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# Seeking Serious Tourists – Balancing Culture, Conservation and Economic Gains from Aboriginal Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

*Ethnic culture, often complemented by attractive relatively natural environments, is the core tourism attraction for indigenous areas. With the rise of aboriginal tourism, many regions with indigenous people intend to reform their economies by introducing tourism development. However, some places where this has occurred have exhibited adverse consequences, such as the breaking up of conventional social/cultural norms and distortion of unique ethnic cultures. Thus, it is critical to establish an approach to development that can satisfy both cultural and economic concerns to achieve sustainable development in aboriginal regions. Based on serious leisure theory, it is proposed that serious travelers can contribute offer enhanced prospects of contributing to aboriginal communities in terms of both economic gains and cultural conservations. The idea is assessed in the context of aboriginal community in Taiwan and the empirical findings mostly verify the above claims. Serious aboriginal tourists express their support for ethnic culture with real spending on culture-related products and services. Likewise, serious aboriginal travelers reveal their passions for ethnic culture by demanding more cultural experiences and, more willingly donate for aboriginal cultural conservation. Thus, it is suggested that, aboriginal destinations should cater more to the serious traveler market to make sustainable development possible.*

## INTRODUCTION

The unique ethnic culture makes aboriginal travel prevalent in tourism market. Moscardo and Pearce (1999) indicated that the colorful ethnic sentiment lured most tourists to aboriginal resorts. The increasing popularity of aboriginal tourism attracts more and more visitors to indigenous areas. Tourism has often been treated as a developmental instrument for revitalizing tribe's economy and culture. Ray (1998) emphasized that local culture was re-created for valuable products in developing culture tourism. Thus, as we examine the aboriginal tourism development literature, the economic and culture debates entangle all the time (Lash and Urry, 1994). Unfortunately, many culture tourism development cases brought about stiff critiques. Several case studies in Taiwan by Chang (2004) and Yang and Huang observed and criticized that indigenous tribes gained less, but suffered violent lost on environmental and living quality with twisting cultural presentation in tourism. The cultural Harvest Festival had turned into tourism marketing event; machine-made resembling handcrafts were mass produced and sold; performing bogus dances and songs to please visitors; and some

businessmen eagerly gain competitive advantages by hook or crook without respects for culture and tradition.

In the past, tourism impact discussions mainly came from resource-based thoughts. We believe this line of discussions should not leave out tourism's its key player – tourists. Not all visitors are helpful. Some study results even revealed negative economic or cultural effects caused by some tourists (Wu 2003, MacCannell 1976). McIntosh, Goeldner and Richie (1990) indicated although cultural tourism intended to give tourists profound cultural experience, but not all visitors in culture destinations seek for experiencing ethnic culture. Thus, it seems necessary to figure out who might be beneficial to destination's economy and cultural conservation. Since 1982 Stebbins have advocated "serious leisure" and suggested that individuals with higher level of serious leisure would have more commitments upon, identify oneself with the activity, and willingly devote more money and efforts. According to the serious leisure theory, if tourists hold serious attitudes toward aborigine, it is reasonable to assume they will concerns in depth about local culture and spend more money on site for their cultural journey.

This study takes a step further to measure the depth of culture travel based on the concept of serious leisure. Furthermore, we propose and examine that serious tourists would more likely support local cultures and economically contribute more for local development. Thus, this study first will construct a serious culture travel scale based on the concept of serious leisure to measure the depth of cultural travel. Further, this study will test two sets of relationships: (1) relationships between serious cultural travel and preferences for culture-based tourism products and supports for culture conservations, (2) relationships between serious cultural travel and local consumption patterns and expenditures.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study is based on support and evolution of the serious leisure theory, discussing management of sustainability of aboriginal rights and cultural preservation from tourist analysis. Thus, this research is primarily based on the characteristics of aboriginal tourism while referring to the principles of serious leisure to test the seriousness of tourists who visit aborigines. This is then followed up by the economic contributions and attitudes toward cultural preservation of tourists of different levels of seriousness.

### **1. Sample Selection and Execution**

The subjects of this study are the tourists that visit aboriginal areas. Samples were collected from three aboriginal destinations in Taiwan representing different types of aboriginal tourism. Wu-Lai was a popular tourism resort famous for her Tai-yi aboriginal culture and hot spring. San Di Men was an aboriginal museum park run by government. Bu-Non Tribal Home was a famous indigenous destination closed to Bu-Non tribe's living area and run by tribe villagers. Total 390 questionnaires were evenly distributed in three sampling sites, and 372 of them were collected and used for further analysis. In the samples, most tourists were in the 20-39 age demographic (60.7%), followed by the over 40s (29.3%). Most of the subjects were married (51.9%) and have a college-level education or above (44.4%) with an income of between 20 to 40 thousand NTD per

month (44.6%). The occupations of the subjects were extremely varied. The social background of the subjects were similar to that of a previous study on aboriginal tourism (HueiJen Liu, 2007; Chang, Wall & Chu, 2006).

## 2. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed according to the main research topics and divided into four main sections: (1) seriousness of tourist, (2) tourist inclination to spend and buy cultural products, (3) cultural content preference and amount willing to spend on the preservation of aboriginal culture, and (4) basic information.

Testing for seriousness was based on Stebbins' interpretation of serious leisure and relevant material (Yo-Jin Lin et al, 2004; Yueh-Lin Yu, 2003). Serious leisure mainly describes people's attitudes toward investing in long-term leisure activities and their values, and "serious tourism" is used to evaluate the investment and values of tourists toward participation of tourism activities, so the ideas and items of evaluation for "serious leisure" were used. Because basic fundamental differences exist—for example, leaving behind daily life to travel—tourism is not a routine activity for most people, thus the six characteristics of serious leisure (persistence, perseverance, lifetime devotion, personal effort, sub-culture-ness and identification) might not be suitable for tourism activities. For example, lifetime devotion relates to treating an activity like a business that one goes after in life. For acts of being a tourist that occur not very often, this might not be a good criterion. Thus, this study uses the content of the structure, but does not presume any tourism sub-structures. Also, when developing the questions, modifications of aboriginal tourism characteristics were also taken into account. For example, changing "I will still participate in a leisure activity even when I'm feeling down" to "even if there is a setback (quality of trip was not as expected,) I will still visit an aboriginal area in the future." The questionnaires use the Likert meter, from "highly disagree (1)" to "highly agree (5)." To ensure effectiveness of the questionnaire, three experts (two researchers and one of the tourism industry) were asked three separate times to make sure. There are 22 variants in this seriousness chart.

The economic contributions of the tourists mainly stemmed from their spendings at the tourist location (Smith, 2001); hence, this study asks for the amount the tourists spent and what they spent it on based on Wu's (2007) categories: lodgings, food and shopping. Moreover, to further understand if spending has to do with cultural characteristics, choices were provided including souvenirs, meals, B&Bs, arts and crafts and talks. These also used the Likert meter. This study evaluates tourist attitudes toward cultural preservation from three directions: (1) thoughts toward the value of aboriginal cultural preservation, (2) concern for the issue of aboriginal cultural preservation, and (3) preference within the content of aboriginal culture. The preservation value of cultural resources is non-marketable, and Ciriacy-Wantrup (1947) explains that conditional evaluation, used to directly get the subject's willingness to spend to estimate non-marketable (humanity) resource value is one of the most commonly used. This study also uses this to establish cultural resources' preservation value. First, a tourist is given a condition—in order to develop tourism, a traditional aboriginal culture may be lost if unpreserved—then the tourist is asked his/her willingness to "support preservation of the local culture" and the amount he/she is willing to spend. As for personal preference of aboriginal culture, mostly to know if there will be traditional activities at the tourist

location, Ryan and Huyton's (2000) and the questions developed by Chang, et al (2006) include correlations between participation of activities and whether or not they have to do with the traditional aboriginal culture. The questionnaire also includes shopping preferences, so shopping as a choice is excluded, leaving four. To understand the subject's concern toward cultural preservation, the study also asks the tourists their attitudes toward aboriginal concerns and support on a daily basis. Apart from the amount they are willing to spend, the Likert meter is also used here. Finally, the questionnaire also asks for the subjects' social economic background including information such as age, education, marital status, occupation and income.

## FINDINGS

### 1. Aboriginal Serious Tourism Survey

Overall, tourists' seriousness toward aboriginal tourism is good, with an average of 4.01-3.24 for each item. High acceptances are: aboriginal tourism is something that should be promoted (m=4.01), visiting aboriginal areas is a meaningful activity (m=3.93); low acceptances are: even if there is a setback, I will revisit in the future (m=3.24), coming here, I met a lot of new friends (m=3.28), and, I often pay attention to aboriginal societies/organizations and visit aboriginal tourist locations together (m=3.33). This shows that mental identification with aboriginal tourism is high, but execution is considerably lower.

This study included 22 variants in the survey. First of all, the summated-rating scale was used to add up the totals. Then, reliability was analyzed. The survey's overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value was 0.921, showing fine reliability. The tally distributions of the Serious Tourism survey are shown in Fig. 1; average seriousness was 79, with the highest being 110 and the lowest, 26. For further analysis, the overall tallies were divided into three groups—26-73 of low-seriousness totaled 122 persons, 74-84 of mid-seriousness totaled 128 persons, and 85-110 of high-seriousness totaled 122 persons.

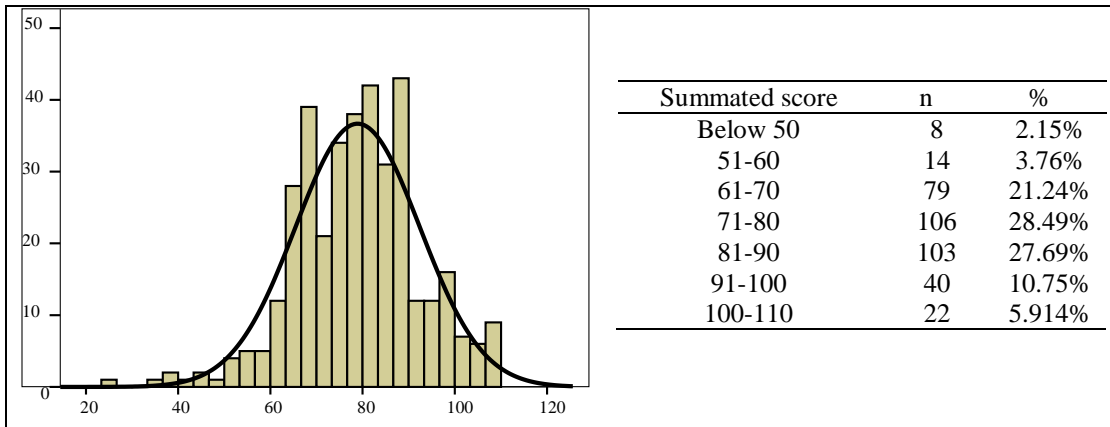


Figure 1. Distribution of serious travel scale

### 2. The Relationship Between Tourism Seriousness and Contribution to the Local Economy

Does more seriousness lead to a higher local economic contribution? In spending, serious tourists buy more (45%) than tourists of mid (38%) or low (25%) seriousness.

(Table 1) However, differences for lodgings and food were not noticeable. This shows that tourists' deliberations on whether or not to lodge/eat at the aboriginal location is not affected by serious tourism. As for differences in overall spending, food and shopping, more serious tourists' amounts were much higher than less serious tourists. For a highly serious tourist, the average spending was 970 NTD, which, when compared to that of a not ever serious tourist (495 NTD), was higher by 96% and 39%, when compared to a moderately serious tourist's 698 NTD. (Table 2) In addition, study results also showed that highly serious tourists had higher preference for "buying souvenirs with aboriginal characteristics," "eating an aboriginal meal," and "choosing a local aborigine as a tour guide" than the other tourists. (Table 3)

Table 1 Comparison of different items in local spending

	Seriousness Level						Chi-square	Cramer's V
	Low		Medium		High			
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Lodging								
No	102	83.6	100	78.10	93	76.20	$\chi^2 = 2.187$ p=0.326	0.077
Yes	20	16.4	28	21.90	29	23.80		
Dining								
No	43	35.20	49	38.30	35	28.70	$\chi^2 = 2.655$ p=0.265	0.084
Yes	79	64.80	79	61.70	87	71.30		
Shopping								
No	91	74.60	79	61.70	67	54.90	$\chi^2 = 10.545$ p=0.005**	0.168
Yes	31	25.40	49	38.30	55	45.10		

Table 2 Comparison of different amount in local spending

	Seriousness Level			ANOVA	Post hot test
	Low <sup>a</sup>	Medium <sup>b</sup>	High <sup>c</sup>		
Lodging (NT\$) <sup>1</sup>	140	194	260	F=1.606, p=0.202	
Dining(NT\$) <sup>1</sup>	137	102	276	F=9.219, p=0.000	c > a, b
Shopping(NT\$) <sup>1</sup>	54	138	190	F=5.556, p=0.004	c > a
Total(NT\$) <sup>2</sup>	495	698	970	F=6.205, p=0.002	c > a

Notes:

1. Tourists that did not spend on this item were counted as having spent \$0 NT when calculating averages
2. Total spending was calculated using sums provided by the tourists themselves and included spending other than accommodations, meals, and shopping (e.g. guided tours or transportation)

Table 3 Comparison of difference preferences in culture-based tourism products

Questions	Seriousness Level			ANOVA	Post hot test
	Low <sup>a</sup>	Medium <sup>a</sup>	High <sup>c</sup>		
04. I prefer to buy souvenirs with aboriginal cultural flavor	3.26	3.43	3.91	F=23.28***	a, b < c
05. I prefer eating meals with aboriginal flavor	3.42	3.70	4.26	F=35.92***	a < b < c
06. I prefer staying at hostels operated by aboriginal people	3.25	3.53	4.18	F=44.09***	a < b < c
07. I will tour aboriginal arts/crafts workshops	3.74	4.21	4.46	F=32.33***	a < b < c

08. I will select local aboriginal people to serve as tour guides to better understand aboriginal culture	3.58	4.16	4.43	F=34.33***	a < b < c
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### III. Relationship Between Serious Tourism Levels and Tourists' Attitudes Toward Cultural Preservation

By using “willingness to pay,” we aimed to understand tourists’ monetary values of willingness and identification toward the “preservation and sustainability of local culture.” Results show an obvious difference; the willingness of the highly serious reached 68%, while the low serious only reached 34.43%. (Table 4) Analysis of variants showing the differences in the total amounts the tourists were willing to pay had obvious differences; highly serious tourists averaged an amount of 143 NTD that they were willing to spend toward the preservation of aboriginal culture, which was noticeably higher than the other tourists. (Table 5) In addition, the results showed that there is definite positive correlation between the seriousness of tourists and their concerns and preferences for aboriginal topics and cultural content. Not only are highly serious tourists concerned (4.09) about aboriginal topics (such as basic rights, education and cultural preservation,) they also showed obvious preference for experiencing “viewing aboriginal architecture, song and dance, and costumes” (4.51) and “wearing traditional clothing with aboriginal characteristics” (4.52); experiences that are rich with aboriginal cultural content. (Table 6)

Table 4 Comparison of difference in inclinations to pay for aboriginal culture conservation

Willingness to Pay	Seriousness level			Chi-square	Cramer's V
	Low <sup>a</sup>	Medium <sup>a</sup>	High <sup>c</sup>		
Yes	34.43%	53.91%	68.03%	$\chi^2=29.45$	0.282
No	65.57%	46.09%	31.97%	p=0.000	p=0.000

Table 5 Comparison of difference in WTP amount for aboriginal culture conservation

Willingness to pay	Seriousness level			ANOVA	Host hoc
	Low <sup>a</sup> (n=122)	Medium <sup>b</sup> (n=128)	High <sup>c</sup> (n=122)		
Average amount	63	59	143	F=4.06**	c > a, b
Standard deviation	236.54	117.78	362.76		

Table 6 Comparison of differences in culture preference and conservation supports

Questions	Seriousness Level			ANOVA	Post hot test
	Low <sup>a</sup>	Medium <sup>a</sup>	High <sup>c</sup>		
I want to see tradition aboriginal architecture, song and dance, apparel, etc.	3.70	4.24	4.51	F=37.13***	a < b < c
I hope to actually experience aboriginal life	3.34	3.87	4.28	F=46.84***	a < b < c
I hope to interact with local aboriginal people	3.45	3.90	4.34	F=43.86***	a < b < c
I prefer local people wearing traditional outfits	3.75	4.29	4.52	F=31.20***	a < b, c

I have consistently concerned with aborigine issues	3.05	3.49	4.09	F=58.05***	a < b < c
I support for aboriginal culture conservation	3.75	4.40	4.69	F=47.86***	a < b < c

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From analyzing tourists, the theory of “serious tourism” was deduced and the title “serious tourists have more promise and identification of values toward aboriginal cultures and economic development, with actions that better meet the principles of sustainable development” was proposed. The seriousness of tourists was evaluated as well as its correlation with tourists’ economic contributions and thoughts toward cultural preservation. Finally, there is discussion of the meaning of sustainable development for aboriginal tourism.

### 1. The seriousness of tourists to aboriginal tourist locations

Although the differences in the seriousness of tourists are great, with close to no seriousness at 23 points and extremely serious with a full score of 110, this result is similar to past relevant studies. Moscardo and Pearce studied two types of tourists in Australia, the highly-interested in aboriginal culture “aborigine connections group” type and the “low-grade aboriginal tours” type, which stood for 36% and 16% respectively; McKercher and du Cros (2002) discovered that 18% of tourists to Hong Kong are of the deep cultural experience type, while 27.9% lack deep experiencing and rarely participate in cultural tourists’ activities. Using seriousness to reflect the depth of aborigine tourism not only showcases the uniqueness of aboriginal cultural tourism, but also helps eradicate past statements of the analysis of tourists to aboriginal areas; for example, McIntosh (2004) felt that most tourists to aboriginal areas prefer to experience aboriginal culture making aboriginal tribes a huge market, while Ryan and Huyton (2002) thinks that tourists to aboriginal areas do not differ much to other tourists as deep experience of aboriginal culture does not matter to most. This study proposes that by examining tourists’ seriousness, whether a trip to an aboriginal tribe is the same as a normal tourist act can be determined. This study uses the theory of serious leisure to examine the seriousness of tourists toward tourism, which is proof and application of the serious leisure theory in the field of tourism as well as the first study on aboriginal tourism. Our survey contains 22 points that may differentiate the seriousness of tourists, such as “visiting an aboriginal tourist location is something worth doing my entire life,” “I’ve participated and been concerned about the development of aboriginal tourism for a long time,” “I identify a lot with aboriginal tourism,” and “I will actively recommend aboriginal tourism to others.” These points are able to show the differences in seriousness among the tourists, which is similar to the identification that people of serious leisure (such as volunteers or hobbyists) feel.



2. Economic gain as well as cultural preservation is key to sustainable development for aboriginal tourism

Most aboriginal tribes start developing tourism due to economic issues. However, with economy as the final goal, even though temporary economic relief is achieved, cultural resources often suffer unrecoverable consequences. Conversely, if cultural preservation is the sole consideration and local economic needs are ignored, developments cannot last. Moreover, cultural preservation often needs a large sum of money. Thus, from a locally operated and sustainable development starting point, the development of aboriginal tourism needs both economic gain and cultural preservation. Therefore, the title of this research was proposed. Results of our study showed that highly serious tourists prefer to buy things/services that have aboriginal characteristics or are managed by aborigines. They have also shown that these tourists spend more than less serious tourists (table 7). Hence, through comparisons of these differences, we can deduct that “more serious tourists have higher economic contributions to the tourist location.” In addition, the results showed that highly serious tourists have higher preference for activities with aboriginal cultural content, and are more supportive of the preservation of aboriginal culture (table 1). Thus, it is safe to say that the “more highly serious tourists value and show more support for the preservation of aboriginal values and cultures.”

**Table 7. Economic gains and culture conservation supports by level of serious travel.**

	Serious travel	Empirical comparisons
Economic gain		
Local spending	High > low	High serious tourists spend more money in total (NT\$970), dining (NT\$276), and shopping (NT\$190) comparing to visitors with lower serious travel attitude.
Consumption preference	High > low	Higher serious tourists more likely prefer to choose souvenirs, restaurant, lodging, and shopping store, and interpretation services with emphasis on aboriginal culture.
Culture Conservation		
Culture value	High > low	The inclination (68%) to pay for aboriginal culture conservation and the amount of willingness to paid (NT\$363) are significant higher for serious tourist.
Culture savors	High > low	High serious tourists are more interesting in profound cultural savors as experiencing aboriginal architecture, songs, dancing, costume and accessories, and living.
Concerns for aborigine	High > low	High serious tourists pay more attentions to and support for aborigine issues.

Culture is the key to developing aboriginal tourism. A lack of culture means a lack of character. Economy is the main reason to developing tourism. Without economic motivation, goes the necessity for developing tourism. However, an economic and cultural win-win situation is hard to achieve (Henderson, 2000 du Cros, 2001; Li, 2003), something that this study has proposed and proved can be reached with the help of “serious tourists.” In other words, from a tourist market viewpoint, managing the market for serious tourists is the best bet for achieving both economic gain and cultural

preservation; especially in the cases of many aboriginal tribes where the amount of tourists they can attract is limited. The studies have shown that highly serious tourists show much more support in “economic contributions” and for “cultural preservation” than others, meaning that to achieve sustainable development, the market should target these more “serious” tourists. This study discussed this issue from the tourists’ viewpoint only. However, how the locals should react and operate once these serious tourists enter their tribes is another matter. For example, although our research shows that serious tourists prefer to buy products and services that have cultural characteristics, the data shows that only 45% actually purchased anything and the value of the purchases also differ greatly. This may be because tourists cannot find high-priced aboriginal cultural products, which shows that there is still much room for improvement in this regard. Future development of tourism goods needs to consider how to use cultural elements to create high quality products with cultural content to meet the needs of serious tourists and increase the profits of the locals.

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