

# Study on the Impacts of Tourism Development in Letong Ancient Town: A Resident Perception-Based Approach

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**Abstract:** Residents constitute the principal elements of regional tourism development, and their behavioral cognition will play a certain role in promoting local tourism development. In recent years, although tourism along the Sichuan–Tibet Line (318 and 317 routes) has made some progress, there are some problems, such as homogenization of products, a single local culture, and inconspicuous brand characteristics. At the same time, due to the remote geographical location, living conditions, health conditions, and other imperfections, resulting in greater constraints on tourism development. This article employs Letong Ancient Town as a representative case study, and discusses the impact of tourism development on the local economy, environment, society, and culture from the perspective of residents' perception through field research and data analysis, thereby providing a reference for regional tourism development.

**Keywords:** Letong Ancient Town; Tourism supply; Residents' perception

**Online publication:** July 11, 2024

## 1. Introduction

With the construction process of the Sichuan–Tibet Railway, the economic development along the line has been promoted, and the living standard of the residents has also been improved. At the same time, urban residents face the increasingly noisy environment and fast-paced urban life, longing for a quiet and beautiful natural environment and freshness, and the rich natural resources and human resources along the Sichuan–Tibet Railway can meet the tourism needs of urban residents, so the development of tourism along the railroad is an inevitable trend. By reviewing and organizing the existing literature, in foreign countries, the tourism industry has been developed for a long time, has formed a more solid research system, and also presents a diversified tendency in the direction of research. Domestic and foreign scholars have studied the influencing factors of the tourism economy and tourism environment in depth, and have paid more and more attention to the relationship between social culture and tourism, that is, the relationship between residents and tourism. Zorica *et al.*'s point of view is that, with the increase in the continuity of tourism activities, between foreign tourists and locals, they will

realize the development of cultural and ideological integration, learn from each other, and complement each other's strengths and weaknesses to slowly develop into new characteristics of the culture <sup>[1]</sup>. Lee and Shim believed that the historical stories and cultural characteristics of tourist places are the key elements to attract tourists, so in the process of developing tourist places not only repairing the local scenery and architecture but also paying attention to the excavation of the characteristics of the history and culture <sup>[2]</sup>. Kim *et al.* argued that in the development of the tourism industry, the over-commercialized use of the traditional characteristics of the culture and ideas will have an unpredictable impact on the local cultural traditions and will produce unpredictable damage <sup>[3]</sup>. Calabrò and Vieri argued that the development and preservation of cultural heritage are not contradictory and achieve a mutually reinforcing role, bringing cultural and historical value <sup>[4]</sup>. Ryu *et al.* investigated the role of residents' participation in their perceived benefits of rural tourism projects in Kumbalangi, India <sup>[5]</sup>. Aly *et al.*'s view is that driving the development of tourism in northern Nigeria not only gradually improves infrastructure, but at the same time, drives the local economy income and increases tax revenue, yet there are negative consequences: neglect of faith and traditional values and unfriendly to the road system, in addition to highlighting the negative effects of economic and cultural diversification on tourism development in northern Nigeria <sup>[6]</sup>. Zhang summarized the impact on the environment during the development of the tourism industry, which includes both positive and negative dimensions, and also analyzed some of the reasons why the tourism environment has caused changes and variations in the local environment <sup>[7]</sup>. Wang conducted an in-depth analysis of the impact on the environmental, cultural, and economic levels <sup>[8]</sup>. Lu analyzed whether the residents' participation in the tourism process would affect the social and cultural changes based on the residents' participation level and the content of the study <sup>[9]</sup>.

In summary, the research exploring the impact of tourism development spans multiple disciplines, including tourism, economics, sociology, psychology, and others. Among these studies, relatively few focus on the perceptions of residents in tourist destinations. This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of Letong Ancient Town, which serves as the primary research subject of the investigation. It explores the impact of tourism development on the regional economy, environment, and social culture from the perspective of residents. The aim is to provide insights for the region's tourism development, thereby promoting regional development and achieving economic growth.

## **2. Analysis of the impact of tourism development in Letong Ancient Town**

Letong Township, located in the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, is rich in tourism resources. It is situated in the western part of Sichuan Province, within the southwestern region of the country. The area boasts several notable tourist attractions, including the Genie Snow Mountain Natural Scenic Area, one of China's most beautiful grasslands, Maoya Grassland, the Bayi International Horse Racing Festival, Hai Zi Mountain Natural Scenic Area, Zaga Mountain Scenic Area, Gemu Natural Ecological Reserve, and the Lower Dam Caves. These well-known tourist resources are part of the scenic area radiated by the Maoya Dam site along the Sichuan–Tibet Railway.

### **2.1. Data collection**

The survey was conducted through field research and the random distribution of questionnaires to rural cadres, managers, and residents, and took two weeks to complete. A Likert scale was used to set the evaluation index, with different grades from 1 to 5 assigned to indicate the degree of agreement. The responses were divided into five levels: "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The evaluation indexes were combined with their influence to assign scores from 1 to 5, indicating the degree of agreement. The

higher the overall score, the higher the cognitive level of the community residents, which in turn enhances their subjective initiative and stimulates the overall development of tourism.

A total of 320 questionnaires were collected, of which 308 were valid, resulting in a validity rate of 96% after excluding 12 invalid questionnaires. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows: 163 men (52.92%) and 145 women (47.08%). Age distribution included 39 individuals under 18 years old (12.66%), 147 individuals aged 18–40 (47.73%), 87 individuals aged 41–65 (28.25%), and 35 individuals aged 65 and above (11.36%). Occupational distribution showed that 53.57% were enterprise workers, followed by civil servants (16.56%), enterprise managers (15.58%), housewives (8.44%), and farmers (5.85%).

## 2.2. Reliability and validity analysis

In this paper, the alpha reliability coefficient method is adopted by SPSS23 to carry out the test, and the Likert 5-level scale is adopted, so the reliability coefficient needs to be above 0.7. According to **Table 1**, the overall sample reliability analysis Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.897, the value is above 0.8, indicating that the overall reliability level of the sample has credibility. According to **Table 2**, the variable economic influence perception, with a validity coefficient of 0.886; the variable environmental influence perception, with a validity coefficient of 0.822; and socio-cultural influence perception, with a sanitization coefficient of 0.756, are greater than 0.7, indicating that the sample passes the validity test.

**Table 1.** Sample reliability analysis

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient	Number of items
0.897	12

**Table 2.** Sample validity analysis

Variables	Coefficient
Perceived economic impact	0.886
Perceived environmental impact	0.822
Perceived social and cultural impact	0.756

## 2.3. Impact analysis

From the perspective of residents’ perception, this paper explores the impact of tourism development on the economy, environment, and social culture of the region. The results of the field questionnaire survey are as follows:

### 2.3.1. Social and cultural impact

In terms of society and culture, the questionnaire data revealed the following:

- (1) Openness and progressiveness: 206 people (66.88%) agreed that “the development of tourism makes residents more open and progressive in their ideas,” while 54 people (17.54%) disagreed.
- (2) Cultural exchange: 208 people (67.53%) agreed that “the development of tourism promotes cultural exchanges between tourists and residents,” with 55 people (17.86%) opposing this view.
- (3) Cultural identity: 209 people (67.85%) agreed that “the development of tourism has brought positive impacts on local cultural identity,” while 47 people (12.56%) disagreed.

The survey indicates that the interest of tourists in local folk arts has significantly increased the enthusiasm of residents to preserve and promote these traditions. Thus, tourism development has greatly assisted in the

dissemination and promotion of the town's traditional culture. However, negative perceptions focus on changes in living habits, the influx of commercial elements, the dilution of local cultural characteristics, and cultural homogenization. Some traditional cultural elements may have been over-commercialized, losing their original essence and meaning.

### **2.3.2. Environmental impact**

In terms of the environment, the questionnaire data showed:

- (1) Infrastructure improvement: 219 people (71.1%) agreed that “tourism development has improved infrastructure (including water and electricity supply),” while 51 people (16.56%) disagreed.
- (2) Environmental pollution: 230 people (74.7%) agreed that “the development of tourism aggravates environmental pollution and increases domestic waste,” with 43 people (13.96%) opposing this view.
- (3) Natural environment damage: 214 people (69.48%) agreed that “the development of tourism has damaged the natural environment and landscape,” while 59 people (19.15%) disagreed.
- (4) Traffic congestion: 210 people (68.18%) agreed that “the development of tourism makes local travel inconvenient and causes traffic congestion during peak tourism seasons,” with 57 people (18.51%) opposing this view.

Residents perceive that if the benefits gained from tourism development exceed the costs, they tend to support it. A good ecological environment is crucial for local tourism resources, leading to stronger positive perceptions of the environmental impact. The survey indicates that tourism development can improve local public services and living conditions while enhancing residents' awareness of ecological protection.

### **2.3.3. Economic impact**

In terms of the economy, the questionnaire data revealed:

- (1) Economic conditions: 215 people (69.8%) agreed that “the increase in the number of tourists has improved local economic conditions,” while 55 people (17.86%) disagreed.
- (2) Employment opportunities: 217 people (70.45%) agreed that “the development of tourism has created local employment opportunities,” with 53 people (17.21%) opposing this view.
- (3) Local investment: 219 people (71.1%) agreed that “tourism development has attracted local investment,” while 47 people (15.26%) disagreed.
- (4) Quality of life: 201 people (65.26%) agreed that “tourism development has improved the quality of local life,” with 55 people (17.86%) opposing this view.
- (5) Living costs: 216 people (70.13%) agreed that “tourism development increases local living costs,” while 55 people (17.85%) opposed this view.

Residents of Letong Ancient Town have strong positive perceptions of the economic impact of tourism. Field research found that the influx of tourists has increased residents' income and employment opportunities, showing tourism's positive role in generating income. However, the cost of living has also risen.

## **3. Conclusion and outlook**

Through this study, it is found that the advantages of tourism development far outweigh the negative impacts. The development of tourism not only enhances the local economic level but also has a positive impact on the environment and social culture. The local economy can fully develop through tourism, and the residents' ideology and quality of life have also improved qualitatively with the growth of tourism. Therefore, tourism development and the development of the local community are mutually complementary. However, the rapid

development of tourism has also brought certain challenges to the regional environment and cultural protection. These challenges include (1) The impact of foreign cultures; (2) Increased holiday traffic, generating noise; (3) Various types of living garbage; and (4) Serious damage to the ecological environment. To achieve the sustainable development of regional tourism and ensure a virtuous cycle, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive regional tourism strategy and an effective environmental protection system.

## Funding

The 2022 Sichuan Tourism Development Research Center General Project “A Study on the Perceived Evaluation and Differences of Tourism Supply between Tourists and Local Residents along the Sichuan Tibet Railway” (Project No. LY22-25)

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## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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