

Cultural Commodification in Experiential Tribal Tours of Bunun in Taiwan

Introduction

With support from Taiwanese government in recent 10 years, indigenous groups are developing tribal tours booming, especially in Taitung county with various indigenous groups. In this project, I chose Bunun group as a target to explore the updated developmental situation of indigenous tourism.

Method:

Location: Bunun Pasikau Tribe in Taitung County, Taiwan

Duration: 4.5 Months

During fieldwork, I conducted participant observation in tourist sites to study the mechanism of operating tribal tours as well as the ways to perform an indigenous culture. Also, I have conducted 7 in-depth interviews with research partners, including owners and employees of tribal tours.



Research Question

In what way Bunun people present 'Bunun' image in the field of indigenous tourism beyond commodification?

Objectives

- To explore divergent modes of indigenous tourism through varying strategies of performing indigenous culture in a tour with consideration of commodification.
- To understand the dilemma Bunun people face between image representation and business development.

Findings

- The coverage of Bunun knowledge in tribal tours was reduced more than half of the originally planned. It's feedback and request from a tour guide of a travel agency: it is too long and tedious for tourists.
- Power relationship among owners of tourist sites, travel agency, and tourists determines the models of performances in tribal tours.
- Indigenous culture is packaged as a commodity in tours, through re-appropriation of time and locations as well as affixing to popular trends:
 - Adding singing and dancing elements in tribal tour which do not belong to Bunun culture, these elements can fulfill the tourists' expectations for indigenous groups.
 - Designing scripts with meanings related to the sexual and social phenomenon to attract tourists' attention.