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# Research Progress of Tourism-oriented Poverty Alleviation in China

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**Abstract** Through systematic summary of domestic research documents about China's tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in recent 10 years, it is found that researches mainly focus on 5 aspects: effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, model and development strategy, benefit of poverty stricken people, practice of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in specific region, and other related problems. At present, academic circle mainly has weak points of research content, method, object and region in tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Finally, it points out key research interests: (1) Strengthening combination of qualitative and quantitative researches; (2) Expanding research fields and scope and promoting in-depth researches; (3) Analyzing benefiting mechanism of poverty-stricken people participating in tourism development in depth with poverty-stricken people as research objects; (4) Increasing scale development of perception research on effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation and research on measurement testing, to make subsequent research have reliability and comparability.

**Key words** Tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, Research progress, China

Poverty amid affluence is an enormous challenge in the present world, and it threatens survival and development of human. Eliminating poverty and realizing common prosperity are sacred responsibility of all states and government. At the opening ceremony of International Conference on Poverty held on May 26, 2004, Premier of the State Council, Wen Jiabao made solemn promise of "making effort to make people share achievement of economic development and reach common prosperity". Tourism industry has higher industrial correlation, so it has greater potential in promoting regional economic growth, increasing employment opportunities, and eliminating poverty, and many countries take tourism as major strategy for anti-poverty. As the largest developing country with relatively large poverty population, China specially focuses

on how to eliminate poverty in poverty-stricken regions. Since most poverty-stricken regions are rich in tourism resources, China takes tourism as a major method for anti-poverty. According to statistics of National Tourism Administration, poverty population benefited directly from developing tourism industry accounts for about 1/3 of the total poverty population. As a special type of development oriented poverty alleviation, the tourism-oriented poverty alleviation has received close attention from academic circle. We used "tourism-oriented poverty alleviation" to search in China Academic Journals Full-text Database, and obtained 215 papers in the period from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2012. For research interests of these papers, see Table 1.

Table 1 Analysis of papers on domestic tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in 2000 – 2012

Research field	Q'ty of papers	Proportion // %	Representative authors
Research on effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation	20	9.3	Zhang Wei (2005), Li Jia (2009)
Tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development in specific regions	83	38.6	Qin Qiwen (2004), Li Yunxia (2008)
Research on benefit of poverty-stricken people	8	3.7	Wang Yongli (2007), Hong Jing (2009)
Tourism-oriented poverty alleviation model and strategy	66	30.7	Li Guoping (2004), Wang Ming (2009)
Other related problems	38	17.7	Zhao Xiaoyun (2004), Wang Tie (2008)

## 1 Major content of research on China's tourism-oriented poverty alleviation

**1.1 Research on effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation** The effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation includes function and significance of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, status and function of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in development of poverty-stricken regions, and influence of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation<sup>[1]</sup>. Scholars conduct analysis mainly from economic effect, social effect and environmental benefit of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation.

**1.1.1 Economic effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation.** The primary objective of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation is to drive local economic development through tourism industry. Thus, economic benefit is the top concern. Researches of many scholars indicate that tourism industry provides employment opportunities for local people, provides market for traditional handicrafts, foods, agricultural products, local and special products, brings into full play powerful promotion of tourism industry, expands regional exchange, increases local ability of attracting foreign investment, promotes construction of infrastructure and coordinated development, and pushes forward optimization of industrial structure and upgrade of idea of people in poverty-stricken regions<sup>[2-3]</sup>. However, some scholars state that tourism-oriented poverty alleviation has economic risk. They think that tourism-oriented poverty alleviation overstates high correlation of tourism industry and func-

Received; July 31, 2013 Accepted; August 26, 2013  
Supported by Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities in 2013 (SWU1309219) of Southwest University.  
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tions of employment, foreign capital attraction, and increase in residents' income, but neglects leakage and loss theory coexisting with multiplier theory<sup>[4]</sup>. Li Gang<sup>[5]</sup> also notes that uneven benefit of local residents and tourism leakage and loss will weaken sustainable effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and influence the effect of poverty alleviation.

**1.1.2 Social and cultural effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation.** Rise and development of the tourism industry in poverty-stricken regions provide opportunity for local residents getting in touch with external world and strengthening exchange with external world, promote idea upgrade and transformation, and enhance awareness of commodity economy and marketing concept; also, they are helpful for enhancing cohesiveness of local residents, strengthening acceptance of local culture, and promoting protection of culture and rapid development of education undertaking<sup>[6-8]</sup>. However, social and cultural risk of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation should not be ignored, such as risk of loss or assimilation of ethnic culture, degeneration of residents' value concept and ethics, deterioration of gambling and alcohol abuse, worse local social security, loss of simple virtue, increasingly tense of interpersonal relationships, and widening of gap between rich and poor<sup>[9]</sup>.

**1.1.3 Environmental effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation.** Researches have shown that tourism-oriented poverty alleviation can promote local economic development, widen employment channel of residents, reduce excessive dependence on natural resources, and enhance awareness of environmental protection, thus has certain positive environmental effect. At the same time, excessive tourism development easily leads to damage of tourism resources and style of scenic spots, and may also cause a series of environmental problems, including air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, domestic rubbish pollution, visual pollution, and disaster of scene<sup>[10]</sup>. For this, scholars have put forward several recommendations, such as enhancing construction of ecological civilization in poverty-stricken regions, developing "cultivation - marsh gas - planting" vertical eco-tourism, making breakthrough in idea of getting rich, combining with other industries to increase farmers' income, giving play to functions of government, guiding residents to participate in development and protection of tourism resources, developing eco-tourism and knapsack tourism that have less damage to environment<sup>[10-12]</sup>.

**1.2 Model and development strategy of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation** Research and summary of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation have high realistic value for implementation of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation and popularization of poverty alleviation experience. Many scholars have stated their opinions in combination with specific practice of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in case regions. Hu Xiru<sup>[13]</sup> summed up three basic models of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, namely, through eco-tourism, ethnic cultural tourism, and border tourism. Li Guoping<sup>[14]</sup> analyzed power system, decision system, executive system, target system and safeguarding system for tourism-oriented poverty

alleviation of Guangdong Province, and set up vertical tourism-oriented poverty alleviation model on this basis. Through analysis and research on current economic situation and tourism resources in Baise of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Kuang Xuedong<sup>[15]</sup> believed that eco-tourism, ethnic cultural tourism, border tourism, Red tourism and Ancient Sites tourism are suitable poverty alleviation models. Li Baihuai<sup>[16]</sup> summed up 4 models: farm-stay tourism, modern agricultural industrial tourism, characteristic cultural tourism and scenic spot dependent development-oriented poverty alleviation. Du Zhongchao *et al.*<sup>[17]</sup> introduced "farmer households + farmer households", "government + communities (associations) + farmer households" + "companies + farmer households" and "government + companies + farmer households" in Guanzhong region. Ding Huanfeng<sup>[18]</sup> believed that community participation in tourism development is system innovation of development-oriented poverty alleviation, and is a development model of sustainable tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Feng Canfei<sup>[8]</sup> stated that tourism in poverty-stricken regions should adhere to the basis of government-leading, enterprise type operation and management and eco-tourism, and enhance trans-regional cooperative comprehensive tourism development model.

As to adopting "government leading" strategy or "market leading" strategy, scholars have been disputing all the time. Liu Xiangming<sup>[19]</sup> explained that government is not leading in all matters, its functions are mainly manifested in macro-decision-making, department coordination, and supply of public goods. When tourism industry in poverty-stricken regions is activated and gradually thriving, government should release control over market, to realize "government leading, enterprise operating and society co-operating". On this basis, Li Yongwen<sup>[20]</sup> put forth the RHB strategy, namely Resource, Human and Benefit strategy, which provides basis for development of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Besides, many scholars proposed strategic ideas for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, such as giving full play leading function of government, raising fund for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation through multiple channels, cultivating tourism talents, giving priority to development of eco-tourism and characteristic tourism favorable for participation of poverty people, paying close attention to image construction and promotion of tourist zone, stressing construction and demonstration function of pilot zone of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, building local industrial chain.

**1.3 Practice of regional tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development** Practice of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development in specific regions is a key research interest all the time. From the statistical analysis in Table 1, it can be seen that there are 83 academic papers published (accounting for 38.6%) during January 2000 and December 2012. Middle and western regions are hot regions of researches, related papers reach 61 and are mainly distributed in Gansu, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi and Hubei. Researches have shown that scholars agreed that the tourism-oriented poverty alleviation has made considerable

achievement, but there are still some problems: at government level, it fails to realize the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation, and the relationship between resources, tourism resources and economic benefit. At the level of benefit of local residents, congenital weakness in location influences residents' fair benefit, outside investors deprive part of benefiting opportunity of poverty-stricken people, and competition of other industries bring losses of benefits of residents. At the level of operation of tourism enterprises, existence of leakage and loss weakens multiplier effect; sci-tech intervening weakens multiplier effect of employment; shortage of tourism talents and tourism enterprises running after maximum profit go against goal of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. In addition, there are problems of poor support for tourism products, serious homogeneous development, lack of regional characteristics, and conflict with resources and environment, as well as cultural protection.

In line with the above problems, researchers put forth many recommendations<sup>[24–26]</sup>: insisting on government leading; properly handling relationship between micro and macro poverty alleviation, resource development and protection, and immediate interest and long-term interest; building proper tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development model; exploring characteristic tourism products in depth; raising tourism development fund through many channels; setting up guarantee system for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development; publicizing, promoting and exploiting tourism market; cultivating and introducing high quality talents; energetically developing circular economy of tourism; coordinating various benefit relationship, especially protection of rights and interests of poverty-stricken people; setting up information system for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development; enhancing dynamic connection between regional tourism development and individual ability; fostering local tourism industrial chain; combining methods of poverty alleviation; improving science of selection of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation projects.

**1.4 Research on benefit of poverty-stricken people** In the practice of regional tourism development, it is difficult for local residents to enjoy benefit from tourism development. Due to lack of human capital, shortage of fund, remote residence and limited tourism knowledge level, those poorest people are often excluded out of benefiting scope. Thus, some scholars focus on the problem of development and benefit of poverty-stricken people. Liang Mingzhu<sup>[28]</sup> proposed the principle of "realizing continuing interactive balance of subject benefits", advocated to set up benefit protection mechanism for farmers, agriculture, and countryside, and discussed in depth land compensation, benefit allocation, training and employment, and social participation. He Jingming<sup>[6]</sup> believed that it should set up related benefit protection mechanism, and give priority to development of tourism products favorable for poor people. Liu Na<sup>[29]</sup> thought that apart from improving the benefit protection mechanism, it should also bring into full play leading role of government, and enhance improvement of humanistic quality of poor people. With the example of Sichuan eth-

nic region, Wang Yongli<sup>[30]</sup> analyzed benefit situation of poor people and major factors restricting benefit of poor people. On these bases, she discussed the important functions of government at all levels in tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Feng Wanrong and Zhao Qinghong<sup>[31]</sup> made field research of Dai People Park in Xishuangbanna. They concluded that whether local residents can be benefit, and also closely related with their ways and degree of participation in tourism industry.

**1.5 Research of other related problems** Research interests also include informationization construction, tourism financing, the relationship between women and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, cultural industry and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and between tourism education and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Following useful conclusions are made. In the aspect of information construction, Han Lin<sup>[32]</sup> believed that Internet plays good propagation and promotion role in tourism development in poverty-stricken regions, and attracts more self-service trips, which will benefit local residents, bring income to flow to poor people engaged in small commodity operation, effectively alleviate poverty and promote rural economic development. Liu Yunjun<sup>[33]</sup> elaborated the close relationship between tourism development and information service, and put forth measures including building tourism information database, expanding tourism information collection scope, implementing secondary in-depth development of documentation resource, and improving information quality of tourism workers.

In the researches on financing channels of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, Pan Huanhui<sup>[34]</sup> proposed 5 effective financing channels: loan from financial institutions, inviting outside investment and encouraging investment, establishing fund for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development, setting up shareholding system tourism group and issuing tourism corporate bond. In line with characteristics of western regions and PPT projects, Chen Yong<sup>[35]</sup> proposed Build, Operation and Transfer (BOT) financing model.

In the research of relationship between women and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, researchers<sup>[36]</sup> said that women in poverty-stricken regions have inborn advantages in service management, make economic and social contribution in the process of poverty alleviation, raise their status in developing economy, and win approval of both the family and society. In addition, tourism development also results in women commodity in destination, double working day, assimilation, variation and loss of traditional women culture.

As to cultural industry and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, Wei Xia<sup>[37]</sup> believed that combination of cultural industry and tourism-oriented poverty alleviation is an inevitable choice for poverty-stricken ethnic regions to realize historic leap. Therefore, interactive development of cultural industry and development-oriented poverty alleviation and rural tourism is an important discussion topic promoting tourism development and regional economic development of ethnic regions.

## 2 Comments on researches of China's tourism-oriented poverty alleviation

In sum, researches of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in recent 10 years mainly focus on benefit of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, model and development strategy, benefit of poverty stricken people, practice of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation in specific region. Common understanding has been reached in promotion function of tourism development to economic development of poverty-stricken regions, and leading role of government in tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. This lays foundation for further research. At the same time, domestic researches on tourism-oriented poverty alleviation also have certain limitations. These are specifically manifested in uneven distribution of research fields (69.3% documents focus on regional tourism-oriented poverty alleviation development, poverty alleviation model, and development strategy). For deep subjects, such as benefit model of poverty-stricken people, income distribution mechanism of tourism, and building of local tourism industrial chain, it lacks deep theory, and analysis becomes a mere formality and lacks guidance for practice. Besides, it lacks overall and systematic analysis on poverty mechanism, obstacle of poverty-stricken people participation in tourism industry, factors influencing performance of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and coordinated development of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation and related industries.

In research methods, most documents take qualitative researches, and focus on analysis on theory, basic concept of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and general discussion of idea of poverty alleviation in specific regions, models and development strategy. There are few deep quantitative researches, few regular analyses and deductive analyses, and it lacks systematic, quantitative and regular theoretical research achievement. It should be noted that for perception research of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, researchers adopt different quantitative criteria for the same subject, but it lacks evaluation yardstick. Also, it lacks confidence and effect testing of quantitative criteria, so the validity of conclusions is to be discussed.

In research object, researchers focus on regional tourism development and overall economic growth of poverty-stricken regions, and pay close attention to economic effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. However, for benefit and development of poverty people, the discussion is slightly weaker. And it lacks quantitative researches on ability of poverty people participating in tourism industry, obstacle of participation, degree of participation, actual benefit degree, perception degree of poverty alleviation effect, and attitude towards tourism development.

In research regions, scholars focus on hot regions, including Gansu, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi, and Hubei. Combining current resource situation in specific regions with local poverty situation, researchers proposed specific ideas and measures for tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. It lacks in-depth empirical research on scenic spot, reservoir area and villages. Especially for reservoir area of Three Gorges, researches are to be further deepened.

## 3 Key research interests of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation

(1) Strengthening combination of qualitative and quantitative researches. Researches on tourism-oriented poverty alleviation should change the limitation on simple qualitative analysis, and comprehensively use door-to-door interview, questionnaire, observation and structural equation model methods. Researches should focus on performance evaluation of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, ability of poverty people participating in tourism industry, participation in decision-making, and participation behavior, building model for ability of poverty people participating in tourism industry, quantitative description of relationship between statistical characteristic of poverty people and ability of participating in tourism, enriching theory of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and providing method reference for similar researches.

(2) Expanding research fields and scope and promoting in-depth researches. Domestic researches on tourism-oriented poverty alleviation are similar, and most researches focus on theoretical analysis and general poverty alleviation experience. It is required to further research combined development of tourism industry and related industries, building local tourism industrial chain, community participating in tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, functions of women in tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, perception of poor people about effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, and optimal selection of path of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Meanwhile, selection of research regions is limited to provincial and county level. Thus, it should probe into scenic spots, Three Gorges area, and villages. Through empirical research of case regions, it is recommended to analyze relationship between system elements of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, select optimal path and build most suitable poverty alleviation model.

(3) Analyzing benefiting mechanism of poverty-stricken people participating in tourism development in depth with poverty-stricken people as research objects. It is proposed to use the stakeholder theory to make in-depth analysis on dynamic game between local government, community residents, and tourism operating enterprises in the process of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation. Similar game will always result in conflict between individuals and between collective and individuals. Thus, it is worth thinking deeply about how to guarantee balanced benefit between stakeholders and realize sustainable tourism-oriented poverty alleviation through proper system design.

(4) Increasing scale development of perception research on effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation and research on measurement testing, to make subsequent research have reliability and comparability. At present, there are a lot of subjects about perception research on effect of tourism-oriented poverty alleviation, but the research criteria and measurement yardstick are not consistent, and no common understanding is reached. Therefore, in future researches, scholars should draw lessons from past academic achievements, set up measurement yardstick and scale for common understanding of perception of effect of tourism-oriented pov-

erty alleviation through in-depth interview, expert opinions, exploratory factors and confirmatory analysis, to make subsequent research findings reliable, comparable and testable.

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