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Beyond photo-taking tourism: exploring family cultural tourism experiences through story-based guide map design in Dong villages

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Abstract. Recently, a growing amount of people now travel to different places with their own family seeking to improve familial relationship, cultural understanding and tourism experience. Unlike traditional traveling process: taking pictures, listening to the tour guide and trying local food, families now pay more attention on interactive tourism since this is beneficial for their child's development. This essay employes Dong village as the research context, include field research and personal travelling experience as main research methods. Different from traditional sightseeing tour, the study proposes a story-based guiding map that illustrate famous attractions through engaging storytelling mode. Travelers can click different links to access them. This work allows families to gain an immersive and interactive traveling experiences instead of only taking pictures to record the scenery, providing a feasible optimization for family cultural tourism.

Keywords: family's traveling experience, guided map tour, storytelling mode, village

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Traditionally, while traveling, individuals focus more on taking picture of famous attractions and buying souvenirs, like special fridge magnet, a representation of visit. They are passively affected by standardized travelling mode, lacking a profound connection between visitors and regional cultures. However, with the normalization of family outings, family tourism became a niche yet crucial segment in cultural industry and rural tourism. Parents play a vital role in encouraging cultural learning in children's development. Therefore, they feel unsatisfied only admiring beautiful scenery, they gradually pay more attention on immersive and interactive experiences, with a wish that their child could learn knowledge and skills during the entire travel

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process. Research shows that Learning in humans is highly embedded in social interaction: since the very early stages of our lives, we form memories and acquire knowledge about the world from and with others [1]. Located in Huangguang Dong Village in Guizhou province, the village contains a complete heritage, iconic architecture, local food, and special festivals. Nevertheless, present travel in this place still focuses more on sightseeing. Adapting local cultures and tourism model to meet the needs of families has became a critical problem in upgrading tourism.

1.2. Research problems

Based on above-mentioned industry shift and the current situation in the village, we focus on two core issues.

How to plan and organize tourism activities so that they can perfectly aligned with local traditions, cultures, festivals, the environment, etc.?

Would the transformation of adding storytelling and acting in the tour map boosts interactive engagement and deepen the understanding of the local cultures of the Dong ethnic group?

2. Theoretical basis

2.1. Research on parent-child travel experiences

Traditional tourism in Guizhou Dong villages focuses on superficial sightseeing and photo-taking. Tourists often remain passive onlookers, a situation especially prominent among parent-child groups. Children tend to get bored with rigid cultural lectures, while parents fail to gain profound cultural insights, lowering overall travel satisfaction. Hence, it is vital to optimize scenes, interactive activities and touring routes to boost visitor participation and cultural experience.

2.2. Storytelling and experience design

Story-based guided tours offer a practical solution to reduce children's comprehension barriers and strengthen families' cultural memory. Authentic folk customs and village history are adapted into vivid adventure-style narratives. Abstract cultural knowledge is transformed into approachable content. Kids follow story threads to visit real-world sites, and parents dig into genuine cultural implications behind these storylines.

Local landmark sites, including drum towers, wind-rain bridges, indigo-dyeing workshops and folk craft courtyards, should shift from static display to immersive experiential spaces. Rather than observing from afar, parent-child visitors are encouraged to take part in on-site operations. Differentiated experiences can be arranged for different age groups: children engage in easy handicraft sessions and clue-hunting games, whereas parents access in-depth explanations of Dong architecture and folk life. Family-oriented collaborative tasks serve as a key improvement. When parents and kids explore the village side-by-side, they break away from disjointed sightseeing and build shared travel memories.

2.3. Cultural tourism product design

Nevertheless, creative narratives must be rooted in real local heritage. Fictional plots cannot distort historical facts. Supplementary factual materials ought to be offered for adults to guarantee reliable cultural transmission. To sum up, activating local scenes, designing collaborative interactive activities and adopting story-driven touring can effectively move past the old sightseeing-only model. These measures raise parent-child involvement and achieve innovative development for Dong-village-based cultural tourism.

3. Case analysis: map design Dong village story guide

3.1. Demand-oriented user: starting from pain points for family tourists

Family tourism at national cultural heritage sites often faces three interrelated challenges. First, the road is difficult to find - the roads in Dong Village are zigzag, the road signs are messy, there is a lack of maps, and it is difficult to find scenic sites. Second, children's participation is low—the text of the map board and the traditional explanation is formal and long, and there is a shortage of experienced and operational tourism projects. Third, cultural understanding is superficial—lack of easy-to-understand explanations, family tourists go for a walk in a hurry, I missed the deep cultural connotation contained in the Drum Tower and the Shotian Festival ceremony. These pain points profoundly affect the tourist experience and hinder the in-depth interaction between tourists and local heritage. Therefore, map redesign should take clarity, attention and age-appropriate storytelling as basic principles, and turn negative sightseeing into an active exploration experience for family tourism.

3.2. Map design: building a parent-child exploration path

For the above three types of family tourist pain points, the way to scenic sites gives priority to the comfort, playability and clarity of travel between parents and child together. The order of the tour is as follows: observation deck - a 300-year-old house - commercial street - Gaolo drum tower - Yui Hall (tie dyeing experience). Considering the material reasons for the needs of children and parents to visit the landscape, they are only arranged in total. Three places are necessary to visit. As a commercial service point for this route, Commercial Street offers restaurants, cafes and other facilities. The last homestay in Yueyetang not only provides children with a new experience to tie dye but also provides parents with a space to rest to solve their fatigue. The public road is comfortable and informal but only meets the common and different needs of a family of three [2].

3.3. Story and image design: promoting cultural participation

The primary innovation of this design is to include the narrative frame in the map medium. Introducing a fictional family of three, incorporating national culture and the characteristics of the guest group. The story in the film is interpreted by a family of three (father, mother and daughter). The trip unfolds in the story in parallel with the actual route that the map provides to tourists. With unified maps and interesting stories, it reflects visual tips and texts. Combination of word prompts ensures that passengers are always active participants rather than passive listeners.

In order to further cross the language and cultural gap, the map is equipped with a bilingual video introduction in Chinese and English with a QR code link. Stories, clues, and multimedia resources jointly transform the map from a simple navigation tool to a cultural medium - inviting families to write their own Dong village together while respecting the living heritage of the Dong community.

4. Discussion and conclusions

4.1. Changes in parent-child travel demands and reconfiguration of cultural experience value

For our project, we didn't make it a tour guide that can only make the tourist view and consume. Instead, we made it a tour guide that could really help the tourist to relax and enjoy the journey.

To accomplish this goal, we put effort into the guiding direction we made for the map. The stops we had made on the map are mostly full of ethnic characteristics or natural resources, for example, the "Gulou" (translated as the "drum-tower"), the viewing platform, and the old house that has already lasted for 300 years. These touring stops can help the tourists to know this place better while touring, rather than just roughly seeing through. We also have a stop where tourists can do handwork, which is tie-dye. This can make the tourists participate in the traditional handicraft making that's famous in this place, which is a fun and special experience that can increase the enjoyment of this trip, and it can also be a souvenir to bring home. In our map, there's only one spot that tourists need to consume, which is the business street. All the things on this street are things that are beneficial for all the tourists, like snacks in the stores, restaurants, and cafes. But no one will force the tourists to consume; it's all personal choice, so it won't give the tourists pressure.

Rural tourism should not only be about offering viewing resources; if the journey is only about watching and walking through the spots, it also won't leave any significance. The thing that the tour really needs to have is creating emotional value for the tourists. I think the main point of accomplishing this goal is to think about what the tourists really want to experience in this trip and what can make this a pleasant journey for them. In order to do that, we need to step into the tourists' shoes and think about what will make us happy if we are here for a trip. The first and most important thing is not to add any pressure to the tourists. If the main purpose is to make tourists or visitors feel relaxed, the possible things or actions that might make people feel uncomfortable, for example, overmarketing and selling stuff, should not appear. That might make people feel pressured to consume or not. The second thing is to have a touring guideline that is interesting, memorable, and at the same time not so tiring. Things like choosing scenic spots or activities that are special and beautiful, and adding an introduction board that tells about the background story of this place if there can make this journey more meaningful. To make the trip not so tiring, we can make the guiding shorter and only introduce the spots that are most important or the most worth staying for. Also, we can design the touring line that doesn't need to walk back and forth, but can be finished in one go, without backtracking [3].

4.2. The design value of storytelling in empowering rural cultural dissemination

This paper looks at how digital guided tours can help spread minority culture. It uses family visits to Dong villages as a case study. The main idea? Narrative storytelling. Traditional tourism tends to keep things shallow. Tourists show up, snap photos of drum towers, listen to a few folk songs, and glance at the stilted houses. But that's about it. Most visitors—especially outsiders—don't really feel anything deeper. There's no real emotional connection. Storytelling, though, changes the game. When tour planners weave stories into the route, the culture stops being static and starts feeling alive. Tourists shift from just watching to actually taking part. And along the way, they develop stronger bonds with the local people and the culture itself. One story they used is called "A Family's Exploration of the Dong Village." It's designed to help foreign tourists—especially families—get a better feel for the culture. Let's be honest: some Dong customs are niche. Outsiders, and kids especially, have a hard time wrapping their heads around them. Take the drum tower's mortise-and-tenon joints, or the rituals of the Saizi festival. Try explaining those with plain text, and you'll lose the kids in about two minutes. But once you turn it into a family adventure, something changes. It just clicks. The drum tower, for example, becomes "the first stop on a hunt for hidden heritage treasures." Parents and kids grab a hand-drawn map and start looking for little architectural details together—almost like a game. And if they scan a QR code, a short cartoon pops up and shows them how the tower was actually put together, piece by piece. Because the story feels familiar, like something out of everyday life, the culture stops seeming so distant. It's a simple, down-to-earth way to bring Dong traditions closer to families who might otherwise feel lost. The whole tour really runs on three things: hand-drawn maps, short videos, and some written explanations. They

kind of balance each other out. The map keeps you from getting lost. The videos give you a peek into what villagers actually do day to day. And the text? That fills in the backstory—the history, the folklore, the little details you wouldn't guess on your own [4].

Take the Dong workshop as an example. The map marks the spot and shows where the parent-child craft area is. A quick QR scan, and suddenly you're watching a video that walks you through the entire tie-dye process—step by step. Then the text chimes in with a bit of cultural context, explaining why tie-dye matters to the Dong people. Each part does its own job, and together they cover more ground than any single one could. The end result feels fuller, more textured way beyond what plain text could ever pull off. Digital media gives these old villages a new kind of energy. With digital maps and QR codes, Dong culture finally escapes those stiff, dusty display boards. Remember the old way? Scenic areas crammed with signboards full of dense text. Such a drag, right? Kids zone out within seconds. And even if they do read it, it slips right out of their heads before they've walked ten steps. Now? QR codes open a whole different world. Animations, videos, little interactive challenges—it's actually engaging. Families can pause, rewind, go at their own pace. And the best part? They can keep the map after the tour and revisit the content later, wherever they are. No time or place constraints.

4.3. Limitations and future directions -what our study didn't address

It was very satisfying to work on the design project in the remote Dong village, but we encountered some practical limitations. Firstly, our ideas, such as the story-based guide map, were founded on design principles and restricted field studies rather than thorough user tests. We did not have the chance to test these concepts with a larger number of visitors; therefore, it is uncertain how effective our visual maps and narrative suggestions will be for ordinary tourists. Our main product idea was based on the positive impact that the village culture might have on family relationships between parents and children. We wished to enhance closer emotional relationships between the parents and their children. However, in fact, the village life is more uncertain than what we had described. The real situation of the families is influenced by various elements such as the parents' involvement, the visitors' understanding of local ethnic customs, and the surrounding environment of the village. As our research period was short, we were unable to conduct a systematic evaluation of these subtle interactions which occur naturally. At last, the majority of our findings are obtained from the qualitative analysis of the existing literature and one case study in Dong village. If we had collected more tourist reviews, we might have received more real-time information from a wider group. Moreover, we did not obtain detailed demographic data such as the visitor's education, income or family history, which could enable us to know how various types of families react to rural cultural tourism. Where We Go from Here To enhance the foundation we have built, the next step should be to improve the practical aspects of the project in order to provide a more attractive and convenient tourist visit. According to our initial results, we suggest five main areas to be considered in the future. Expanding the Content of the Educational Map: The guide map should not only provide basic navigation but also include stories and popular science information. By including interesting facts about the traditional Dong architecture, local ecosystems and intangible cultural heritages, the map can become an educational means to arouse the curiosity of both children and their parents [5]. Enhancing both the appearance and practicality: A perfect design depends on the small features. In future modifications, we should enhance the visual effect, for example, by applying vivid color schemes, various icons and environmentally friendly materials, so that the real map is not only a convenient tool but also a beautiful present for the family to keep at home. Improving Audio and Subtitle Functions: In order to make the culture easily available, the additional digital audio guides should be continually modified and reducing the difficulty of the story helps children better understand the culture. Incorporating distinct, multilingual subtitles

and interesting, suitable for children's narrations will guarantee that the storytelling is comprehensive and understandable for visitors of all ages and origins. Starting a Family Activity Handbook: In order to increase the involvement, we intend to make a workbook with a map, which includes interactive challenge cards and reflective questions. This handbook aims to help families understand the local crafts together, converting the solitary sightseeing into a joint adventure. Making a Good Travel Experience: In the end, the whole visiting feeling should be arranged carefully. Dividing the village tour into different parts, like introduction, detailed investigation and final reflection, can lead to a more convenient and less stressful procedure suitable for various family needs (such as families with small children and those with teenagers). Finally, these combined improvements will facilitate the connection between design theory and practical effects, producing a more attractive, eco-friendly and significant cultural enjoyment for distant communities.

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