THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PROBLEMS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DAI NATIONALITY CULTURE THEME HOTELS IN XISHUANGBANNA REGION, YUNNAN, CHINA

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The rise of minority culture-themed hotels in Yunnan Province is a new direction for the development of the hotel industry in Yunnan Province. At present, the scale of Dai Nationality (Acronyms: Dai) culture theme hotels in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, varies in size and development. In this paper, we selected three five-star hotels in the Xishuangbanna area as research objects, and conducted interviews with tourists who have stayed there to understand the development status of Dai culture hotels in Yunnan Province. We discussed and summarized the problems in the development of ethnic minority hotels.
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particularly Dai theme hotels, which include: a lack of staff cognition of the ethnic minorities' culture; a lack of high-level experience with the cultural content; and a lack of marketing efforts in the development of this type of hotel. In order to improve the development of ethnic culture-themed hotels, the hotels should explore positive countermeasures in the design of Dai culture experience content, the improvement of marketing work, and human resources development.

**Keywords:** Xishuangbanna Region; Dai Nationality Culture; theme hotel

**Introduction**

As the hotel industry becomes increasingly competitive, many hotels are highlighting their cultural characteristics to attract consumers' attention. This trend has led to the creation of cultural theme hotels, which have emerged as new directions in the industry's development. "Ethnic culture theme hotel" refers to a rich, unique ethnic culture that is reflected in the hotel's materials, architecture, food, clothing, entertainment, festivals, customs, and rituals, all of which serve to reflect the hotel's ethnic identity.

Yunnan is a province with a large number of ethnic minorities and rich and colorful minority cultures. Fully highlighting the cultural characteristics of minority theme hotels has become a new force in today's increasingly competitive hotel industry.

However, the ethnic culture theme hotel, such a new thing in the development process, encountered some inevitable resistance and problems. In addition to the positive response of the theme hotels themselves, it is very meaningful for academics to pay attention to and think about these development resistances and problems so as to try to put forward some effective development countermeasures (Xu, 2009).

The number of ethnic minority cultural theme hotels in Yunnan Province, China, has been steadily growing annually. This trend is particularly evident in the number of budget hotels and specialty inns that feature ethnic minority cultural characteristics.

The establishment of these ethnic culture theme hotels caters to a variety of consumer groups, enabling them to experience the accommodation needs of the local ethnic cultural characteristics. These hotels also adapt to the current development of the tourism and hotel market, paving the way for a bright future.

Geographically speaking, Dali, Lijiang, Diqing, Xishuangbanna, and other more developed tourist destinations predominantly host ethnic culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province.

Cultural theme hotels can create an immersive thematic cultural atmosphere, provide thematic cultural products and services, and organize various thematic cultural activities to meet the cultural experience needs of the guests in addition to the basic accommodation needs, bring cultural enlightenment to the guests, and make the hotel's goods and services generate a higher premium (He, 2010).

Successful cultural theme hotels are often cultural landmarks, cultural experience and consumption spaces, windows for healthy lifestyles and social civilization, as well as Netflix hotspots with distinctive cultural characteristics in the region.
**Research objective**

This paper takes three five-star Dai culture theme hotels in the Xishuangbanna area as the research object, interviews the tourists who have stayed in these hotels, understands the development status of Dai culture hotels in Yunnan, and explores and summarizes the problems in the development of the minority mainly Dai theme hotels, including: there are problems in the development of this kind of hotel such as: insufficient cognition of the staff to the culture of minorities, low degree of experience of the cultural content, insufficient marketing efforts, and so on.

To enhance the quality and popularity of ethnic culture theme hotels, further development is necessary. In order to improve the development of ethnic culture-themed hotels, the hotels should explore positive countermeasures in the design of Dai culture experience content, the improvement of marketing work, and human resources development.

**Literature Review**

**Ethnic and cultural theme hotels**

In recent years, the rapid development of China's hotel industry has drawn widespread attention to the creation of cultural theme hotels, particularly after the first International Theme Hotel Development Forum in Chengdu in 2004, igniting a craze in the industry. In October 2017, the former National Tourism Administration formally promulgated the "Basic Requirements and Evaluation of Cultural Theme Tourist Hotels" standard. Cultural theme hotel construction has become a key development project of the accommodation industry.

The emergence of culturally themed hotels has invigorated the hotel industry's market. However, any matter has its own specific internal law. A cultural theme hotel, as a new mode of cultural construction, should have its own definition, internal laws, and conditions, if not from the essence of grasping them, contrary to the objective law of cultural development and change, which can only be twice the effort or flashy but not real.

A theme hotel's operation and services, which primarily include architectural decorations, staff costumes, special food and beverage, guest room decoration, special commodities, special experiential activities, and other aspects, should reflect the hotel's cultural theme (Zhou & Wang, 2013). Theme hotels are hotels with a specific theme as the centerpiece, which can provide a unique consumer experience in design, construction, operation, management, and service. The theme encompasses elements such as history and culture, national folklore, natural resources, and social resources, all of which contribute to the unique charm of cultural resources. These elements enrich and optimize the connotation of the hotel product, thereby enhancing the quality of the hotel experience for customers (Zeng & Huang, 2008).

**A theme hotel's characteristics**

The strategic starting point of theme hotels is uniqueness, where they leverage the distinct characteristics of the cultural environment as a marketing tool to attract customers and establish their core competitiveness. The uniqueness between theme hotels lies in the differences between the themes, the resulting differences in the details, and the different experience content, while the focus on the experience is the same. We can reflect the uniqueness of theme hotels in a variety of ways and channels, such as unique cultural resources, unique service programs, and unique brand resources (Guo, Yao, & Wang, 2022).
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Culture reflects the hotel's pursuit of connotation; it is the hotel's responsibility to implement the specific tactics and means of the culture to gain a competitive advantage. The theme hotel culture and the general hotel culture are two distinct concepts; the general hotel culture primarily focuses on service, while the theme hotel culture is rooted in the hotel culture, with operational characteristics playing a key role. According to Liu, Hu, Sun, & Guo (2023), culture is the culmination of both human material and spiritual wealth, and any theme hotel revolves around this core element to delve deeper into the corresponding theme culture, thereby elevating the hotel's cultural prominence.

Experiencing is the essence that the hotel pursues. The hotel's ultimate goal is to achieve a high return on investment by providing customers with a unique experience. Normalization and standardization are the basis of hotel services. However, too many similar products in the hotel industry have caused consumer burnout, and the development of theme hotels is a new opportunity that has activated consumer enthusiasm, brought customers a different hotel experience, and met consumer demand for novelty (He, 2020).

Yunnan Dai Culture Theme Hotel

The Dai, also known as the Tai national language, belongs to the Zhuang-Dai branch of the Zhuang-Dong language family of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Dai people regard peacocks and elephants as auspicious objects, and they have colorful folk tales. The Dai people like to live by water, love cleanliness, often bathe, and women love to shampoo, so they are known as the "nation of water." In the past, the Dai people generally believed in the following Southern Theravada Buddhism and Primary Religion. Many of the Dai culture's customs in Xishuangbanna are very similar to Thai culture.

The Dai mainly live in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and Gengma and Menglian Autonomous Counties in Yunnan Province. More than 30 counties, including Jingdong, Jinggu, Ning'er, Lancang, Xiping, Yuanjiang, and Jinping, are home to the remaining Dai. The Dai border areas share borders with Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam.

Currently, the Yunnan minority culture theme hotel conveys its ethnic cultural significance in the following ways: First and foremost, the Yunnan ethnic culture theme hotel seeks to highlight an ethnic minority's local architectural style. For instance, the Xishuangbanna New Daiyuan Hotel's main building seamlessly integrates with the Dai dry-rail building's style. The main building of these ethnic culture-themed hotels highlights the style and characteristics of local ethnic minority houses. Simultaneously, the hotel lobby, restaurants, and guest rooms showcase colors and patterns that accentuate the cultural traits of ethnic minorities.

Secondly, the staff of Yunnan ethnic culture theme hotels are uniformly dressed in "ethnic costumes" corresponding to the ethnic culture theme. Ethnic clothing is the most direct reflection of ethnic cultural characteristics and elements. In order to directly reflect the hotel's national culture theme, theme hotels usually have to design a few sets of "ethnic clothing" that can highlight the hotel's theme and let the hotel staff wear "ethnic clothing" to work. For example, Xishuangbanna New Daiyuan Hotel employees wear "Dai ethnic clothing" at work. The purpose of this is to let travelers feel the room service of "Dai girls" and so on (He, 2010).
Once again, the catering of the ethnic culture theme hotel is based on the catering culture of an ethnic minority corresponding to the theme. For example, the catering at the Dali Wind Flower Snow Moon Hotel primarily reflects the Dali Bai people's food culture. For example, the catering of the Xishuangbanna New Daiyuan Hotel is mainly based on the special diet of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, which fully highlights the dietary culture of the Dai ethnic group, the purpose of which is to let the tourists taste the dietary culture in line with the theme of the hotel (Zhang, 2020).

Finally, some ethnic culture-themed hotels will arrange corresponding ethnic song and dance performances to teach guests to learn simple ethnic languages, take photos with guests, explain and promote ethnic tourism attractions, or host themed bonfire parties and ethnic culture knowledge lectures highlighting the hotel theme so that tourists have the opportunity to experience and understand rich and colorful ethnic culture knowledge (He, 2020).

Research methodology

This paper takes three five-star Dai culture theme hotels in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, as the research object, interviews tourists who have stayed in these hotels, understands the development status of Yunnan Dai culture hotels, and discusses and summarizes the problems existing in the development of minority, mainly Dai theme hotels. These three hotels are five-star hotels with the theme of Dai culture, including the Crowne Plaza Xishuangbanna Cold Resort, the Anantara Xishuangbanna Resort, and the New Dai Garden Xishuangbanna Hotel.

This study, in the form of a semi-structured interview, investigated 205 tourists who stayed in these three five-star Dai culture theme hotels in January 2023. It also summarizes and discusses the problems that tourists have with the development of Dai theme hotels in this area.

Results

Characterizing respondents' demographic information

All tourists who visited Xishuangbanna and stayed in the five-star Dai Culture Theme Hotel were included in the samples, with 72.56% being first-time visitors and 62.32% being local residents.

The study found that men accounted for 62.7% of the respondents, while women accounted for 37.3%. In addition, the age distribution of the respondents showed a clear trend toward youthfulness, with 36.27% and 40.93% of the respondents aged 18–24 and 25–35, respectively.

According to the results of the survey, only 7.44% of the interviewees had not received compulsory education, and 54.88% of the interviewees had received "undergraduate and college" cultivation. In terms of occupational structure, students and employees of enterprises and public organizations have the highest proportion of 38.13% and 30.23%, respectively.

This shows that the education experience of the respondents is higher than the average level. In terms of average monthly income, the middle-income group is the main force, with the 3,000–7,000 monthly income group accounting for the highest proportion (62.32%).
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**Issues arise during the development of Dai theme hotels**

Although there are a lot of minority specialty hotels in Yunnan Province, there are not many Dai specialty hotels. Since the operation concept of theme hotels in the Xishuangbanna region differs from that of ordinary hotels, and there is no established precedent or law to follow, the development of minority culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province still faces significant challenges.

The author conducted a visit to the residents and managers of three ethnic culture theme hotels, and discovered that the majority of them face the following challenges:

**Insufficient knowledge of national culture in hotels**

The management and grass-roots staff of some ethnic culture-themed hotels do not have a comprehensive knowledge of ethnic culture. The vast majority of hotels agree that the introduction of ethnic minority culture can increase the characteristics of the hotel and give tourists a sense of freshness, but such ethnic cultural characteristics and freshness cannot bring greater economic benefits.

Some brand hotel chains, on the contrary, believe that minority culture is in some ways in conflict with the hotel's own brand culture, and it is not possible to pay full attention to ethnic culture. Some hotels believe that in order to emphasize the characteristics of minority cultures, they need to invest more money.

The investment in staff training is also larger, and because of the high demand for staff turnover, which results in lower profits, the hotel's capital recovery cycle is long. It seems that most of the managers of ethnic culture theme hotels are still focusing on the traditional short-term profitability concept, and they do not have enough knowledge about the long-term development that ethnic culture may bring to the hotel's theme creation, brand innovation, and the spread of hotel culture.

**Insufficient experience of national culture**

Most minority culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province only showcase minority culture through hotel buildings, staff costumes, and other external forms, without providing a comprehensive understanding of minority customs, cultural activities, and programs. Minority architecture, clothing, and other external cultural forms are easy for peers to imitate and lose competitiveness. Tourists often perceive the external form as a fleeting visual experience that quickly loses its freshness, preventing it from making a lasting impact.

Deep-seated folk customs, such as ethnic songs and dances, the production of handicrafts, and the health care of ethnic minorities, such as massage, can leave a deep impression on tourists and contribute to the formation and dissemination of the hotel's good reputation. At the same time, activities with extensive experience are difficult to imitate, forming the hotel's characteristics and core competitiveness while also safeguarding the hotel's interests.

**Inadequate marketing efforts**

From the point of view of the development status of the existing ethnic culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province, most of the hotels have not invested enough in marketing. Enter "Yunnan ethnic culture theme hotel," "Dai hotel," and so on in the Internet search engine. Similar keywords will appear on the first few pages of the website, primarily featuring low-grade residential inn-type small hotels and guesthouses.
In addition, it is difficult for tourists to name a few representative and highly recognized ethnic culture-themed hotels in Yunnan Province's tourism hotel market. This indicates that while hotels in Yunnan Province have incorporated ethnic cultural elements into their operations, their marketing strategies have not been effective, and ethnic culture has not yielded significant economic benefits for the hotels.

Thus, it seems that minority culture has not really become the cultural label or cultural symbol of these ethnic culture theme hotels; the so-called ethnic culture theme hotels have not yet truly embodied the theme of ethnic culture.

**Inadequate human resources**

In the process of operating Dai cultural theme hotels in Yunnan Province, the reason why Dai characteristic cultural activities cannot be held for a long period of time and regularly is not only because of insufficient capital investment but also because of insufficient human resource power.

For the ethnic culture theme hotel, the ethnic culture characteristics in the hotel building, decoration, staff's costumes, etc. can be easily realized without the support of a large number of human resources. Staff with knowledge and skills of ethnic culture are essential to carry out activities with strong tourism experience, such as ethnic songs and dances, handicrafts, ethnic food, and ethnic stunts.

**Discussion**

In Yunnan Province, the number of ethnic culture theme hotels is relatively large, and the theme hotels with Dai cultural characteristics also face fierce competition from different ethnic minority theme hotels in Yunnan. In addition to the Dai, there are other hotels with strong NaxiDongba culture in Yunnan, such as the Indigo Hotel in Lijiang Old Town, which is characterized by the ancient tea-horse road in Yunnan (He, 2010).

At present, the investigation of the very Dai culture of Xishuangbanna Crowne Plaza Resort and a few international hotel group's specialty hotels, although already in the market, has a certain degree of popularity and reputation, but most have not yet formed the ethnic culture theme hotel brand. In the increasingly fierce competition in the hotel industry, these hotels do not have a greater competitive advantage.

In Yunnan Province, the marketing of ethnic minority cultural theme hotels is a weak link. Bian (2009) has pointed out that part of the ethnic minority cultural hotels, due to the limited operation of funds and awareness of the reasons, many small-scale ethnic culture theme hotels are not willing to invest too much effort in hotel marketing and publicity, resulting in low visibility and poor operating efficiency. Standardizing the hotel's marketing work can not only improve the hotel's popularity but also promote the hotel's product innovation and service improvement in order to improve the hotel's operating profit. Furthermore, hotel marketing encompasses more than just advertising; it involves conducting market research, developing marketing programs, executing marketing strategies, and monitoring feedback and other related aspects (Xie et al., 2019).

In the implementation of the marketing work of the national culture theme hotel in Yunnan Province, in addition to the use of various ways to publicize the characteristics of the hotel, it should also standardize the other aspects of the marketing work.
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The hotel employs scientific market segmentation and positioning strategies to highlight its unique business culture and products, employs suitable techniques to boost its popularity, and establishes an ethnic minority culture hotel brand to secure a specific market position and a steady customer base (You, 2020; Li et al., 2019).

One of the main factors limiting the development of minority culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province is the serious shortage of staff with advanced management concepts and certain minority culture skills. In order to meet the development needs of minority culture theme hotels, the hotels should gradually build up a high-quality staff team that is familiar with the comprehensive knowledge of the hotel's theme minorities and possesses some minority culture skills (Guo et al., 2022).

The hotel should prioritize the training of various ethnic minority song and dance performances, food and beverage production, cultural publicity, language interpretation, and other talent-related areas. The hotel's internal human resources training and education can facilitate the cultivation of this type of talent. On the other hand, the hotel can cooperate with universities and colleges through the hotel management students to carry out targeted training to realize this (He, 2010).

**Recommendations**

We can't just use some national culture symbols to make visual identification systems for Yunnan minority culture theme hotels. Instead, they build the image of the hotel around its national culture theme by incorporating minority culture meanings and national culture elements into the building's design, decorations, service process, and management system. This gives the hotel a unified cultural image that gives customers a full experience.

This will give customers an all-round experience of minority culture. To enhance the experience of minority culture theme hotels in Yunnan Province, the hotels should make improvements in the following areas:

The buildings of different ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province have distinctive features, such as the Dai's dry-rail style architectural features, etc. The hotel's ethnic culture theme reflects the architectural and cultural features of the corresponding ethnic groups in its structure, layout, and decoration. Ethnic culture theme hotel reflect the architectural and cultural characteristics of the corresponding ethnic groups in the structure, layout, and decoration of the main building of the hotel. Additionally, the hotel lobby serves as a crucial platform for the hotel to showcase the theme culture of ethnic minorities.

Therefore, the decoration of the lobby and the selection of objects should specifically focus on creating an atmosphere that reflects the culture of these ethnic groups.

The guest room is an important part of the hotel, and it is the place where guests stay the longest. Whether to keep the guests and become repeat customers or make it the hotel's obligation to publicize, the guest room is the most important attraction.

The hotel should provide guests with a safe, hygienic, convenient, comfortable, and private accommodation environment on the premises, as well as highlighting the minority culture theme as much as possible in the guest room decoration design.

In order to highlight the ethnic cultural atmosphere of the guest room, it can be in the functional layout of the guest room, color patterns, utensils, materials, and other aspects of the effort, specifically furniture, electrical appliances, sanitary ware, carpets, murals, curtains, crafts objects, brochures, and even bedding fabrics, as well as disposable supplies,
such as the appearance of the shape of the content. Let the guests in the private space with strong national characteristics spend a warm, romantic, and unforgettable night, in addition to meeting their needs on the experience of heterogeneous cultural needs and, more importantly, playing a positive role in strengthening the establishment of the hotel's national brand.

Showing the food culture with national characteristics to tourists is also one of the most effective ways to reflect the national culture in the national culture theme hotel. Food culture is the most important component of ethnic culture. The dining environment not only reflects the food culture of ethnic minorities, but also influences the selection of ingredients, cooking methods, and catering services.

For the ethnic culture theme hotel, first of all, we should create a dining environment that meets the visitors' imagination of ethnic minorities as much as possible, and we can reflect the architectural style and life scene of ethnic minorities in the design of the hotel restaurant. Secondly, in the selection of dishes and food cooking methods, the dishes and cooking methods commonly consumed in the daily lives of ethnic minorities should be the main focus, so that guests can taste the original flavor of the specialties of various ethnic groups. Again, in the process of catering service, we can reflect the catering etiquette of ethnic minorities as much as possible, such as the way of serving food and the etiquette of toasting.

Finally, you can also set up a theme banquet with ethnic and cultural characteristics to attract guests. The design and selection of the hotel staff’s working clothes is a direct and effective way to show the ethnic culture of the ethnic culture theme hotel. Therefore, the hotel should design a few sets of ethnic clothing that are rich in ethnic characteristics and can meet the needs of the hotel service work, and then let the staff wear ethnic clothing to work so as to enhance the characteristics of ethnic culture.

It is the experiential activity program that can leave a deep impression on the guests and make them consume in a happy mood. Rooms and restaurants are the places where guests stay for a long time, and they can be said to be the most important places for people to experience ethnic culture. But the hotel can also let guests in on the greetings, greetings etiquette, national songs and dances of the show, the interaction of national folk activities, national handicrafts production, and other aspects of re-experience. The first three activities are also the most ethnic theme hotels to show the national culture in the most normalized way.

First of all, in the process of service, the service staff can usually use some easy-to-learn ethnic language to greet the guests, accompanied by the corresponding greeting etiquette, and at the same time drive the interested guests to learn together.

Secondly, the hotel can regularly hold some minority songs and dances and reflect the theme of ethnic folk activities at the evening party. During the increase in the toast song, give incense packets and other similar links to enhance the guests' sense of experience.

Finally, the hotel can carry out some ethnic folk interactive activities and ethnic crafts production activities so that guests have a deeper understanding of ethnic customs and ethnic culture. In addition, the hotel should develop some crafts that represent the theme culture of ethnic minorities so that tourists can buy souvenirs. Although the experience activities can help guests understand Yunnan minority culture more deeply and comprehensively, organizing the activities should not be low-level vulgarization or too commercialized; instead, try to highlight the essence of Yunnan minority culture and make it flourish.
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For the theme of hotel product marketing, first of all, combined with the hotel's own positioning and the characteristics of the target customer groups, personalized needs, based on the maximum degree of enhancement of the consumer experience, and an all-round grasp of the theme of the hotel, consumer demand for a variety of information is targeted to take the appropriate marketing strategy, adjust the theme of the hotel products, and optimize the sales price and sales channels.

In the era of network information, theme hotels should keep pace with the times in terms of publicity and promotion. While using TV, newspapers, radio, and other media to promote hotels, they should also properly use new media marketing methods such as microblogs, WeChat, APPs, etc., not only to reduce costs but also to reach different customer groups and improve visibility.

Conclusions

Yunnan is the southwest border multi-ethnic tourism province; out of the 25 ethnic minorities, 15 are unique ethnic groups. In the Yunnan Xishuangbanna region Dai culture theme hotel development process, there are still
1) The hotel's understanding of ethnic culture is inadequate.
2) Inadequate experience with ethnic culture.
3) Insufficient marketing efforts.
4) Problems with not having enough workers and other issues: as the hotel industry grows around the world, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, which has strong ethnic ties to Southeast Asia, including Thailand, should use the benefits of the Dai culture to create minority theme hotels and pay some attention to the issues and challenges listed above to make the hotel industry more culturally relevant and competitive.

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*Paper submitted* 01 April 2024
*Paper accepted for publishing* 01 May 2024
*Paper revised* 11 May 2024
*Paper published online* 30 May 2024