

# Does **ethnic tourism** benefit ethnic minorities in Yunnan?

Province in **Southern China**, bordering Tibet, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar. Was (and partly is) very **isolated** for centuries due to difficult terrain; thus **underdeveloped**, but **culture and traditions were preserved** <sup>5</sup>

China's greatest **cultural diversity** <sup>15</sup>

**25** ethnic minorities <sup>15</sup> **8** autonomous prefectures <sup>15</sup>

Largest: Yi  
Others: Bai, Hani, Lahu,  
Mosuo (Naxi), Tibetan...

Tourism is significant for the economy, especially **ethnic tourism** →

"a form of tourism that is motivated by visitors' search for **exotic cultural experiences** through interaction with distinctive **ethnic groups**" <sup>16</sup>

Yunnan has many ethnic minority parks / "villages" for tourists, including <sup>15</sup>

Yunnan Nationalities Village  
Kunming

Dai Park 傣族园  
Xishuangbanna

Focus area:  
**Yunnan**

Tourism development is considered by China a **key industrial policy** <sup>7</sup>

and a "**smoke-less**" industry (issues are often overlooked) <sup>13</sup>

Contribution to GDP: **Tourism in China**

**3,94** trillion CNY <sup>vv</sup>

**2,5 %** direct contribution (**9 %** total contribution)

<sup>11</sup> **9% of jobs**

Are indirectly supported by the tourism industry



Reduces regional **economic disparity** <sup>6</sup>

**1**

Are the **policies** effective to protect minorities from exploitation?

**1949 - PRC founded** <sup>7</sup>

Almost 0 domestic tourism  
Int. tourism limited to officials

**1978- Open door policy** <sup>7</sup>

International tourism allowed  
1,299 visitors in Yunnan <sup>17</sup>

**Exponential growth in tourism numbers**

**1995** Recognized as "one of 4 pillars of development" in Yunnan <sup>7</sup>

**2005** 34.78 million visitors (Yunnan) <sup>17</sup>

**Policy is based on market demand**

→ Minorities are not included in policy making <sup>10 17</sup>

Minorities are deemed "illiterate"

→ Environment is neglected <sup>17</sup>

Only in 1993 was sustainable tourism included in policy <sup>12</sup>

**Policies are devised by Han**

-> even though ethnic minorities make up nearly 40% of population of Yunnan

Research on environmental impacts are lacking

- ✘ The **money** from tourism often **goes to middle men**, not the community <sup>3 4 15</sup>
- ✘ Tourism can **change ideas** of **ethnic identity** <sup>2 10</sup>
- ✘ Some locals worry that their culture is being **commodified** <sup>15</sup>
- ✘ Policies tend to **favor economic aspects** over socio-cultural <sup>7 12</sup>

**On the other hand..**

**2**

Does ethnic tourism marginalize "authentic" minority culture?

→ Case study: Dai Park & Mosuo Village

**Sexualisation of minority groups**

- 1: Female performers of the Dai minority tourist site managed by Han company <sup>1</sup>  
=> "Hip-bumping dance" performance, which is NOT a Dai custom <sup>1</sup>
- 2: Both women and men of the Mosuo minority  
- Portrayal of "lovely" women in tourism ads (See image); also some names of the local businesses: "girls", "princesses", "beauties" (p. 723) <sup>16</sup>  
- Encourages presence of sexual workers of both genders. <sup>9</sup>  
Which are all in conflict with the "real" Mosuo values: locals are traditionally shy and sex-related discussions are a taboo <sup>16</sup>

**Acknowledgement from the outside world**

-Following the tourism boom, the Yunnan minorities have become popular choices for scholarly research and art adaptations <sup>16</sup>

- Approval from the PRC government: re-allowing the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and the native Daba religion <sup>16</sup>

**Impacts**

- 1: Intergroup tensions:  
Dai people vs Dai Park management <sup>1</sup>  
also migrant entrepreneurs vs Mosuo locals <sup>16</sup>
- 2: Tensions within one minority community: traditional vs capitalist values <sup>16</sup>  
Or: does tourism strengthen the cultural identity of minorities groups and lead to mutual understanding? By providing the environment for minorities to consolidate their identity and bridge with the rest of the world, eventually providing capital for the minorities to protect their cultural integrity. <sup>16</sup>

**"Staged authenticity" or "cultural adaptation"?**

Example: Requirement to wear traditional clothing when engaging in tourism activities, redesigning of traditional clothing <sup>16</sup>

Should this act be viewed as unauthentic, or a genuine, creative cultural adaptation from the Mosuo themselves? <sup>16</sup>

**3**

Does the **profit** from tourism benefit the minority groups?

→ Case study: Yunnan Nationalities Village

fund minority education. <sup>18 15</sup>

**Evaluation**

Tourism can help people

- Learn skills
- adapt to city life
- gain work opportunities

Needs improvement:

- Treatment of staff (i.e. dormitories)
- Promotion opportunities for minority staff
- Include ethnic minorities in important positions

**70% minorities** <sup>15</sup> **STAFF**

→ Minorities often employed in **less secure, low pay jobs**

→ **0% disagree** "tourism provides more jobs"

**33%** "unfair wages"

**7,5 %** "fair wages"

Most agree that **the park promotes development and living standards.**

Economically successful:  
**15 million visitors (2007)**  
**25 replica villages**

Many **return to their hometown** and **start their own business** with gained experience. Moreover; the government revenue from the park is **used to**