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Ecotourism Practices in Potatso National Park from the Perspective of Tourists: Assessment and Developing Contradictions

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Abstract: Ecotourism in Potatso National Park has been developing for more than 15 years, which has had important guiding significance for the development of China's national parks. This paper analyzes ecotourism practices in Potatso by extracting related travel notes and adopting the ground theory and content analysis method. The results show that the current ecotourism practices in Potatso include 5 dimensions and 15 elements. The five dimensions are the natural environment, environmental education, community participation, ecotourism experience and socioeconomic background. The five most important elements are the ecosystem elements, sensory and behavioral ecotourism experience, ecological facilities and interpretation systems. There are also three contradictions: between tourists' environmental awareness and lack of environmental behaviors, between community participation and residents' reception capacity, and between environmental education and tourists' experiences. Regarding the future development of Potatso, conservation will always come first. A breakthrough is needed to strengthen the conversion of environmental education to the environmental behavior of tourists, adjust the participation model of communities dynamically, and continue innovating in the form of environmental education.

Keywords: national park; ecotourism practice; developing contradictions; Potatso



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1. Introduction

A national park is a place that combines both biotic and abiotic heritage and attracts tourists from all around the world [1]. Ecotourism has been argued to be particularly important in contexts with high biodiversity value because it is assumed that tourist activities should promote the conservation of nature and its value [2,3]. Moreover, ecotourism is a feasible and effective way to maintain the sustainable development of national parks and is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [4–6]. The balance between conservation and development in ecotourism in national parks has a long history and can be seen in the legislation of various countries and the planning approaches for various national parks [7–9]. At present, sustainable development is still the core issue for national parks. It is reflected not only in the existing planning schemes of national parks but also in the dynamic development of their ecotourism. This paper carries out a bottom-up study from tourists' travel notes under the guidance of existing top-down theories of ecotourism to enrich the empirical research on ecotourism practices in national parks.

While ecotourism has achieved fruitful outcomes in its development, there are also various problems and contradictions within this system, not only among stakeholders but also within specific stakeholders. One of the most important stakeholders in ecotourism is tourists, and attitude and performance of tourists have a significant influence on ecotourism development in national parks. The attitudes and behaviors of tourists in national parks are two main research topics. On the one hand, research on the attitudes

of tourists in national parks mainly focuses on psychological and emotional aspects, including tourists' motivation, demand, satisfaction, and perceptions of crowding, visits and consumption [10–14]. On the other hand, ecotourists' contributions to environmental conservation, community development and dissemination of natural knowledge are also highlighted. Training and identifying ecotourists is also an important research topic for national parks [15,16]. The effects of facilities, ecotourism attitudes, interpretations, and a four-step observational learning process are emphasized [17–20]. Generally, how to have an ecotourism attitude and engage in ecotourism behaviors at the same time is always the goal of research on national parks. The background and characteristics of contradiction between tourist attitudes and behaviors in ecotourism practices need to be identified, as well as the mechanism behind them, to improve the existing research on ecotourism.

Another important stakeholder in ecotourism is the community. Community-based ecotourism maximizes the sustainability of natural resources, prevents economic leakage and protects the local traditional culture [21,22]. On the one hand, the contradictions related to the community in ecotourism are embodied in itself, that is, the issue of the community's own capabilities and participation in ecotourism [23–25]. On the other hand, these contradictions are reflected in the contradictions between the community and other stakeholders; that is, community participation is the result of a rights game among the government, national park managers, and tourists. However, these two conflicts related to the community are also related; that is, improving one's own ability can lead to achieving more rights and interests in cooperation with other stakeholders. The relationship between communities and other stakeholders in ecotourism involves joint management, exclusion, participation, and cooperation [26–31]. Communities that achieve equitable access to and engagement in tourism and associated benefits may be more resilient and better positioned to capitalize on linkages between tourism-based livelihoods and biodiversity conservation [12]. In China, the models of community participation mainly include dominant management, tourism area-community integration, tourism area-community function division, and community residents' participation [32]. Potatso took community participation fully into consideration at the beginning of planning [33]. However, after more than ten years, whether this model of community participation is still feasible and whether it faces challenges need to be assessed.

In addition to the conflicts related to stakeholders, ecotourism produces contradictions in the practice of sustainable development principles. They are usually reflected in the contradiction between tourists' experience needs and national parks' environmental protection need [34]. Environmental education is an important feature that distinguishes ecotourism from mass tourism [35–38]. In terms of environmental protection of national parks, the practice of ecotourism is mainly reflected in environmental interpretation system and environmental facilities. Moderate levels of tourism development facilitate the alignment of conservation and community development goals of national parks [39–41]. Therefore, the design of the interpretation system and the importance of supporting facilities with localized features have received scholars' attention, regardless of their content or form [42]. With the increasing maturity and diversified needs of tourists, the dynamic adaptation of environmental interpretation system and facilities to tourists' experience needs is a challenge for the development of ecotourism in national parks.

The above analysis shows that the theoretical research on ecotourism in national parks is relatively mature. However, the evaluation of ecotourism in previous studies was based on theoretical models, observations in national parks, or questionnaires, which can easily interfere with theoretical and questionnaire-related assumptions [14,43,44]. Moreover, the existing research on national parks involves multiple dimensions of ecotourism. Most studies are based on one specific dimension to obtain a deeper understanding, and few studies have considered ecotourism practices systematically in national parks. This paper will provide empirical research on ecotourism to help identify and solve problems in the development process of ecotourism.

Based on these goals, this work chose a national park that has been developed for decades, Potatso National Park, as the case site. At the same time, this paper extends the research on ecotourism practices of national parks from a relatively novel perspective of tourists' travel notes, seeking to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the characteristics of ecotourism practices in Potatso National Park? (2) What elements are important to ecotourism in Potatso National Park? (3) What problems and contradictions exist in ecotourism in Potatso National Park? The answers to these questions will allow us to study the current status of ecotourism in Potatso National Park from multiple dimensions. Moreover, by comparing its current and previous development statuses, this paper offers suggestions for the sustainable development of national parks by combining theory and practice.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 provides the introduction. Section 2 presents a brief introduction of the study area, data and analysis method. Section 3 presents the main results, and Section 4 discusses the results and summarizes the conclusions and implications of the paper. Section 5 offers the main conclusions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

Potatso National Park is located in Shangri-La County, Diqing Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Its geographical position is $99^{\circ}59'16'' \sim 100^{\circ}02'38''$ east longitude and $27^{\circ}43'52'' \sim 27^{\circ}58'30''$ north latitude (Figure 1). This national park is located in the subalpine cold-temperate coniferous forest vegetation zone in northwestern Yunnan Province. Its altitude ranges from 3200 to 4159 m [45]. The park is composed of the internationally important wetland Bitahai Provincial Nature Reserve, the Shudu Lake Scenic Area located in the “Three Parallel Rivers” World Natural Heritage alpine pastures and surrounding forests located in Tibetan villages such as Luorong Village, Militang and Gangchaba [46]. The total area is approximately 300 square kilometers, and the park is currently a must-see attraction for most tourists visiting Shangri-La.

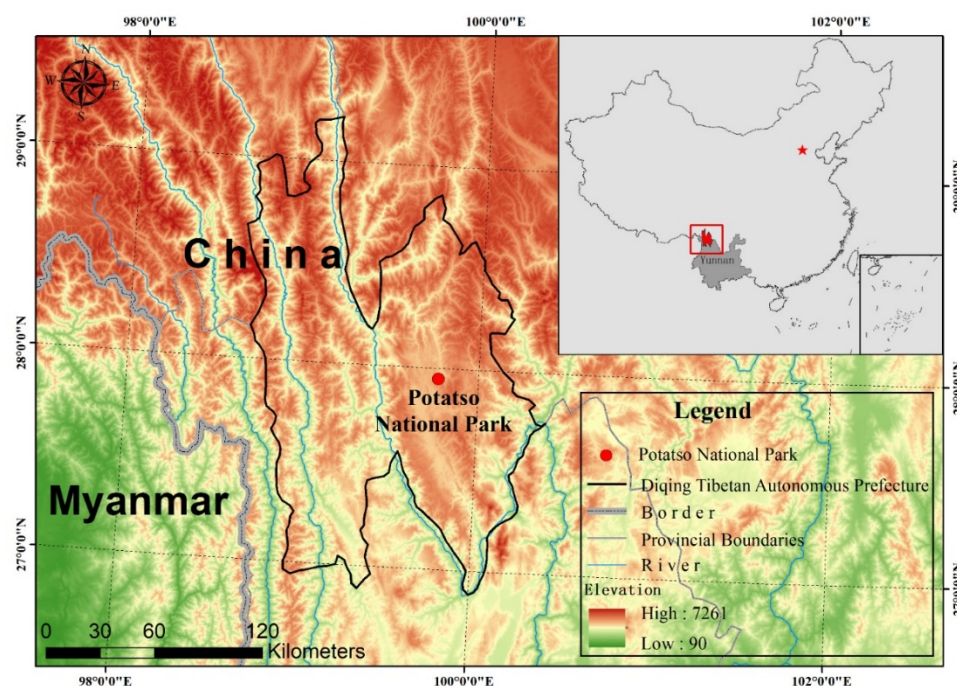


Figure 1. Location of Potatso National Park.

Studies on Potatso National Park are both common and typical. First, Potatso was originally planned according to the protected area category of the IUCN (international union for conservation of nature) opened to the public in 2006. It was planned and

constructed by professional academic institutions and planning agencies based on the investigation of foreign national parks and according to the principles of national parks worldwide. Potatso can be treated as the birthplace of China's national park movement. Therefore, Potatso as the sample case in this study, is representative of national parks across China. Second, ecotourism in Potatso has evolved for a long time, and benefits and problems of national park construction and management have emerged. The current national park management system has undergone several "trial and error" adjustments. Choosing Potatso as the case site is conducive to the comparative study of the current state and existing achievements of national parks and to enriching the theoretical system of national park construction.

2.2. Data Collection

"Travel notes" refers to articles about travel experiences recorded on the internet or on paper. Some travel notes are argumentative, some scientific and some lyrical. The data used in this paper are tourists' travel notes about Potatso National Park, and we collected them for the past 3 years (May 2018–October 2021). In addition, from the beginning of our writing to the submission, we constantly checked whether the latest travel notes were available. Our data come from a website that is known for sharing various types of travel content (<http://www.mafengwo.cn>, accessed on 2 November 2021).

Computer and manual data collection methods were combined. First, we captured all the travel notes in the past three years as raw data through Python crawler software and by searching for "Potatso" on the website. Then, we controlled the data quality by manually checking these travel notes. Commercial propaganda, plagiarized travel notes without expression of personal opinions, travel notes from which information related to ecotourism could not be extracted, etc., were eliminated. After data cleaning, a total of 56 complete, useful and informative tourists' travel notes, including 106,000 words, were collected. All of these travel notes were published publicly on the internet.

Details of tourist samples are shown in Table 1. The authors of these travel notes were mainly independent tourists and people on organized small group tours. Moreover, there are tourist buses with fixed time and route between Potatso National Park and the urban area, and the length of the tourists' itineraries was one day. The tourists' travel time was mainly from June to September. The numbers of tourists traveling during the peaks of May Day and National Day were also large. The travel expenses were mainly transportation and sightseeing tickets, ranging from 100–300 yuan. Some tourists also spent money on oxygen, snacks and cold-weather clothes.

Table 1. Details of tourists in travel notes.

Characteristics		Percentage
Travel mode	Travelled alone	20.67
	Travelled with his or her families	33.33
	Travelled with his or her friends	26.67
	Travelled with his or her members of group tour	20.00
Length of itineraries	One day	100
Travel time	May–October	70.00
	November–April	30.00
Travel expenses	100–300 yuan	

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The ground theory method is the continuous induction and analysis of certain original materials and empirical facts to form a theory [47]. The existing ecotourism theories and research results show that ecotourism includes the natural environment, ecotourists, environmental education and community participation [48–50]. This constitutes the macro and basic theoretical framework of the grounded theory method; that is, the four dimensions of ecotourism have been basically established in theory according to existing theories.

Under this framework, we analyze and summarize the actual data and empirical facts on ecotourism from tourists' travel notes in Potatso and finally extract the comprehensive theory rooted in tourists' ecotourism practices; that is, elements of each dimension and content of ecotourism practices in each element in Potatso are refined.

In the process of constantly analyzing and summarizing the actual data and empirical facts, we use the content analysis method to convert nonquantitative tourist travel notes into quantitative data to count and assess the ecotourism facts [51,52]. The key step of the content analysis method is the design of an analysis system. This paper constructs an analysis system according to the results of grounded theory analysis, which continuously summarizes and organizes the original data from the bottom up and ultimately extracts the relevant theories. Combining grounded theory and content analysis methods, we try to conduct a theoretical and quantitative analysis of the tourist travel notes.

In practice, information in the travel notes, which may be regarded as background information on ecotourists, and tourists' experiences unrelated to ecotourism are not included in the analysis of this article. Moreover, due to the great deal of content included in travel notes, this study uses the Nvivo11 version to analyze the collected text data through three-level coding [53,54]. First-level coding, that is, open coding, searches for concept categories from the collected text data, extracts and identifies keywords, and conducts conceptualization processing. The secondary code, or associative code, organically integrates and links open codes to form a new code to explain the formation of the phenomenon more comprehensively and clearly. Third-level coding, that is, core coding, concentrates on the abstracted core coding by determining the second-level coding with strong correlation abilities. The three-level coding process can provide an outline and guidance, express the internal logic between relationships more effectively, and finally complete the interpretation and construction of the entire theory.

Our research team members evaluate all the extracted travel notes. Coding agreement refers to the degree to which every two team members code the notes the same. The degree of agreement between each pair of team members in each first-level code in each travel note is realized through the "code comparison query" function in Nvivo11. The overall coding agreement of the first-, second-, and third-level codes of every two team members is calculated by the calculation template provided by Nvivo11 based on the degree of agreement in each first-level code. The overall coding agreement of every two team members exceeds 78%, showing that the coding results have high reliability and can be used for further analysis. In addition, for any inconsistent analysis results of different members, consensus was reached through communication.

3. Results

3.1. Text Coding and Five Dimensions of Ecotourism in Potatso

In the process of coding the travel note data, the characteristics of ecotourism in Potatso are finally refined to obtain 56 open codes. From these open codes, related codes form 14 associated elements. Finally, among these elements, we extract five dimensions: natural environment, environmental education, community participation, ecological experience, and socioeconomic background (Table 2). Among these five core codes, natural environment, environmental education, community participation and ecological experience are the four main aspects of ecotourism. This shows that the ecotourism practices of Potatso National Park are comprehensive and are fully reflected in the practices of tourists. It also indicates that Potatso's socioeconomic background has an impact on tourists' participation in ecotourism.

The content of the natural environment dimension is dominated by ecosystem elements, and tourists pay less attention to ecosystems and their relationship with the environment in this dimension. The dimension of environmental education attracts more attention from tourists and includes the content, form, and conveyors of environmental education: the natural environment, interpretation system and ecological facilities, respectively. The community participation dimension is associated with locals' participation in

economic activities, cultural dissemination and environmental protection. Ecotourism experience is related to tourists' ecotourism experiences in the sensory, physical and spiritual aspects. In addition to the above dimensions related to the connotations of ecotourism, the socioeconomic factors affecting ecotourism are mentioned, including film and television, celebrity effects and industrial chains.

Table 2. Results of coding the travel note data.

Dimensions of Ecotourism	Elements of Ecotourism	Ecotourism Content	Attention Frequency
Natural environment	Ecosystem elements	Trees, water, aquatic life, terrestrial life, paleontology	100%
	Ecosystem	Wetland, plant diversity, rich scenery, vertical zonality, harmony within the ecosystem	62%
	Relationship between the ecosystem and the environment	Eating habits, religious beliefs	49%
	Climate	Strong ultraviolet, lack of oxygen, plateau climate	58%
Environmental education	Interpretation system	Guide map and signage, guide explanation, voice explanation by QR code	82%
	Ecological facilities	Wooden plank road, ecological hiking experience area, stone road, simple wooden rest station, eco-friendly commuter cars, observation decks, cruise ships	91%
	Commentary content	Natural environment	
Community participation	Participation in economic activities	Transporting tourists, tour guides, drivers, selling travel supplies (oxygen cylinders), selling local products (yak beef jerky, mushrooms), attraction staff	38%
	Spread of the local culture	Visit a herder's home, taste a herder's food (butter tea), experience a herder's life (spindle)	27%
	Community environmental education	Plant season, climate, play style	21%
Ecotourism experience	Sensory experience	Sensory pleasure and enjoyment, incomplete pleasure, regret	100%
	Physical experience	Photography, outdoor camping, hiking, feeding pigs, petting horses, littering, walking along the trail	100%
	Spiritual experience	Blessing, freedom, Tibetan culture acquisition, ecological system cognition	71%
Socioeconomic background	Film and television	"His Royal Highness Wolf"	6%
	Celebrity effects	Wedding of Jie Zhang and Na Xie	7%
	Industrial chain	Tour group, outdoor club	9%

3.2. Five Important Elements of Ecotourism in Potatso

According to the degree of tourists' attention to each element, five elements received more attention from the tourists. All the tourists paid attention to the ecosystem elements and sensory and physical ecotourism experience, 91% paid attention to ecological facilities, and 82% paid attention to the interpretation system. This shows that tourists in Potatso have the characteristics of general tourists; that is, they pay attention to the sights of the scenic area and participate in tourism mainly through the five senses and the behavioral experience. They also have the characteristics of ecotourists; that is, they pay attention to ecotourism facilities and environmental interpretation systems.

Potatso received 100% positive feedback from the tourists on the elements of the ecosystem. Everyone described the ecological elements that they saw, such as trees, water, aquatic life, terrestrial life, and paleontology. The beautiful scenery in Potatso encourages visitors to participate in physical and behavioral aspects, so the abovementioned three elements receive the most attention. However, 62 and 49% of the tourists paid attention to

the overall ecosystem and the relationship between the ecosystem and the environment, respectively. This shows that the basic effects of ecotourism have been achieved. However, some tourists in Potatso National Park remain shallow ecotourists, and their concerns for ecology are more superficial. The natural environmental dimension of ecotourism in Potatso National Park needs to be further improved.

Regarding sensory experience, the experience of most of the tourists was positive. To their senses, Potatso was a wonderful, beautiful, pure and ideal place. There were also some tourists who felt regret and disappointment due to the weather or their itinerary. Overall, in the golden season of tourism in Potatso (May–October each year), tourists had far more positive than negative sensory experiences. Compared with tourists' sensory experience, their physical experience was a manifestation of the deeper interaction between tourists and national parks. For example, tourists played with animals and rode horses. The behavior of some tourists was sustainable, such as walking along wooden trails. The behavior of other tourists, such as littering, was not conducive to environmental restoration.

The ecological facilities and interpretation system of Potatso were planned and constructed by professionals and guided by the concepts of national park protection, recreation and education and combined with the localization of ecotourism. The value of sustainable development is reflected in the high quality of tourists' ecotourism experience, and the tourists made no negative comments on the ecological facilities and interpretation systems. Ecological facilities use local materials as much as possible to minimize their impact on the ecological environment. Among these materials, wooden plank roads and ecological trekking experience areas were loved by many tourists, satisfying tourists' desire for an ecotourism experience. The tourist interpretation system communicates to tourists visually. There are not only static explanations but also explanations as tourists move around with the help of modern technology.

3.3. Three Contradictions in the Development of Ecotourism in Potatso

The analysis results above indicate that there are three contradictions of ecotourism in Potatso National Park (Figure 2). The details of each contradiction are as follows.

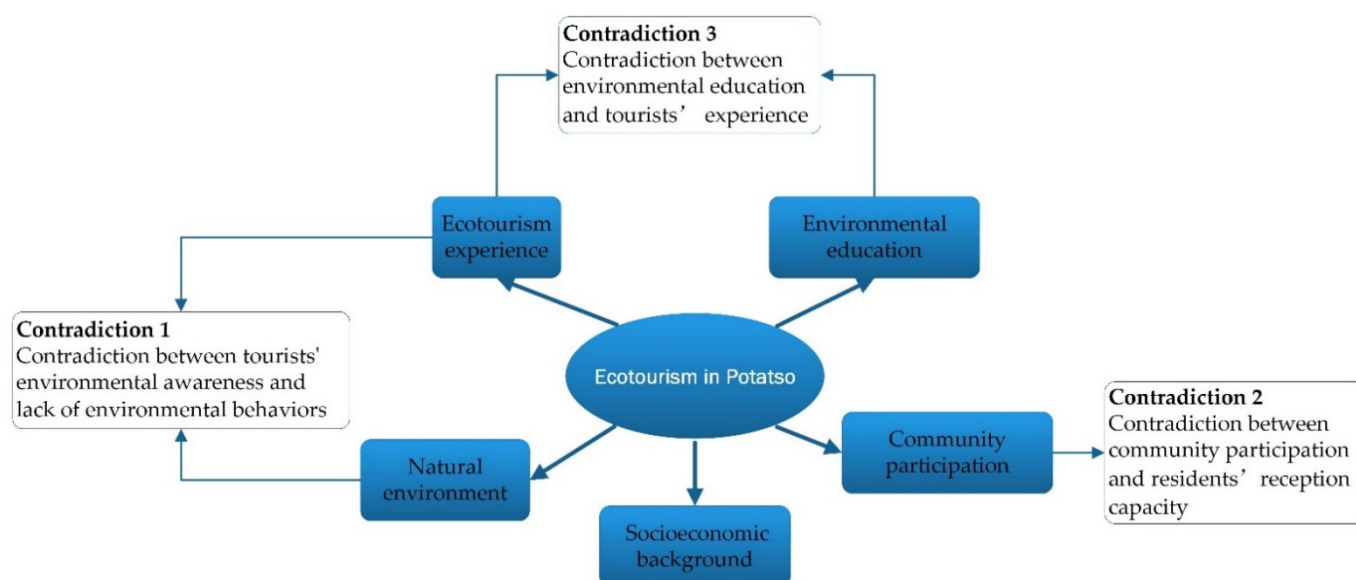


Figure 2. Five dimensions and three contradictions of ecotourism in Potatso National Park.

3.3.1. Contradiction between Tourists' Environmental Awareness and Lack of Environmental Protection Behaviors

The text analysis results show that the tourist experience has three aspects: sensory, physical and spiritual experience. It is found that tourists feel sensory and spiritual plea-

sure when they are at Potatso, showing that they already have a relatively high level of environmental awareness. Some tourists describe their physical experiences, and some of their behaviors are sustainable. Moreover, positive emotions are found in their travel notes in relation to recording and sharing the environmental protection knowledge that they have learned in environmental education.

However, in environmental education for tourists, more attention is given to the elements of the ecosystem, with less attention paid to the overall ecosystem and its fragility and integrity, which keeps tourists' cognition of the ecosystem relatively low. More seriously, tourists did not fully demonstrate responsible ecotourism behavior. Psychological research has shown that out of the instinct for self-protection, people tend to have negative perceptions of things that they do not understand. Only when tourists have sufficient environmental knowledge can they have a more rational and peaceful mentality and engage in conscious actions and fewer behaviors that damage the environment. The deeper their understanding of environmental protection is, the more tourists can understand the complexity of the ecosystem, and only then is it possible to promote environmentally protective behavior.

The main body of environmental education accessible to tourists comes from not only tourist guides and tourist facilities in Potatso but also guidance and explanations from community residents. Various social and economic environments also demonstrated environmental protection, such as celebrity effects from the publicity of film and television works. Guidance from different tour groups at all stages of tours also significantly affects tourists' environmental perceptions and behavior.

3.3.2. Contradiction between Community Participation and Residents' Reception Capacity

From the perspective of the travel notes, the participation of community residents acts as a supplement to the ecotourism services. Local tour guides have a better understanding of local traditional culture and natural resources, which is more conducive to spreading and promoting national culture and the protection of natural resources. Moreover, community residents make the experiences of tourists richer and more vivid. For example, tourists are invited to experience the weaving process and the process of making butter tea. In the analyzed travel notes, tourists noted that their villager tour guide provided them with good guidance on taking photographs and scenic spots and explained the local climate. However, these travel notes did not mention issues related to resource protection guidance from locals.

The tourists' travel notes show that there is still much room for improvement in terms of community residents' ability to participate in ecotourism. The main problems summarized from tourists' travel notes were as follows: (1) Tourists visited to see local agricultural products, but the transaction success rate was low. The tourists' travel notes expressed positive emotions related to residents' agricultural products, but there were no records of the tourists buying local specialty products. This finding was inconsistent with the principle of ecotourism, which promotes the community's coordinated development. (2) Community residents do not provide adequate environmental education and publicity. As a Tibetan cultural area and at its stage of transition from agricultural to industrial civilization, community residents have a simple concept of coordinated development between humans and space. However, when the products of industrial civilization carried by tourists enter Potatso and its communities, it is difficult for community residents to realize their impact on the ecological environment in time. In turn, few community residents can act as active guardians of the ecological environment. Thus, community residents become passive guardians of the ecological environment. That is, tourists will destroy the environment, and then, community residents will clean it up. This kind of great waste of energy and resources is also not conducive to rooting community residents and tourists in the concepts of environmental protection and sustainable development.

3.3.3. Contradiction between Environmental Education and Tourists' Experience

The results of the content analysis show that the tourists paid much attention to environmental education with positive evaluations. However, the tourists had more negative emotions regarding the tourism experience than they did regarding environmental education. The contradiction between environmental education and tourism experience is mainly reflected in the following three points.

First, there was a contradiction between restrictions on the tour route and the free experience of tourists. Although Potatso contains many routes for tourists to take, the travel notes still contained many mentions of constraints on routes, such as “designated routes”, “designated viewing platforms”, “designated locations”, and “keep walking on the plank road”. While most tourists were happy with the design of the tourism facilities, a small number noted “restricted freedom” and that the area is “not full of pleasure”. It is challenging to find a balance between path restrictions and tourists' demand for a “freeing” experience.

Second, there was a contradiction between the protection of ecosystem elements and tourists' in-depth experience. The travel notes showed that the tourists mainly took part in immersive sightseeing in Potatso National Park. There were also some participatory experiences involving encounters with wild animals. It was also found in the travel notes that some tourists had a deeper need for participatory experiences, such as sliding on the grass. Of course, these deep participatory experiences cause lasting damage to the ecological environment in Potatso, and they must be taken seriously.

Third, there is a contradiction between the reality of vast land and sparse populations and the need for intensive publicity for environmental protection. The population density of the county in which Potatso is located is 7 people per square kilometer. In this case, even if the ecological environment of the plateau is more fragile, intensive environmental protection propaganda is unrealistic. Thus, in the travel notes, tourists said that there was garbage on the grassland. In all the travel notes, only three tourists noted this issue, demonstrating the need for deeper environmental education.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Converting Environmental Awareness to Environmental Behavior Is the Key to Cultivating Ecotourists*

There are two perspectives on the definition of ecotourists. Some studies have made theoretical divisions regarding the types and behaviors of ecotourists. Some scholars hold that this “preconceived” approach may somewhat lead to a lack of scientificity and rationality and thus propose a method of self-identification by tourists. This paper combines the above two methods and not only examines the characteristics of tourists in ecotourism but also results from the active descriptions of tourists themselves. This work also implicitly includes mutual observation between tourists. The results of the content analysis show that most tourists in Potatso National Park paid attention to the natural environment and environmental education. However, some tourists focused only on scenery through the visual sense, and their behavior was unsustainable, indicating that they are still shallow, sightseeing ecotourists. Potatso has always considered ecotourism as its main goal, and the park is the benchmark of domestic ecotourism. Thus, China's ecotourism still needs further improvement.

The results of this paper also show that ecotourists are not lacking in Potatso National Park because environmental education is not sufficiently professional or because tourists have not paid attention to the environmental education conducted there. Rather, we think that there are two reasons for this absence. First, environmental education has not been able to make the leap from an interpretation system to tourists' environmental awareness. Although Potatso provides various forms of environmental education, few tourists truly read or understand them. For example, most tourists displayed Potatso's natural environment introductory signs in their travel notes. However, due to the extensive content of the signs or the restrictions on the tourists' itineraries, few tourists fully understood

the knowledge in the pictures. Individuals with strong environmental awareness tend to demonstrate more environmental behaviors. Therefore, the interpretation system in Potatso needs to be more grounded.

The second reason is the lack of paths and channels for tourists to develop environmental behaviors. In educating tourists on the environment, tourists' other interests should not be neglected [55,56]. For example, although most tourists liked the wooden plank roads and horse trails, many found the wooden plank roads, made of round logs, and the muddy horse trails difficult to walk on, on rainy days. This made the tourists feel unsafe, causing them to walk into the ecological reserve zone and destroy the environment. In addition, food, daily necessities, etc., use unenvironmental packaging, which creates hidden dangers for the disposal of garbage. Therefore, Potatso needs to create feasible action guides to which tourists can refer.

4.2. Resident Participation and Reception Capacity form a Sustainable Interaction

From theory to practice, the top-down approach has always been taken for granted in China's national park management. Although "community participation" is included in the Master Plan of Potatso National Park [57], the qualitative research conclusions of this paper show that the local community is only superficially involved in the project, rather than being given the right to participate or make decisions. This is related to China's natural resource management model and the historical background of the community. At the initial stage of tourism development, as the main traffic to Potatso was through walking only, local residents participated in ecotourism by transporting tourists. Later, for resource protection reasons, the community withdrew from the horse team service project in 2005. Community residents held barbecues inside and outside the scenic area, provided photographs, cleaning and sanitation, security, and singing and dancing performances, and engaged in activities other forms of participation. Local community residents are not directly involved in tourism development decision-making and reception capacity because very few speak Mandarin proficiently.

However, community participation is a complex and dynamic process. With the improvement of the education level of most residents and the development of tourism training, an increasing number of community residents have begun to participate in tourism reception. Therefore, although community participation was mentioned less in the tourists' travel notes than other factors were, there is clearly a need for local residents to move from "behind the scenes" to becoming increasingly involved in ecotourism. Potatso is facing a change in its model of community participation. It should further increase the degree of community participation to avoid ecological problems and support existing ecological protection efforts. A proven successful co-management mechanism adopting customary institutions, sharing responsibilities and granting rights to local communities provides positive lessons [58,59].

4.3. Increased Demand for Tourist Experiences Calls for Innovation in Ecotourism

The contradiction of tourists' dissatisfaction with their experiences reflected in the practices of ecotourism has once again prompted discussion about the relationship between conservation and development in the dynamic planning and construction of national parks. The results show that some of tourists' needs can be achieved through innovative forms of experience, but not all tourists' needs are sustainable. Tourists' excessive demands exceed the threshold that national parks' ecological environments can withstand. These demands not only destroy the ecological environment but also affect the quality of the tourist experience. For example, some tourists expressed a need for "sliding grass", and this needs to be taken seriously. Staff in national parks, tourism companies, and community participants must not satisfy tourists' nonenvironmental and unethical behaviors in pursuit of economic benefits. The development of national parks should always be based on conservation.

The sustainable needs of tourists can be satisfied through a breakthrough in form. For example, the American Fossil Park links informal field collection sites with protected

national parks that prohibit the collection of specimens of any kind [60,61]. Similarly, by establishing a place for tourists to participate near Potatso National Park, an informal education bridge can be effectively built with the national park that will meet tourists' needs and provide them with a richer experience. Although the location of informal education can easily be moved, professional ecological protection knowledge is not easily transferred [62,63]. Therefore, it is also necessary to carry out effective education in informal places that are suitable for different levels of tourists' ecological cognition. Through this combination of formal and informal education sites, the protection of national parks can be achieved by increasing tourists' ecological awareness rather than increasing on-site monitoring.

5. Conclusions

This article uses the relatively new tool of tourists' travel notes to study the ecotourism practices of Potatso National Park. This approach provides a more comprehensive look at the development status of ecotourism in Potatso and demonstrates the contradictions in ecotourism. It can provide more empirical and theoretical enlightenment on the dynamic development of national parks. The main findings are as follows.

This study confirmed that ecotourism in Potatso is at a relatively mature and sustainable stage. Potatso's ecotourism practices sustainable principles and contains four dimensions: the natural environment, environmental education, community participation and ecotourism experience. In addition to the interaction between ecotourism stakeholders, the socioeconomic background dimension has a guiding role in tourists' ecotourism practices. In these five dimensions, tourists pay the most attention to five elements: the ecosystem elements, sensory and behavioral ecotourism experiences, ecological facilities, and the interpretation system.

In this study, we identified three contradictions in the development of ecotourism in Potatso. The contradiction between tourists' environmental awareness and lack of environmental behaviors emphasizes the importance of transforming environmental education into environmental behavior. The contradiction between community participation and residents' reception capacity suggests that the relationship between national parks and communities is dynamic and that the original model of community participation needs to be dynamically adjusted under the current social background. The contradiction between environmental education and tourists' experience indicates that tourists' demands are also dynamic. There are still some unsustainable needs that should be prevented and the need for a deeper experience that can be met through innovative environmental education forms.

Related to the future development of ecotourism in Potatso is the significant development of communities and tourists so that they are more responsible for ecosystems. Strengthening the absorption of environmental education by tourists and the implementation of environmental behaviors is the focus of the current ecotourism. Moreover, cultivating ecotourists not only needs to cultivate tourists' ecological consciousness, but also the need to cultivate tourists' geographical and folk cultural knowledge from a more macro view through geotourism and cultural tourism. Potatso needs to offer more ways for the community to participate in ecotourism, facilitating benign interaction among communities' sense of ownership, sustainable ideas, and tourism reception capacity. An experiential and informal education site that allows in-depth participation by tourists could be created in the national park or in the communities, and the conservation of the environment should come first. We explore the general practice of ecotourism in Potatso, and more detailed empirical research is needed in the future based on the accumulation of research data.

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