

Original Paper

Dissemination of Ethnic Cultures of Characteristic Villages in Guangxi from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization

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Received: July 13, 2022

Accepted: August 18, 2022

Online Published: August 22, 2022

doi:10.22158/assc.v4n3p71

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v4n3p71>

Abstract

Currently, in the implementation stage of China's rural revitalization strategy, the cultivation and construction of characteristic villages is of great significance. On the basis of reviewing the relevant research on characteristic villages, this study deeply analyzes the problem that ethnic cultures have not played a sufficient role in the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi, while proposing two key points in the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi, i.e., the activation of ethnic cultures of characteristic villages in Guangxi, and the aggregation of cultural dissemination talents, so as to collaboratively promote the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi.

Keywords

characteristic village, rural revitalization, ethnic culture, dissemination

Fund Project

"Research on Dissemination Tactics for Guangxi's Ethnic Cultures under the Background of Rural Revitalization Strategy"—A Philosophy and Social Science Planning Research Project of Guangxi in 2021 (21FXW007); "Research on Development of Red Culture Publishing Resources in Guangxi"—A Key Project for Social Science Think Tank of Guangxi in 2021 (Zkzdk-67).

1. Introduction

In 2009, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Finance jointly launched a protection and development pilot for minority-characteristic villages ("characteristic villages"). Since then, a large number of characteristic villages have been cultivated with distinctive residential features, rich ethnic cultures, strong industrial support and harmonious ethnic relations. So far, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission has organized three batches of naming and listing of "Chinese Minority

Characteristic Villages”, and 59 villages in Guangxi have been selected as “Chinese Minority Characteristic Villages”. In the construction of characteristic villages, these 59 villages have achieved certain results in promoting the excellent culture of ethnic minorities in Guangxi, carrying out ethnic folk tourism, protecting traditional ethnic minority houses, cultivating rural characteristic advantageous industries, improving people’s production and living conditions and levels, and consolidating ethnic unity. Currently, in the implementation stage of China’s rural revitalization strategy, the cultivation and construction of characteristic villages is of great significance. The rural revitalization strategy is just purposed to stimulate the vitality and creativity of rural development and create a beautiful rural life with civilized rural customs, lovely ecology, prosperous industries and affluent life, so as to realize the comprehensive development of the countryside and completely eliminate the backwardness of rural areas. Therefore, it can be said that the construction of characteristic villages has played a positive exemplary role in rural revitalization and development.

When all walks of life across the country vigorously promote the strategy of rural revitalization and build characteristic villages, many scholars have conducted in-depth research on characteristic villages from the perspective of their respective disciplines. These studies have either discussed the common problems with characteristic villages or analyzed some cases of characteristic villages. They mainly cover theoretical construction research on the protection and development of characteristic villages, on the practical strategies for protection of characteristic villages, on the ethnic cultures of characteristic villages, and on the economic development of characteristic villages. In 2014, the Economic Development Department of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission published *the Series Books on the Protection and Development of Chinese Minority Characteristic Villages*, which provides strong guidance for the research and practice of the protection and development of characteristic villages. Among the books, *Research on the Experience in Protection and Development of Chinese Minority Characteristic Villages* demonstrates, in a more truly manner, the successful experience of carrying forward the traditional ethnic cultures, promoting the transformation of industrial structures, and boosting the economic and social development of ethnic areas in the construction of many characteristic villages in China. Professor Li Zhongbin has been engaged in the study on characteristic villages for nearly ten years, with a series of in-depth and influential academic achievements delivered, such as *Construction of Minority Characteristic Villages and the Development of Ethnic Cultures*, *Theoretical Discussion, Effect Evaluation and Policy Innovation Research of Construction of Minority Characteristic Villages* and others. They conduct profound theoretical discussions in terms of the index systems for selection of characteristic villages with cultures as the core, the policy innovation for cultural industries in construction of characteristic villages, and other aspects, while proposing some innovative theories, such as the books of “Townization of Villages”, “Ternary Interaction”, “Balloon Effect, Consolidation of Bases and Expansion of Borders” and “Digital Property Rights of Ethnic Cultures”. Based on the field investigation in five Yao ethnic villages in Guangxi, Zhong Xuesi explored the factors affecting the efficiency of tourism poverty-alleviating resources’ allocation among

characteristic villages in ethnic areas, and put forward certain policy suggestions for promoting the optimal allocation of tourism poverty-alleviating resources in Yao nationality characteristic villages in Guangxi in the following four dimensions: governmental functional agencies, tourism operation enterprises, community and social organizations, and tourism-participating individuals.

In summary, while rich results are acquired in the protection, development and practice of characteristic villages in various places, the theoretical research on characteristic villages also deliver some influential academic achievements. However, the theoretical research on the construction of characteristic villages is still lagging behind, with some deficiencies: First, the development of characteristic villages is not integrated closely enough with the rural revitalization strategy; second, discussions on the construction of characteristic villages pays more attention to rural tourism, but ignoring the research on the development of agricultural characteristic industrialization; third, although many scholars have paid attention to the important roles of ethnic cultures in the construction of characteristic villages, their discourses are mainly concentrated on the level of case analysis, lacking more in-depth theoretical elaboration. Based on this situation, this study will, from the perspective of the rural revitalization strategy, explore the endogenous mechanism of the coordinated development between ethnic culture dissemination and characteristic village construction in Guangxi, reveal the effective dissemination paths of ethnic cultures, and then provide helpful references for the construction of characteristic villages in ethnic areas as well as the rural revitalization. Therefore, it is more innovative to carry out this study from the perspective of Rural Revitalization Strategy, and it has more practical guiding significance to put forward the dissemination path of ethnic culture based on the case of characteristics villages in Guangxi.

2. Weak Driving Force of Ethnic Cultures of Characteristic Villages in Guangxi

The excellent traditional ethnic cultures are an important resource for building up a powerful ethnic culture area. Guangxi is rich in ethnic cultural resources. In the hard development of the habitants of 12 ethnic groups, they have formed the characteristics of ethnic cultures with profound accumulation, diverse forms, distinctive features, openness and tolerance. However, in the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi, the issue that the ethnic cultures have not played their functions sufficiently is prominent, mainly manifested in the following two aspects.

2.1 Weak Individuality of the Ethnic Cultures

The shaping and dissemination of characteristic villages' ethnic cultures are not "characteristic". In the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi, the characteristic ethnic cultural resources and advantages of each village have not been highlighted, lacking the characteristic shaping of ethnic cultures, and thus resulting in aesthetic fatigue. So the development and construction of rural characteristic cultural industries in the characteristic villages cannot be effectively promoted.

This situation is showcased in the following three aspects: First, some models for development of villages' ethnic cultural industries are simply copied, leading to the sameness and the lack of innovation.

Some villages even follow the trend of building up Internet-influencer card-punching spots, leading to the homogeneous replication of villages and no differentiated advantages of characteristic villages. If the geographical advantages in terms of the village history, cultures and people's living habits are not fully exploited, there will be a lack of endogenous driving force for the development of the villages, eventually leading to ephemeral consequences. Due to the above reasons, some of the 1,652 named minority characteristic villages in three batches across the country have found they are in insufficient development stamina or stagnation. Second, ethnic cultures are showcased intensively in the major ethnic festivals of villages, so the rendering and dissemination of ethnic cultures have not formed a normalized mechanism. There are no good echoes between major ethnic festivals of local villages and their excellent traditional cultures as expressed in daily production and life, so no synergistic dissemination effect can be delivered. Often, some characteristic villages will gather all their ethnic cultural resources to carry out grand celebrations during their major ethnic festivals. For example, from May 15th to 17th, 2008, the first Young Crops Festival celebration was held. In addition to the traditional sacrificial ceremonies of the Wa ethnic group, such events as ethnic history and culture exhibition, ethnic matrix parade, wooden drum pulling by thousands of persons, artistic performances and others were organized. However, after the all-out carnival feasts, even the ethnic culture exhibition halls of some villages were closed immediately. So, how may characteristic traditional cultures can be presented in daily life? Third, the ethnic cultural personality of the characteristic villages does not demonstrate strong cohesion. There is a lack of deep exploration, refinement and presentation of the villages' cultural relics, ethnic cultural resources and intangible cultural heritages, and no unique ethnic cultural brands of the villages have been formed. Brands bring out vitality, competitiveness and recognition. Without the brand differentiation strategic idea of "I have what other do not have; I have the better things than what others have; and I have things more special than the excellent things of others", it is impossible to show the personality features of ethnic cultures of characteristic villages. Of course, the shaping and refining of the ethnic cultural personality proposed here is not something "specially" created in a grandstand manner to attract the public; instead, it is the uniqueness of ethnic cultures that is generated from the inside of the ethnic villages themselves.

2.2 Lack of Human Resources

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward the strategy of strengthening the country with talents, pointing out that "talents are the strategic resources to realize national rejuvenation and win the initiative in international competition." Therefore, talents should be the key to the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi as well as an important resource to realize rural revitalization. But in reality, the lack of human resources is the key problem hindering the current construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi. The talent structure for the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi should include not only such management talents as grass-roots government and village cadres, but also the traditional folk forces, such as new rural sages, village elders and tribe influencers. However, with the deepening of the urbanization process, the rural

population have transferred to cities in large scales, and a large quantity of new rural sages with high cultural level, strong ability, open mind and technical knowledge have left the countryside, resulting in the increasingly scarce talent resources for the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi. Similarly, more and more young adults are leaving rural areas for cities, leading to a large-scale outflow of rural talents from ethnic areas. So the phenomenon of hollowing out in the countryside is increasingly prominent, gradually driving some villages into a vicious circle that *the more backward, the fewer talented people will be retained; and the fewer talents, the more the areas will fall behind*.

Moreover, in the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi, the important role of traditional folk forces such as village elders and tribe influencers is often overlooked. Village elders and tribe influencers own deep knowledge and feelings about the inheritance, development and dissemination of the ethnic cultures of their villages, while having a certain prestige in their villages. So they play the role of opinion leaders of their villages. Their attitudes, views and participation in the construction of characteristic villages would directly affect the choice and action of related villagers. In reality, however, their power has not been effectively and fully explored, integrated and exerted, and they have not formed a kind of consciousness to participate in the construction of characteristic villages. Of course, in the construction of characteristic villages, the vast majority of villagers are the direct participants, builders and beneficiaries; and they are the subject for dissemination of ethnic cultures of villages and the key to the construction of characteristic villages. However, in the real world, because government and other relevant agencies pay insufficient attention to the role of villagers in the construction of characteristic villages and the villagers themselves have certain limitations, many problems have appeared, such as low enthusiasm of villagers to participate in the construction of characteristic villages, few opportunities to participate in the construction, and low service levels.

3. Innovate the Dissemination Path of Ethnic Cultures and Help Revitalize the Characteristic Villages of Guangxi

While enjoying the fruits of reform and development, villages shall constantly stimulate and enhance their own endogenous dynamics and improve their self-developing ability. The construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi shall rely on Guangxi's rich ethnic cultural resources, explore the excellent elements and characteristics in traditional ethnic cultures of each village, take ethnic cultures as the driving force for the construction of characteristic villages, expand the channels for the dissemination of excellent traditional ethnic cultures, and help the revitalization of characteristic villages in Guangxi.

3.1 Activation of the Ethnic Cultures of the Characteristic Villages in Guangxi

In the historical development of the characteristic villages across Guangxi, due to differences in ethnic origin, geographical and natural environment, and social and economic development conditions, these villages have formed their own distinct traditional ethnic cultures, which are contained in their residential buildings, food, clothing, production methods and life styles, among other aspects. The

existence of traditional ethnic cultures is the foundation for the generation and continuation of the villagers' sense of happiness, satisfaction, locality and settlement, and it is also the basis for the realization of rural revitalization. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to and give full play to the role of traditional ethnic cultures in the revitalization of characteristic villages in Guangxi.

Based on these analyses, this paper puts forward the viewpoint on activating the ethnic cultures of the characteristic villages in Guangxi, which mainly includes understandings at three levels. First, the excellent traditional ethnic cultures of the characteristic villages shall be presented in the actually daily production and life of the villagers, and shall neither be put on the shelf to become a museum-style display nor be showcased only in major ethnic festivals of villages. Only when the excellent traditional ethnic cultures are deeply rooted in, generated from, and manifested across the lives of villagers, the ethnic cultural tourism, and the development of agricultural industrialization, may they become a dynamic and sustainable endogenous driving force for the revitalization of characteristic villages. Second, the construction of characteristic villages is not simply to excavate and compile ethnic cultures, nor simply to protect and restore characteristic residential buildings. Rather, it is to use the ethnic cultures contained in the villages as an element to develop the economy and promote the revitalization of villages and their people. In other words, there should be a mutually associating and promoting relationship between the construction of characteristic villages and the ethnic cultures of villages. In addition, now that ethnic cultures are regarded as an element in the construction of characteristic villages, it is necessary to highlight their distinctiveness by shaping individuality, building brands, and making differentiated strategies. Only by deeply exploring and forming the uniqueness of characteristic villages from such aspects as the connotation, expression and industry development mode of ethnic cultures, may it be possible to fundamentally solve the problem that "characteristic villages has no characteristics". Third, the people of characteristic villages have created their ethnic cultures, while consuming such cultures. That is to say, the ethnic cultures of characteristic villages is not eternal, but is constantly enriched and changing with historical fluctuations, social and economic developments and their own evolvement laws. It is inadvisable to stick to all traditional ethnic cultures, which should be made into dynamic traditional ethnic cultures that adapt to the development of the times and satisfy the requirement of the construction and revitalization of characteristic villages. In addition, the government should strengthen macro-guidance to deliver a large-scale effect by forming "a long chain" or "connected blocks" between characteristic villages, so as to forge an overall atmosphere for ethnic cultural characteristics.

3.2 Assemble Cultural Dissemination Talents and Promote the Construction of Guangxi's Characteristic Villages in a Coordinative Manner

The Marxist proposition that talents are the decisive factor for economic and social development and come from the masses and other basic principles, as well as Deng Xiaoping's incisive claim that "whether China's affairs can be done well... the key lies in talents", fully demonstrates that talents are the core and foundation of all activities. Undoubtedly, talents are the key to the success or failure of the

construction of characteristic villages. Since rural areas are less attractive than cities, the phenomenon of brain drain is serious. So, how to retain talents? How to attract talents to feed back to their hometown? This is the key to the construction of characteristic villages.

Although in the process of rural construction, cases are often seen that successful people donate and invest in their hometowns or scholars voluntarily join the construction of cultural hometowns after retirement, there is a lack of mature mechanisms for encouragement and motivation. Such cases are just actions called by the nostalgia by chance. Therefore, local government should make corresponding policies to establish a normalized mechanism for introducing and absorbing talents, so as to attract, encourage and motivate talents to return to and back-feed their hometowns by actively participating in the construction of characteristic villages. In particular, it is necessary to attract the cultural people, economic talents, technical backbones and highly respected retired people who have moved out from the countryside, so that they can become “new rural sages” in the construction of characteristic villages in Guangxi. These talents are well familiar with the ethnic cultures of their hometowns, with profound insights into compiling, refining and remodeling the traditional ethnic cultures of their villages, while holding certain objective and scientific judgments on how the rural ethnic cultures can boost the economy and productivity. Therefore, only by assembling the talents for the dissemination of ethnic cultures of villages, driver “new rural sages” to back-feed the villages, and cultivating the reserve force of the young-adult generation with the influence of “new rural sages”, may the effective and sustainable development of the construction of Guangxi’s characteristic villages be truly promoted. Of course, in a broad sense, talents should include the people of the characteristic villages, who are the creators, sharers, inheritors and disseminators of the ethnic minorities’ cultures of the characteristic villages. The villagers’ identification with their own ethnic cultures and the establishment of their cultural self-confidence can form the cultural consciousness of inheriting and disseminating their ethnic cultures, and is of great significance for the construction of characteristic villages. Therefore, it is necessary to give full play to the strong power of the people in characteristic villages, so as to jointly create the revitalization of characteristic villages.

In addition, during the construction of characteristic villages, the relationship between the development law of ethnic cultures and the economic interests should be properly processed. Over recent years, in the context of the integrated development of culture and tourism, some villages have vigorously developed ethnic cultural tourism programs to glean economic benefits. In order to highlight their “characteristics” and attract the public’s attention or enhance the public’s sense of experience and interest, some villages have even added improper “ingredients” or “flavors” in their original simple and authentic traditional ethnic cultures. For example, some villages’ tourism projects simulate local ethnic wedding events by inviting tourists to perform their wedding customs together. Male tourists are invited into the villages’ storied buildings to act as “bridegrooms” in “weddings”. In the “Wedding Festivity” section, such male tourists are forced to give the “brides” an amount of “meeting and greeting money”. This kind of off-odor wedding custom performance uses stimulating the senses of

tourists as a gimmick, seriously deviating from the original intention of the folk custom display and misleading the public's cognition and understanding of the village folk cultures. Therefore, in the construction of characteristic villages, on the one hand, it is necessary to deeply excavate ethnic cultural resources and protect, develop and disseminate ethnic cultures in a scientific manner; on the other hand, when excavating ethnic cultural resources, it is necessary to pay attention to screening and selecting the ethnic cultures suitable for development and dissemination. The development and leverage of the traditional cultures of characteristic villages cannot be completely focused on the acquisition of profits for the purpose of realizing capital appreciation. Otherwise, villages' status, significance and value will be degraded in the hearts of the villagers, while the villagers' respect and love for their own hometowns will also be destroyed. As a result, their original sense of security, belonging, cohesion and identity would be gradually replaced with the feelings of anxiety and loss.^[9]

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, rural revitalization is the pivot to China's social and economic development. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "Rural revitalization requires not only shaping, but also building a soul." The cultivation and construction of characteristic villages is an important initiative to implement the rural revitalization strategy. Therefore, following the instructions of General Secretary Xi Jinping, in the process of rural revitalization, we should deeply explore how to protect and inherit the ethnic cultures carried by the characteristic villages and retain the ethnic cultural memory, while innovating the ethnic cultures of the characteristic villages, mining and giving play to the tension of ethnic cultures, and creating a characteristic village industry chain. Of course, the premise of building characteristic villages properly must be in-depth investigations, so as to objectively, comprehensively and deeply explore ethnic cultural resources; and in turn, ethnic cultural resources shall be integrated, outstanding traditional ethnic cultural characteristics be refined, and the spirit and connotation of ethnic cultures reshaped. In this way, the dissemination of unique ethnic cultures will boost the development of such villages' advantageous industries. Making and implementing policies according to the villages' local conditions would help truly realize the revitalization of characteristic villages in Guangxi!

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