

The Exploration of the Development Situation and Prospect of Eco-Agritourism

——With the Case Study of Lihua Village, Beijing, China

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ABSTRACT

Eco-agricultural tourism, also known as eco-agritourism, based on rural agricultural resources, is recently an important direction of the China new rural construction, which has a broad prospect but has also exposed its problems during developing. Lihua Village (in Panggezhuang town, Beijing, China) is a tourist village with a feature of pear tree planting, which has rare ancient pear trees scenery in china plain area. Even though the village has an outstanding agricultural characteristic, it is now going through a bottleneck period in tourism development, with the problems of assimilation of tourism products and the non-virtuous circle between tourism and community regeneration. Thus, facing such issues, in order to fully understand the recognition and need of agricultural resources utilization in tourism development of the village, the paper uses forms of field investigation, questionnaire survey and interviews with local villagers, tourists and township government. Therefore to analyze the role of cultural resources in coordinating ecological agriculture, tourism development and community construction, and presents a new developing model of taking advantage of the distinctive agricultural resources - a combination providing to the tourists of community participation, ecological life and industrial coordination - as a driven force of developing local eco-agricultural tourism and an adaptor for the new trend of agricultural economic structure adjustments.

KEY WORDS: China, eco-agricultural tourism, agritourism, agricultural culture resources, Lihua village

1. Background

Recently, a booming market of agritourism appears in China, within the process of industrial structure adjustments in such village area. Yet to some remote rural area, the successful cultivation of village tourism industry and the organic regeneration is now becoming a common recognition of an effective developing strategy. Village tourism brings job offers to local villagers, as well as developing economy and has established a new model of agricultural development—to tap its potential in the basis of preserving the original agricultural resources, in order to use the new kind of industry for feature development in village.

Eco-agritourism is a new type of ecological touring activity in the background of rural eco-environment and eco-agriculture and village culture resources, in which uses

aesthetic and economic principles and sustainable developing theory to develop and distribute agricultural resources, and has the main functions of eco-agricultural producing and eco-tourism. The tourism covers the activities of eco-agriculture construction, scientific management, touring goods production, eco-agriculture touring, farm work experiencing, and ecological agriculture knowledge getting.

Comparing with traditional agricultural tourism, eco-agritourism is using local culture of agriculture with a sustainable strategy in resource development, village eco-environment preservation, community regeneration, so as to reach a balance between urban and rural area, human and nature, economy development and ecological preservation in the condition of industrial transformation.

However, in current status, eco-agriculture tourism has exposed its problems of short-term profitability, which appeared from government policy, developing strategy, industrial construction, to touring product producing, usage of agricultural resources, etc. Thus, an unhealthy developing situation of cloning and unsustainable village tourism is now a general issue. The paper analyses issues of the local agricultural resources utilization situation and village tourism development by using a case study of Lihua Village (Panggezhuang town, Beijing, China), to explore and discuss a village landscape construction strategy on the basis of agricultural resources, and to explore the developing prospect of eco-agriculture tourism.

2. Study Object and Method

2.1 Study Object

Lihua village is the city's fruit-tree planting village, with a 23km distance from downtown Beijing. Dates back to Ming Dynasty, its 10 thousand mu pear tree orchard has over 400 years history and is now an identification of Lihua Village. Village tourism in here began at 1994, and now the population of the village is up to 960 people from 305 families, and in which 62 families are registered in business, while 20 of them open all year round. Busy touring season here is April with Pear Flower Fairy and September with Pick-up Festival. Lihua village also has an operative characteristic of local cuisine and pick-up activities.

2.2 Study Method

The paper interviewed local families (registered and unregistered), Lihua Village Secretary, head of department of Panggezhuang town tourism planning. On the foundation of survey investigation, interviews and field research, the paper pays attention to the depth of the case study as well as quantitative data, the analysis of the present status of the tourism resources are presented below.

3. Agritourism status of Lihua Village

3.1 Advantages of Lihua Agricultural Resource

The 10 thousand pear tree orchard in Pangezhuang town has the biggest and largest varieties of ancient pear tree community, with 30 thousand pear trees which are over 100 years old. The center of the orchard lies in Lihua village, and the oldest tree is now 417 years old. Surrounded with rare ancient pear trees scenery in china plain area, the village is very unique comparing with other pear flower feature village in geographic and geomorphic conditions and planting patterns, which become the iconic agritourism resource in Lihua village.

Meanwhile, pear flower, pear fruit and timber material of the pear tree are considered as raw material for a further development of the distinctive tourism products. And how to make a full use of this agricultural resource for developing local tourism accessory products is now becoming a key point of enriching touring experience.

3.2 Problems of Agricultural Resources Developing

Economic oriented tourism model easily makes tour operators neglect the most essential attractiveness of village tourism, which can be evaluated by the tourists' loyalty degree. The survey result illustrate that half of the tourists show that they will revisit the village, while most of the non-revisitors think that the main problems are monotonous visiting experience and lack of distinctive tourism products, another half say it is very important for the village to develop a distinctive and various experiences for tourism quality enrichment. And due to the analysis of the survey data, problems of Lihua agricultural resources developing are:

- Even though as the natural village in the center of *the Ten Thousand Mu Pear Tree Orchard*, Lihua village doesn't have a distinctive character compare with other surrounding villages. Almost all of the registered tour operators' main economic sources come from catering industry, and tourism products show more similarities. Travelling experience merely shows in aspects of Pear Flower Fairy, Pick-up Festival, and agritainment experience.
- Only a few of the touring families have tourist souvenir products, which are calabash drawing and Chinese folk paper-cut. But these products barely represent Lihua village and its agricultural resource and characteristics. A pear herbal tea product is to a certain scale, yet it is still lacking of Lihua village's agricultural characteristics.
- The only relationship between villagers and tourists is one-way sales, which lacks of positive interaction and information exchange, and failed to reflect the villagers' roles in the rural tourism rural cultural transmission.
- In order to provide convenient transportation and infrastructure, village increased its hard-surface construction. And with a urbanized greenery measure, the village

lost its localism and originality. Meanwhile, community regeneration pays more attention to function than tourism experience, and it fails to combine with agricultural resources to create an eco-community regenerative construction.

4. Developing Strategy of Lihua village based on Agricultural Resources

On the foundation of sustainable planning and design and community regeneration, the agricultural industry is of a certain scale, which means that its agricultural resources have huge potential for tourism development, with distinctive agricultural production landscapes, processing and production experience as Lihua village tourism attractiveness. And at the same time developing tourism products of sightseeing, recreation and comprehensive experience, so as to develop iconic healthy cuisine, original accommodation, low-carbon shopping, various agricultural experiences, in order to establish a powerful industrial economic coordinated benefit, and eventually make Lihua village an iconic eco-agricultural tourist attraction.

4.1 Village Landscape Structure Adjustment

There are 12 registered tour families in Lihua village, and it's about 1/5 of the villagers. Some villagers think only a small part of them benefit from the tourism, and the development of tourism brings a series of problems to the village- environment pollution increased, ecological environment threatened, resources over-consumed, agricultural characteristics lost, local landscape faded and so on. In addition, traditional culture and values are heavily impacted by the commercialization, which makes the village lack of social cohesion and sense of identity.

Therefore, in the beginning of tourism quality promotion, we need to adjust and plan the landscape structure in Lihua village, so as to meet the capacity of local tourism, and at most present Lihua village agricultural resource characteristics, as well as restore the original landscape of the village, promote the sense of community identity.

- 1. Abandon the design model of unfeatured assimilative landscape, and promote the landscape quality of Lihua village in soft and hard landscape planning and design, including functional space reorganization, neighborhood space remodel, and plant space redesign, etc. In order to improve villagers' life experience and tourists' visiting experience in ways of promoting community quality and tourism environment.

As is shown in the picture below (Figure 1, Figure 2), the new plan of the village changes the current mixed transport pattern, which locates all the mobile vehicles to the parking lot at the outer space of the village attached with the urban road, and organizes a slow-traffic system within the village by electric mobile and bicycles. There are two main parts of the village community space: first is to reserve the current village roads and add rain gardens beside the roads, which are for increasing soil permeability (Figure 3.); secondly, using the current open space to design with

new planting and recreation facilities, so as to make them the new communication space for local villagers and tourists.



Figure1. Master Plan of Lihua Village

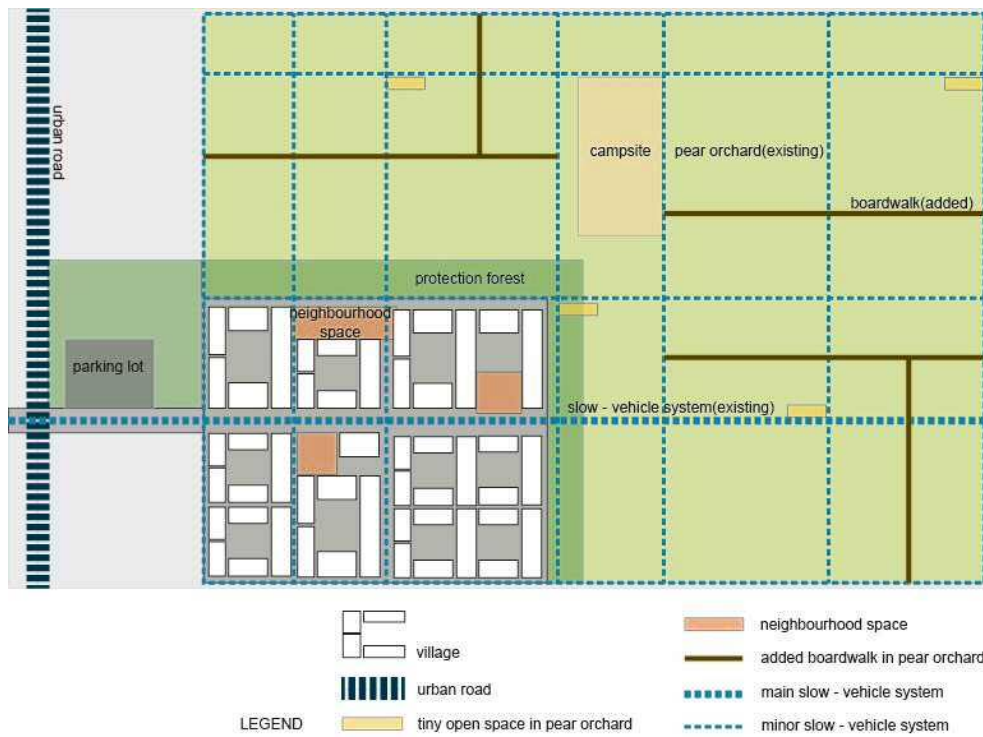


Figure2. Village Space Structure Plan

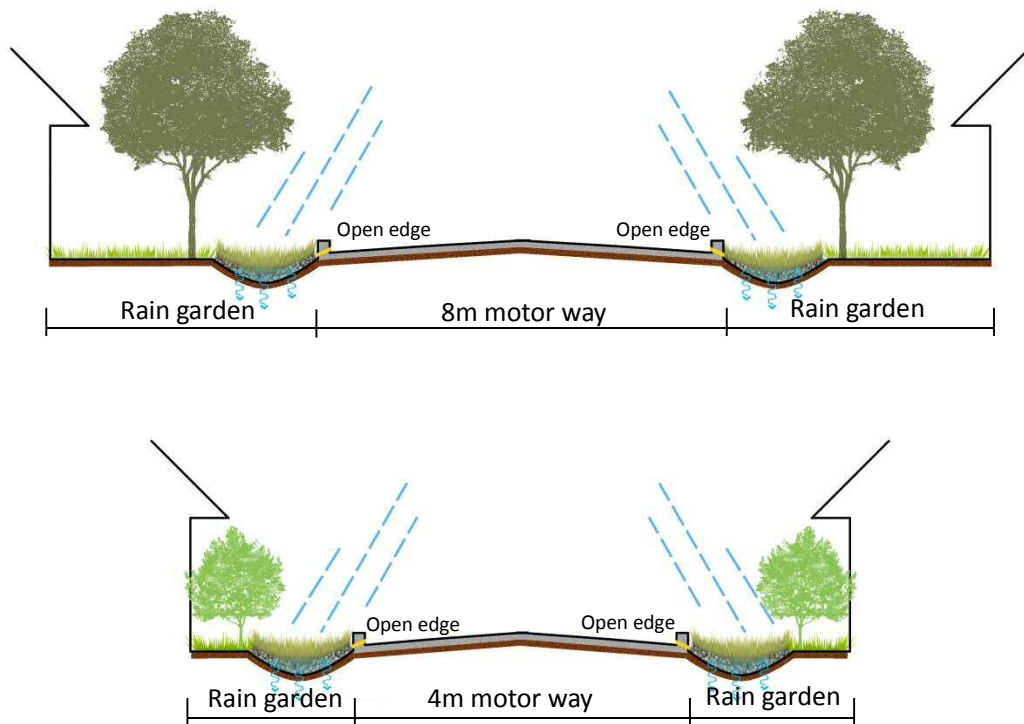
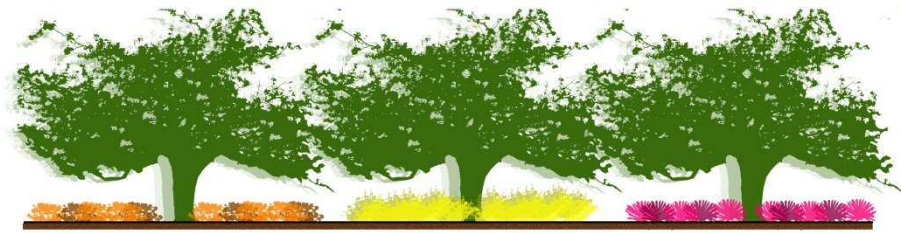


Figure3. Village Road Section

Roads in the pear orchard redesign with the current system and add into wooden deck system for sight-seeing and pick-up activities, in order to reduce the damage of planting soil. A few rest spots are added in the orchard for tourists to take a short rest. As for a various experience activity, green space is designed as camp site near by the orchard.

- 2. The current planting model in pear orchard is single-layer planting, which has a module of 4m*3m with all pear tree matrix planting, and some space are saved for sightseeing and pick-up activity. The surface under pear trees is exposed. This kind of landscape is strongly regular with pear flower blooming season and pear fruit ripe season. The land and agricultural resource is failed to make good use of. The adjustment plan is to make most use of the land and solar-thermal resource to increase productivity of the orchard, with multiple layers planting in the orchard. Vegetables and other plants can be added under the pear trees. The planting principles are: 1) to plant dwarf vegetables; 2) vegetable varieties are in no conflict with pear tree growing; 3) no common disease and pest are shared with growing vegetables and pear tree, such as beans and greens. In order to avoid continuous cropping, different variety of vegetables shall be plant in each year for a good productivity, and at the same time enrich the visiting experience. Sustainable concepts are added into planting vegetables such as low-energy and zero-chemical pesticides measure, in order for enrich the tourist experience as well as establish a healthy cuisine icon for the Lihua village.(Figure4-5 Planting Mode and Vegetable selection)

Pear tree planting



Different kinds of vegetable planting

Figure4. Multiple planting layers



Sweet potato



Perilla



Leek



Beans

Figure5. Different kinds of vegetable planting

4.2 Eco-agritourism Product Development

Tourism products' developing is a recreational activities by using village cultural resources as an attraction. It emphasizes on active participation of the local villagers, and encourages them to establish tourism cooperative mechanism spontaneously. As the major media source of Lihua village's local culture and agricultural culture, local villagers is the key of promoting communications between villagers, township government and tourists.

During this process, the experience of agricultural activities becomes a platform of interactive communication. And basing on different kinds of experience, the paper divides them into four following types:

- **Type 1. Sightseeing Experiencing**
 The tourist attraction of Lihua village is agricultural landscape based on local cultural resources, and cultural landscape based on village life scenery. The current status of this experience mainly includes Pear Flower Fairy, which focuses on the display of agricultural landscape and lacks of local cultural landscape display. The plan adds local landscape display into the village landscape structure, which easily makes tourists engage into local community life and culture. The biggest issue for Lihua village is its distinct seasonal difference, so using the under space land resource of the pear tree orchard for growing ornamental vegetation such as rape (with a florescence of May), which enrich the landscape experience out of the pear flower season.
- **Type 2. Participation Experiencing**
 The existing activity of participation experiencing is of single type, which mainly includes Pick-up Festival in ripe season. This may leave a dull and tedious impression to the tourists. In order to provide various activities for tourists, the village should carry out activities of fruit reutilization experience, which conduct by local villagers' workshop. Experiencing activities can be including learning to make pear juice, pear fruit wine, pear fruit vinegar, pear jam, dried pear fruit, pear seed essential oil, etc. The communication between villagers and tourists shall become the cultural dissemination channel, with a feature of parent-child family interaction, and bring more villagers into the tourism model without catering and lodging business.
- **Type 3. Purchasing Experiencing**
 Purchasing experiencing can be developing together with participation activities in order to avoid defect of one-way sales, and in the same time increasing the interaction and also enrich the variety of pear tourist souvenirs.
 For some complicated skills required products, the product sale can be in combination with technical presentation, such as pear wood crafts and pear wood tableware and other pear image handicrafts.
 Launching tourism products of great popularity will create a certain influence and visibility of Lihua village. The village already has pear herbal tea and pear wine in mass production. On this basis, products of pear perfume, pear skin care products and pear health care products will enrich the variety of tourism product and develop this series to become an iconic character of Lihua village.
- **Type 4. Accommodation Experiencing**
 The current accommodations mostly are lodging house, providing similar living experience. A camp site nearby the pear orchard will increase a various accommodation experience for tourist, especially camp lovers. For specialized cuisine, village caterer on one hand preserve the traditional cooking dishes with pear product innovative menu, such as pear dessert, pear beverage and so on.

In conclusion, the new tourism model of Lihua village is to fully tap into its agricultural

resources, to develop diverse tourism products in means of featured sightseeing, participating, shopping, dining and accommodation.

5. Prospect

Through the field investigation and analysis of Lihua village tourism development status, the paper proposes an eco-agritourism developing strategy based on its agricultural resources. The adjustment uses community regeneration as a condition of village tourism base conversion and eco-agriculture development, and at the same time uses tourism product development as industry transformation catalyst. A close relationship between villagers and tourists are connecting by the measures above, which bring out the value of social network. Eventually, a coordinating developing relationship of eco-agriculture, tourism and community construction is established in Lihua village, and this will bring a harmonious development of modern village community, economy and ecological environment.

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