

Study on the Impact of Corona Virus Disease 2019 on Qiang Rural Tourism and Coping Strategies

—Take Maoxian, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province as an Example

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How to cite this paper: Zheng, X. (2021). Study on the Impact of Corona Virus Disease 2019 on Qiang Rural Tourism and Coping Strategies. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, 95-106.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.95008>

Received: April 16, 2021

Accepted: May 9, 2021

Published: May 12, 2021

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease 2019 is the most widespread and deepest impact upon the tourism industry in China since the reform and opening up. Local governments and the tourism sector have taken measures to promote the recovery and development within the tourism industry. The tourism market and cultural tourism consumption in Sichuan province are one of the most affected and lost industries. Mao County, a must-visit destination in the western part of Sichuan Province along the Ninth Ring Road, resumed work and production after preventive and control measures were taken. On April 26, 2020, the county slowly began to welcome passenger traffic and bucolic tourism in Qiang villages gradually began to resume operations. In the context of epidemic prevention and control, this paper compares the current situation of tourism in Mao County with Sichuan analyzes the impact of the epidemic on Qiang tourism, and proposes corresponding countermeasures. This is important to seize fresh opportunities, taps brand new potentials, encourages new models, and accelerates the sustainable and rapid recovery of the consumer market in Mao County, and hopefully provides some reference for the future development of rural tourism in the Qiang villages.

Keywords

COVID-19, Rural Tourism, Qiang Villages, Impact, Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

Rural tourism, as a modern form of tourism (Liu, 2020), is a product of the un-

known countryside and the new era, and plays an important role in promoting the development of the agricultural economy. The emergence of rustic tourism has given rise to a new economical model of “agriculture + leisure + tourism”, which is conducive to the integration and transformation of the rustic economy by shaping high-quality folk landscapes while developing agriculture; rural tourism further expands the sales channels of agronomic products, improves topical economical returns, and promotes the expansion, clustering and standardization of the agronomic industry chain; rustic tourism expands the sales channels of agronomic products and improves local economic returns. Rgricultural tourism (Huang et al., 2015) as well brings employment opportunities to the local countryside, accelerating the process of rural urbanization and the transformation of agricultural infrastructure. With the influx of strange tourists bucolic tourism in villages has deepened artistic exchanges between urban and rustic areas, improved the overall cultural level of the rural population, and facilitated the preservation and transmission of sectional folk culture, while also enhancing the happiness of unfamiliar tourists, who live their “desired life” here.

At the same time, the rural tourism industry is highly sensitive and vulnerable. In December 2019, a novel coronavirus pneumonia broke out in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across China. A quarantine-based lock down was adopted across the country. The government extended the Chinese New Year holiday, and businesses began to postpone the start of work, but normal social activities of people were severely affected. Offline consumption came to a halt, and various industries suffered a huge blow, while the tourism industry also suffered a heavy blow. 2020 On March 12, 2020, Sichuan Province held its 14th prevention and control of the new coronavirus in the form of a web-based pneumonia outbreak press conference. According to incomplete statistics, the loss caused by the epidemic to the province’s tourism industry will exceed 150 billion yuan, and under the strong leadership of the provincial government, the province’s tourism system has achieved linkage and rapid response. 13,966 entertainment venues have been closed. 3799 business performances have been canceled. 678 scenic spots have been closed. 5447 groups have been canceled, and more than 122,000 people have been canceled. According to the relevant agencies (Xia & Feng, 2020), the loss of ethnic culture tourism industry will reach 40% by 2020. With the rapid spread of the epidemic in China, the tourism industry will have been little to gain from the long Spring Festival holiday in 2020. The outbreak of the new pneumonia has had a significant impact on China’s rustic tourism industry. Yan Wei (Yan & Yan, 2020) analyzed the business pressure and coping strategies faced by small and medium-sized tourism enterprises most affected by the epidemic, analyzed the changes in the economic elasticity of the tourism industry, and concluded that the tourism industry will maintain a high recovery efficiency in the post-epidemic period. Hu Huimin (Hu & He, 2020) analyzed the unique advantages of tourism and discussed the marketing strategies of tourism, taking into account the problems during the recovery of tourism, to provide assistance for the first recovery of rural tourism after the epidemic. Luo

Wei and Jin Mengting (Luo et al., 2020) analyzed the negative impacts of the fresh coronavirus pneumonia on China's tourism industry, such as, for example, stagnation of scenic spot operations, shrinking tourism market, increased industry competition, lack of tourism conditions, and changes in tourism demand. To achieve recovery and revitalization of China's rural tourism industry after the new coronavirus pneumonia, two aspects are needed: the government should increase support for post-harvest recovery and rehabilitation, establish post-disaster emergency management and safety warning mechanisms, and strengthen post-disaster tourism market order maintenance and service management. It should do a good job of epidemic prevention and control, improve the quality of tourism products and service management, increase publicity and promotion, and use technology to drive the upgrading of the tourism industry. Faced with this unprecedented epidemic, tourists have been thinking and analyzing, deeply concerned about the recovery, promotion and development of rural tourism after the epidemic. In a large number of studies, scholars have each conducted some discussions on the problems in the recovery of rural tourism, but the relationship and impact between rural tourism and ethnic areas, the importance of synergistic development of both, and in-depth empirical studies and case studies are more lacking. The analysis of these issues is of strong practical significance for solving the problems of urban-rural integration and rural revitalization in ethnic areas.

Now, many attractions are opening in Sichuan Province, but people's travel situation is not optimistic. In this special period, the advantages of rural tourism come to the fore. How-to guide tourism consumers to make travel decisions through marketing and other means is a question worth exploring. In this paper, Maoxian, the largest Qiang county in China, is selected as the research site. Through field research and interviews in Qiang villages, we analyze the impact of new coronavirus pneumonia on the development of cultural travel in Qiang villages in Mao County and give the results of scientific coping strategies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Location

Maoxian is located in the southeast of Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, with a total area of 3902.6 square kilometers. Straddling the upper reaches of the Min and Ful rivers, it is known as a "craggy peak with many shady valleys". The terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast. The altitude of the mountains is about 4000 meters, and the average altitude of the county is about 1700 meters. Maoxian is not only an important breeding ground for the ancient Shu people, but also a corridor of the Hori River, an important stop on the ancient Tea Horse Road and a distribution center for materials on the westerly plateau of Sichuan. Chengdu is 190 kilometers away from the capital of Sichuan, and is the only way to Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong via the "westerly Route of the Ninth Ring Road". It is an important tourist hub in northwestern Sichuan, China. After the opening of Chengdu-Lanzhou railroad in the future,

Mao County will be integrated into the “one-hour” tourism circle of Chengdu, and the transportation location will show the incomparable advantages of the other three counties in the Qiang region (Beichuan, Wenchuan and Lixian) (Figure 1).

2.2. Research Status

Maoxian is the largest Qiang county and the core area of Qiang culture in China is considered to be the most typical area for the Qiang people. The Qiang is an ancient person, with Oracle bone records, and has maintained its original ethnic origin. It has been able to experience the strife of successive dynasties and has been called a “living fossil” in the evolutionary history of the Chinese nation. The population of Qiang in the county is about 110,000, accounting for 30% of the total population of Qiang in China. Maoxian (Song, 2012) has been listed as a national Qiang cultural and ecological protection experimental area. Qiang culture is not only an important part of rural cultural tourism in Maoxian, but also a powerful driving force for the recovery and development of tourism in Maoxian. Here is the only Qiang museum in China, with ancient Qiang tower’s

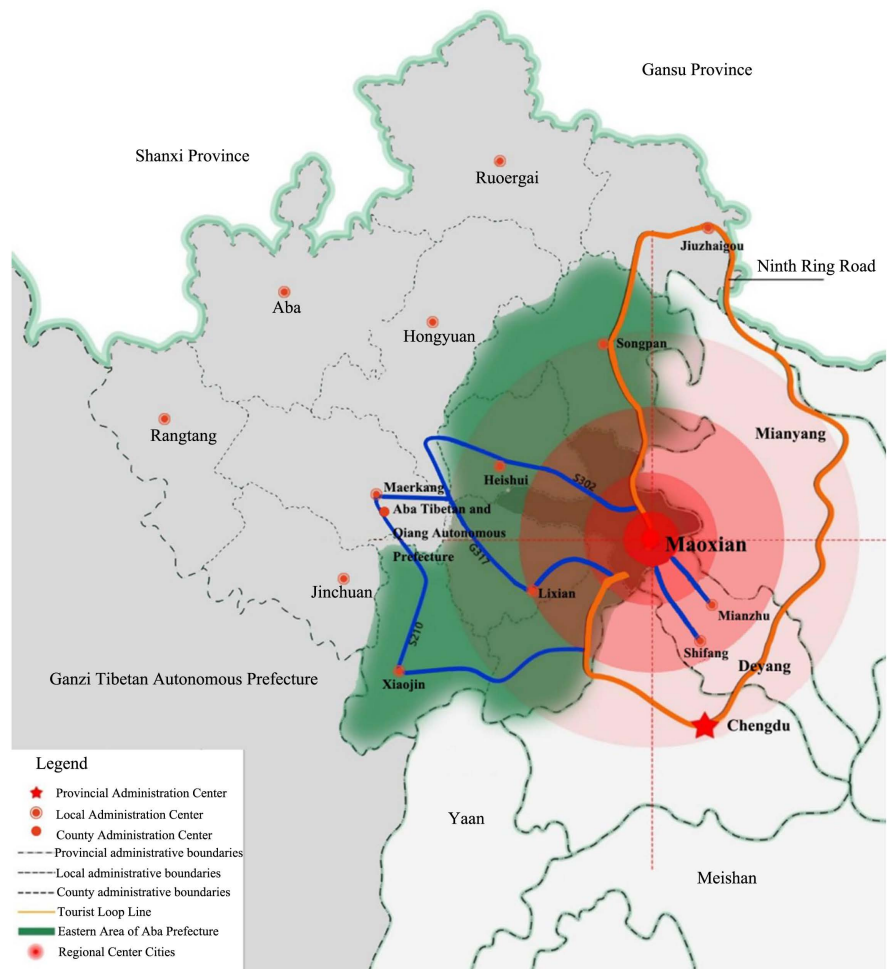


Figure 1. Location of Maoxian.

architecture, Qiang flute (**Figure 2**), Qiang watchtower (**Figure 3**), Qiang show. It is a unique treasure of Qiang culture, which is undoubtedly a great source of resources for Qiang cultural tourism in Maoxian.

At present, the carrier of Qiang rural industry in Maoxian is mainly Qiang villages and tourist attractions. 2010, the construction of the first batch of high-quality tourism village demonstration points of Pingtuo Village, Muto Village, Yangliu Village, Niuwei Village, four villages, the change of “village” to “village”, the whole into “Qiangxiang Ancient Village” scenic spot. At the same time, overcoming the impact of the “8 - 8” Jiuzhaigou earthquake disaster, leading the recovery and revitalization of the industry with the integration of cultural tourism development. We have prosperously created influential festivals such as “Maoxian Plum Culture and Tourism Festival Val Russian Foot” and “Qiang New Year”; successfully declared nine non-heritage projects at regional and state levels; and were prosperously shortlisted as one of the candidate counties for the original batch of famous tourism counties in Sichuan Province and one of the initial batches whole area tourism demonstration zones The creation of the list. The tourism brands represented by the original ecologic Qiang culture display in the ancient Qiang city of China, ecologic tourism in Songpinggou of Deixi, outdoor sports of alpine skiing in Jiuding Mountain ([Pan, 2018](#)), leisure and recreation in the aged Qiang village have basically taken shape. In June 2020, Pingtuo Village was selected as one of the 100 key villages of tourism in Sichuan Province and the first batch of national forest villages. Into Pingtuo Village and Muto Village have become important pillars of tourism in Maoxian and typical representatives of tourism industries such as rural tourism, ecological tourism, and agricultural tourism in Maoxian. As shown in **Table 1**.



Figure 2. Qiang flute.



Figure 3. Qiang Watchtower.

Table 1. Qiang characteristic tourism industry representatives.

Representative of Qiang characteristics	Tourism industry carrier	Tourism Industry Resources
Pingtou Qiang Village; Muto Qiang Village; Baishi Qiang Village	Qiang Villages; Tourist Attractions	Village scenery; Qiang folk culture; agricultural specialties
Niuwei Village; Shawan Village	Qiang Village	Village scenery; Qiang folk culture; agricultural products
Ancient Qiang City of China	Tourist Attractions (4A)	Qiang watchtower architecture; Qiang folk culture; cultural and sports performances; arts and crafts
Jiudingshan International Alpine; Ski Resort	Tourist Attractions	Ecological environment; natural scenery; ski resort; resort

Source: Compiled from field research.

With the opportunity of building the national Qiang and ecological experimental reserve, we vigorously promote and inherit and build the Qiang cultural rural tourism destination, with the Qiang village ancient fortress scenic area of the core of Pingtuo Village (Zhang, 2018) (Figure 4) and Muto Village, and China Ancient Qiang City (Figure 5), which brings together the essence of Qiang traditional culture, is a typical representative of the integration of agriculture, culture and tourism and the integration of culture, business and tourism. Using its own advantageous resources, it has created the Jiuding Mountain International Alpine Ski Resort, which integrates ski tourism, outdoor camping, sports and leisure, and sightseeing and vacation, and developed a new tourism and sports industry. At the same time, the public platforms of “Maoxian Tourism” micro letter and intelligent tourism system are built, focusing on the integration of tourism and Internet technology.



Figure 4. Pingtuo Village.



Figure 5. Ancient Qiang city, China.

3. Analysis of the Impact of the COVID-19 on Rural Tourism in Qiang Villages

The COVID-19 has a wide range of effects and a long duration, causing inevitable negative impacts on the bucolic tourism industry in Maoxian in the short term. However, relevant departments and practitioners should have a strategic consideration to turn crisis into opportunity, focusing on the long-term development trend of tourism in Qiang villages and promoting innovation and upgrading of the county's rural tourism industry through policy support.

1) The economic benefits of rural tourism in Qiang villages have suffered direct losses

The occurrence of the COVID-19, 45 A-class tourist attraction (including three national scenic spots with Jiuzhaigou, Huanglong and Siliuoshan), seven museums (memorials), one art gallery, 14 libraries, 14 centres and 219 township cultural stations have been closed within Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous

Prefecture; 1 entering groups have been canceled, with 3281 group visitors. 67 teams were canceled, with 1008 team visitors. The Spring Festival holiday was originally a golden week for tourism featuring ethnic minorities, and the COVID-19 has led to the closure of basically all scenic spots since the outbreak. On January 25, 2020, Maoxian closed the China Ancient Qiang City Scenic Area, the Songpinggou Scenic Area in Feixi, the Prince's Ridge Ski Resort in Jiuding Mountain Scenic Area, as well as the towns and villages set up epidemic prevention chokes points, banned all foreign vehicles and personnel from entering, blocking the flow of people and suspending or postponing activities, bringing irreparable losses to the tourism business income of Maoxian and even Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture. The Spring Festival Golden Week was a period of good business conditions for tourism across the state, but this year, due to the need for prevention and control of the COVID-19, leisure agriculture and tourism operators closed their doors to customers, and revenue from tourism businesses such as tickets, catering, accommodation and shopping was close to zero, resulting in large losses.

2) The spread of the Qiang Village tourism cycle has affected the recovery of the ethnic tourism industry in the post-epidemic period

For the "Spring Festival Golden Week" of rural tourism in Maoxian, some activities such as lantern fairs on Qiang Spring Festival folk customs are usually held in the ancient Qiang City to attract a large number of foreign tourists. Because of the COVID-19, these long-prepared projects were not carried out as planned, resulting in waste and economic loss. During the period of the COVID-19 prevention and control, the chances of choosing are significantly reduced for safety reasons; the COVID-19 prevention and control have continued to unfold, resulting in the peak season of tourism for the entire village as a summer village with Qiang characteristics will also be seriously affected. In addition, during the latter stages of the COVID-19, production enterprises within the major cities are likely to resume production by transferring holidays and using weekends to work overtime, which, to a certain extent, affects tourists' holiday leisure consumption and is not conducive to the cycle of Qiang village tourism development and recovery.

3) The tourism of Qiang villages has been damaged, which is not conducive to sustainable development

The impact of the COVID-19 on the tourism industry chain in Maoxian, represented by the Qiang culture, is reflected in catering services, accommodation services, sales of agronomic and sideline products with ethnic characteristics, Qiang l performances, logistics and transportation, especially in the subdivided industries of catering, accommodation and sales of agronomic and sideline products. The movements of people and leisure consumption during the period of prevention and control of the COVID-19 were hindered, and the agricultural and sideline products were unable to add value through l tourism; the Qiang national characteristic landscape created also lost the process of transforming from multifunctional values such as cultural, ecological and social into economic val-

ues. Thus, in addition to direct losses, the COVID-19 has caused chain damage to the county and even the state's tourism industry chain of ethnic minority characteristics, affecting the sustainable development of the rural tourism industry of the entire Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture.

4) The prolonged home epidemic prevention and control have brought mental depression to the people

High expectations of health consumption demand after the COVID-19. Rural tourism is close to nature and suitable for psychological healing after the epidemic. The countryside and fields have an ordinary healing effect due to their ecologic beauty and slow pace of life, which fits the consumer psychology of urban residents after a period of panic and isolation. The special geographical location of Mao County allows you to relax and feel the humanistic atmosphere of the countryside, relieving the depression brought by the epidemic while having a good ordinary ecologic environment. Because this virus originates from a wild animal parasitic virus, it is transmitted through people gathering in contact and seriously endangers people's health. This new coronavirus pneumonia will once again wake up people's awareness of healthy living and consumption. Food quality safety and consumer health and hygiene will attract great attention, and people will be more eager to relax in the village and rural tourism with beautiful environment and safe consumption.

4. Suggestions

After field research, enquiries revealed that the number of people choosing tourism in Qiang Village after the epidemic has decreased significantly in 2020 compared to 2021. In the face of this situation, local people and expect the village committee and the government to introduce economic support policies to promote the development of tourism in their hometown back to health. According to China's internal epidemic prevention and control into normalization, urban and residents to accelerate the release of travel demand, also gradually enhance obvious. Based on these findings, the author believes that in order to play tourism in Qiang villages the following countermeasure suggestions for recovery and development are proposed, with a view to promoting the rapid revival and sustainable development of rural tourism in Qiang villages.

1) Provide substantial support measures in the short term to reduce operators' losses

It is suggested that relevant departments of the local government provide scientific guidance and substantial support for rural tourism industry in Qiang Village, Maoxian County in terms of policy and financial support, facility construction and supervision and management. Strengthen financial fund coordination and actively strive for various agriculture-related projects to support rural tourism development. Strengthen financial support, cooperate with relevant departments to open up green channels of credit, speed up the issuance of loans, the implementation of interest subsidies as well as the rural tourism business entities with ethnic characteristics should maximize the rent reduction conces-

sions.

2) To adapt to the new needs of the development of the new era, to improve the quality of rural tourism characteristics of the Qiang villages

Rural tourism is no longer a simple “eat farming rice, live in farming house, do farming work, see farming scenery” collection, but the integration of leisure travel and residence, health and wellness, rural culture and creativity, agricultural experience, e-commerce and other new needs and new business models. According to the current resource conditions and strategic positioning of Maoxian County, the Qiang village with Qiang characteristics of rural tourism as the core leading to trade and commerce economy, physical leisure and health mutual integration of the mountainous “Qiang country ancient village” scenic area in the most well done tourism to provide tourists with a safer Qiang environment, better quality tourism services, more across the tourism activities, more comprehensive tourism activities. Tourism activities are richer and more comprehensive. Promote the living heritage of Qiang culture. Through costume culture, festival culture, food culture and performing arts culture, enhance the cultural connotation of Qiang City, create a model of living heritage of Qiang culture, gather popularity and develop night economy. Build a culture and art industrial park, deeply integrate minority culture, fruit and vegetable culture with tourism, and focus on developing imaginative industries. Find the combination of Qiang culture and special products, tell good brand stories, highlight brand characteristics, and start from its own brand culture.

3) Improve rural tourism management service level

The image of rural tourism in Maoxian is not outstanding in the whole Sichuan ethnic area (Zhang, 2019), while the corresponding supporting facilities and tourism environment of rural tourism still need to be improved visibility, recognition, influence and reputation need to be improved. The four stakeholders—government, village committee, tourism development company and villagers—need to work together to establish a benign communication and coordination mechanism and benefit distribution mechanism in order to achieve common construction and sharing (Figure 6). At the same time, the overall quality of tourism service personnel can be improved by strengthening the training of tourism reception and service specifications, establishing a brand image, and

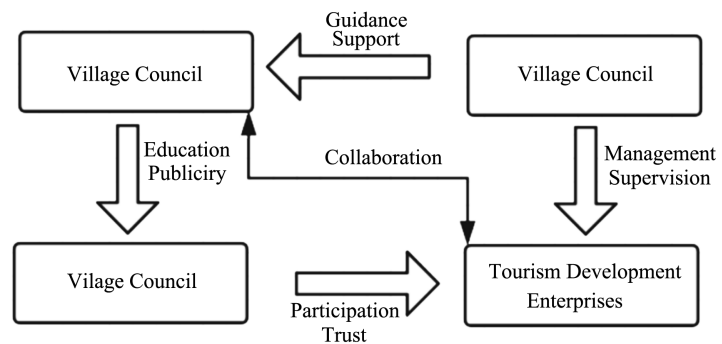


Figure 6. The positive interaction relationship between the four.

driving the construction of tourism urbanization by improving the quality and efficiency of characteristic rural tourism to truly realize the great development situation of going hand in hand and integrating urban and rural areas.

4) Integrate the power of the media and do a good job of publicizing the health and safety of Qiang Village

The negative emotions such as irritation and anxiety caused by the new crown epidemic and quarantine policy have gradually penetrated into people's hearts, and even if the epidemic is over it will still constrain people's behavior, which will directly affect the process of rural tourism development. To dispel the concerns of tourists, we have to solve the health and safety problems that tourists are concerned about. After the epidemic, the villagers of Qiang Village should strengthen the disinfection and sterilization of rooms, restaurants, public places and food materials, and make public announcements on the Qiang Village Visitor Center's publicity videos and bulletin boards in a timely manner to do a good job of "disinfection propaganda", start self-correction and self-investigation of health and safety issues, include health and safety inspection in their daily work, regularly The results of these checks will be published on a regular basis, and tourists will be invited to supervise them in order to ease their worries and restore their confidence in the health and safety of rural tourism. In addition to promoting corporate epidemic prevention measures, we must also promote the beautiful life of ecology, livability and recreation. After the epidemic, the publicity of Qiang Village rural tourism should also tend to build sunny mountains and water, recuperate small cities, create a natural and comfortable travel and living experience, and convey eco-friendly green ideas.

5. Conclusion

According to the experience of previous major public health emergencies, everything is two-sided, and the epidemic has had a serious impact on the rural tourism industry in Qiang Village, but from another perspective, the severe market situation has forced the entire rural tourism industry to improve itself. The peak season is mainly from mid to late April to mid-October (the best time for summer vacation). It is recommended that rural tourism-related departments maintain communication and coordination, plan ahead, focus on upgrading and innovating the rural tourism industry in the post-epidemic era, and take systematic measures to promote high-quality sustainable development of the county's rural tourism industry with ethnic characteristics on the basis of coping with short-term shocks. In addition, operators related to rural tourism in Qiang Village should also be prepared to meet their customers. The key to missing the peak season and being able to persevere through the difficulties of the post-epidemic period lies in their own ability to do well.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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