

The Current Situation of Liangshan Cultural Tourism

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01 Introduction

What comes to mind when thinking of Liangshan, the autonomous prefecture of Sichuan in China? A place of breathtaking scenery or a region rich in cultural heritage? In fact, Liangshan offers both, specifically its cultural tourism economy has experienced significant development over the past six years. According to Jianshi (2021), with the development of economy and society, as well as the gradual improvement of infrastructure—such as transportation and communication—the interaction between the Yi people and other ethnic groups, as well as the outside world, has been steadily strengthened. This has led to the improved standard of living for the Yi People and broadened their perspectives.

Nevertheless, despite these advancements, Liangshan's travel industry continues to face significant challenges. Professor Hou (2024), one of the interviewees in the current study, highlighted ongoing problems of unsustainable and uncoordinated development in the region. For instance, there is marked similarity among tourist attractions, hotels, and other related amenities, which hinders the industry's growth and results in slow development. Thus, it is crucial to explore new approaches and utilize Liangshan's cultural assets to foster more rapid, sustainable, and progressive developments.

The present essay aims to address several challenges facing the current Liangshan's cultural tourism. The preservation and development of intangible cultural heritage, as well as the advancement of the Yi traditional handicraft industry, are related to the beliefs and cultural identity of the Yi people in Liangshan. Moreover, the homogenization of Liangshan's cultural tourism is a pressing problem that potentially diminishes the region's appeal to tourists. Hence, this essay will examine the obstacles encountered in the development of Liangshan's cultural tourism under the current social and economic context.



02 Problems Encountered in Liangshan Intangible Cultural Heritage

Liangshan is home to the Yi people, whose intangible cultural heritage encapsulates the whole historical and cultural development of the region. However, the rapid development of modern progress has placed this heritage in several difficult conditions. If these challenges are not addressed, the people of Liangshan might lose their “soul.”

Bimoism

Changfu Wang (2021), a renowned scholar of Yi history and culture, highlighted in his book *Liangshan Yi Etiquette and Customs* that Bimo, the disseminator and guardian of Yi culture, is central figure in the preservation of Yi heritage. Bimo has copied and safeguarded tens of thousands of classical Yi scriptures, primarily performing rituals to appease the gods and worship ancestors. The Yi people hold Bimo in high esteem, largely due to their belief in animism and Bimo’s ability to send them to their ancestors. A majority of Yi people asserted that the most unique thing in their heart is their religion–Bimo. Professor Hou (2024) also noted that Bimo enables people to overcome their fear of disease and death, which profoundly influences the Yi people’s unique understanding on life and mortality.

Nowadays, there have been increasing efforts to promote Bimo culture through various channels. Yet, some inheritors of Yi culture, particularly those from older generations, struggle to accept certain modern adaptations of Bimoism. For example, Wolong Qubi (2024), a Bimo culture professor, observed that some individuals were performing Bimo singing and healing rituals in a hot pot restaurant. While younger generations view this as a method to raise awareness of traditional Yi culture, Professor Qubi (2024) argued that such practices show disrespect to the Bimo, contradicting with its revered figure in Yi society. This example demonstrates the differing perspectives on how traditional culture should be preserved and inherited, reminding us to maintain respect for cultural essence while blending tradition with modernity.

Yi Character

Another issue is the preservation and propagation of Yi character. Yi character is one of the two ancient scripts still in use today among the six ancient scripts in the world (Hou, 2024). In Xichang, a city in Liangshan, Yi character can be found on street signs and in schools.



However, these signs have not significantly contributed to the promotion of the Yi character. It is informed from the interviewed students that learning the Yi characters is not emphasized in schools: they only learn a few basic characters. Moreover, many Yi people interviewed by the researcher expressed that they can only speak Yi language but cannot read or write in Yi script. This indicates that newer generations are at risk of losing their ability to read and write in their own languages. During a visit to the Siga primary school in July 2024, Principal Riga Axi pointed out that learning Yi character is not prioritized since it is not a subject in China’s college entrance examination, and the extra points awarded for knowledge of Yi culture are decreasing. Consequently, the Yi character faces the threat of disappearing, underscoring the need for greater efforts to encourage the Yi people to use and preserve their written language.

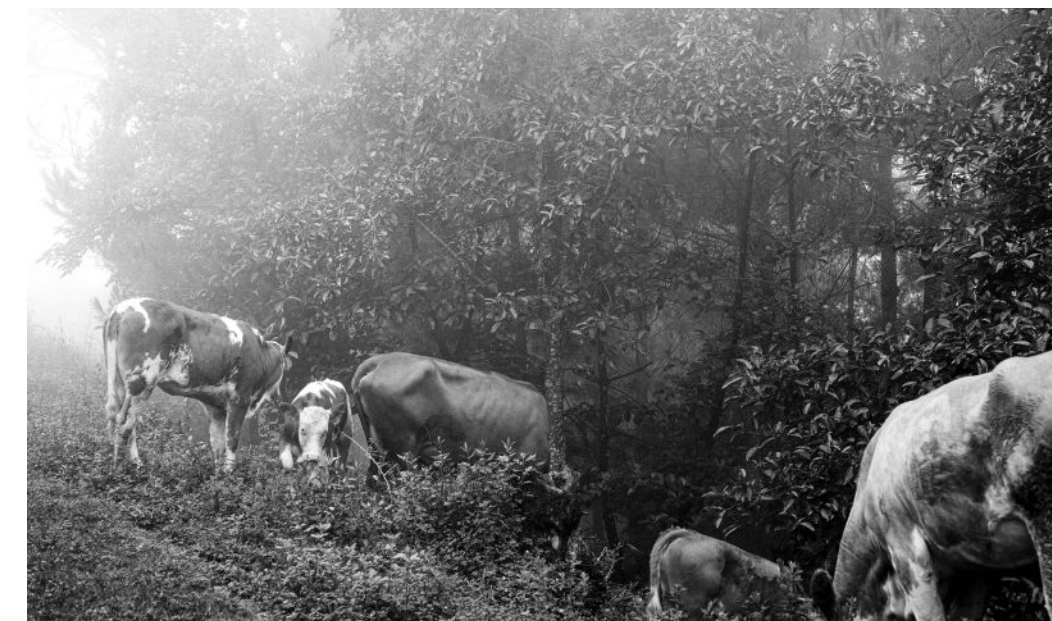




The Current Situation of Yi Culture

Professor Hou (2024) indicated that in the past, Liangshan's mountainous terrain provided a natural barrier that protects the region's culture from outside influence. Today, on the contrary, the once isolated and independent cultural space of Liangshan is destroyed—Liangshan must face the impact of modernization. The living environment, inheritance mechanisms, transmission route, and public awareness of Yi culture have all shown signs of weakening, posing severe challenges to the inheritance of Yi traditional culture (Jianshi 2021). All these factors thereby imply that Yi culture is increasingly marginalized.

Hence, the loss of cultural subjectivity, social inequality, and internal social conflicts are all potential consequences of economic development. As Professor Hou (2024) noted, "civilizations seek common ground while cultures seek differences," emphasizing the need for strategies that can both maintain the uniqueness of Liangshan's intangible cultural heritage and adapt to the demands of modern society.



03 Problems of the Promotion of Yi Traditional Handicraft Industry



Yi's traditional handicraft industry is also a threatening factor affecting its cultural heritage. In the contemporary fast changing fashion trends, fast fashion retailers like Forever 21, Zara, H&M have capitalized on trends through highly efficient supply chains. These retailers produce smaller quantities of a wide variety of products, disrupting the traditional fashion hierarchy (Linden 2016). They also ensure consumer demand, short product cycles, and production runs for the retailer (Linden 2016). To cater the popular demand, numerous Yi traditional garments are now machine-made. Photo-shooting tours offering inexpensive, mass-produced clothes are becoming prevalent in Xichang. As a result, the fast fashion industry has become deeply embedded in daily life, often becoming consumers' first choice of consumption.

Nevertheless, the trend has largely constrained the development of the traditional handicraft industry, which one of the most evident "victims" is the Ayingzi's "Ayingmo" Yi embroidery shop. Unlike the machine-made clothing that is often poorly designed and roughly produced, Ayingzi's embroidered garments are entirely handcrafted. According to Ayingzi (2024), the patterns on these garments are inspired by the combination of nature, everyday life, and the women craft workers' own imagination, making each piece unique. In other words, Ayingzi is dedicated to pass on the traditional Yi culture and empowering women, as all the embroiderers at her shop are women.

So why has the development of Ayingzi's shop been limited? Firstly, Ayingzi is committed to maintaining high production quality, which requires meticulous craftsmanship and patience; each piece of clothing is time-consuming. For instance, a simple piece can take at least a month, while more complicated designs can take up to a year or two. In addition, these garments are expensive, ranging from several thousand RMB to tens of thousands of RMB. This high price point, combined with the long production times, makes the garments unaffordable and less appealing to the average consumer, resulting in a limited and relatively fixed customer base. Ayingzi's clients are typically large companies placing substantial orders at one time, government officials purchasing for work or special occasions, and families customizing for major festivals.

Moreover, Ayingzi's shop has not adapted to modern business practices. To be more specific, Ayingmo operates solely through physical stores, with no online sales channels. The physical layout of the shop also poses challenges: the garments are displayed too closely together, making it difficult for customers to appreciate the unique beauty of each piece of "artwork." Besides, the traditional Yi embroidery clothing is not well-suited for everyday wear due to its traditional design and delicate nature, which makes it difficult to wash. Consequently, the shop lacks visibility and has not integrated into the broader cultural tourism industry.



Ayingzi, Founder of Ayingmo

04 The Challenges of Liangshan Cultural Tourism



In recent years, Liangshan's cultural tourism has made great progress. Yet, the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of this popularity remains unresolved. According to Yinzhong Jia (2016), the author of *Culture of Chinese Ethnic Minorities*, the development of ethnic minority cultural resources should not only create new economic growth opportunities, promote social and economic development, and improve people's quality of life but also enable these cultures to adapt to the changing times, enduring for as long as possible. In other words, while the sustainable development of national cultural resources is necessary, it is crucial to maintain a balance—overdevelopment can lead to the depletion of these resources. Currently, in many ethnic areas, the pursuit of economic gain has led to the overexploitation of ethnic cultural resources, often at the expense of protecting and preserving traditional cultures.

Hotels, homestays, and ancient cities exemplify the issue just mentioned. The primary goal of building hotels and homestays is to attract more tourists. However, excessive pursuit of this purpose might be counterproductive. As Liming Li (2024), the manager of Mercure Hotel and General's Mansion, observed, "All of the hotels mimic each other's hardware conditions, same chain hotels set up closely, resulting in vicious competition." Similarly, Bin Yu (2024), a homestay owner in Queens Village (Dashiban Village), an ancient city in Xichang, noted that there is a row of homestays along the road that all look the same but fail attract many tourists. This problem stems from homogenization. Efforts to appeal to the broader market often focus on factors including sanitization diverse facilities, while neglecting unique characteristics of the Yi nationality. As a result, these hotels and homestays look so similar that they fail to spark tourists' interest.

Furthermore, ancient cities have not effectively contributed to the promotion of traditional Yi culture. During a visit to Jianchang Ancient City, the data collected revealed the presence of six drinks shops and ten tourist photography shops, all of which were modern shops unrelated to Yi culture. Another phenomenon of cultural shops selling common souvenirs like postcards and fridge magnets also revealed similar problem of cultural promotion. A high school student from Chengdu (2024), staying at the Mercure Hotel, expressed her disappointment that the ancient city was no different from others she had visited, offering no novelty. Consequently, homogenization has led to low visitor numbers and an unsatisfactory economic situation.

Another problem with cultural and creative shops, as pointed out by professor Qubi (2024), is the distortion of Yi traditional culture. Specifically, some products are packaged with Yi characters, but in some cases, the characters are printed upside down, leading to misunderstandings of Yi script and culture.

Conclusively, to promote the sustainable development of Liangshan's cultural tourism industry, it is essential to address these issues, make proper use of Yi culture, and identify new economic growth opportunities in the region.



05 Conclusion



In conclusion, this paper has discussed the various challenges facing Liangshan cultural tourism. It has explored three main aspects: intangible cultural heritage in Liangshan, including religion and Yi character; the Yi traditional handicraft industry; and tourism in Liangshan. The research reveals that the subjectivity of Yi culture is gradually diminishing, with ongoing conflicts between traditional and modern culture. Likewise, the marketing channels and customer base for the Yi traditional handicraft industry remain limited. Another major finding of the current research is the homogenization of Liangshan's tourism offerings, along with the obstacles encountered in modernizing traditional Yi culture. This study offers guidance for promoting economic growth in, and that future research could focus on exploring how the preferences of different age groups intersect with the uniqueness of traditional Yi culture.

The present essay highlighted the importance of preserving Yi culture. Given the long history of Yi culture, which embodies both the tangible and spiritual legacies of the Yi people's deep connection to their homeland, we cannot sit still, waiting for the end of its' development. It is our responsibility to ensure this cultural heritage continues to thrive.



06 ACTION PLAN

The present essay puts forward three main proposals to address the problems, including both the cultural and economic aspects. The proposals are aimed from differing angles inspired by the United Nations (2023): decent work and economic growth, quality education, and responsible consumption and production. The present essay anticipates these proposals could help foster a more sustainable development in Liangshan cultural tourism.



1. Provide Souvenirs in General's Mansion

According to Liming Li (2024), the manager of General's Mansion, the hotel is the reformation of a general's house built during the Qing dynasty. As the first resort hotel in Panxi area, General's Mansion is renowned for its high quality. However, as mentioned above, Liming Li (2024) emphasized the issue of hotel homogenization in Xichang, where many establishments mimic each other, leading to a lack of distinctiveness. He also pointed out that although the hotel provides souvenirs for its cooperative partners, these are typically high-end items like exquisite clothing and silver jewelries.

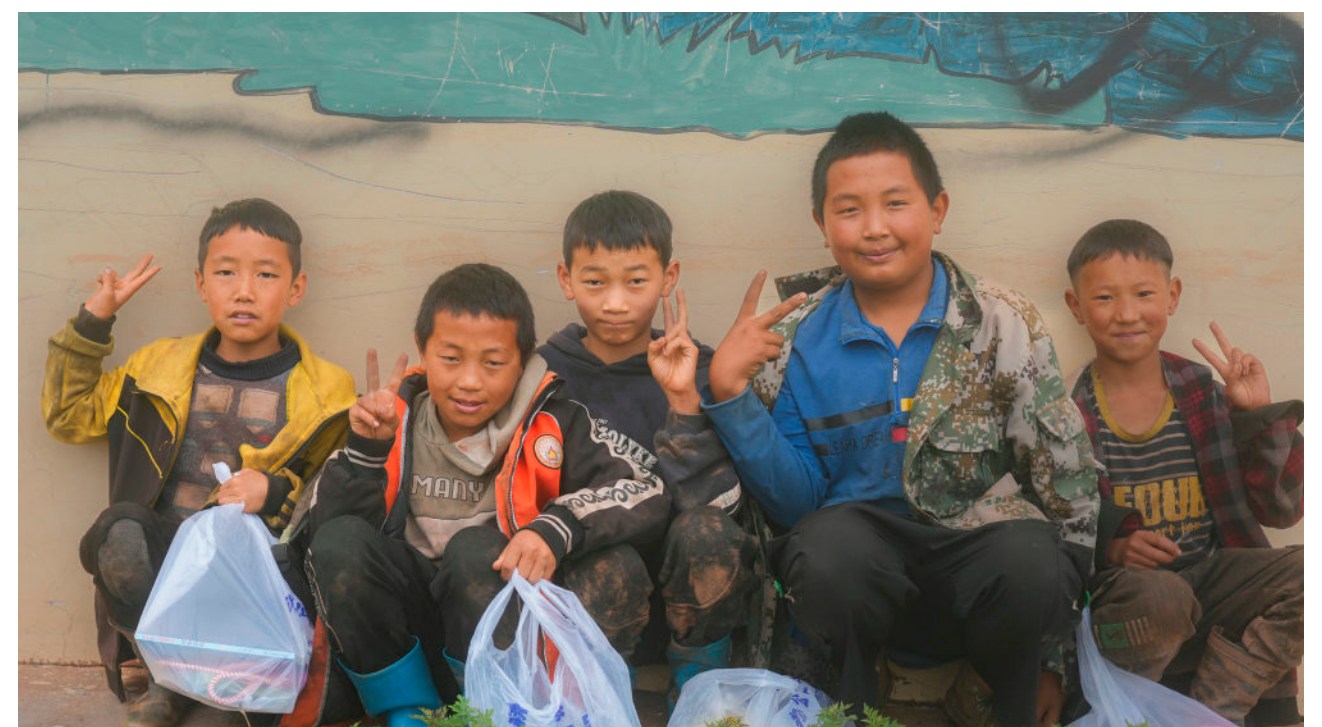
Therefore, providing souvenirs like blind boxes which contain Yi traditional handicrafts in them for the tenants as a gift is a potential solution for attracting more consumer. Blind boxes are small gift boxes with identical packaging that contain different items inside, triggering people's curiosity and interest among recipients. These blind boxes would not only be more affordable than silver jewelries but also offer visitors to Liangshan an opportunity to learn more about traditional Yi culture. Additionally, these souvenirs could be distributed during major Yi festivals, such as Yi New Year and the Torch Festival, enhancing their cultural significance. By providing such culturally rich souvenirs, local hotels could create memorable experiences for guests, potentially leading to a stable source of income.

2. Offer After-class Activities About Yi Culture

On the other hand, culture heritage is considered another issue. As discussed earlier, Yi characters are not widely learned by younger generations, and some elder Yi people believe that learning Yi characters is not worthwhile. This lack of interest puts the Yi character at risk of disappearance. Moreover, it was learned from the visit to the Maka Primary School in Xichang that students in China follow a unified educational system, including only one to two Physical Education classes per week. As a result, students in Xichang have limited opportunity learn about traditional Yi culture.

To address this gap, offering after-class activities in primary and middle schools will enable students to gain a deeper understanding of Yi culture. Activities should include two main aspects: culture and arts. Schools could offer Yi character classes that teach students how to read and write in Yi, with teachers also instructing them on how to incorporate Yi characters into daily life, enabling students to practice their skills early on. Likewise, activities should include traditional Yi music, Yi dances, and painting lacquerware which is mainly used as crafted tableware. Education in such arts could thereby lead students to create a stronger sense of community and appreciation for aesthetics.

All these activities play a role in raising the awareness of protecting traditional Yi culture and enhance Yi people's cultural pride. As a result, the proposed solution could motivate more Yi people to contribute to the growth of Liangshan's cultural tourism, helping to advance their community and broaden the reach of Yi culture.



Brand Promotion of Ayingmo



Finally, Ayingmo, Ayingzi's Yi embroidery shop that was mentioned earlier, also encounters problems of not advertising to the public and not entering the cultural travel industry. To address these issues, a brand promotion strategy has been proposed, inspired by the approach taken by Youyou Shama.

Youyou Shama, the brand manager of CHINAYI, created this brand with the goal of preserving and promoting Yi costume culture. CHINAYI breaks convention by launching products aimed at the public, particularly younger demographics. According to Youyou (2024), she works closely with the craft workers to ask them to make the clothes according to the standards of the brand and the designer, resulting in standardization of products. For example, items of the same type are consistent in size and pattern. By contrast, each garment made by Ayingmo is unique, as designs and patterns are the result of the individual creativity of different craft workers. Additionally, Ayingmo sells its products exclusively in physical stores, while CHINAYI has also established an online market, leading to a wider population of costumers.

The present essay will introduce a brand promotion strategy for Ayingmo, focusing on two main aspects. First, branding Ayingzi's store will help increase its visibility to a wider audience. For example, the store can create a logo and design the packaging as well as the hanger, incorporating Yi embroidery patterns with contemporary aesthetics and appeal to more young people. Besides, considering the current condition of the environment, the packaging will use eco-friendly materials like recycling paper and seed paper. These materials would allow for the creation of unique, imprinted designs that set Ayingmo apart from other modern brands, while also emphasizing the high quality of its products.



Luxury



Cultural
Lineage



High-end
Quality



Craftsmanship



Modern
Fusion

AYINGMO
BRAND DESIGN

LOGO DESIGN

COLOR PALETTE



M
Ayingmo



采风南下，寻百褶
听千年苗语
眼手相传间
拾获灵感，心艺绵延



阿英莫

M
Ayingmo

Tote/Shopping Bag



Clothing/Item Tags



Promotion and Marketing through Xiaohongshu (RedNote) and Tiktok

Furthermore, Ayingmo will start some advertising on social medias like TikTok and Xiaohongshu (RedNote). The content will primarily feature images of embroidery products and videos showcasing the craft workers embroidering fabrics. At the same time, Ayingmo will sell merchandised products, such as handmade bags, souvenirs, and cultural products via online platform. These products, which are practical for daily use and modern affordable, will help broaden the reach of Ayingmo and Yi embroidery, ultimately contributing to the expansion of the Yi tourism industry in the future.



Xiaohongshu (Red Note)



TikTok Account



The videos on Tiktok not only promotes our products but also highlights the rich heritage of the Yi people, inviting a wider audience to discover and appreciate Yi culture and traditions.

21:29

<

阿英莫AYINGMO ...

✓ 账号正常 > 原创认证 >

7日账号数据

播放量	粉丝净增	完播率
10200	200	79.3
-9.9%	--	+19.9%

最新作品 99万播放, 99涨粉 >

全部

行业频道

变现任务

账号检测

开始直播

学创作

☆ 我的收藏 灵感宝库

🛡️ 创作助手 作品检测

📅 创作 一周总

热搜灵感 活动 挑战 话题 热点

12:00

添加朋友 新访客 35

阿英莫AYINGMO

抖音号: 12345679101112 88

9.2w 获赞

99 朋友

233 关注

3452 粉丝

编辑资料

阿英莫Ayingmo | 彝族刺绣传承 以手造物, 眷眷织心。

凉山·四川 + 添加年龄、学校等标签

📺 直播中心

🛒 抖音商城

💰 我的钱包

👤 常访问的人

📖 抖音课堂

作品 ▾

私密

收藏

喜欢

88.8万

55.5万

77.7万

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