

Brand Construction of Rural Tourism Destination from the Perspective of Integration of Agriculture and Tourism

-- A Case Study of Wuyuan

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Abstract

Strengthening the brand construction of rural tourism destinations on the basis of the integration of agriculture and tourism is an important and wise strategy. It is an important approach to achieve sustainable development of rural tourism, especially with the current problem of homogenization and low-quality construction of rural tourism in China. Wuyuan is a typically successful example of rural tourism construction in China and a demonstration area of integration of agriculture and tourism. This research focuses on Wuyuan's destination branding experience and potential problems to be solved in the context of Agro-tourism integration, and finds that some special tourism project brands and agricultural tourism brand industry chain have developed through related resources combination utilization, but there are still some issues such as not ideal integration degree and brand service quality, and so on. So some countermeasures are proposed to promote the brand construction of tourism destinations in the paper.

Keywords

Integration of Agriculture and Tourism; Wu Yuan; Rural Tourism Destination; Destination Branding.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is a form of tourism produced in the industrialized era along with people's psychological need for pursuing nature and returning to the countryside. It is the fastest growing and most widely benefited field of China's tourism consumption in recent years, and is generally regarded as an important grasp for implementing the strategy of rural revitalization and a new growth point for rural economic development. The Analysis Report from China Rural Tourism Industry shows that China's leisure agriculture and rural tourism revenue was 850 billion yuan in 2019, up 6.3% year-on-year, and the number of visitors was 3.2 billion, up 6.7% year on year. However, the current phenomenon of homogenization and low-quality construction in China's rural tourism is serious(Wu Liyun,2020), and with urbanization and industrialization in China, some rural tourism destinations are also experiencing changes and pains such as the gradual extinction of traditional farming culture, serious decline of village space, and loss of nostalgic memories (Li Hongbo et al., 2015; Zhou Li, 2018), and rural tourism destinations urgently need to carry out personalized and differentiated brand construction to promote their quality. In addition, the sustainable development of rural tourism cannot be achieved without industrial empowerment. The integration of agriculture and tourism is an important means for the sustainable development of rural tourism, which emphasizes the integration of traditional agriculture and tourism industry to achieve industrial upgrading of

agriculture and also bring new operational types of tourism and visitor new travel experience. As early as 2015, the No. 1 document of the Central Government proposed to "promote the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas", and gradually promote the integration of traditional agriculture and tourism to meet the increasing consumption demand. Wuyuan County is a rural tourism destination that develops rural tourism and carries out Agro-tourism integration at an early stage in China. It is meaningful to analyze the development status and improvement strategy of Wuyuan agricultural tourism brand, which not only has guiding significance for the sustainable development of Wuyuan tourism, but also provides reference for more domestic rural villages to realize the brand construction under the background of integration of agriculture and tourism.

2. Literature Analysis

2.1. Rural Tourism Destination Brands

Rural tourism is a part of tourism, and its goal is to provide a variety of tourism products and services to meet the demand of tourists by using the natural environment, cultural-historical and other resources as well as characteristics of rural settlements (Xie Hong, Zhang Ying, 2019). Rural tourism literature focuses more on the development and protection of rural tourism resources, and the supply of tourism, and so on. However, with the intense competition and homogenization construction of rural tourism, rural tourism is in urgent need of differentiated branding as well as tourist recognition to destination brand. A brand is a symbol that concentrates the key information of an enterprise or product, and brand information can be planted in consumers' minds to form a unique brand image through brand communication. According to literature information, the elements that usually prompt tourists to form the brand image of a specific rural tourism destination mainly include: original landscapes of rural settlements, cultural relics and monuments that carrying rural amorous feelings, such as original village streets, rivers, bridges; the gourmet snacks that preserving the taste of the countryside and bring unique eating experiences, and the special agricultural products that embody rural memories; the various folk activities, traditional festivals, legends, handicraft techniques that condense the core values of rural culture (Xie Hong, Zhang Ying, 2019). These elements and their combinations may establish a unique brand image of rural tourism destinations in the minds of tourists.

2.2. Integration of Agriculture and Tourism and its Impact on Rural Tourism Destination Brand

There is no unified definition of the integration of agriculture and tourism, according to the literature, it usually refers to agriculture and rural tourism making full use of each other's resources, market advantages and opportunities to promote each other and develop together. There is another definition emphasizes the integration of rural, agriculture and tourism. In 2010, The Ministry of Agriculture released the "12th Five-Year Plan for National Leisure Agriculture Development" and launched a campaign with the National Tourism Administration to create national leisure agriculture and rural tourism demonstration counties, which marking an accelerated development period for the integration of agriculture and tourism in China (Zhong YiPing et al., 2020). According to "the Annual Report on the Integrated Development of Rural One, Two, and Three Industries", the national business income of leisure agriculture and rural tourism exceeded 620 billion yuan in 2017, and the number of employees in leisure agriculture reached 9 million nationwide, and leisure agriculture has gradually become a representative industry for the integrated development of the three rural industries. The integration of agriculture and tourism has become an important way to sustain the development of rural tourism at present. Some rural tourism destinations are either agriculture-based or tourism-based in this integration process. The role of integration of

agriculture and tourism is manifested in pushing the development of rural tourism industry, promoting the further extension of the agricultural industry chain, and establishing a new industrial system that integrates modern agriculture and rural tourism in order to achieve the purpose of rural revitalization and tourism supporting the development of agriculture (Fan Hanjue, 2020).

The integration of agriculture and tourism will enrich the connotation of the previous rural tourism destination brand. In the process of the integration, the combination of agriculture and tourism is not a simple addition, but a rational adjustment of industrial resources and spatial layout optimization to promote the transformation of agriculture from traditional production activities to ecological living activities, and rural industries can be integrated and developed, thus extending the traditional agricultural industry chain and tourism industry chain, and forming a special brand industry chain; The integration can transform the originally little-known natural resources into rural tourism resources that attract tourists' attention, transform local special agricultural products into tourism products or tourism souvenirs, which forms special project brands and further enhances the brand awareness of rural tourism destinations (Chen Yan, 2020; Song, 2021). In addition to increasing the number of special tourism projects and extending the tourism industry chain, the integration of agriculture and tourism also generates service quality requirements for supporting services. Rural tourism essentially belongs to the service industry, which cannot be separated from supporting service quality in the context of Agro-tourism integration. It will seriously affect the perceived effect of tourism and customer satisfaction if tourists cannot experience the good supporting services in Agro-tourism project. It can be seen that the integration of agricultural and tourism can inject new content into agricultural and rural tourism, and generate new business, and promote the branding of rural tourism destinations.

3. Case Selection of Wuyuan

Wuyuan, located in Shangrao, Jiangxi Province, enjoys a pleasant climate and abundant rainfall throughout the year, and has been a famous tourist destination since the Tang Dynasty. Now there are 13 towns in Wuyuan that are rated as national ecological towns, the forest coverage rate of the whole county reaches 82.64%, the animal and plant resources are very rich, and 193 nature protection areas such as rare animal type, natural ecological type and water connotation type have been established; Wuyuan has 49 intangible cultural heritage projects at all levels, among which 6 items, including Huizhou opera, Nuo dance, three sculptures, She inkstone making technique, green tea making technique and Alu paper umbrella making technique, have been selected as national intangible cultural heritage list; The county has 7 famous Chinese historical and cultural villages, 12 national folk culture villages, and 28 Chinese traditional villages; It has 5 national key cultural relics protection units and A total of 16 points, and has more than 4,000 ancient buildings of Ming and Qing dynasties. At present, Wuyuan is the only AAA scenic spot in the whole country, with 1 AAAAA scenic spot Jiangwan and 14 AAAA scenic spots (People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2021). In 2019, the GDP of Wuyuan County was 13150.44 million yuan, among which the tertiary industry was 7835.4 million yuan, accounting for 59.58%. In 2019, the GDP grew by 8.6% year on year, while the tertiary industry grew by 9.3%. Wuyuan, which mainly focuses on the tertiary industry, has a high brand awareness of tourism. As an area of only 2947.51 square kilometers and a population of just over 300,000, Wuyuan receives more than 10 million tourists every year. Wuyuan also attaches importance to the development of agriculture while developing tourism. For example, wuyuan huangju and organic green tea have been vigorously invested and developed, and rape flowers have also become a must for tourists to Wuyuan travel. In short, Wuyuan is rich in tourism resources, and has a strong typicality in the development of national rural tourism, and has excellent

conditions for the integration of agriculture and tourism. The paper will analyze the specific practices of Wuyuan Agro-tourism integration, and how it affects the brand of Wuyuan tourism destination, what are the shortcomings and so on.

4. The Current Status of Brand Building based on Integration of Agriculture and Tourism

This part will analyze the brand building experience and the shortcomings from the Perspective of Wuyuan's Agro-tourism integration in order to better strengthen the Wuyuan brand building.

4.1. The Wuyuan Brand Building Experience based on Integration of Agriculture and Tourism

Wuyuan is a rural tourism destination that focuses mainly on tourism and at the same time attaches importance to the development of agriculture, and is a typically successful example of rural tourism construction in China and a demonstration area of Agro-tourism integration. Wuyuan brand building experience based on the integration of Agriculture and Tourism as follows:

Firstly, Local government-led clear development idea and reasonable layout planning for the integration of agriculture and tourism. Despite its long history of tourism, Wuyuan's traffic has not been very convenient due to its geographical location, which has hindered the development of Wuyuan to a certain extent. In the 1980s and 1990s, part of the Wuyuan population begins to move out, and some village population even moves out as much as half because the wuyuan economic development was relatively backward caused by the long-term inconvenience traffic. Since then, Wuyuan began to resume the development of tourism, and later began to implement the strategy of "developing the whole area of tourism, building the most beautiful countryside". Through the reasonable planning and use of agriculture and tourism resources, Wuyuan is converted into a tourist scenic area based on the original countryside, and won the title of the most beautiful countryside in China. At present, Wuyuan tourism brand image is also very prominent, And Wuyuan tourists mainly come from the domestic city and foreign countries. Through the analysis of tourists' comments from the tourism APP, the tourism brand image perceived by tourists mainly includes "beautiful scenery," which reflects the ecological and natural scenery of Wuyuan, "industrial culture" reflecting the rape flower and green tea of Wuyuan, and "leisure" that they want to pursue when they come to Wuyuan (Wang Rong et al., 2019; Shen Mengjun, Wu En, 2019). The brand images in tourists' minds are generated through Wuyuan's agricultural and tourism cultural resources' utilization and brand communication.

Secondly, Reasonable mix use of Wuyuan agriculture, tourism and cultural resources. Wuyuan is very rich in agriculture, tourism and cultural resources. By digging deeply agricultural resources and tourism and cultural resources, and building the brand of agricultural products and cultural brands, the government and enterprises actively promote the integration of agriculture and tourism and the integration of culture and tourism, see the table below. It uses ecological and agricultural resources to vigorously develop people-rich industries such as lotus red carp, cold-water pond fish, Jiangwan snow pear and rice and oil crop rotation in Wuyuan, and use cultural resources to have produced a number of beautiful villages such as the photographers' club Zhang Village and Yanshan Village of She Yan, which achieve an overall improvement in tourism and brand image. Some Wuyuan people are engaged in work related to tourism, some families have opened B&Bs, some are engaged in tourism catering, some develop the business of local chicken; Some ancient buildings in Wuyuan are either for tourists to visit, or are made into boutique hotels, special catering restaurants, and so on. Tradition and modernity are perfectly combined here. Through the integration of Agriculture and Tourism,

there has created new tourism industry in Wuyuan, and has enhanced the brand image of Wuyuan tourism.

Table 1. Agriculture and tourism resources and related brand in Wuyuan

Resources	Major Agro-tourism Projects	Agro-tourism Brands
Ecological resources: forest resources, water resources, natural scenery, maple trees, sea of flowers	Tourism, lotus red carp, cold water pond fish, Jiangwan Snow Pear and rice and oil rotation, green tea brand, agricultural experience-based tourism, tea tourism projects (Wuyuan ask tea, charming tea country tour) Ancient architecture + B&B + tourism, boutique hotels, specialty restaurants, tourism + sports, photographers' club Zhang Village, Yanshan Village, the hometown of She Yan, agricultural products + sunshine autumn	Agro-tourism special project brands (agricultural product brands, tourism special projects); Brand industry chain (such as Wuyuan tea travel industry chain, ancient architecture tourism B&B industry chain, etc.)
Agricultural products or processed products: Wuyuan yellow chrysanthemum, organic green tea, Wuyuan rape flowers, Tianjie food house, chili peppers, sun plaque, terraces		
Cultural resources: ancient Huizhou-style houses, architectural landscapes such as corridor bridges and ancestral halls, ancient villages, intangible cultural heritage projects at all levels, Huizhou folklore, rural entertainment		

Source: Author's compilation based on relevant information

Thirdly, paying attention to shaping special tourism project brand and special brand industry chain based on integration of agriculture and tourism. According to the foundation of Wuyuan's agricultural tourism economy and culture, and special tourism products and special agricultural product brands are created. Wuyuan's ancient villages, rape flowers and green tea have formed local special tourism products and brands. Taking green tea and its industry chain as an example, Wuyuan is famous as the hometown of tea, which was recorded into Lu Yu's "Tea Classic" in the Tang Dynasty and started to be used as tribute in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Wuyuan green tea is now exported to the European Union and has a high reputation overseas. Under the local government's driving, Wuyuan Green Tea Industry Park construction is promoted at a high level with 4A level scenic spot standard, which create a new landscape of industrial integration development and shape the brand of tea travel industry chain. As the cultural, economic and trade logistics centre for Wuyuan green tea, the industry park carries the mission of Wuyuan's tea culture image display, brand incubation and industrial innovation, and has designed a series of thematic activities including tea garden picking experiences, mountain excursions for fitness and sightseeing overlooks. According to planning of the industry park, it integrates planting, production, culture and tourism, and provides tea picking, tea making, tea tasting, tea shopping, tea fighting and watching tea art, learning tea art and watching performances and so on. Those enrich the connotation of modern agriculture and promote the integration of tea tourism.

4.2. The Deficiencies of Wuyuan Brand Development based on Agro-tourism Integration

4.2.1. There is Room for Further Integration of Wuyuan's Agriculture and Tourism Brands

Although Wuyuan tourism industry is well developed, and its agricultural resources are also rich, and its integration of agriculture and tourism has achieved certain effect, but the degree of integration is still far from enough. Agricultural travel brand in Wuyuan still has further space for development, and Wuyuan tourism being pillar industry plays the role of driving local agricultural development is not ideal, and brand industry chain from integration of agriculture and tourism also need to be extended to other Agro-tourism projects other than tea green. For

example, Wuyuan rape flower is very famous, and its rape terraces become tourist's must-see tourist spots. However, only the rape "flower" into the tourism industry, the rape industry chain including rapeseed processing products is not integrated with rural tourism. It does not fully draw on its advantages and characteristics in agriculture to tourism development in Wuyuan, and no give full play to the role of tourism development to drive local agricultural development.

4.2.2. Brand Communication Methods and Effects Need to be Improved

With the development of information technology and the popularity of the Internet, the focus of information sources has changed from traditional media to internet media. Although related Companies in Wuyuan actively makes use of internet resources to deliver information, now the Wuyuan brand spreads more from tourist word of mouth of tourism APP and bloggers information of Weibo and WeChat. Wuyuan official microblog released its first original message in May 2011. Up to now, there are less than 10,000 publicly released microblog messages with 440,000 followers, and the number of comments and retweets is not high. Wuyuan scenic spot opened an official TikTok account in October 2019, but the released video is very short, the work likes are not high, and the released content is mostly related on life trivialities, natural scenery as well as rape flower. Wuyuan scenic spot has not settled in other short video platforms. Some key words of Wuyuan brand communication mainly include the most beautiful countryside or village in China, the holy land of enjoying rape flowers, and the beautiful summer resort in autumn, which focus on beautiful natural scenery and ancient Huizhou sentiment. However, resources in Wuyuan are very rich and there are many scenic spots. It not only needs to seize the key resources or high visibility of the scenic spots to communication, but should promote other high-quality resources and scenic spots.

4.2.3. The Quality of Tourism Services Needs to be Improved

Through collecting the public's tourism comments of Wuyuan on Weibo, TikTok, Zhihu and other new media platforms, it found that tourists' satisfaction with the brand management quality of Wuyuan is not high, and the quality of tourism service needs to be improved. For example, various scenic spots in Wuyuan are scattered, and have large distances between scenic spots and independent operation, and local traffic is also not convenient, it is difficult for tourists to tour multiple scenic spots in Wuyuan in a short time, and it is more difficult to have a good travel experience. Wuyuan has not yet established a fast and convenient transportation system, so many tourists can only choose the way of self-drive travel, which will also restrict the long-distance tourists to travel to Wuyuan (Wang Rong et al., 2019). In addition, when tourists will need the help of staff for a variety of reasons inside the scenic spot, their perceived value is low because of the lack of enough staff in the scenic spot or the lack of business ability of staff.

5. The Strategies of Enhancing Wuyuan Brand Construction

Since rural tourism is the pillar industry of Wuyuan economy, in the context of Agro-tourism integration, it is necessary to better integrate Wuyuan rural agricultural resources and agricultural products into the tourism economy. The part will propose countermeasures of strengthening the brand construction of tourist destinations combined with the above-mentioned brand building experience and existing problems.

5.1. Integrating Wuyuan Agricultural Tourism Brand with Government as Lead and Culture as the Main Line

Tourist destinations are complexes created by the integration of various forces. The branding of agricultural tourism destinations should fully utilize the power of local governments, because the government is easier to integrate local resources to form a brand image. Considered to be the soul of rural tourism, culture plays a main role in the integration of agriculture and tourism. To this end, the local government should actively coordinate all forces to integrate Wuyuan

resources and continuously improve the brand image of the integration of agriculture and tourism with culture as the main line. In the process of integration of agriculture and tourism, it may actively carry out festival activities relying on the accumulation of Hui culture, such as intensively display and perform the "intangible cultural heritage" represented by Nuo dance, Hui opera, three sculptures, and She inkstone, and innovatively design Jialu paper umbrellas, She inkstones and other products in order to attract tourists, and let tourists have a deep understanding of Wuyuan folk culture; It also can promote "Jiu si tang, Ming xun tang" and other old house vacation activities to experience business life. It needs to pay more attention to cultivating premium brands of agricultural tourism products and developing the industrial chain of agricultural tourism brands. The development of rural tourism in Wuyuan is closely related to agricultural products, which including local characteristic agricultural and sideline products, dietary snacks, cultural and creative products, tourism projects and so on. Brand construction of Wuyuan tourist destination should not only develop the high-quality brand of a single product, but also need to cultivate excellent brand industry chain. In addition to further building the tea tourism brand industrial chain and the ancient architecture-tourism-homestay brand industrial chain, it is necessary to create Wuyuan special food-tourism brand. Wuyuan cuisine represented by powdered steamed vegetables and paste dishes is rich in nutrition, and it is necessary to increase the development of Wuyuan cuisine to enhance the gourmet experience of tourists.

5.2. Strengthening Brand Communication and Enhancing Brand Influence

In the choice of Wuyuan brand communication channel, it needs to pay attention to Internet communication channels and analyze the characteristics of potential users to make content marketing. Because there is travel user community which gathered with the same characteristics in internet social software such as Weibo and TikTok, it is necessary to design accurate communication content for these user communities. It can also be accompanied by product links under the vibrato video, such as designing promotional mix including boutique travel routes, food, accommodation, and so on, and integrating agricultural tourism and natural scenery tourism aimed to promote agriculture and tourism each other. Wuyuan can also create emotional resonance for tourists and promote branding through learning from the design of cultural and creative products or combining story characters with story scenes.

In the selection of Wuyuan brand communication content, in addition to disseminating natural scenery, idyllic scenery, and local folk customs, the promotion of agricultural products should be integrated into the promotion of tourist attractions, as agricultural products have become an important part of the development product system of tourist attractions in the process of integration of agriculture and tourism. The promotion of agricultural products of tourism scenic spot will be closer to the demands of tourists, highlight its cultural and regional uniqueness and the value of leisure experience, which makes the communication content of the Wuyuan brand richer and builds more distinctive brand image.

5.3. Improving Brand Service Quality

At present, Wuyuan's brand service quality problems mainly originate from the inconvenience of rural transportation affecting tourists' travel, and lack of professional staff and teams. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen Wuyuan's infrastructure construction and professional talent training. On the one hand, it is supposed to improve rural transportation and optimizing the construction of rural roads; on the other hand, it needs to improve the quality of farmers and employees, and train professional staff and brand management teams so that more high-quality talents can return to their hometowns. In addition, it also needs to improve the management system of scenic spots to avoid behaviors such as "slaughtering customers". When brand image problems occur, they should be solved in a timely and effective manner to avoid the spread of negative word-of-mouth.

6. Conclusion

The integration of agriculture and tourism is the inevitable choice of sustainable development of Wuyuan tourism, which extends the agricultural industry chain and tourism industry chain, and forms a special brand industry chain, such as tea tourism industry chain. Under the leading of local government, the current Wuyuan agriculture and tourism has presented a certain degree of the Agro-tourism integration, which through reasonably carrying out Wuyuan agriculture, tourism and cultural resources mix utilization, and shaping some Wuyuan characteristic tourism project brand and brand industry chain. However, the analysis of the Wuyuan case finds that it still shows problems such as not ideal integration degree of agricultural tourism brand and poor brand communication effect, and so on. So, it needs to take further countermeasures to enhance the Wuyuan brand image of Agro-tourism integration, and to help the Wuyuan rural tourism sustainable development.

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