: from the pre-Qin period to the present, the Tujia people have been living in the western part of Hunan and other nearby areas such as Hubei and Chongqing. There has been no major migration and they gradually formed into a single ethnicity which is today's Tujia (Yang, 2009).

According to historical records, the Miao of Xiangxi originated in ancient times and was originally called Jiuli which was a large tribal alliance in ancient China, about 5,000 years ago, raised in the areas along the lower reaches of Jianghuai and the Yellow River. The leader of Jiuli was called Chiyou who is an all-powerful hero. According to records, Chiyou once fought a battle with the Yellow Emperor and Yandi in Zhulu (now the Zhuolu County of Hebei Province) and ended in failure. Then he led his people as they retreated to the lower reaches of Jianghuai and the Yangtze River, and then entered the Xiangxi area to settle down, thus laying the foundation for Miao people to prosper in Xiangxi. In today's Xiangxi Miao area, there are still many customs and legends that respect and mourn the ancestors Chiyou. Over time, some Miao people have moved in from Guizhou. Their immigration has increased the number of Miao people in Xiangxi, and at the same time added the magical style of the Miao people in Xiangxi (Duan, 1998).

In 2018, the total population of Xiangxi was 2.98 million, among which the Tujia and Miao peoples were the main population. As a settlement of ethnic minorities in Hunan, Xiangxi is also the region with the largest population of Tujia and Miao in Hunan Province (The People's Government of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, 2018c). As the largest nation, the Tujia population is over one million. The Miao population is over 800,000 and is the second largest nation and the Han population is over 600,000 and is the third largest nation. According to the preliminary results of the 2010 census, the number of ethnic minority people in Xiangxi reached 1,967,096, accounting for 77.21% of the total population; among them, 1,089,301 were Tujia, accounting for 42.75% of the total population; and 863,141 were Miao, accounting for 33.88%. The rest of the ethnic population was below 10,000. Among them, there were 7,178 Hui people; the populations of the three ethnic groups of Yi, Yao and Bai were 2,044, 1,933 and 1,843 respectively;



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the population of seven ethnic groups including Uygur and Manchu were just over 100 (Hunan Statistics Bureau, 2011).

## **2.4 Geography**

Geographically, Xiangxi is located at the junction of the northern part of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and the mountainous area in western Hubei. It sits on the eastern edge of China's second step from west to east. The limestone in the southwestern part of Xiangxi is widely distributed, with extensive karst development, multiple caves and vaults. In the northwestern part of Xiangxi there is a dense cover of quartz sandstone, and small peaks have been formed by the crustal action. The eastern and western parts of Xiangxi are low hills, with an average elevation of 200-500 metres and there are many alluvial plains on both sides. The overall outline of the Xiangxi landscape is dominated by the mountains with hills and small plains, and a curved mountainous terrain that protrudes to the northwest (Zhangjiajie Tourism Network, 2018).

Xiangxi has a subtropical monsoon humid climate. The annual average temperature is 15 ~ 16.9°C, with the highest temperature being 40.5°C, and the lowest temperature being -5.5°C. In summer, there is plenty of precipitation and the climate is warm and humid. while in winter, there is less precipitation and the climate is cold and dry. The four seasons are distinct and the total amount of precipitation is moderate (Wu et al., 2014).

## **2.5 Resources**

The unique mountainous environment and the climatic conditions of four distinct seasons make the Xiangxi area abundance in resources.

### **2.5.1 Water resources**

The water resources in Xiangxi are very rich. There are many water systems in the territory, such as the Yuan River, the You River, the Li River and the Wu River. The river network criss-crosses Xiangxi and the annual average runoff is 13.2 billion cubic metres. The karst groundwater resources in the territory are abundant, with a total amount of 2.737 billion

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cubic metres, accounting for 20.6% of the total annual water resources. The groundwater and surface water are mutually transformed to form a pattern of comprehensive utilisation of surface water and groundwater (Li, 1993).

### **2.5.2 Biological resources**

Xiangxi is a natural treasure house of wildlife resources and a biological research gene bank. There are more than 2,206 plants in total. It has preserved the world-famous *Metasequoia*, *Davidia involucrata*, *Ginkgo biloba*, *Taxus chinensis*, bole tree, *Liriodendron*, and *Emmenopterys* (Gong & Chen, 2006). Among them, there are 985 kinds of medicinal plants, 19 of which are state-protected precious herbs, such as *Eucommia*, *Ginkgo biloba*, *Gastrodia elata*, camphor, and turmeric (Chen, Lu, & Zhang, 2007). Xiangxi is an important producer of Chinese tung tree, oil tea, raw lacquer and Chinese herbal medicine (Zhangjiajie Tourism Network, 2018).

Xiangxi has a mild climate and rich vegetation which are suitable for various animals, and the region is rich in wildlife resources. However, human population growth and frequent production activities have led to a decline in forests. Vegetation has been destroyed to varying degrees, and the species and quantity of wild animals have shown a downward trend (Huang, 1989). Since the 1980s, with the country's emphasis on the ecological environment, the ecological construction project has been gradually implemented, and the ecological environment in Xiangxi has recovered. According to the surveys of wildlife resources in 1991 and 1999, there are more than 201 species of vertebrates and 640 forest insects in Xiangxi. Among them, there are five species of animals protected at the national level, which are the golden eagle, clouded leopard, leopard, Elliot's pheasant (*Syrnaticus ellioti*), and the scaly-sided merganser (*Mergus squamatus*). There are 37 national second-class protected animals, such as macaques, civets, black bears, brown bears, jackals, and pangolins. Among these animals, 14 are listed as endangered wild animals in the world (Zhangjiajie Tourism Network, 2018).

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### 2.5.3 Mineral resources

Xiangxi has a complex geological structure and many mineral resources. 485 mineral deposits of 63 different minerals have been discovered in the territory, among which manganese, mercury, aluminum and Zisha clay mines rank first in Hunan Province, manganese industrial reserves rank second in the country, and mercury prospective reserves rank fourth in the country (Liu, 2011).

### 2.5.4 Tourism resources

The historical and cultural heritage of Xiangxi is profound, and the natural scenery is beautiful and magnificent. Therefore, Xiangxi integrates the cultural landscape and the natural landscape. According to the classification of national tourism resources, Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture has eight main types of tourism resources, including: geographical landscape; water scenery; biological landscape; climate landscape; relics, buildings and facilities; tourism commodities; and humanities activities. There is a total of 133 scenic spots, with the famous scenic spots including Fenghuang (Phoenix) Ancient Town (Figure 2), Southern Great Wall of China, Liye Ancient City, Mengdong River Drifting (Figure 3), Furong Town, Jishou Dehang Miao Village (Figure 4), Xifeng Lake, Longshan Fire Karst Cave (Figure 5), Wota revolutionary base site, Laosicheng (the sacred place of the Tujia culture) and the former residence of the literary master Shen Congwen (Zhen, 2004).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 2: Fenghuang ancient town (Mafengwo, n.d.).

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Figure 3: Mengdong River drifting (Xiangxi Tourism, n.d.).

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Figure 4: Jishou Dehang Miao village (“China’s Jishou Dehang ‘Miao April 8th’ Carnival”, 2017).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 5: Longshan fire karst cave (Yin, 2017).

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### 2.5.5 Other resources

Xiangxi 's main crops are rice, wheat, corn, soybean, rapeseed, tobacco and so on. The local products are most famous for tung oil, raw lacquer, tea oil, tea, tobacco, citrus and medicinal materials. Xiangxi is one of the key production areas of tung oil in the country. The tung oil produced in Xiangxi is of high quality and is a golden colour, and is well-known around the world. Xiangxi is also the “hometown of raw lacquer”, and Longshan is listed as the national raw lacquer base. The “Guzhang Maojian” produced in Xiangxi is a national famous tea. The citrus planted in Luxipu City located in the southeast of Xiangxi is one of Hunan’s famous oranges. “Xiangquan” and “Jiugui” are China’s nationally famous wine brands (The People’s Government of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, 2018b). Tujia brocade (Figure 6) and Miao embroidery are favoured by people for their distinctive national characteristics and as unique traditional crafts (Zuo, 2005; Wang, 2007).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 6: Tujia brocade (Xiangxi Tourism Portal, 2018).

## 2.6 Culture

### 2.6.1 Ethnic language

The Tujia nationality in Xiangxi has its own language, Tujia language, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and is closer to an independent language of the Yi language branch. In 1956, Pan (2000), a famous Chinese ethnologist, found that in the area where the Tujia people live with the highest population density, more than 90% of people spoke Tujia language. According to Ye (1999), there were 160,000 people who used Tujia language as their only communication tool in the Xiangxi region in 1990. More than 200,000 people used both Tujia and Chinese. These people only used Tujia language in their hometown. Once they had left their hometown, they used Chinese completely. At the end of the 20th century, Deng (2001) has discovered that the actual number of people using Tujia language was less than 100,000. In order to develop cultural education and the inheritance of ethnic culture in the Tujia inhabited areas, in 1985, Jishou University

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created “the Tujia Pinyin Program” and implemented trial teaching (Peng & Ye, 1985).

The Miao language in Xiangxi belongs to the eastern dialect of the Miao-Yao language of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Yang (2004) divided the Xiangxi Miao language into the western sub-dialect and the eastern sub-dialect, and the number of people using the western sub-dialect was 18 times that of the eastern sub-dialect. In history, many Miao people have created words on the basis of Chinese characters to record the Miao language (Figure 7). In order to solve the difficulty of learning culture in the Miao people’s dialect area, in October 1956, the relevant state departments held a scientific seminar on the Miao language and characters in Guiyang City, and created the “The Text Scheme of Eastern Dialect in Miao Language” (Shi, 1958).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 7: Miao language (Yi, n.d.).

## **2.6.2 Ethnic food**

There are few fields and many mountains in the Xiangxi area, and the food is mainly rice and corn. As for specialty foods, Tujia “Baba” is a necessary food for the New Year, which has an important meaning in Tujia's life. Usually two people beat the steamed glutinous rice poured into the stone trough alternately with a wooden mallet until the glutinous rice becomes soft and sticky which then are divided into small balls, called “Baba” (Figure 8). There are many ways to cook “Baba”, such as steamed, fried, boiled, roasted (Figure 9). “Baba” tastes soft, sweet and very delicious. Tujia people will make different “Baba” at different festivals, so it is closely related to the festivals of Tujia people (Tian, 2008).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 8: Tujia’s culture of beating “Baba” (Pan, 2013).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 9: Fried “Baba” (Guan, 2018).

Sour and spicy are two indispensable tastes in the daily life of Tujia and Miao people in Xiangxi. Almost every household in the village has up to a dozen earthenware jars,

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pickling all kinds of sauerkraut, sour meat, sour fish, etc. (Figure 10). In addition, bacon is the most characteristic meat. During the Chinese New Year, every household kills the pigs, cuts them into strips, rubs salt and peppers together, packs them into a tank for about ten days, hangs them up, and then smokes them for a period of one to two months with a small fire. Tujia bacon is a very popular food in China (Figure 11). Miao and Tujia have been neighbours for generations, so their dietary habits are similar (Long, 2004).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 10: “Miao People Make ‘Sour Meat’ ” (2016).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 11: “Tujia Specialties – Tujia Bacon” (2018).

### **2.6.3 Ethnic architecture**

Xiangxi is located in the mountainous area and is rich in wood. The local people prefer to build wooden houses and wooden structures are very common. The most distinctive building is the “stilt house” (Figure 12). Most Tujia and Miao people live in mountainous areas where the slope is steep. It is not easy to level the ground and excavate foundations. In addition, the weather in the mountain area is cloudy and rainy, humid and foggy. The ground floor of a brick house would be particularly wet and not suitable for living. Therefore, the Tujia and Miao people build dry, well-ventilated wooden stilt houses, most of which next to mountains and rivers (Chen, 2016).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 12: Stilt houses (Zhenshengtu, 2010).

### **2.6.4 Ethnic clothing**

Tujia people like to wrap their heads with a long piece of cloth. They are very loosely dressed and usually have a lot of buttons on their clothes. Usually, their clothes and trousers are very short, the trousers are wide, and the collar and cuffs are embroidered with exquisite and colourful patterns (Figure 13). The embroidery on the garment has a strong ethnic character (Xie, 2011).

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**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 13: Tujia costumes (“National Costume Culture – Tujia Costumes,” 2006).

Miao costumes in Xiangxi consist of casual wear and formal dress. Formal dress is worn on holidays or important events and casual wear is worn in everyday life. The casual wear is simple, with fewer decorations, sleeves that are large and short, and no collar. The pants are short and very loose (Figure 14). In contrast, the texture of the dress is exquisite, the production is fine, and the decoration of each part is very prominent. For example, in the sleeves, collars, plackets, backs, hems, trousers, etc., all kinds of patterns are sewn. Silverware is the favourite traditional ornament of Miao women in Xiangxi, and is known for its beauty (Figure 15). Miao women still have the custom of wearing silver ornaments on important holidays nowadays, and they are very particular about wearing silver jewelry which is roughly divided into headwear, collars, jewelry, and ornaments (Luo, 2011).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 14: Casual wear of Miao women in Xiangxi (Techan, n.d.).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 15: Dress of Miao women in Xiangxi (“The Difference Between the Miao Costumes,” 2016).

### **2.6.5 Ethnic festivals**

The Tujia people attach great importance to traditional festivals, and most of their festival activities are closely related to ancestor worship, farming and war. The Tujia people celebrate many festivals, such as the Niuwang Festival, the Caterpillar Festival, the May Festival, New Year’s Day, the Sheba Festival, the Daughters’ Meeting, the June 6<sup>th</sup> Festival, and the Annual Meeting; there are festivals almost every month. Take the June 6<sup>th</sup> Festival as an example (Figure 16). For the Tujia people in Xiangxi, June 6<sup>th</sup> is the birthday of the sun. Therefore, on that day of the lunar calendar, the Tujia people should pay homage to the sun god, and pray that the sun god will give the sunlight and warm everything which could ensure a good harvest (Huang, 2012).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 16: The June 6<sup>th</sup> Festival of Tujia people (“June 6<sup>th</sup> Festival of Tujia people,” 2014).

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There are also many traditional festivals of the Miao people, including the April 8th Festival, Qingming Song Festival, March Songs Festival, June Songs Festival, Cherry Songs Festival, and the Autumn Festival. The April 8th Festival and the Autumn Festival are the most the most important festivals. The New Year of the Miao people is equivalent to the Spring Festival of the Han people. It is usually held in the autumn, so it is called the Autumn Festival (Figure 17). On the day of “Autumn Begins”, which is the 13th solar term in China’s 24 solar terms, the Miao people wear ethnic costumes and silver ornaments, and flock to the “autumn field” with relatives and friends to celebrate the harvest. During the festival, they will participate in or watch various folk and cultural activities (Liu & Gu, 2009).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 17: The Autumn Festival of Hunan Xiangxi Miao people (Long, 2019).

#### **2.6.6 Ethnic marriage customs**

Crying marriage is the most characteristic wedding custom of the Tujia people in Xiangxi. The bride begins to cry half a month before leaving home, mostly telling of the sad mood when leaving (Figure 18). The contents of the “Crying Marriage Song” include crying for parents, crying for brothers and sisters and crying for ancestors. Sometimes the bride is crying alone, sometimes crying with her mother and sisters (Wang, 2011).

**Image removed due to copyright**

Figure 18: Tujia traditional marriage custom – the crying marriage (“Traditional Customs of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture,” n.d.).

Young men and women of the Miao support free love and oppose the arranged marriage system. Most young people find someone they like by visiting relatives or friends and participating in various social activities such as festivals. After a period of contact, they can deepen their understanding of each other. Finally, they can decide for themselves whether they are married or not. They do not need to go through the matchmaker, nor do they need the consent of both parents (Wu, 2012).

#### **2.6.7 Social development**



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➤ Culture and sports

As of 2016, there were nine art galleries and cultural centres, nine public libraries, 10 museums and memorial halls, and nine radio and television stations in Xiangxi. In terms of cultural heritage, Xiangxi has 25 examples of national intangible cultural heritage and 68 examples of provincial intangible cultural heritage. In 2016, there were 11 stadiums, 231 sports fields (including gymnasiums, small sports fields, and athletic fields) and eight swimming pools (Xiangxi Statistics Bureau, 2017).

➤ Transport

● Airports

There is no airport in Xiangxi for the time being and Xiangxi Airport is still under construction. It is planned to test flights in September 2020. After completion, it will greatly improve the transport environment of Xiangxi and promote the development of local tourism (Phoenix Ancient City Network, 2019).

● Railways

In 2016, there was only one railway in Xiangxi, the Jiaoliu Railway. In addition, there is a railway named the Qian Zhang Chang Railway which is under construction and will pass through Xiangxi (“Qian Zhang Chang Railway,” 2018).

Another high-speed railway and two ordinary railways have been included in the national Twelfth Five-Year Plan and construction will be started in the next few years (“Traffic Overview in Jishou City,” n.d.).

● Highways

According to the *Statistical Communique of 2016 National Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi Prefecture* (Xiangxi Statistics Bureau, 2017), the highway mileage of the whole prefecture was 12,749.38 kilometres in 2016, an increase of 0.52% on the previous year. There are three national highways and two provincial highways in Xiangxi.

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## **Chapter 3. Literature**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the basic concepts of ethnic eco-cultural regions or communities are introduced and analysed in terms of five themes. After a review of the global scholarship on ethnic tourism, including impact research, stakeholder research, community participation research, conservation research, perception research and authenticity research, a detailed analysis of China's ethnic tourism research is conducted and compared with research from other countries in the world to verify the feasibility and necessity of the research on the development of ecological and cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

### **3.2 The concept of ethnic eco-cultural regions or communities**

“Community” is an important term in sociological research which refers to a social living community (Tonnie & Loomis, 2017). In addition to the general characteristics of the community, that is, its social nature, the ethnic region or community also has a special nature – its ethnic cultural attributes (Gao & Zhu, 2009). Starting from the social and ethnic characteristics, the ethnic region or community is defined as an ethnic regional society based on the members of the minority society and the common geography and close daily life of its members which is a social community with both social and ethnic characteristics (Gao & Zhu, 2009). The ethnic regions or communities are characterised by ethnic minorities and geographical features are rural areas, which not only emphasises the characteristics of ethnic minority groups in specific geographical areas, and their interrelationships, but also emphasises the sustainable ecological environment system of ethnic minority groups. In short, ethnic areas or communities are the gathering places of ethnic minority groups interacting with the natural environment system (Li, Chen, Wang, & Wang, 2013). Although the Tujia and Miao people account for the vast majority of the total population in Xiangxi, from the statistics of the Hunan Province where Xiangxi is located, the Tujia and Miao people account for only 7.21% of the total population of the province (The People's Government of Hunan Province, 2019). Therefore, Xiangxi, being the gathering region of Tujia and Miao ethnic groups, is defined as an ethnic minorities

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region. At the macro level, the entire Xiangxi region can serve as a large-scale ethnic ecological and cultural community which is formed by the gathering of ethnic minority residents in a specific natural background which includes mountains, water, forests, farmland, and settlements.

According to Li et al. (2013), ethnic ecological cultural regions or communities are social communities and social settlements with ethnic, regional and cultural characteristics, and their connotations can be analysed in terms of the following five themes.

### ***Specific geographical space***

Ethnic regions or communities exist within a specific rural area, with a relatively closed and complete regional environment and a sound ecosystem.

### ***Specific ethnic groups***

The residents of ethnic regions or communities are the main population of a certain minority group, which has different methods of maintaining its livelihood, and different ethnic culture, traditions, beliefs and consciousness from the general group.

### ***Unique ethnic settlements***

Residents' gathering places have been formed by ethnic minority groups in the process of interaction and mutual adaptation with the specific geographical space, and are characterised by unique settlement landscapes and settlement forms.

### ***Social interactions and relationships***

In a process of economic production and life in a certain geographical space, ethnic groups of a certain size have a variety of relationships between people, and between people and nature, and social structures have been formed by blood and kinship. In social interactions and social relations, people have formed a consistent pursuit of interests and various social connections, and also formed the norms and systems necessary to safeguard and maintain the normal operation of the community. These norms and systems provide codes of conduct and target expectations for people when they engage in social activities.

### ***Social awareness and culture***

The community awareness and culture of ethnic regions or communities are a set of

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patterns formed by the interaction of relationships in ethnic groups, which are values, codes of conduct, and ways of thinking that are recognised and enjoyed by members of the ethnic community. They continue through the process of socialisation. It is the lasting motivation of the members of the community to maintain the existence of the community. This model continues to spread in the process of socialisation and is a lasting driving force for maintaining the existence of the community.

### **3.3 Research on impact**

The research on the impact of ethnic tourism is divided into two strands: the impact of ethnic regions or communities on tourism, and the impact of tourism on ethnic regions or communities. In order to meet the needs of tourists, the human-oriented factors of government policy makers directly determine the change of landscape in ethnic regions (Michaud & Turner, 2006). Yang, Wall, and Smith (2008) researched the relationship between the government and tourism in ethnic regions and found that detailed government policies can solve many problems and promote the development of tourism. In comparison, more research is on the impact of tourism on ethnic regions. In terms of positive impacts, the most direct impact of the development of ethnic tourism on local residents is the improvement in economic income, employment opportunities, national consciousness and women's status (Sheikhi, 2015; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). From another perspective, the massive increase in tourism projects and tourism activities has brought about different degrees of impact on ethnic environments and residents' perceived capacity, such as social and cultural decline, social structural changes and landscape changes (Chen, 2014).

### **3.4 Research on relevant stakeholders**

The rise of large-scale tourism activities and the development of ethnic tourism projects have also created conflicts and contradictions among the relevant interest groups of ethnic regions or communities, especially between local governments, tourism enterprises and local residents (Wood, 1984). de Oliveira (2003) used three tourist areas in Brazil as examples to analyse the problems of tourism development under different policy backgrounds, emphasising the role of the government in the development of ethnic

tourism, and suggesting that countermeasures in the development of ethnic tourism should involve listening to the voices of local residents. Yang and Wall (2009) took Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China, as an example, and summed up the four tensions in the development of ethnic tourism, which are: state regulation versus ethnic autonomy; cultural exoticism versus modernity; economic development versus cultural preservation; and authenticity versus cultural commodification. On this basis, the attitudes of the four major stakeholders (countries, tourism enterprises, ethnic minorities and tourists) on the development of ethnic tourism have been compared and evaluated, and a conceptual framework for the development of ethnic tourism has been constructed (Figure 19).

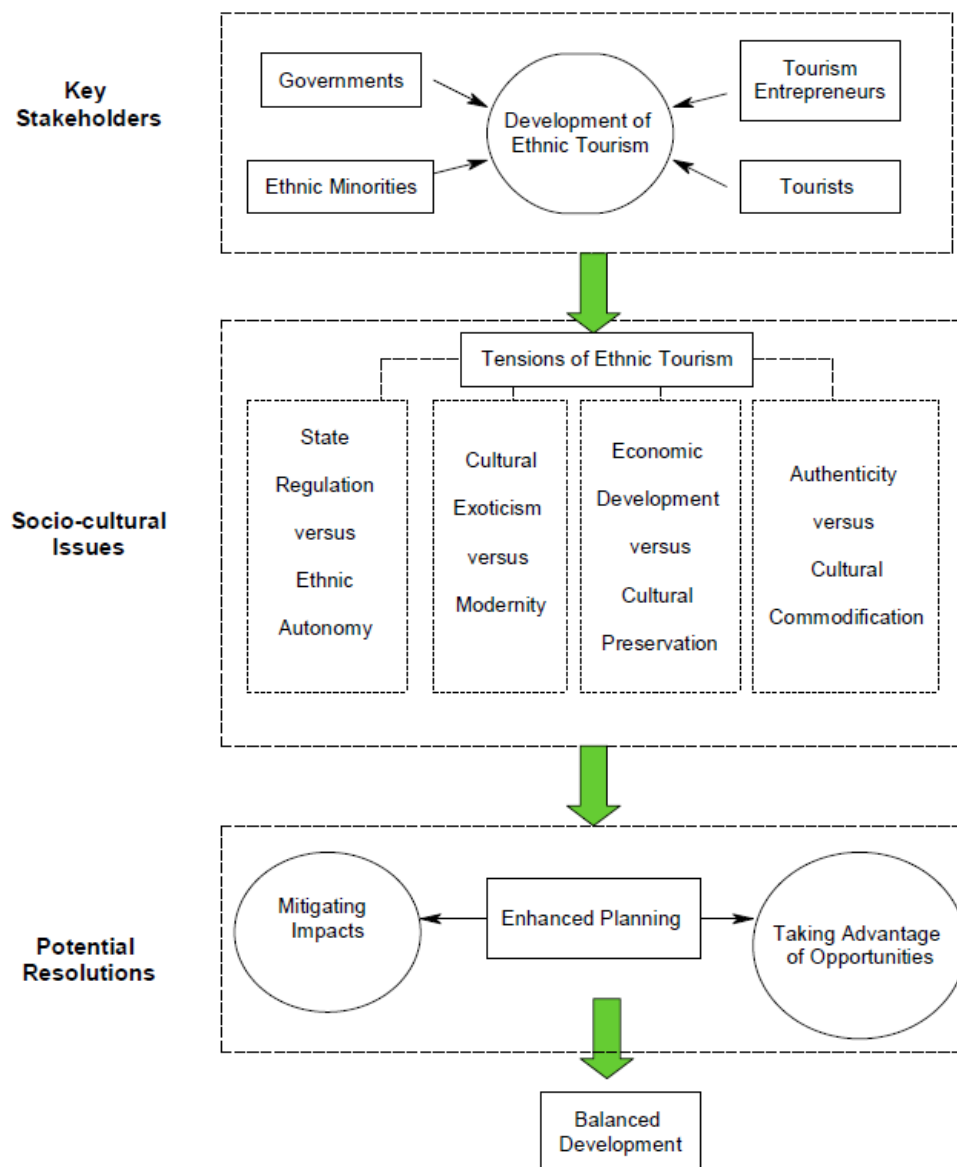


Figure 19: A conceptual framework: Planning for ethnic tourism. (Yang & Wall, 2009)

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Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins (2013) believed that the low level of participation of stakeholders in tourism development is the main obstacle to sustainable tourism, and builds a multi-stakeholder participation management framework based on the three steps of “attraction-integration-management”. In order to demonstrate the scientific and effective participation of stakeholders in the management model, Ying and Zhou (2007) have analysed the role and status of the relevant interest groups of Xidi Village and Hong Village in Anhui Province, China, in the development of rural ethnic tourism and shown that the degree of participation of the government, ethnic communities and tourism enterprises in the tourism industry leads to a great difference in residents’ attitudes towards tourism development and the proportion of participation in tourism, the degree of government intervention, and the degree of influence of external funds.

### **3.5 Research on community participation**

With the deepening of tourism, the role of the community in tourism development has gradually become a key factor in the development of ethnic tourism (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012). Joppe (1996) emphasised the relationship between tourism development and the community and the status of the community in the development of tourism. Ying and Zhou (2007) believed that when the government and tourism enterprises become the dominant force in the development of ethnic tourism, the participation of community residents in the process of fund allocation and decision-making is greatly reduced. Daim, Bakri, Kamarudin, and Zakaria (2012) analysed the perceptions and attitudes of community residents in the Pahang National Park in Malaysia on community participation in tourism activities and found that community residents are willing to invest in tourism development only when tourism activities can bring tangible value to the community.

In order to balance the status of communities and other related interests in the development of tourism, the methods of enriching community residents’ participation in tourism development have been proposed (Inskeep, 1991). Community residents participate in tourism development decision-making and benefit distribution, and community residents’

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participation in tourism knowledge education and training is adopted by most ethnic communities (Hamilton & Alexander, 2013; Wang, Yang, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010; Ying & Zhou, 2007).

### **3.6 Research on protection**

Different from traditional tourist attractions, ethnic regions are ethnic minority settlements with cultural heritage, distinct regional personality, a complete architectural pattern and rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Gao & Zhu, 2009). The protection of ethnic tourism covers all aspects of culture, traditional livelihoods, architecture, and festivals. Many countries have achieved remarkable results in the research into and practice of the protection of ethnic heritage resources and traditional knowledge. In the mid-1990s, Australia launched the Indigenous Protected Areas Program to protect indigenous cultures by building indigenous communities (Ross et al., 2009). The New England region of the northeastern United States has proposed to establish a community forest protection model when it recognised that local forest resources determine the economic, cultural, and social development of the region (Brown, Mitchell, & Beresford, 2005).

### **3.7 Research on perception**

After the 1970s, ethnic tourism became an important industry choice for the sustainable development of rural ethnic areas. While bringing economic development, social progress and cultural exchanges, its negative effects have also affected the lifestyles, traditional concepts and external perception of ethnic minority residents. Therefore, the study of residents' perception of tourism in minority regions has become a significant topic.

The rural residents' perception of tourism impact is concentrated in the economy, the environment and social culture (Zhao, Li, & Huang, 2005). Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) have divided tourism perception into economic benefits, social benefits, social costs, cultural interests, and cultural costs. Economic benefits are positively related to residents' attitudes toward tourism, and there is no significant and direct negative correlation between cultural costs and social costs. The distance from the tourist centre to the

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households, the dependence of the individual or community economy on tourism, the life cycle stage of the tourism destination, community attribution and attachment, and community attention are the main factors affecting residents' perception and attitude towards tourism (Harrill, 2004; Natan, Israeli, & Arie, 2002). In order to classify the different types of perceptions of ethnic community residents, cluster analysis has been used to divide them into three types: support, neutrality and opposition (Zhao et al., 2005).

Questionnaires are often used to analyse the perception of tourists. For example, Moscardo and Pearce (1999) took 1,500 visitors from the Australian Aboriginal Cultural Park as the study sample. According to the results of the survey, tourists were divided into the following groups: a strong ethnic tourism group, a cultural passive experience group, an ethnic product activity group, and a low-ethnic tourism group. In addition, by using questionnaire surveys, researchers can study the tourism experience of tourists in ethnic tourism in terms of, for example, tourism environment, tourism culture and tourism products and prices, residents' attitudes and tourism services; and then they can examine and trim the development of ethnic tourism according to the needs of tourists (Barutçu, Doğan, & Üngüren, 2011; Petrosillo, Zurlini, Corliano, Zaccarelli, & Dadamo, 2007).

### **3.8 Research on authenticity**

In the 20th century, with the vigorous development of ethnic tourism, the problems of the commercialisation and vulgarisation of ethnic culture, and the distortion of ethnic tourism products, have emerged. Therefore, the study of the authenticity has become the focus of ethnic tourism research (Cohen, 1988). Contemporary concepts of authenticity focus on four perspectives: objectivism, constructivism, postmodernism, and existentialism. The first three emphasise the authenticity of travel objects, and the latter perspective is about real travel experiences (Rickly & Vidon, 2018). Wang (1999) argued that, unlike other authenticities, the existential authenticity can provide a broader explanation of tourism motivation and experience. The existential authenticity has nothing to do with the authenticity of tourism products, so tourists are not looking for the authenticity of tourism products but are looking for their true self in various tourism activities, which broadens



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the concept of authenticity in tourism research and can explain many tourism activities. Xie (2010) believed that when tourism occurs in ethnic minority areas, multiple stakeholders act on the attribute of authenticity and hold their own views on authenticity. Through the study of Li dancers in the folk village of Hainan Island in China, the tensions existing in the five structures (commodification versus spontaneity, cultural evolution versus museumification, economic development versus cultural preservation, ethnic autonomy versus state regulation, and mass tourism development versus sustainable cultural tourism) have been analysed. The study also pointed out that the balance can be achieved through the certification of various stakeholders. In addition, it is also recommended to fine-tune these imbalances in the formulation of tourism strategies to coordinate the relationship between government, ethnic communities, tourism businesses and tourists to ensure the best results.

### **3.9 Ethnic tourism research in China**

From Chinese tourism themes for different years, from the “folk customs tour” in 1995 and the “Chinese folk-art tour” in 2002, to the “Chinese village tour” in 2006 and the “Chinese culture tour” in 2011, it is not difficult to see that ethnic tourism is booming in China. The mystery, authenticity and experience of ethnic tourism resources have very effectively promoted the rise of tourism in ethnic minority villages. In the meantime, a large number of unique and famous ethnic minority villages have emerged, and tourists have a strong interest in them. Minority villages such as Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Village, Yunnan Hani Terrace and Xinjiang Kanerjing are waiting to be included in the list of world cultural heritage sites which has made Chinese ethnic village tourism so significant. The ethnic tourism research in China originated in the 1990s and initially flourished in the early 21st century (Wu & Yu, 2000). Analysing and summarising this work indicates that the research on Chinese ethnic community tourism reflects the following main topics: ethnic tourism impact research, ethnic resident/tourist perception research, community participation research, and ethnic tourism development model research.

#### **3.9.1 Research on impact**

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Chinese scholars began to pay attention to the study of tourism impact in the 1990s. Most of their research follows foreign theories, and most of them use questionnaire survey methods and qualitative analysis to study ethnic tourism (Tian, 2003). The analysis of Liu and Jiang (2011) is representative of the study of the impact of tourism on the culture of ethnic communities, and has divided the influence of tourism development on ethnic communities into five themes: social relations, commodity economy, community residents, traditional values and traditional rule of order.

The influence of ethnic tourism in various stages of the life cycle of tourism development is also different. Xue and Ye (2011) have analysed the cultural change mechanism of three typical ethnic communities in northwestern Yunnan, which are located at different stages of the life cycle of tourism. In addition, the development of folklore tourism has brought diverse job opportunities to the residents of ethnic communities. In particular, the traditional women's life has undergone major changes due to participation in tourism, which has affected the evolution of the internal structure of their communities to a certain extent (Liu, 2007).

### **3.9.2 Research on perception**

Research on tourism perception includes research on ethnic residents' perception and tourists' perception of the ethnic tourism experience (Feng & Cheng, 2009; Huang, Gu, & Yuan, 2008). Studies have shown that, under different tourism development life cycles or at different locations within the same region, local residents have different views on tourism due to factors such as residence time, occupation, and sources of family income (Chen, Wang, & Mao, 2011).

Tourist perception research explores the activity experience and perception of authenticity from the perspective of tourists (Wang, Huang, & Yu, 2009), thus guiding ethnic tourism planning and design, and providing tourism strategies. There are also evaluations of tourism resources based on the perception of tourists, such as the evaluation of the accessibility and attractiveness of ethnic tourism destinations, and satisfaction with them. Through quantitative analysis and evaluation, the ranking of each factor is obtained, so as

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to deliver comprehensive evaluation results (Cheng & Fu, 2010; Wang et al., 2010).

### **3.9.3 Research on community participation**

Research on community participation focuses on the relationship between community participation and ethnic tourism development, related interest groups, and the community participation model. Community participation covers various activities of community residents in decision-making, planning and management supervision of tourism development. Governments and enterprises should fully respect the opinions and needs of the community, and regard it as the main development subject and participant (Bao & Sun, 2006). The existing research shows that the level of community participation directly affects the quality of ethnic tourism development, among which factors such as development conditions, resource endowment, management guidance, residents behavior, market competitiveness and tourism development status have been recognised as the main factors affecting the community's participation in tourism development (Lu, 2012). In order to improve residents' right to speak in the process of tourism development, Luo (2006) has proposed a community participation benefit guarantee mechanism including law, income distribution, property rights and compensation for demolition. At present, the community-involved tourism activities that have been formed mainly include asset participation, human resource participation and cultural participation (Yan & Huang, 2008). However, the contradiction of community participation in the distribution of interests and the lack of voice of community residents are still prominent, and this has become an important issue for scholars (Xu, Wan, & Fan, 2012).

### **3.9.3 Research on the development model of ethnic tourism**

In order to promote the rational allocation of roles and the fair distribution of tourism income among the various stakeholders of ethnic tourism, different modes of tourism development have been formed, such as “family-led”, “government-led”, “collective-led” and “company-led”. Chen & Zeng (2011) have summarised the current status of China's existing ethnic tourism development and classified it into the six types described in Table 1.

Table 1: Ethnic tourism development model

| Participants                                       | Operation method  | Feature   | Example  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Family+<br>Family                                  | Families freely combine to jointly develop and operate ethnic tourism.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Less investment;</li> <li>➤ The true preservation of the rural ethnic culture;</li> <li>➤ Limited reception affected by the management level and capital investment.</li> </ul>  | “Luxi People”,<br>Shou County,<br>Hunan Province.              |
| Government+<br>Community+<br>Residents             | The government plans and manages ethnic tourism resources; communities and residents participate in tourism development activities.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improvement of ethnic community environment;</li> <li>➤ Increased employment opportunities;</li> <li>➤ Benefit of some residents.</li> </ul>   | Jiaju Tibetan Village, Danba County, Sichuan Province.         |
| Company+<br>Community+<br>Residents                | The company develops, operates, and manages, directly signing contracts with community residents, and has clear rights and responsibilities.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Good product integration, market development and tourism brand establishment;</li> <li>➤ Improved tourism infrastructure;</li> <li>➤ Low participation of community residents.</li> </ul>  | Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Park, Yunnan Province.           |
| Community+<br>Residents+<br>NGOs                   | Community established joint-stock enterprises, residents participate in development; NGOs provide funds and technical assistance.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tourism is developed independently by the community;</li> <li>➤ Residents benefit more from the distribution of benefits;</li> <li>➤ Better residents’ awareness of ecological protection.</li> </ul>  | Diqing Hama Valley, Yunnan Province.                           |
| Government+<br>Company+<br>Community+<br>Residents | The government directly manages and plans ethnic tourism resources, and provides tourism services through the establishment of subordinate companies; some community residents participate in tourism development activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The government is the leader of ethnic tourism planning, policy development and tourism revenue;</li> <li>➤ The tourism promotion is more vigorous, and the popularity is improved in the short term;</li> <li>➤ Community residents benefit less and the distribution of tourism income is uneven.</li> </ul>   | Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village, Guizhou Province.                 |
| Shareholding system                                | All parties jointly created joint-stock enterprises, clarified the property rights relationship of all parties, and participated in tourism development through land and capital management.                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Residents directly participate in tourism development decisions, production and management activities and distribution of benefits;</li> <li>➤ Residents and enterprises have common interests and goals;</li> <li>➤ The community has a wide range of benefits, more employment opportunities and higher incomes;</li> <li>➤ Tourism resources and the environment can be better protected;</li> <li>➤ Effectively establishes the brand image of the tourist destination.</li> </ul> | Hongsha Village, Sansheng Township, Chengdu, Sichuan Province. |

*Note.* Adapted from Chen & Zeng (2011).

The study has found that the “family-led” and “collective-led” tourism development models have a high degree of participation and development of community residents.

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However, due to the limited size of reception and publicity, tourism revenue growth is small. In contrast, in the “government-led” and “company-led” tourism development models, the government and the company are the main players in tourism development, with a high degree of participation, large tourism investment, and rapid growth of tourists. However, residents are mostly in a passive position in the process of tourism participation, and tourism income is less distributed.

### **3.10 Comparison of ethnic tourism research in China and abroad**

Due to different national conditions, the research on ethnic tourism in China and abroad is different in research object, research perspective, theoretical basis, research content and research methods (Li et al., 2013).

In terms of the research object, Chinese scholars pay more attention to ethnic tourism in rural areas than urban areas. Scholars in European and American countries pay more attention to urban ethnic tourism research than rural ethnic regions, and give more attention to analysing the harmonious symbiosis between different ethnicities and ethnic communities within the city.

In regard to research perspective, Chinese scholars pay attention to ethnic regions from the perspectives of ethnology, sociology and geography, focusing on the study of influencing factors, spatial structure and tourism development. The foreign study of ethnic communities pays more attention to sociology and anthropology, focusing on organisational and social issues in specific ethnic communities.

In theoretical terms, foreign studies have been extended from the classical typology theory to functionalist theory, human ecology theory and urbanity theory; Chinese research has formed a theory of differential pattern with local characteristics based on foreign functionalist theory (Yang, Wang, & Feng, 2008).

In relation to research content, Chinese research mainly focuses on the characteristics of ethnic evolution (traditional culture, land use, livelihood methods and ethnic languages), influencing factors, tourism development and tourism impact; foreign scholars focus on

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the education, medical care, employment and health issues of residents in different ethnic communities, as well as cultural conflicts and crime among communities, and explore systems and policies that are conducive to the development of ethnic communities from the perspective of sociology and political economy.

In terms of research methods, quantitative evaluation and analysis are used in China. Data sources are mostly questionnaires, statistical data, and satellite imagery. Foreign scholars have more qualitative explanations for the development of ethnic communities, the analysis of power centres, and the relationship between communities, using the methods and theories of sociology, psychology, and political economy.

Compared with the foreign ethnic community research, Chinese research content focuses on geographical factors and historical factors, and gives insufficient attention to social, cultural and political factors. In terms of policy formulation, the research on the development of “people” in ethnic communities is not deep enough. Ethnic eco-cultural tourism is more complex and fragile in terms of its regional, ethnic and cultural characteristics. The economic development of some ethnic areas in China is relatively backward, with low education level, and not much understanding of the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism. It is often easy to damage the ecology and culture in pursuit of economic benefits. For example, in the Badagongshan Nature Reserve in Zhangjiajie, Hunan, since 1997, at least 400 cubic meters of primary secondary forest have been felled by local villagers, resulting in severe damage to the *Davidia involucrata*, known as the plant giant panda (Gao, 2018). Foreign research is relatively mature, and the research results have a certain reference value for the evolution and future development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

### **3.11 Summary**

From this literature review chapter in combination with the contextual background of Xiangxi provided in Chapter 2, it is not difficult to find that Xiangxi possesses the characteristics and particularities of the five ethnic eco-cultural areas described by Li et al. (2013), and is suitable for ethnic tourism research. Although there is a large amount of

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literature on the study of ethnic tourism from various perspectives, there are few studies that comprehensively and comprehensively analyse the external environment and self-development status of ethnic regions, at least not in relation to Xiangxi. This dissertation studies the internal and external environment, including the issues of policy, economy, and competitors, and uses the SWOT analysis to explore four directions to propose suggestions and planning strategies suitable for Xiangxi.

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## **Chapter 4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter first outlines the objectives and research philosophy, ontology, epistemology and paradigm of the study of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. Then the case study method is introduced, including case selection, data collection (secondary data collection) and data analysis method (thematic analysis and SWOT analysis). At the end of this chapter, some ethical considerations as well as research limitations are considered, and the chapter summary is presented.

### **4.2 Research aim and objectives**

The purpose of this research is to explore the difficulties and problems in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi by analysing factors such as geography, nature, ethnic society, history and culture, economy and tourism in Xiangxi. Following from this, the intention is for a strategy suitable for the development of eco-cultural tourism to be made, in order to promote the sustainable development of eco-tourism in Xiangxi. The research objectives include the following sub-goals and steps:

- To assess the general situation of Xiangxi and the development status of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.
- To analyse the difficulties and problems in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.
- To formulate a strategy suitable for the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.

### **4.3 Research philosophy**

Before conducting research to draw meaningful conclusions, it is necessary to determine the nature of the research and whether it is quantitative, qualitative or mixed research; this is the most basic step in the initiation of research work (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Quantitative research studies the phenomenon by means of experiments, investigations,



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statistics, etc., and in order to obtain objective facts, the rigor, objectivity and neutrality of the research is strictly required (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). By contrast, qualitative research usually refers to in-depth and detailed research on social phenomena that need to be studied through field experience, open interviews, participatory and non-participatory observations, literature analysis and case studies (Patton, 2015). Compared with the natural sciences, qualitative research can explain the problems of human sociology more deeply (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Qualitative research is essentially interpretative which means that the researcher should interpret the data, including describing the individual or the environment, analysing the subject or category, and finally explaining or concluding the individual or theoretical meaning, stating the experience gained by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Thus, I have used qualitative research, because my research is intended to analyse the development status and existing problems of geography, nature, ethnic society, history and culture in this particular region of Xiangxi, so qualitative methods should be adopted to consider the factors being studied.

#### **4.4 Ontology, epistemology and paradigm**

The term ‘paradigm’ refers to a concept or mode of thinking in the natural sciences, social sciences, and philosophy; it is also known as the worldview, and includes theories, research methods, assumptions, and standards that make up a particular field. It is usually composed of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods (Gray, 2018).

When studying the various resources of and data from Xiangxi, such as the classification of geography and natural resources in Xiangxi, as well as the development of ethnic society, history and culture, information was subjectively constructed by human thoughts rather than objective and unique existence (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Through the research and the analysis of the collected data, the problems and difficulties in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi have been found. This process is realised through a deep understanding of the people, products, resources and social life in this region. The resulting concepts and implications are explained and reconstructed through scientific means and language. From the perspective of epistemology, truth needs to be

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explained, and this truth can be used to discover the deep meaning of human activities (Goldman, 2004). Therefore, the paradigm adopted in this research is the interpretative paradigm, in which it is believed that the human experience of the research object is not passive perception and acceptance, but active understanding and interpretation (Wright & Losekoot, 2010). As a common paradigm, the interpretative paradigm assumes that reality is pluralistic and is socially constructed by researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach allows individuals to build their own “world” and then identify the inherent meaning within it (Wright & Losekoot, 2010). In this research, after finding out about the problems and difficulties in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi through interpretation and qualitative methods, a strategy suitable for the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi has been formed to promote the sustainable development of eco-tourism in Xiangxi.

#### **4.5 The case study approach**

In the social sciences, case study is a frequently used research method, mainly for close-range, in-depth and detailed research on research topics or objects, as well as investigations on relevant backgrounds and conditions (Stake, 2005). Specifically, in order to explore the current state of research objects in real life, researchers select one or more scenarios as research objects, systematically collect data and materials, and conduct in-depth research to draw conclusions (Stake, 2005). In addition, in case studies, researchers design a unique logic, and use specific data collection and unique data analysis methods, such as the use of on-site observations or research documents. Based on the characteristics of data collection and data analysis, case studies are often more subjective and qualitative. Because case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence, different sources of data must be able to lead to the same conclusions, in the way of triangulation (Yin, 2017). In order to guide the direction of data collection and the focus of data analysis, researchers often develop some theoretical propositions in advance which could preserve the integrity of the research object and help to find meaningful features in the data (Yin, 2017). Compared with other research methods, the advantage of case study is that it can grasp the background of the dynamic development of the case and the context of the situation

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through a systematic description and in-depth understanding of the case, so as to obtain a more comprehensive view (Gerring, 2004).

In this research, eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi was taken as a research case. First, the researcher collected data, and extracted and summarised all kinds of sub-factors related to tourism in Xiangxi area. Then, information on the achievements, problems and difficulties of the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi area was obtained with a more incisive description and powerful explanation. Finally, a strategic plan to promote the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi was drawn up.

#### **4.5.1 Case selection**

A researcher's criteria for case selection are related to the research object, the purpose of the research, and the problem to be solved. This information also determines whether the research can bring meaningful data to the case study (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This research chose Xiangxi as a case study area based on the following two considerations:

- The ethnic culture of Xiangxi is very rich and the characteristics of ethnic landscapes are prominent, which determines that the study of Xiangxi has a certain typicality and representativeness. Xiangxi is located in the western part of Hunan Province, with a minority population accounting for nearly 80%. There are 14 ethnic groups living together and belonging to a typical multi-ethnic mixed habitat ("Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture," n.d.). The unique Tujia and Miao culture in Xiangxi are one of the most representative regional cultures in China. The Xiangxi minority area is a space for the concentrated expression of ethnic culture, and preserves a relatively complete spatial structure and landscape pattern. In the open environment of the new century, due to a series of external factors such as urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation, the spatial structure, landscape pattern, industrial structure, social relations and culture of ethnic minority areas in Xiangxi have undergone dramatic changes, and thus cultural protection, tourism development and sustainable development are all worth exploring and paying attention to.

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- The research basis of tourism and other resources in Xiangxi is relatively comprehensive and the relevant materials are easy to obtain, which was conducive to the research presented in this dissertation. The research content covers tourism development, social structure, economic development and ethnic culture. The relevant theories and materials are rich. At the same time, Hunan is my hometown. I have lived there since I was born, so I am familiar with the area which provides me with considerable convenience in collecting data.

#### 4.5.2 Data collection methods

According to Yin (2012), there are six data collection sources in a case study, namely documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Due to the time limitations of a dissertation, the data sources of this research mainly consist of the first two types, the second-hand data of documents and archival records.

- **Documents.** Documents mainly include letters, memos and other communications; schedules, announcements, meeting records, and other incident reports; administrative documents such as proposals, progress reports and other internal documents; formal research or assessments of events or venues; and news reports or articles published by the mass media.
- **Archival records.** Archival records include personal data diaries, schedules, phone books; censuses and questionnaires; maps and charts; lists and product information; service records and organisational records. Archival records are stored in computers or archives, data rooms, libraries, etc.

First of all, social statistics, ethnic policies and tourism policies, and information on the current status and scale of tourism development in Xiangxi were obtained from the Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture Government, the Tourism Bureau and other government agencies. The main social statistics are from the *Xiangxi Statistical Yearbook* from 2014 to 2017 and the *Statistical Communiqué on National Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi* from 2008 to 2017. In addition, the planning documents from the national level

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to the local level were collected, including the *Eleventh Five-Year Plan* which includes the social and economic development plan and the overall plan for tourism development. Through the review of these planning documents, the impact of planning on the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi could be understood. In addition to government documents and statistics, other literature was collected and reviewed, such as the “Research on the Arrangement and Protection of Xiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Project” and “The Traditional Marriage Custom of Miao in Xiangxi and the Construction Value of Harmonious Marriage and Family”, magazines, books such as *Mysterious Xiangxi: Cultural Features and Forms of Xiangxi* and *Historical and Cultural Materials of Tujia Nationality in Xiangxi*, newspaper articles such as “Xiangxi Airport Construction Progress Announcement” and “Qian Zhang Chang Railway is Expected to be Put into Use by the End of 2019”, videos and online information related to Xiangxi eco-cultural tourism. Extensive review, collation, extraction, and summarization of this information and data ultimately resulted in a comprehensive, system-wide body of information.

#### **4.5.3 Data analysis methods**

##### *4.5.3.1 Thematic analysis*

Data analysis refers to the classification and combination of collected data, and the checking, listing or other reorganisation of evidence to explore the issues that need to be addressed in the research (Dey, 2003). According to the method of collecting information in this research, thematic analysis was mainly used to analyse data which is a very common method of analysis in tourism research and can be performed in a variety of ways (Ritchie, Burns, & Palmer, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) have provided six steps to follow in identifying, analysing, and reporting qualitative data using thematic analysis (Figure 20).

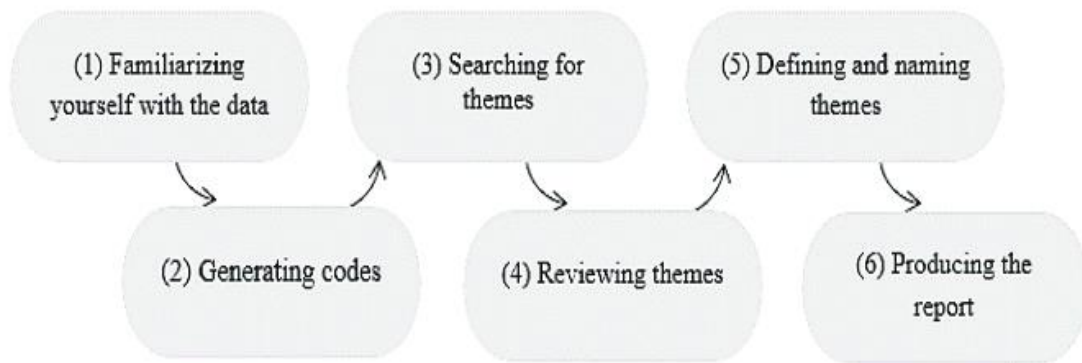


Figure 20: Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the first step, researchers should fully understand and be familiar with all aspects of the data to lay the foundation for future analysis. Through the collection and verification of laws and regulations, and information on economic, social development, natural and cultural resources, and tourism development in Xiangxi, ecological and cultural tourism in the region has been comprehensively and objectively recognised. After gaining familiarity with the basic data, this study generated the initial codes of GDP, tourism income indicators, and ecological and cultural resources of Xiangxi through the data compilation which provided guidance for subsequent analysis. Searching for themes extracts topic-based related data for sorting, combining, or splitting. This study collated the GDP and tourism revenues of China and Xiangxi for the past ten years, and analysed their development trends; this belongs to the economic theme. It also analysed the tourism development indicators of tourism cities around Xiangxi which has formed the competition theme of the same industry and is also a factor affecting the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. In reviewing themes, after collecting and collating the initial codes, this study formed a number of sub-themes, such as regulations and policies, economic development, social development, tourism development in other regions, and tourism development in Xiangxi. During the review of each sub-theme, the codes unrelated to eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi were removed; these included population development and education development. Meanwhile the GDP and tourism revenue of Xiangxi was separately listed as a sub-theme, as it is an internal factor compared with the external factors of national economic development and tourism revenue. After finally determining and studying the sub-themes of politics, economy, society, ecological culture

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and tourism development in Xiangxi, the problems and challenges in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi were obtained, and corresponding development strategies and specific policies were proposed to realise the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi, as reported in this dissertation.

#### *4.5.3.2 SWOT analysis*

This research further performed a SWOT analysis on the collected data. A SWOT analysis is based on the perspective of the development of an industry, in order to describe the status and future development of an industry in the context of the competitive environment and competitive conditions within or outside the industry (Valentin, 2001). A SWOT analysis uses a matrix model to focus on the main internal strengths and weaknesses and analyse opportunities and threats from outside that are closely related to the subject. Then, by combining and analysing various factors, a series of corresponding conclusions are drawn from them, which provides a basis and guidance for decision-making. Using a SWOT analysis method, the environment in which the research object is located can be studied in a comprehensive, systematic and accurate way and corresponding development strategies, implementation plans and specific countermeasures can be formulated (Valentin, 2001).

As far as Xiangxi is concerned, through the SWOT analysis, the internal and external environmental conditions faced by Xiangxi eco-cultural tourism industry were comprehensively summarised, and then the advantages, disadvantages and opportunities for, and threats to, Xiangxi in developing eco-cultural tourism were analysed. At the same time, the problems and difficulties in the process of developing eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi were found, and development strategies and specific policies formulated to achieve the sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.



Figure 21: SWOT analysis chart.

#### 4.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the reasons why qualitative research, the interpretative paradigm and case study should be used in this research to achieve the research aim. It also explained how to use case studies to conduct research. In the section on case selection, the reasons and basis for selecting Xiangxi as the research destination were introduced. In terms of data collection, use of two types of secondary data collection methods, document and archival records, was described. Thematic analysis to analyse the sub-themes of politics, economy, society, ecological culture, and tourism development in Xiangxi was explained. Meanwhile, the process of SWOT analysis to obtain objective and effective analysis results and corresponding countermeasures from the four dimensions of advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and threats was also set out. The results of specific analyses are given in the following chapter.



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## **Chapter 5. Findings and Discussion**

SWOT analysis uses a matrix to analyse the external environment of the research object and the state of its own development to obtain its advantages, disadvantages, and opportunities and threats. Then, based on the results of this analysis, corresponding countermeasures and strategies are formulated. This chapter first considers the national and provincial levels as its external environment, and these are analysed from the perspectives of politics and law, economics, social development, and technological development. In addition, the external environment also includes the competitive environment, so then the development status of the four tourist destinations around Xiangxi is analysed. As far as the internal environment is concerned, this chapter analyses the geographical and eco-cultural environment, economic development, and tourism development of Xiangxi, and identifies the achievements and problems of the tourism industry in Xiangxi. Finally, the SWOT analysis is used to make suggestions for the sustainable development of the ecological and cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi.

### **5.1 The external environment of the eco-cultural tourism industry development in Xiangxi**

By analysing the external environment, the opportunities and threats faced by the Xiangxi region in the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry can be found, and corresponding countermeasures can be formulated. Making correct predictions and judgments on the future development trend of the external environment is the premise of and basis for the success of the industrial development strategy.

#### **5.1.1 External macro environment**

An understanding of the external macro environment is mainly composed of a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the four aspects of politics, economy, society and technology.

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#### 5.1.1.1 Political and legal environment

Since the reform and opening up in 1978, China's tourism industry has realised world-renowned achievements and has grown into an important tourist destination and source country. In the past 40 years, China's tourism industry has experienced three stages which are opening up and initial reforms in 1978-1991, the opening up and accelerating reforms in 1992-2011, and the two-way opening and deepening reforms from 2012 to the present. Over the past 40 years, various policies formulated by the Chinese Government have laid a solid foundation for the development of tourism. In the third phase, which is now nearly a decade old, the Chinese Government has increased its emphasis on ethnic cultural tourism and has formulated a series of related policies and regulations to promote the development of China's ethnic cultural tourism industry (Table 2).

Table 2: Policies and regulations related to eco-cultural tourism at the national level in 2009-2018

| Time | Policies and regulations  | Related content   |
|------|---|---|
| 2009 | <i>Several Opinions of the State Council on Further Promoting the Development of Minority Culture</i> (State Council, 2009)                   | Further prosper and develop the cultural undertakings of ethnic minorities and promote the great development and prosperity of socialist culture.   |
| 2012 | <i>Several Opinions of the State Council on Implementing the Strategy of Promoting the Rise of the Central Region</i> (State Council, 2012)   | Accelerate the development of key areas and build eco-cultural tourism circles in Xiangxi and western Hubei to foster a new economic growth zone. Strengthen the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage and promote the integration of culture and tourism.  |
| 2014 | <i>Several Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the Integration of Cultural Creativity and Related Industries</i> (State Council, 2014) | Strengthen the protection and utilisation of natural and cultural heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage. Accelerate the development of smart tourism, promote the integration of tourism and Internet innovation, and support the development of tourism products with regional characteristics and ethnic customs. |
| 2015 | <i>Overall Plan for the Reform of Ecological Civilization System</i> (State Council, 2015)  | Promote the construction of ecological civilisation, implement a strict ecological environmental protection system for tourism development, and establish state-owned natural resource asset management and natural ecological supervision institutions.  |
| 2018 | <i>Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018~2022)</i> (State Council, 2018b)   | It is necessary to develop villages rich in natural historical and cultural resources such as historical and cultural villages, traditional villages and ethnic minority villages into characteristic industries, and vigorously develop the eco-tourism industry.  |
| 2018 | <i>Action Plan for Supporting Poverty Alleviation in Deep Poverty Areas</i> (State Council, 2018a)  | Focus on strengthening the construction of tourism infrastructure and public service facilities in 34 deeply poor areas, in which Xiangxi is included in the key targets of tourism poverty alleviation.  |

In 2001, former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji inspected Xiangxi and gave instructions that “Developing tourism is the biggest way out for Xiangxi in the future” (“Xiangxi: Making good use of ethnic autonomy,” 2009, p. 4); since then, tourism development has become a national policy and government task for the development of rural areas in Hunan and ethnic minority areas in Xiangxi. More recently, various tourism-related policies were launched as a policy basis for the development of ethnic tourism (Table 3).

Table 3: Policies and regulations related to eco-cultural tourism at the provincial level since 2004

| Time | Policies and regulations   | Related content   |
|------|--|---|
| 2004 | <i>Decision on Accelerating the Development of Xiangxi Area</i> (Hunan Provincial Committee, 2004)   | Hunan Provincial Government ranks Xiangxi as a provincial key development area.   |
| 2006 | <i>The Overall Planning of Tourism Development in Hunan Province</i> (Hunan Tourism Development Committee, 2006)   | Establishes the Greater Xiangxi Tourism Sector which has made Xiangxi a new tourist growth point. The goal is to create a tourism destination centered on natural and cultural heritage tourism, folk tourism and eco-tourism in central China.   |
| 2007 | <i>Opinions on Continued Support for the Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture</i> (Hunan Provincial Committee, 2007)                          | Focuses on the development of ethnic cultural tourism and ecological tourism, and accelerate the cultivation and expansion of tourism pillar industries. Highlights the four major tourism sectors of Fenghuang, Dehang, Mengdong River and Liye to create a “Mysterious Xiangxi” and “Charming Xiangxi” tourism brand. |
| 2012 | <i>Deepening the Implementation of the Strategy of Western Development, Promoting the Development of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture</i> (Hunan Provincial Committee, 2012) | Gives priority to the development of cultural tourism industry. Highlighting the leading position of the cultural tourism industry, the Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture will be built into a nationally renowned ecological ethnic cultural tourism destination.  |
| 2016 | <i>Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development in Hunan Province</i> (Hunan Tourism Development Committee, 2016)  | Accelerates the construction of a public platform for tourism information in the Greater Xiangxi Tourism Circle, docking with the national poverty alleviation strategy, focusing on the development of ethnic customs tourism in Xiangxi, and strengthening tourism cooperation with neighbouring cities.              |
| 2018 | <i>Three-year Action Plan for Building a Tourism Base in Hunan Province (2018-2020)</i> (Hunan Provincial Committee, 2018)   | Hunan Province will focus on building five major tourism sectors, including Xiangxi sectors, improve brand building, market supervision, and break down marketing barriers.   |

As discussed in Section 3.4, four tensions are proposed in the model established by Yang and Wall (2009), which are state regulation versus ethnic autonomy, cultural exoticism versus modernity, economic development versus cultural preservation, authenticity versus cultural commodification. Regarding the tension between state regulation and ethnic community autonomy, it can be seen from the policies and regulations issued at the

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national level and local government level in the past ten years that China's tourism development is still a "top-down" government-led model. After the state issues the policy, the local government will refer to the policy at the national level to actualise and localise the policy according to its actual situation. In China, the positions of different levels of government on ethnic tourism policy formulation are basically consistent (Li, 2007). The development and construction of tourism activities involve various fields such as food, lodging, travel and entertainment. As a new type of market economy activity, the development of ethnic tourism relies on the government's investment in infrastructure construction and policy support for tourism development activities. Although excessive intervention under the government-led model will deepen the tensions between all relevant stakeholders (Li, 2004), the government has absolute advantages and resources in terms of capital investment, foreign investment, and propaganda, especially the formulation of various tourism-related policies which determine the direction of tourism development. From the policies and regulations listed in the tables above, it can be seen that the state has put forward instructions for further prospering and developing of minority cultural undertakings. Several policies have proposed promoting common unity and prosperity and encouraging ethnic minorities to participate extensively in tourism, which effectively alleviates the possible tension between the state regulation and ethnic community autonomy. Judging from the history and development process of Xiangxi, in the Xiangxi region the tension between state regulation and ethnic community autonomy is not obvious or significant.

Comparing the tension between economic development and cultural protection mentioned by Yang and Wall (2009), from a series of policies and measures formulated at the macro level it can be seen that national and local governments are paying more and more attention to the protection of ethnic culture. China's tourism industry has entered a stage of deepening reform and the number of policies of protecting ecology and culture has increased significantly in recent years, which is a very good opportunity for the eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. Policy orientation has influenced the perception of ethnic regions. Ethnic tourism destinations are also increasingly aware of the importance of

protecting culture and the uniqueness of culture as important factors in attracting tourists. However, ethnic areas that have been transformed into tourist attractions will inevitably face the impact of the market economy and modernisation, which means that these tensions will always exist. However, how to achieve their coexistence and balance is a topic that the government, tourism enterprises and local residents need to consider together, in order to do scientific planning from a macro perspective, but also to be guided by people at the grassroots level. This issue will continue to be discussed and analysed in this case.

### 5.1.1.2 Economic environment

#### ➤ National economic development situation

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (2019a), the GDP in 2018 was 90,030.9 billion yuan, an increase of 6.6% over the previous year (Figure 22). In 2018, the per capita disposable income of the national residents was 28,228 yuan, an increase of 6.5% over the previous year. Among them, the per capita disposable income of urban residents was 39,251 yuan, an increase of 5.6% over the previous year; the per capita disposable income of rural residents was 14,617 yuan, an increase of 6.6% over the previous year (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019b).

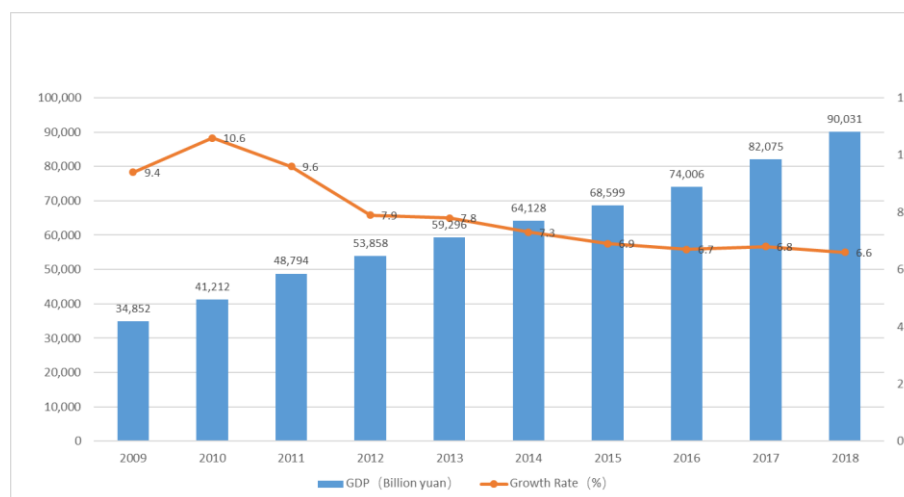


Figure 22: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the growth rate in 2009-2018

Adapted from the *Statistical Communiqué on National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China* issued by the National Bureau of Statistics from 2009 to 2018.

According to Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2019), the total tourism revenue in 2018 was 5970 billion yuan, an increase of 10.6% over the previous year (Figure 23).

In 2018, there were 5.54 billion domestic tourists, an increase of 10.8% over the previous year (Figure 24).

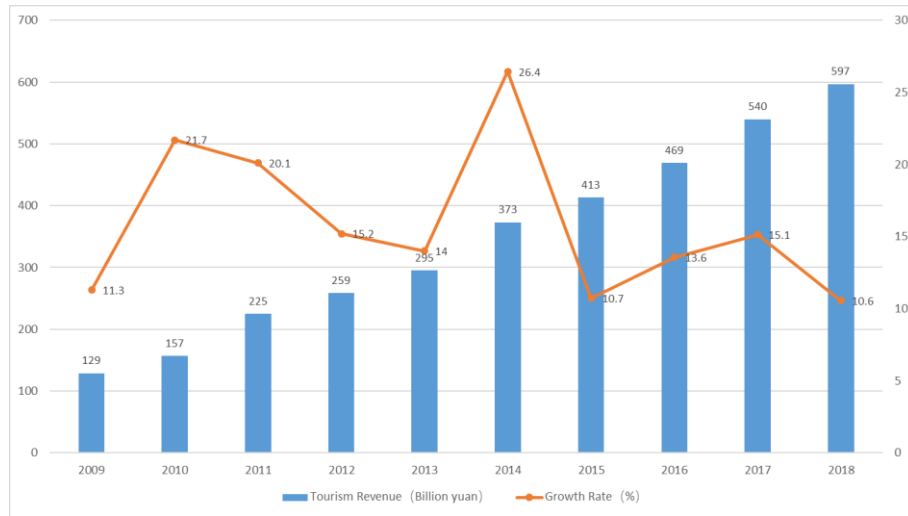


Figure 23: National tourism annual revenue and the growth rate in 2009-2018.

Adapted from the *China Tourism Statistics Bulletin* issued by the China Tourism Academy from 2009 to 2018.

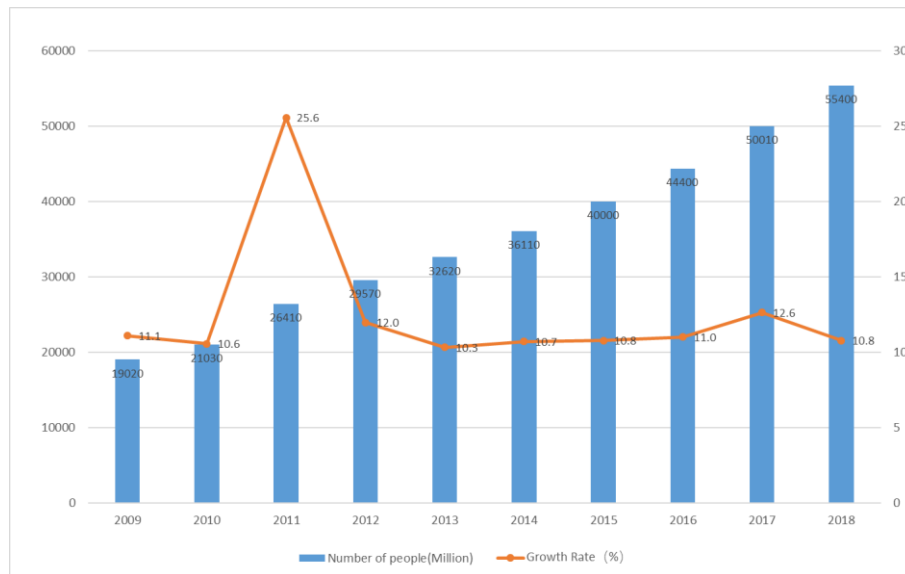


Figure 24: The total number of domestic tourists and the growth rate in 2009-2018.

Adapted from the *China Tourism Statistics Bulletin* issued by the China Tourism Academy from 2009 to 2018.

According to the *Analysis of Tourism Economic Operation in 2018 and the Development Forecast Report of 2019* issued by the China Tourism Academy (2019a), the comprehensive evaluation index of tourists' service quality in tourism in 2018 was 77.91, an increase of 2.5% over the same period of last year, reflecting the satisfaction of Chinese tourists with domestic and foreign tourism. The report predicts that the

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number of domestic tourists will exceed 6 billion in 2019, and domestic tourism revenue will be 560 million yuan, up 9.5% and 10% respectively over the previous year.

➤ Economic development situation in Hunan Province

According to the statistical bulletin on national economic and social development for 2018, issued by the Hunan Provincial Bureau of Statistics (2019), the province's GDP reached 36,42.58 billion yuan in 2018, a year-on-year increase of 7.8%, and the growth rate was 1.2 percentage points higher than the national average. In 2018, the per capita GDP of Hunan Province was 52,949 yuan, an increase of 7.2%. In the whole year, the per capita disposable income of all residents in the province was 25,241 yuan, an increase of 7.2% over the previous year.

Since the start of the 21st century, the tertiary industry represented by tourism in Hunan Province has grown rapidly, and the development of tourism has brought huge economic benefits. According to the Hunan Provincial Bureau of Statistics (2019), the province received 750 million domestic tourists, an increase of 12.5% over the previous year; and 3.651 million inbound tourists, an increase of 13.1%. The total tourism revenue was 825.51 billion yuan, an increase of 16.5% over the previous year; international tourism income was 1.52 billion US dollars, an increase of 17.4% over the previous year.

5.1.1.3 Social environment

Along with the rapid development of China's national economy, there has been a continuous expansion of total consumer demand and the continuous optimisation of the consumption structure. According to the *China Statistical Yearbook* issued by the National Bureau of Statistics (n.d.) over the years, at the time of the reform and opening up, the per capita disposable income of urban residents and rural residents in China was only 343.4 yuan and 133.6 yuan respectively. Data for 2018 showed that their incomes have risen to 39,251 yuan and 14,617 yuan respectively, which is 114.3 times and 109.4 times what they were in 1978. This shows that China's urban and rural residents have basically

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realised the transition from subsistence to well-being, and have more diverse choices in consumption. Over this period, Chinese urban and rural residents began to move from consumption for basic living to enjoyment consumption and, among these forms of consumption, tourism consumption has also shown an upward trend year by year.

According to the *China Tourism Consumption Big Data Report of 2018* issued by the China Tourism Academy (2019b), China's tourism consumption pattern is developing from a single sightseeing tour to cultural needs, increasing demand and individualised needs. Compared with just a few years ago, Chinese tourists are more willing to explore diverse customs and cultural characteristics and go deep into tourist destinations to pursue unique experiences. Therefore, ethnic cultural tourism has become a new consumption fashion.

#### *5.1.1.4 Technological development*

##### ➤ Rapid development of the Internet

With the popularity of the Internet, the online tourism market has also grown rapidly. According to the monitoring data of Analysys (2018), the scale of online tourism transactions in China has increased year by year from 2008 to 2017. The value of online tourism transactions in China in the first three quarters of 2018 was 734.26 billion yuan, which is close to the total value of online tourism transactions in 2016 (Figure 25). In the context of the rapid development of the tourism industry, the penetration rate of the online tourism industry continues to rise; in the first half of 2018, the penetration rate of the online tourism industry has already increased to 18.68% (Figure 26).

Because of the differences in the various geographic regions, the connection between tourism consumers and resource providers needs to rely on third-party institutions. In the context of a low degree of Internet connectivity, consumers rely mainly on traditional travel agencies to provide a variety of services, and group tours are traditional ways of tourism, with higher convenience but lower personalisation. With the acceleration of the development of the Internet and the growth of consumers' own



travel experience, consumers are more eager to have personalised tourism experience. At present, many Internet companies and emerging companies are actively developing ‘Internet + tourism’ which will become the development trend of future tourism.

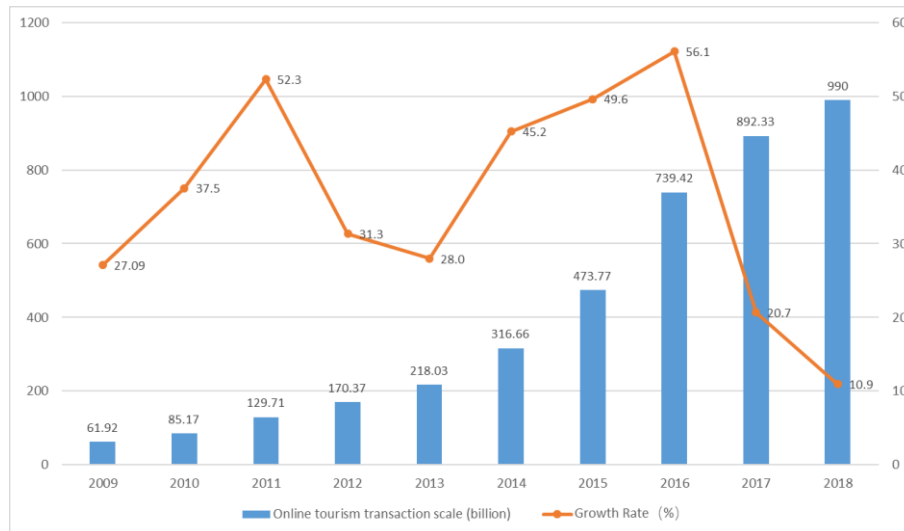


Figure 25: The scale of China's online tourism transactions and the growth rate in 2009-2018. Adapted from *The Scale of China's Online Tourism Industry in 2018 and the Prospect of Online Tourism Development in 2019* issued by Analysys (2018).

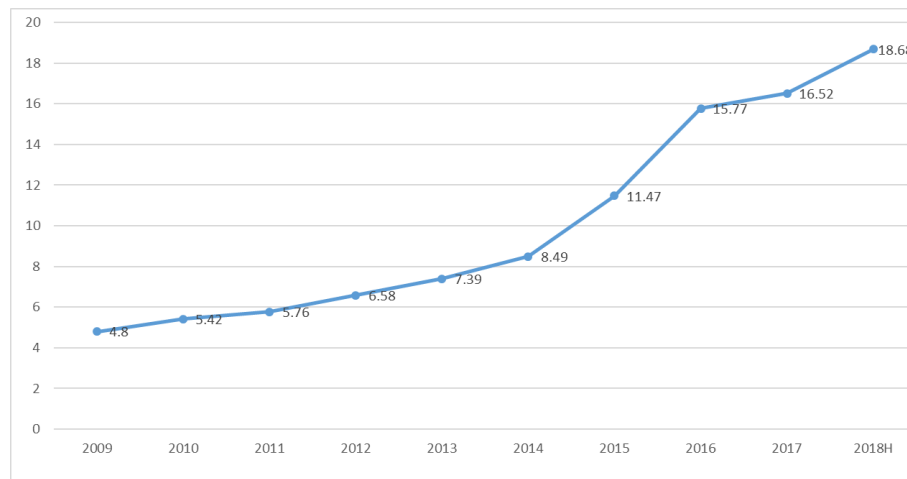


Figure 26: The online tourism industry penetration rate in 2009-2018. Adapted from *The Scale of China's Online Tourism Industry in 2018 and the Prospect of Online Tourism Development in 2019* issued by Analysys (2018).

### ➤ Constantly mature high-speed rail technology

According to the *Guangming Daily* (“In 2018, the National Railway Sent 3.37 Billion Passengers,” 2019), by the end of 2018, China's high-speed rail mileage reached 29,000 kilometres, giving China the longest railroad in the world. China's high-speed

rail has transported more than 9 billion passengers, making it the main channel for China's railway passenger transportation. Relying on the comprehensive advantages of high-speed rail can significantly improve the accessibility of cities along the line. Therefore, the regional development pattern will be reshaped, the accumulation and diffusion of resources will become more convenient, and transportation-based tourism will also usher in a new era of high-speed rail tourism.

### 5.1.2 External industry environment

With the vigorous development of transportation such as aviation and high-speed rail, potential consumers of tourism in Xiangxi may flow from the international market. However, the current domestic industry competition is still the biggest challenge facing the tourism industry in Xiangxi at this stage, especially in the four areas close to Xiangxi which are Zhangjiajie, Enshi, Huaihua, Tongren (Figure 27). The abundant tourism resources in these areas have brought certain competitive threats to Xiangxi (Table 4).



Figure 27: The map of Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture and surrounding tourist cities.  
Adapted from *Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture* (n.d.).

Table 4: Tourism development of cities surrounding Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture in 2017

| <b>Tourist destination</b> | <b>Status of tourism development</b>  |
|----------------------------|---|
| Zhangjiajie                | At the end of 2017, the number of tourists in Zhangjiajie reached 72.5 million, and the tourism revenue was 62 billion yuan, respectively 1.6 times and 1.9 times the figures for Xiangxi (Zhangjiajie Municipal Government, 2018).   |
| Enshi                      | Enshi has actively created A-level scenic spots and increased marketing efforts by accelerating the standardisation of scenic spots. The tourist arrivals and tourism revenue of Enshi had already surpassed those of Xiangxi in 2011. In 2017, these two figures reached 51.33 million visitors and 36.75 billion yuan, respectively 1.15 times and 1.07 times the figures for Xiangxi (Enshi Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2018).   |
| Huaihua                    | Huaihua proposed the strategic concept of building a strong tourism city. By improving the functions of tourism services, improving the quality of cultural tourism, and expanding the source market, the tourism industry has achieved rapid development. Its tourist numbers surpassed those of Xiangxi in 2011 and its tourism revenue surpassed that of Xiangxi in 2010. In 2017, these figures reached 50 million visitors and 35 billion yuan, respectively 1.12 times and 1.09 times the figures for Xiangxi (Huaihua Municipal Government, 2018). |
| Tongren                    | Tongren's tourism industry has continued to grow strongly. Its tourist numbers and tourism revenue surpassed those of Xiangxi in 2011. In 2017, it reached 64.66 million visitors and 51.79 billion yuan respectively, 1.5 times and 1.6 times the figures for Xiangxi (Tongren Municipal Government, 2018).  |

Due to national policy encouragement, about 30 provinces and municipalities have positioned tourism as a pillar industry, indicating that domestic tourism is highly competitive. In order to further consolidate the domestic market, the tourism industry in Xiangxi should firstly explore the uniqueness of its tourism resources in depth, and create differences in the homogenous tourism products that have been developed, using technology or other means. Second, according to the differences in the scenic spots, geographic location and target market consumer demand and preferences, the tourism routes should be integrated to achieve economies of scale.

## **5.2 The internal environment of eco-cultural tourism industry development in Xiangxi**

The internal environment of eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi is mainly analysed in terms of local geographical and eco-cultural environment, economic development status and tourism development status.

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### **5.2.1 The geographical and eco-cultural environment of Xiangxi**

Detailed geographical information on Xiangxi has been provided in sections 2.4 and 2.5. Given the importance of the geographical environment for tourism development in Xiangxi, it is worth summarising the key points from those sections.

Xiangxi is located at the junction of the northern part of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and the mountainous area in western Hubei, and has a subtropical monsoon humid climate. The limestone in the southwestern part of Xiangxi is widely distributed, with extensive karst development, and multiple caves and vaults. In the northwestern part of Xiangxi, there is a dense cover of quartz sandstone, and small peaks have been formed by the crustal action. The overall outline of the Xiangxi landscape is dominated by the mountains with hills and small plains, and a curved mountainous terrain that protrudes to the northwest (Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture Government, 2018). Xiangxi is a natural treasure house of wildlife resources and a biological research gene bank. There are more than 2,206 plants in total. Xiangxi has a mild climate and rich vegetation, which is suitable for various animals and the region is rich in wildlife resources. According to the survey of wildlife resources in 1991 and 1999, there are more than 201 species of vertebrates and 640 forest insects in Xiangxi. Among them, there are five species of animals protected at the national level, and 37 national second-class protected animals. Among these animals, 14 are listed as endangered wild animals in the world (Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture Government, 2017).

In addition to its diverse biological resources, Xiangxi is also a settlement where Chinese ethnic minorities gather, especially Tujia and Miao. Minorities account for nearly 80% of the total population in Xiangxi. Therefore, Xiangxi also has a large number of ethnic traditional cultures such as ethnic architecture, ethnic religions, ethnic foods and ethnic customs, etc. It is a region where the original ecological ethnic culture is very concentrated (Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture Government, 2018).

### **5.2.2 The economic development of Xiangxi**

Since the reform and opening up, Xiangxi has established and implemented the strategy of “common development of agriculture, industry and tourism”. By expanding and opening up to the outside world and accelerating development, the national economy and social development have achieved remarkable results. In 2018, the gross domestic product of Xiangxi was 60.51 billion yuan, an increase of 6% over the previous year (Figure 28). The per capita GDP is 22,885 yuan, an increase of 5.7% over the previous year (Xiangxi Statistics Bureau, 2019).

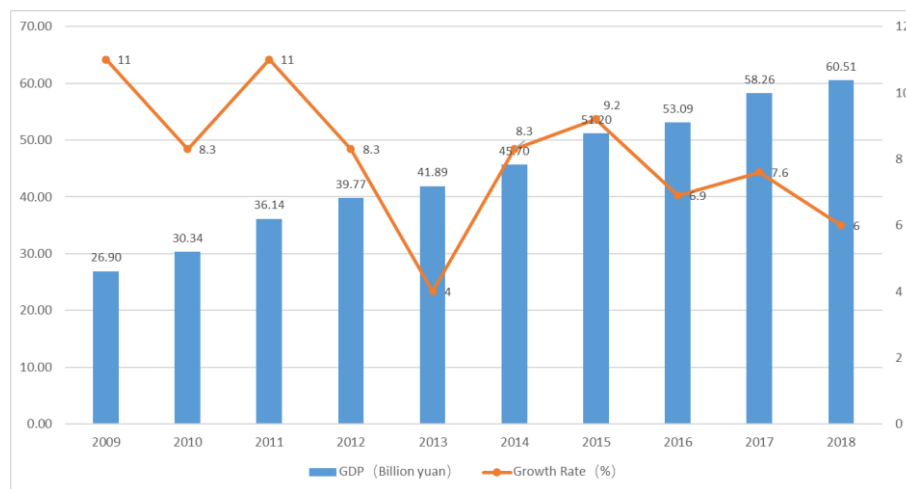


Figure 28: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Xiangxi and the growth rate in 2009-2018.

Adapted from the *Statistical Communique of the National Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi Prefecture* issued by Xiangxi Statistics Bureau from 2009 to 2018.

### 5.2.3 The development status of tourism in Xiangxi

#### 5.2.3.1 The achievements of tourism development in Xiangxi

- Infrastructure and service support construction has been greatly improved

Seven expressways have been built in Xiangxi, and all the scenic spots are connected to the eco-tourism roads, among which the secondary roads pass through important scenic spots, which greatly facilitates passengers' access. By 2020, with the opening of the high-speed rail and the airport, the traffic situation will be further improved. The tourist reception service facilities have also been greatly improved. A number of four-star and five-star hotels have been built in counties and cities such as Jishou and Fenghuang. Some characteristic villages and towns have also built star-rated farmhouses and homestays, large parking lots, scenic toilets and other supporting

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facilities. The tourist reception capacity has been greatly improved (Tripvivid, 2019).

- A number of tourism products with market influence have been launched

At present, Xiangxi has built two tourism boutiques which are Tujia and Miao. It has successively launched a number of tourism products with certain market influences, such as Fenghuang Ancient City, Huangsiqiao Ancient City, Southern Great Wall, Ganzhou Ancient City, Laosicheng Site, Wangcun Ancient Town, Huayuan Border Town, Liye Ancient City Site, Aizhai Bridge and Mengdong River drifting. The four major tourism sections, which are Fenghuang Ancient City, Aizhai Bridge, Laosicheng and Liye Ancient City, have been formed. The whole prefecture has created 26 tourist level scenic spots, including 10 scenic spots above 4A<sup>1</sup> which has been included in the first batch of national tourism demonstration zones (“The Documentary of Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture,” 2017).

- The cultural content of tourism is constantly increasing.

The Laosicheng site was successfully included in the world cultural heritage list, achieving a breakthrough for the cultural heritage of Hunan Province. The province has established 13 national key cultural relics protection units such as the former residence of Shen Congwen, Liye Ancient City Site, and the site of the revolutionary base area, as well as national historical and cultural towns such as Ganzhou Ancient City, Furong Town and Pushi Town. It has declared 26 national intangible cultural heritage projects and 62 provincial intangible cultural heritage projects, ranking first among the 30 minority autonomous prefectures in the country. The unique cultures, customs, costumes, architecture, music, dance and other ethnic cultures of the Tujia and Miao nationalities have gradually merged and intertwined with tourism. The traditional cultural programmes and festivals of the Tujia and Miao nationalities, such as the Maogusi, drum-and-dance of the Miao nationality, the Miao “Autumn Festival”, and the Tujia “Soba festival” have been recovered and displayed. A number of

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<sup>1</sup> China's tourist scenic areas are divided into five levels according to their quality grades, from high to low: AAAAA (5A), AAAA (4A), AAA (3A), AA (2A), and A. The 5A level is the highest level in China's tourist attractions, and represents the level of China's world-class boutique tourist attractions.

handicrafts that reflect the production and life style of the Tujia and Miao nationalities have been passed down and developed, forming a group of ethnic cultural industry brands (Tripvivid, 2019).

➤ Tourism has developed into a leading industry.

The number of tourists and tourism revenues have increased rapidly. According to the Xiangxi Statistic Bureau (2019), by the end of 2018, the number of tourists and the total tourism revenue in the state reached 51.4 million visitors and 44.1 billion yuan respectively (Figures 29 and 30). These figures have grown by 4.8 times and 8.7 times, respectively, compared with a decade ago, and have been achieved by considerable development.

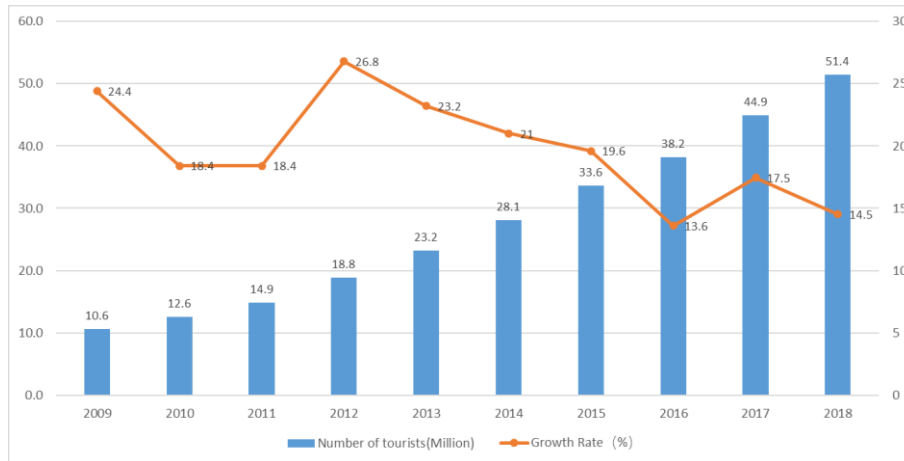
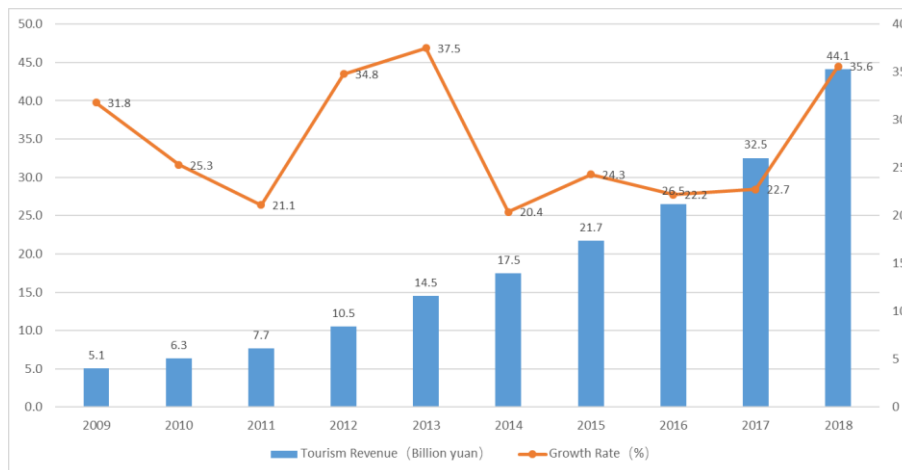


Figure 29: The total number of tourists in Xiangxi and the growth rate in 2009-2018.

Adapted from the *Statistical Communique of the National Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi Prefecture* issued by Xiangxi Statistics Bureau from 2009 to 2018.



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Figure 30: The total annual revenue in Xiangxi and the growth rate in 2009-2018.

Adapted from the *Statistical Communiqué of the National Economic and Social Development of Xiangxi Prefecture* issued by Xiangxi Statistics Bureau from 2009 to 2018.

### 5.2.3.2 Problems in the development of tourism in Xiangxi

Although the tourism industry in Xiangxi has made great progress, due to various factors the tourism industry in Xiangxi also faces some outstanding problems.

- The pace of tourism development is relatively backward

In 2008, compared with the surrounding cities of Zhangjiajie, Enshi, Huaihua and Tongren, the number of tourists and tourism revenue in Xiangxi were only ranking second after Zhangjiajie. In the following 10 years, Zhangjiajie has firmly highlighted its dominant position in the tourism industry, and continuously enhanced the comprehensive competitiveness of the market through various means, making the tourism industry flourish, and so it is always in the leading position. At the end of 2017, the number of tourists in Zhangjiajie reached 72.5 million, and the tourism revenue was 62 billion yuan, respectively 1.6 times and 1.9 times the figures for Xiangxi. Enshi has actively created A-level scenic spots and increased marketing efforts by accelerating the standardisation of scenic spots. The tourist arrivals and tourism revenue of Enshi had already surpassed that of Xiangxi in 2011. In 2017, it reached 51.33 million visitors and 36.75 billion yuan, respectively 1.15 times and 1.07 times the figures for Xiangxi. Huaihua proposed the strategic concept of building a strong tourism city. By improving the functions of tourism services, improving the quality of cultural tourism, and expanding the source market, the tourism industry has achieved rapid development. Its tourism revenue surpassed that of Xiangxi in 2010, and its tourist numbers surpassed those of Xiangxi in 2011. In 2017, it reached 50 million visitors and 35 billion yuan, respectively 1.12 times and 1.09 times the figures for Xiangxi. Tongren's tourism industry has continued to grow strongly. Its tourist numbers and tourism revenue surpassed Xiangxi in 2011. In 2017, it reached 64.66 million visitors and 51.79 billion yuan, respectively 1.5 times and 1.6 times the figures for Xiangxi. In 2017, the number of tourists and tourism revenues in Xiangxi



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ranked the last among these five cities.

- The characteristics of tourism products are not prominent and the phenomenon of homogenisation is serious

After the success of Fenghuang Ancient City, other areas in Xiangxi such as Jishou, Longshan and Huayuan also followed with ancient city tours which are very uniform and the similarity between them is very high. However, the combing and recovery of culture is particularly lacking in tourism planning. For tourists, it is hard to be impressed by the same ancient city landscape and so it lacks long-term appeal. The lack of deep exploration of culture has led to a lack of tourism boutique projects. So far, there is no 5A-level tourist attractions in Xiangxi.

- In the external propaganda, the brand's overall publicity is insufficient

Modern society has entered the Internet age, and science and technology have become the main driving force for the development of the world's tourism industry. Nowadays, people are accustomed to surfing the Internet to check the information about tourist destinations, and book tickets, hotels, restaurants and other services online. "Internet tourism" has become an important means of promoting tourism products. Comparing the four surrounding tourist cities, it is noticeable that they have already built their own tourism brands. For example, Zhangjiajie regards the "National Forest Park" as its main brand, and Tongren's external tourism propaganda brand is "Pure Land of Buddhism". In overall brand building, Xiangxi still has a certain gap compared with the surrounding four tourist cities. For example, the information about the tourist attractions in Xiangxi is relatively scattered. At present, an official website has not been created for Xiangxi Tourism, which is also unfavourable for the creation of Xiangxi tourism brands. In the past, Xiangxi proposed the tourism brand "Mysterious Xiangxi", but there is a problem of brand image dispersion in external publicity. Each county and city only pay attention to their own tourism brands, instead of establishing a unified Xiangxi tourism brand. As a result, the overall brand image of "Mysterious Xiangxi" was replaced by sub-brands such as "Phoenix World". In addition, the brand

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image is vague, and the tourism brand lacks a symbolic attraction to make people think of Xiangxi. In addition to the ancient city of Fenghuang, the recognition of other scenic spots in Xiangxi is not clear enough, and there is no iconic attraction for the spread of a tourism image.

➤ The development of tourism specialty products is insufficient

First, the integration of local specialty products and tourism products is insufficient. At present, there are more than 500 enterprises involved in the production of tourism commodities in Xiangxi, among which the most famous commodities are liquor, tea, kiwifruit and ginger sugar. Although these products have the characteristics of Xiangxi, due to the lack of commemoration, culture and artistry it is difficult for producers to improve the taste of tourism products and for the commodities play the role of tourism products. Second, the economic benefits of tourism commodities are low. Xiangxi has formed a number of professional villages for the production of tourism commodities, such as the hometown of bamboo weaving, the hometown of brocade, and the hometown of Miao embroidery. However, most of them are handmade, complicated in process and inefficient. Third, the shopping routes for tourist goods have not been formed. There are some shopping malls for tourists in Xiangxi, such as Xiangquan Liquor Shopping Mall and Baisha Chrysanthemum Stone Carving Market. However, it has not formed a sales network, and has not yet developed a relatively complete tourist route with shopping content.

➤ The tourism market environment and order are not standardised

In recent years, Xiangxi has made great efforts to rectify the tourism market in, for example, the rectification of illegally operated travel agencies and tour guides, as well as the operation of performance venues and shopping venues that do not conform to the regulations. Although it has achieved certain results, the chaos of the tourism market still exists. For example, unreasonable low-price tourism has caused vicious competition in the tourism market, and the quality of tourism services is low, which has a negative impact on the tourism market in Xiangxi. Therefore, it is still necessary

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to further strengthen the continuous improvement of the tourism market, safeguard the rights of tourists and legitimate tourism enterprises, and promote the healthy development of the tourism market.

➤ The tourism industry lacks tourism talent

Modern society has entered an innovative stage, and the tourism industry has also developed towards being an innovative industry which requires relevant practitioners to have higher quality and innovative ability, and also means that the requirements for managers and technicians are higher than before. At present, Xiangxi is quite lacking in tourism talent (Wu, 2016). Judging from the tourism professionals in tourism enterprises, the degree of tourism enterprise management talent in Xiangxi is mostly at junior college or secondary school education level, and there are very few highly educated professionals in tourism. Service personnel are mainly junior high school graduates, and the talent education structure is extremely uncoordinated. There are 900 licensed tour guides in Xiangxi, among whom only 20 are intermediate tour guides, and there are no senior and special tour guides. Most of them are Mandarin guides with a small number of foreign language guides, who cannot meet and adapt to the rapid development of tourism and affects the overall reception level of the tourism industry in Xiangxi (Yang & Meng, 2017).

The demand for professional talent in the construction and development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi is very urgent. Faced with increasingly cruel market competition, Xiangxi needs to introduce a large number of talented professionals. Especially in the process of tourism internationalisation, it is necessary to vigorously introduce and train a group of comprehensive tourism talents who are proficient in foreign languages, and skilled in ethnic culture. It is also necessary to increase the training of existing employees in the professional skills of tourism management and market operations.

### 5.3 Suggestions on the sustainable development of Xiangxi's eco-cultural tourism industry

Combined with the external environment and the internal environment of the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry of Xiangxi in this chapter, the SWOT analysis of the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry from the political, economic, social and other aspects is as follows (Table 5):

Table 5: The SWOT analysis of the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry

|                      |               |  |
|----------------------|---------------|--|
| External environment | Opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ National and local policies and laws support the tourism industry in Xiangxi.</li> <li>➤ The sustained development of the national economy has gradually promoted eco-cultural tourism.</li> <li>➤ The rapid development of high-speed railway provides convenient transportation for tourism development.</li> <li>➤ The development of technologies such as the Internet has brought tremendous development to the tourism industry.</li> </ul>   |
|                      | Threats       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The support of national and local policies and laws has also led to increasingly fierce competition in domestic markets. The speed of the development of tourism in Xiangxi has been surpassed by surrounding tourist cities.</li> <li>➤ National and local policies and laws place higher demands on relevant standards for tourism.</li> </ul>  |
| Internal environment | Strengths     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Xiangxi has abundant natural resources and cultural resources.</li> <li>➤ Since the reform and opening up, the construction of infrastructure and services in Xiangxi has been greatly improved.</li> <li>➤ At present, Xiangxi has launched a number of tourism products with certain market influence.</li> <li>➤ The Xiangxi Government regards tourism as one of the pillar industries. Through nearly 30 years of development, tourism has become one of the leading industries in Xiangxi.</li> </ul>   |
|                      | Weaknesses    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Compared with the surrounding tourist cities, the development speed of tourism in Xiangxi is relatively backward.</li> <li>➤ The characteristics of the existing tourism products in Xiangxi are not prominent, and the phenomenon of homogenisation is serious.</li> <li>➤ Ethnic cultural tourism products lack deep exploration and enrichment.</li> <li>➤ The tourism brands in Xiangxi are not concentrated enough, and the overall publicity in the external propaganda is insufficient.</li> <li>➤ The environment and order of the tourism market in Xiangxi are not standardised.</li> <li>➤ The tourism industry lacks tourism talent.</li> </ul> |

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Tourism is a comprehensive pillar industry that continues to grow at a high speed and is in a stable state in the world economy. Many countries or regions regard it as a strategic choice for rapid economic development. For more than a decade, Xiangxi has actively followed the trend of economic development, vigorously implemented a tourism industry-driven strategy, and achieved remarkable results. However, due to various factors, the tourism industry in Xiangxi also faces some outstanding problems. In the next 5-10 years, in order to achieve the scientific and sustainable development of eco-cultural tourism, Xiangxi should continue to follow the pace of development of the world tourism industry, adopt sustainable development measures, and give full play to the decisive role of the market in resource allocation and the role of government macro-control.

➤ Carry out scientific planning and further increase the protection of tourism resources

In the process of tourism development, it is suggested that the relationship between development and protection needs to be carefully handled. It is also necessary to adhere to the principle of “reasonable development, effective protection, and sustainable use” to ensure the sustainable development of tourism. First, protect tourism resources, establish tourism resource protection institutions, formulate tourism resource protection plans, and formulate protection regulations for key scenic spots to ensure that there are laws to follow. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen the environmental remediation and supervision of scenic spots, and create a good environment for tourists. In addition, the protection of natural ecological resources must be strengthened. For example, it is forbidden to indiscriminately dig and hunt in scenic spots, so that the vegetation is not destroyed and the water is not polluted; this protection could create conditions for the development and construction of high-grade tourist areas. The second is to plan tourism resources. The whole prefecture should formulate an overall tourism industry development plan, review it regularly and make adjustments to make it more objective and practical. On this basis, all counties and cities should also compile tourism industry planning to avoid duplication and similarity of tourism products in the prefecture, to form a reasonable tourism development layout.

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➤ Further optimise the tourism development environment

At present, many cities in China are paying great attention to the development of tourism which has led to fierce tourism competition. Although Xiangxi's natural tourism resources have certain advantages, compared with several neighbouring cities the influence of some high-quality scenic spots in Xiangxi has not been fully utilised. Only a better environment and policies can attract capital and talent to increase the speed of tourism development.

First, the government environment should be optimised. Government departments at all levels should change their functions, reduce the administrative examination and approval items that are linked to tourism enterprises, and create favourable investment and business environments.

Second, the traffic environment should be optimised. A convenient, fast, safe and comfortable tourist transportation network can be formed by further strengthening the construction of tourist roads. In addition, the transportation connections between the various tourist attractions need to be optimised, and the traffic conditions around the main tourist attractions need to be improved to increase the accessibility of the main attractions. In short, through good road planning, the connection between the urban road traffic network and the main tourist attractions will be realised, forming a smooth, complete and fast tourist transportation network.

Third, the market environment needs to be optimised. Tourism must adhere to the principle of equal emphasis on development and management, and regulate the tourism market through a sound system to ensure that tourism law enforcement has a solid basis. In view of the current chaotic situation in the tourism market in Xiangxi, law enforcement supervision needs to be strengthened, and the tourism business behaviour that does not conform to the law and regulations should be severely cracked down on according to law, and the unfair competitive behaviour between tourism enterprises should be eliminated. Give full play to the positive role of industry associations and clubs in regulating market order. Strengthen tourism regional

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cooperation, jointly cultivate an open tourism market, and form an internationally competitive eco-cultural tourism circle.

Fourth, the tourism service environment should be optimised. Comply with the new trend for the integration of tourism and informatisation, and gradually eliminate the gap between tourism information services in Xiangxi and developed tourism regions. Guided by tourists' satisfaction, an efficient and convenient information service platform should be developed, including tourism information centre, tour guide service centre, tourist vehicle service centre, travel complaint centre, and travel ticket centre to provide tourists with a full range of tourist information services.

➤ Increase publicity and strive to build a tourism brand in Xiangxi

An overall brand awareness should be established for the prefecture as a whole, to rationalise the regional tourism relationship between counties and cities, improve the structure of tourism products, and develop brand clusters. By highlighting the tourism characteristics and themes of various places, the situation of isolation and homogenisation of Xiangxi tourism scenic spots and tourism products could be broken. For example, Fenghuang Ancient City could highlight the “Cultural Tour”, the Jishou Dehang could highlight the “Ethnic Customs Tour”, and the Mengdong River could highlight the “Ecological Tour”. It is necessary to establish a sense of quality and tourism brands to enhance market influence and attractiveness. At present, there is no 5A-level tourist attractions in Xiangxi, with most attractions being 3A-level. Therefore, it is necessary to speed up the application for the world heritage status of Fenghuang Ancient City, which could help create a 5A-level tourist attraction, and create a 4A-level tourist attraction such as Furong Town, Mengdong River, and Zuolong Gorges.

Regarding branding, when Xiangxi was not fully developed ten years ago, it was mysterious to the outside world. Therefore, Xiangxi tourism was publicised as “Mysterious Xiangxi”. Nowadays, the communication of information is highly developed, and the veil of the mysterious Xiangxi has been gradually lifted. Now the

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propaganda of Xiangxi tourism is positioned as “Charming Xiangxi”. Since Xiangxi has two main ethnic minorities which are Tujia and Miao, it has launched a new brand image for its tourism featuring these two ethnic minorities which could fully demonstrate the history, culture, ecological environment, geography, ethnic customs of Xiangxi to tourists.

➤ Invite investment and innovate business models

In the study of China’s ethnic tourism development model in section 3.9.3 , Chen and Zeng (2011) have summarised the current status of China’s existing ethnic tourism development and classified it into six types, including family-led businesses and various combinations between government, company, community, and residents. In the past few decades, most of the tourism resources in Xiangxi were controlled by the government, which has to perform administrative functions as well as market management functions. Therefore, the operating mechanism lacks vitality. From the analysis of the external industry environment in Xiangxi, it is found that due to the encouragement of national policies, about 30 provinces and cities have taken tourism as a pillar industry. In addition, the four ethnic tourist attractions around Xiangxi also make the competition very fierce. Therefore, the “Family+Family” mode has been unable to compete. The development of Xiangxi tourism for more than ten years has also proved that the introduction of large companies to operate tourist attractions has not only introduced funds but also introduced excellent management talent and advanced management experience, which can make tourism develop rapidly and in standardised forms. Therefore, as it lacks company participation, the “Government+Community+Residents” model is not suitable. Other models, such as “Company+Community+Residents”, “Community+Residents+NGOs” and the “Shareholding system”, do not involve government, which may lead to overexploitation and over-commercialisation, and may impact on the authenticity of local culture due to lack of policy support and overall planning. This is unfavourable for the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi. Currently, the main tourist attractions, such as Fenghuang Ancient City and Aizhai Bridge, have adopted the



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“Government+Company+Community+Residents” model to introduce the company’s investment and develop tourist attractions while separating the ownership and management rights of the attractions. It turns out that after adopting this business model, the number of tourists and amount of tourist revenue in the tourist attractions have increased rapidly. Regardless of the model, it is necessary to introduce investment and continuously innovate the model.

In terms of attracting investment, the government should first deal with the interests of investors and scenic area residents, on the one hand to ensure the interests of residents, on the other hand, to address the worries of investment developers. Secondly, it is necessary to simplify the examination and approval procedures, and implement preferential policies such as tax reductions and exemptions. A variety of investment methods, such as joint-stock, joint venture, and sole proprietorship, can be used for participating in the development and construction of the tourism industry, forming a situation in which the government and enterprises jointly develop tourism resources and bring them to the market.

➤ Strengthen the cultivation of professional talent

First of all, a strategic plan for the training of tourism talent should be developed. Give full play to the role of tourism vocational colleges in Xiangxi and make overall planning for talent cultivation. Secondly, in the construction of the talent team, the focus is on the construction of middle- and high-level talent. There are three basic talents in Xiangxi tourism industry, namely tourism administrative management talent, tourism enterprise management talent, and tourism service talent. Cultivating and absorbing high-level talent can continuously enhance the strength and core competitiveness of Xiangxi tourism industry. Thirdly, it is necessary to establish and improve a working mechanism for talented tourism professionals who are full of vitality. For example, tourism enterprises could routinely carry out vocational skills training, technical grade recognition and skills competitions to promote the improvement of vocational skills of employees. In addition, there is a need to strengthen exchange and cooperation with the tourism industry in other regions. The

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business and service concept can be continuously improved through tourism exchange and talent training. For example, domestic experts and scholars could be invited to come to Xiangxi for a lecture on tourism.

Promoting the training and cultivation of professional tourism talent, on the one hand, is intended to improve the quality of tourist attractions, and on the other hand, it is necessary to consider the cultivation of local minority people. Although the tension between state regulation and ethnic community autonomy, as proposed by Yang and Wall (2009), is not strong in Xiangxi, increasing the tourism participation of the ethnic people is an effective way to reduce the tensions existing in ethnic tourism. Therefore, in all the suggestions made above, it is necessary to increase the training of local ethnic people.

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## Chapter 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

A tourism industry that takes ethnic eco-cultural tourism as a product is an important part of the tourism economy, which not only has a very high value contribution to economic and social development, but also is a strong driving force for industry development and social progress in minority areas. Promoting the sustainable development of the ethnic eco-cultural tourism industry has far-reaching significance and broad prospects. At present, there are relatively few studies on the development of the ethnic eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi. Hunan is my hometown, and Xiangxi, as Hunan's largest minority area, is relatively underdeveloped. Therefore, I chose Xiangxi as my research object, hoping to demonstrate the feasibility of the sustainable development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in my hometown.

This chapter presents a summary of the research, and its implications, as well as the limitations of this research and the outlook for future research.

### 6.2 Research summary and implications

The purpose of this research was to explore the difficulties and problems in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi by analysing factors such as geography, nature, ethnic society, history and culture, economy and tourism in Xiangxi. Following from that analysis, a strategy suitable for the development of eco-cultural tourism was made in order to promote the sustainable development of eco-tourism in Xiangxi. This research broke down its objectives into the following sub-goals and steps.

*1. To assess the general situation of Xiangxi and the development status of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.*

This research first summarised the natural resources, history, economy, society, cultural development, and tourism development of Xiangxi by collating the materials related to these topics. Then, through the literature review, the concepts and theories related to ethnic eco-cultural tourism were expounded, and the research on ethnic tourism from China and

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from foreign countries was compared. Combining reality with theory, the general situation of Xiangxi and the development status of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi has been set out. That is, Xiangxi has abundant tourism resources, beautiful natural landscapes, strong folk customs, and great development potential.

Eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi has begun to take shape, and research into its ethnic eco-cultural tourism has also made certain achievements. However, compared with elsewhere in the industry, there are certain gaps.

## *2. To analyse of the difficulties and problems in the development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.*

In order to identify the problems existing in the development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi, this research has collected and collated relevant data in various fields in China, and locally in Xiangxi, from the past ten years, and analysed the internal and external environment of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi.

The external environment research is divided into two parts which are the external macro environment and the external industry environment. The study of the external macro environment is mainly composed of a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the four aspects of politics, economy, society and technology. From the past ten years, the Chinese Government has formulated a series of policies and regulations which show that the Chinese Government attaches great importance to ethnic cultural tourism and is fully committed to promoting the development of China's ethnic cultural tourism industry. This provides an important opportunity for the development of the eco-cultural tourism industry in Xiangxi. From the collection of relevant local policies, it was found that local governments use national policies as a guide and reference to formulate a series of local policies and regulations based on local conditions. The economic environment is an important indicator of tourism development. This research first analysed three sets of data: China's GDP and growth rate for 2009-2018, the national tourism annual income and growth rate for 2009-2018, and the total number of domestic tourists and growth rate for 2009-2018. Then it further analysed the economic development of Hunan Province.

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Finally, the positive impact of the social environment and technological development on tourism has been analysed. The external industry environment analysis mainly compared Xiangxi with the surrounding four tourist destinations with abundant tourism resources, to understand the existing competitive threats and gaps.

Finally, combining that work with the analysis of the internal environment of the development of the Xiangxi ethnic eco-cultural tourism industry, including resources, economy, and tourism development, the research set out the opportunities, threats, strengths, weaknesses and existing problems of developing eco-cultural tourism through thematic analysis and SWOT analysis presented in Table 5.

*3. To formulate the strategy suitable for the sustainable development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi.*

Through the analysis undertaken in the previous two steps, this research finally elaborated a development strategy for the sustainable development of ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi, and proposed specific measures for the problem.

The basic strategy is to carry out scientific planning and further increase the protection of tourism resources. In the process of tourism development, the relationship between development and protection must be properly handled, and the principle of “reasonable development, effective protection and sustainable use” must be adhered to, so as to ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry. On the one hand, the establishment of the tourism resource protection agency and the formulation of the tourism resource protection plan ensure that there are laws to follow in order to achieve the protection of natural and cultural tourism resources. Secondly, it is necessary to formulate the overall development plan for the tourism industry, review it regularly, and make adjustments to make it more objective and practical.

Many cities in China attach great importance to the development of tourism, so competition in the tourism industry is fierce. Through this research, it has been found that although the natural tourism resources in Xiangxi have certain advantages, compared with several tourist cities around it the impact of some of the high-quality scenic spots in

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Xiangxi has not been fully utilised. Only by creating a better environment can Xiangxi attract the funds and talent needed to increase competitiveness. Based on the actual situation, the research proposes optimising four aspects of the environment: government environment, transportation environment, market environment and tourism service environment.

In terms of building a tourism brand, Xiangxi needs to have an overall brand awareness. This requires a global perspective to rationalise the relationship between tourism regions within Xiangxi, improve the structure of tourism products, and develop a brand cluster. Because there are two major ethnic minorities, Tujia and Miao in Xiangxi, it is best to highlight the characteristics of these two ethnic minorities to promote the tourism brand image. In this way, the history, culture, ecology, and ethnic customs of Xiangxi can be fully displayed.

In addition, in the past few decades, most of the tourism resources in Xiangxi were controlled by the government, and they had to perform both administrative and market management functions. Therefore, the operating mechanism lacks vitality. Through the practice of tourism development in recent years, it has been proved that the introduction of large companies to operate tourist attractions can not only introduce capital, but also introduce excellent management talent and advanced management experience, which could help improve the quality of tourist attractions in Xiangxi. When attracting investment, it is not only necessary to provide convenience to investors, but it is also necessary to pay attention to ensuring the interests of residents.

Finally, in view of the lack of tourism talent in the tourism industry, it is proposed to strengthen the training of professional talent, including the formulation of strategic plans for the training of tourism talent, strengthening the construction of middle- and high-level tourism talent, and establishing a vibrant tourism talent working mechanism.

### **6.3 Limitations and future research**

Since no field visits were made in this research, all data were obtained from secondary sources, and the results of the analysis were also based on these secondary data. Therefore,

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the accuracy and timeliness of certain information is relatively weak. However, this problem can be addressed by obtaining data from a variety of different perspectives, and carrying out careful comparisons and verification to ensure the accuracy of the data as much as possible. Secondly, the research did not conduct interviews or questionnaires, so it was not possible to understand some of the existing ideas and opinions of local tourism companies, practitioners or residents. Finally, there are some statistics that are inconsistent or even contradictory, which may be due to differences in statistical time or dimensions. In addition, even different levels of tourism management use different data for the same items in the published documents, which creates certain difficulties for analysing the data. It is assumed that the statistics are inconsistent because some statistics related to economic development or industry indicators have been exaggerated. In this case, the researcher carefully checked and used data released by the most authoritative institutions; for example, data on GDP and growth rate, annual tourism income and growth rate, total number of tourists and growth rate are all from the bulletins issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the China Tourism Academy, and the Xiangxi Statistics Bureau.

Regarding the future research on ethnic eco-cultural tourism in Xiangxi, the present research can be expanded and detailed in the following ways:

- Research on the impact of tourism development on the residents of ethnic minority areas. Taking minority residents as research objects, from the perspective of the continuation of ethnic culture, future research could: analyse their current and future lifestyle choices; analyse the influence of tourism development on the lifestyle choices of ethnic minorities in positive and negative terms, and its adverse effects on ethnic tourism; and further explore the model of sustainable development.
- Research on the sustainable development of industrial diversification in Xiangxi. Future research could scientifically explore the development model combining tourism with agriculture, forestry, mining, ethnic medicine, tea planting, and ethnic handicraft manufacturing, etc., to provide local residents with a variety of sources of employment and continue the inheritance of cultural development, which in turn protects the region's resources sustainably.

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- Research on the protection and continuation of ethnic cultural heritage. Based on the research of residents and industries, future studies could explore the best model for the protection and continuation of ethnic cultural heritage. In the context of vigorous development of eco-cultural tourism, this work could integrate science and technology into heritage protection and tourism development to build and extend the ethnic tourism industry chain.



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