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A Review of the Design and Enhancement of Pastoral Culture Creativity in Chinese Rural Ecotourism

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Abstract

Chinese rural ecotourism is of great significance to promote rural revitalization. As Chinese consumers' requirements for rural ecotourism gradually increase, seeking the integration of regional characteristics of pastoral culture elements is the top priorities of Chinese rural ecotourism attractions. The creative design of pastoral culture is a breakthrough point in creating characteristic rural ecotourism attractions and truly developing China's rural economy. Based on this, this paper sorts out the current situation of China's rural ecotourism attractions, and puts forward feasible suggestions for the design and improvement of future pastoral culture creativity in China's rural ecotourism.

Keywords: Chinese rural ecotourism; pastoral culture; creative design; enhancement initiatives

1 Literature Review

The concept of rural ecotourism originated in Europe and has a history of more than 100 years. After years of development, international rural ecotourism has formed a relatively mature model. From the perspective of the development practice of rural ecotourism, there are mature models such as "manor vacation mode" in Europe, "compound agricultural park mode" in Singapore and "energy conservation and environmental protection theme mode" in Japan. In contrast, the development of China's rural ecotourism started relatively late. The rise of China's rural tourism in the late 1990s has played an important role in optimizing rural industrial structure, narrowing the gap between urban and rural income, promoting rural employment, driving the development of relevant industries and increasing cultural exchanges between urban and rural areas. After 2019, China's rural ecotourism has entered a stage of rapid development, but at the same time, there are problems such as tourism products with sameness, low grade and shallow cultural connotation.

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Chinese scholars have different views on the definition of rural ecotourism. Some believe that rural ecotourism is a form of tourism that takes the countryside as the background, pays attention to ecological environment protection or has prominent positive ecological effects [1]. Others believe that rural ecotourism is a special kind of tourism activity that takes the countryside as the background, nature and rural culture as the resource base, and the concept of ecological civilization as the core orientation, tourists enjoy nature and culture while having a clear purpose of understanding and learning about nature and culture, as well as the responsibility of conservation [2]. Although these definitions have certain differences, their connotations show common characteristics, that is, based on the rural background.

Although Chinese scholars differ in classifications of rural ecotourism development types or development models, having certain common characteristics in essence, namely, all types or models are carried out and implemented in the form of certain tourism projects relying on physical and non-material conditions such as local natural scenery, local customs, folk traditions and various specialties. On the basis of the above conditions, the creative design of pastoral culture is implemented to integrate cultural elements into rural ecotourism projects, providing a platform for tourists to feel rural culture. From a practical point of view, although the concept of pastoral culture has been integrated into the sustainable development of rural ecotourism, the understanding of the creative design of pastoral culture still remains at the level of natural ecology and does not closely link with local culture. At the same time, it leads to the lack of regional pastoral cultural characteristics of tourism projects, which limits the development of scenic spots.

Based on this, combing the development history of pastoral culture creative design in Chinese rural ecotourism and the current situation of Chinese rural ecotourism scenic spots, systematically analyzing the deficiencies and shortcomings of Chinese current rural ecotourism spots from the perspective of pastoral culture creative design, this paper proposes the entry point and enhancement measures of pastoral culture creative design in building rural ecotourism spots in the future, which has very important guiding significance for improving the overall development level of Chinese rural ecotourism and revitalizing rural economy.

2 Pastoral Culture Creative Design

2.1 The Concept of Pastoral Culture

The concept of pastoral culture can be interpreted from three aspects: literal, contextual and modern.

2.1.1 Literal Interpretation

According to the explanation of *An Chinese Unabridged Comprehensive Dictionary*, pastoral refers to the cultivated fields and gardens, also refers to the countryside with natural scenery. Network survey data shows that consumers choose rural ecotourism and rural ecotourism attractions, in the most basic psychological needs, that is, “close to nature and back to the original ecology”. Especially for people living in the city, facing the traffic and heavy work life, who often more eager to life state with leisurely and carefree. Therefore, returning to rural life is the inner desire of modern people, and then choosing rural ecotourism destinations based on pastoral culture as places to relax.

2.1.2 Contextual Interpretation

To understand the pastoral culture from the context, the ancients expressed their yearning for pastoral life in landscape paintings and idyllic poems. No matter dignitaries or ordinary people, they all liked to build private gardens. In ancient times, the private gardens of dignitaries were large in scale, especially Gardens of South China with unique characteristics, leaving abundant landscapes. For ordinary people, although the courtyard is small, it is also taken care of in a unique way, creating a leisurely place to rest. In this contextual sense, in the development of rural ecotourism, the countryside can be understood as a reconstructed pastoral landscape. And the culture embodied is pastoral culture.

2.1.3 Modern Interpretation

With the advancement of industrialization and urbanization, the rapid spread of information technology, modern pastoral culture has integrated the symbols of urban elements and modern elements, not only retaining the beautiful environment of the original ecology, but also having convenient transportation, handy communication and various comfortable living support services and facilities, thus constituting pastoral culture that integrates modern urban civilization.

2.2 Development of Pastoral Culture Creative Design in China's Rural Ecotourism

The development of pastoral culture creative design in China's rural ecotourism can be divided into the following three stages.

2.2.1 Budding Period (from 2012 to 2014)

In 2012, China first put forward the concept about developing culture to drive rural development, in promoting the integrated development of urban and rural culture, increasing the total amount of cultural services in rural areas and narrowing the gap between urban and rural cultural development, encouraging enterprises and social organizations to adopt various ways to establish culture, tourism and sports in rural areas. To a certain extent, this shows that the awareness of promoting tourism through culture has gradually been formed and applied in practice. In 2014 and 2015, China's economic development continued to focus on the construction of rural culture and its role. The important feature of this phase is the initial formation of the ideology that rural areas identify with the concept of culture-led industry and that pastoral culture is crucial to the development of rural tourism.

2.2.2 Growth Period (from 2015 to 2019)

In 2015, China proposed to actively develop a variety of agricultural functions, explore the value of rural ecological leisure, tourism and cultural education; support the construction of a number of villages and towns with historical, regional and ethnic characteristics of the special landscape tourism, to create a variety of diversified and distinctive rural tourism leisure products; promote the integrated development of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries in rural areas. Relying on the resources of rural natural environments, pastoral scenery, local culture and other resources, vigorously develop leisure and vacation, tourism, health care and pension, creative agriculture, farming experience, rural handicrafts, etc., making it an emerging pillar industry for prosperous rural areas and wealthy farmers. We can also vigorously develop rural characteristic industries such as culture, technology, tourism, ecology, etc., and revitalize traditional crafts. From the development direction of this stage, it can be seen that pastoral cultural and creative industries have gradually become the backbone of rural industry development. The integration of Internet, culture, tourism and ecology fully reflects regional culture and promotes the development of featured towns, pastoral complexes and modern production bases. Thus realizing the trinity of rural ecology, culture and tourism, embodies the characteristics of the times of the development of pastoral cultural and creative industries. During this period, a large number of demonstration scenic spots emerged in various places. But also exposed some problems, the most obvious problem is rural ecotourism products homogeneity, having a negative impact on consumers' aesthetic.

2.2.3 High Growth Period (Since 2019)

After 2019, rural ecotourism in China has shown strong momentum despite the impact of COVID-19. Especially during the epidemic period, the relevant infrastructure construction and cultural elements should be further improved to promote high-quality rural ecotourism. In 2021, China comprehensively promoted rural revitalization as a major task of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The CPC and society made concerted efforts to accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural areas so that farmers can live a better life. To this goal, the in-depth implementation of pastoral cultural creativity and enhancing the development level of rural ecotourism are breakthroughs to achieve rural industry revitalization. During this period, various localities had introduced policy measures to promote the development of rural ecotourism. Due to this,

leisure farms, characteristic towns, rural folk customs and boutique hotels have shown a rapid growth trend. Policy support from governments at all levels, coupled with technological innovation, especially the support of digital technology, had provided opportunities for the development of pastoral cultural creativity. At this stage, rural ecotourism scenic spots throughout the country attached great importance to pastoral culture and vigorously developed cultural and creative industries, which was the most prosperous stage for the creative concept of pastoral culture. But the rapid development brought many disadvantages, and the resulting abuse of culture and destruction of natural environment was also very serious.

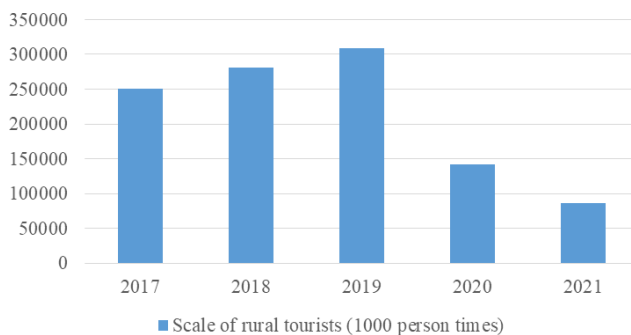


Fig. 1 Scale and growth rate of rural tourists in China from 2017 to 2021

3 The Current Situation of Rural Ecotourism in China

3.1 Types and Modes of Rural ecotourism Scenic Spots in China

China’s rural ecotourism sites can be divided into four major categories according to types, and six models according to the implementation of tourism projects.

3.1.1 Four Major Types

China’s rural tourist attractions are divided into four categories according to the cultural characteristics they contain: Eco-Culture, Folk-Culture, Red-Culture and Historical-Culture. These four types have their own characteristics and can attract people with different needs for consumption.

3.1.2 Six Modes

According to the different tourism projects in rural tourism, rural tourism is divided into six modes: Sightseeing Mode, Cultural Experience Mode, Technology Interactive Mode, Science Education Mode, Accompanying Gift Mode and Parent-child Interaction Mode.

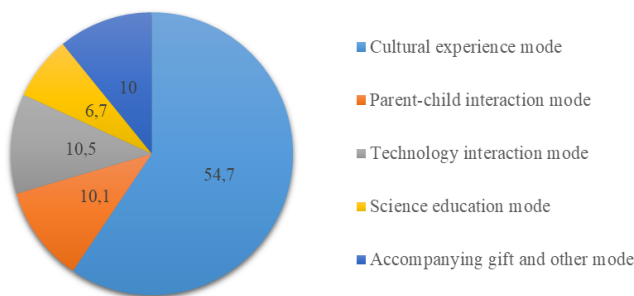


Fig. 2 The Proportion of China’s Rural Ecotourism Project Mode in 2020

Table 1 Four major types

Type	Introduction
Eco-Culture	This category is based on the region's regional specialties, natural environment and architectural style to develop a series of tourism projects. Where there are special products in each region, corresponding cultural festivals are held. At present, there are more than 200 agricultural cultural festivals of various types in China, which is the most common form of pastoral cultural and creative projects.
Folk-Culture	This type is based on the traditional culture and customs of the region to develop a series of tourism projects. Making full use of the unique local cultural traditions, traditional festivals or activities are carried out to provide more opportunities for tourists to participate and experience the local traditions and customs, in order to promote the development of local rural ecotourism. For example, there is the Water-splashing Festival of the Dai people in Yunnan Province. In addition, for local traditional skills, it is like a wordless historical book, recording and recreating the distant production life, evoking nostalgic remembrance and reverence for ancestors.
Red-Culture	This type of element is based on the local Chinese red culture. Through the existing museums or exhibition halls, the red stories and heroic characters are vividly displayed, and the great achievements of revolutionary predecessors and national heroes during the war are truly reproduced, so that the revolutionary history is vivid and full. This type is especially suitable for patriotic education for Chinese teenagers and enhances their patriotic feelings. At the same time, for the elderly in China, the red cultural scenic spot provides them with an emotional outlet to reminisce about the past and remember their old friends.
Historical-Culture	The most representative elements of this type are the ancient buildings such as academies, ancestral halls, temples, theaters, and granaries left in historical villages. Combined with the historical stories of local celebrities and famous masters and the unique local architectural styles, the ancient village buildings, natural environment, historical and cultural elements, literary works, and emotional elements in film and television dramas are restored to real scenes to attract tourists.

3.2 Existing problems

3.2.1 Blind Development and Repeated Forms

There are thousands of eco-rural tourist attractions in China. At present, many tourist areas are blind to follow the trend of development. A large part of the scenic spots is just mechanically copied from other scenic spots on the basis of the original agriculture, making a little modification in order to publicize and receive tourists. The tourism projects of these attractions are highly repetitive and the same as other attractions. Therefore, the transformation has not been successful.

3.2.2 Lack of Cultural Confidence and Regional Characteristics

Many rural ecotourism scenic spots lack their own pastoral cultural characteristics. In order to cater to consumers' urban living habits, the design of catering, accommodation and other supporting facilities has been programmed, which has lost the regional characteristics. The operators in these areas lack cultural self-confidence. Therefore, the scenic spots lack of local flavor, loss of market competitiveness.

3.2.3 Outstanding Seasonal Differences in Scenery

Due to the limitations of their own conditions, some rural ecotourism scenic spots in China have obvious seasonality. For example, the snow villages in the northeast are full of tourists when it snows every winter, which

Table 2 Six modes

Mode	Introduction
Sightseeing Mode	The sightseeing mode is the basic mode of all rural tourist attractions. Relying on the regional countryside scenery, fresh climate, unique geological features and green ecological space, the scenic spots provide a series of services such as rest, vacation, entertainment and catering for tourists.
Cultural Experience Mode	The experience mode is based on the different types of scenic spots. For example, the ecological and cultural scenic spots will develop picking, viewing, hand-made and other projects with local specialties, so that tourists can actually contact agricultural production and farming culture; folk culture and historical culture can be based on different types. The historical story atmosphere provides costumes and props, so that tourists can experience immersive experiences.
Technology Interactive Mode	According to the degree of modern facilities in the scenic spot, we should develop interactive tourism projects with a strong sense of science and technology.
Science Education Mode	The science education mode is a popular model among Chinese consumers nowadays. Due to the rapid urbanization in China, teenagers' access to farming culture has been drastically reduced, so the usage of rural ecological scenic spots to popularize and educate teenagers about agricultural technology enables the young generation to know and love farming.
Accompanying Gift Mode	According to its own cultural characteristics, the scenic spot designs and develops unique travel companion gifts. This model will impress consumers and play a very important role in conducting the scenic spot.
Parent-child Interaction Mode	Some scenic spots specially develop parent-child activity programs, so that children can fully enjoy the joy of traveling.

exceeds the load of the scenic spots and causes huge pressure on the environment and ecology. In summer, there are fewer tourists, with a waste of supporting facilities, which limits the expansion of the scale of rural tourism, showing the importance of the overall design and planning of the early scenic spot.

3.2.4 Weak Inheritance of Local Cultural Heritage

Many villages in China have their ancient cultural heritage and valuable intangible cultural heritage. However, due to the remote geographical environment and low economic level of these places, it has caused the outflow of young and middle-aged labor and the lack of cultural heritage. When developing local rural ecotourism, these scenic spots should pay attention to the in-depth excavation of local intangible cultural heritage, attract consumers through characteristic culture, and drive local economy through tourism, thereby attracting young people to inherit local culture, realizing a virtuous circle and realizing rural revitalization towards common prosperity.

3.2.5 Lack of Brand Awareness

The vast majority of China's rural ecotourism sites lack brand awareness and are negligent in establishing their brand images, especially in the design of scenic support facilities. Non-standard visual effects pull down the level of the scenic area, but also limit the development of the scale of the scenic area.

3.2.6 Lack of Professional Talents and Weak Awareness of Environmental Protection

Some of China's rural ecotourism attractions currently have a weak awareness of environmental protection. Blind development has caused great damage to the local natural environment and cultural environment. The extreme shortage of professionals engaged in overall planning and design has resulted in the loss of rare resources.

4 Design Entry Point and Improvement Measures of Pastoral Culture Creativity

Through the previous review of the current situation of China's rural ecotourism scenic spots and the analysis of the existing problems, for the future construction of China's rural ecotourism scenic spots, the following entry points and suggested measures are put forward from the perspective of pastoral culture creative design.

4.1 Precise Positioning of Pastoral Culture Creativity

The premise of implementing the creative design of pastoral culture is to have a deep grasp of the regional pastoral culture, integrate ourselves into this cultural atmosphere, and determine the positioning of creativity through systematic thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to go deep into the countryside to understand and perceive the local pastoral culture from both material and non-material aspects, and conduct systematic field investigation and research from multiple aspects of clothing, food, housing and transportation, and visit village sages and retired cadres as well as some intangible cultural inheritor. Understanding pastoral culture in an all-round way and accurately identifying the entry point of pastoral culture creativity based on the systematic analysis of research data is the fundamental to improve pastoral culture creative design. In the design of details, in response to the more refined, individual and diverse consumption needs of tourists, on the basis of integrating own resources and characteristics, according to the different consumption needs of tourists, they are effectively integrated and packaged to develop a series of free and random featured customized products such as "semi-self-service day tour", "one-person group" and "travel at any time". It should start with all-round details such as time, mode, price, etc. to meet tourists of different consumption levels.

4.2 Determine the Creative Theme of Pastoral Culture According to Local Conditions

Every village in China has its own unique regional natural ecological conditions, as well as the characteristics of village culture, especially in ethnic minority areas with ethnic customs and architectural styles. In the process of pastoral cultural creative design, we must start from our own cultural characteristics, and if necessary, discuss with local relevant departments, village committees, and village representatives to accurately determine the theme type of pastoral cultural creative design, such as village stories. This story can be a mythical story handed down from ancient times, or an inspirational story from ancestors, or it can be told around local characteristic buildings or special products, focusing on creating a unique contextual atmosphere and avoiding same projects, to leave a unique and deep impression on consumers. This is the core, soul and sustainability of developing rural ecotourism projects.

4.3 Strengthen the Immersive Emotional Atmosphere in Pastoral Culture Creativity

With the rapid advancement of information technology and the continuous updating of digital technology, the concept of immersive experience has become popular, and consumers are paying more and more attention to their own experience of consumer products. This is also a new demand for tourism products. The rural ecotourism project should give full play to its own advantages and meet the needs of consumers. According to the characteristics of tourism projects, relying on digital modern technology, expand the physical experience beyond visual perception, enhance the richness and novelty of tourism projects, so that tourists can enhance their sense of participation and interaction. Of course, the immersive experience is not blindly relying on high-tech means, but under the support of reasonable technological means, making use of local natural advantages and relying on local regional cultural stories, to create tourism special projects, such as role-playing, real-life experience. It can impress visitors, achieve empathy, and find the feeling of being there.

4.4 Pay Attention to Brand Creation in Pastoral Culture Creativity

For a brand, its original function was to distinguish identity and attribution of proof, and it gradually evolved into one of the most important elements in business. Good brand packaging can stand out in the market and

occupy a certain position in the minds of consumers. Therefore, to develop rural ecotourism for pastoral culture creative design, it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of brand creation, which is the top priority of pastoral culture creative design in the future. Therefore, to create a brand attraction of rural ecotourism, it is necessary to give full play to the pastoral culture creative design, and to adopt a corresponding and standardized visual identification system throughout the whole process of rural ecotourism, especially the design specifications of supporting facilities in scenic spots, such as parking and public toilets, striving to design the overall visual cleanliness and standardization of the scenic spot. After the establishment of the brand system is completed, the image of cultural IP will be created, the cultural IP system will be gradually improved, the concept of cultural IP will be formed, and the recognition degree of scenic spots by consumers will be strengthened. The standardized visual system will also more meet the pace of The Times, and the rural ecological tourism scenic spots will be built into standardized scenic spots that can be connected with the world.

4.5 Focus on Industrial Integration in Pastoral Culture Creativity

Rural ecotourism can protect local landscapes, revitalize cultural resources, lead the way of life, create cultural creative products and give rise to industrial integration. Therefore, in the future, the creative design of pastoral culture should have a large-scale view, jumping out of the rural ecotourism product project itself, constantly exploring and creating related industries, and realizing the integrated development with other industries. Especially in China's economically underdeveloped areas, tourism has driven the development of catering, homestays, education, handicrafts and other industries, achieving an effective connection between expansion and consolidation of poverty alleviation achievements and rural revitalization.

4.6 Strengthen Educational Elements of Pastoral culture creativity

Combined with the concept of edutainment, the publicity of pastoral culture, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, the publicity of patriotism education, environmental protection and resource conservation are integrated into the cultural creative design of the scenic spot to strengthen education for teenagers. It is also an effective measure to promote the sustainable development of ecotourism and the harmonious development of human and nature.

4.7 Attach Importance to Professional Personnel Training

The construction of China's rural eco-tourism scenic spots, whether it is the inheritance and exploration of regional culture or the cultural and creative design of scenic spots, requires the participation and planning of professional talents. Therefore, local governments should pay attention to the reserve and introduction of talents, especially the cultivation of young talents. While creating local tourism projects and promoting economic development, it can also play a role in disseminating and inheriting local pastoral culture, which indirectly contributes to the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

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