The Different Amazonian Indigenous Cultures Between Western and Chinese Tourists' Perspectives

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the contrasting portrayals of Amazonian indigenous cultures in the European, American and Chinese travel media, revealing the profound impact of historical, cultural and faith-based factors on tourism. It begins with an overview of the evolution of tourism and its multifaceted impact on indigenous cultures, highlighting the benefits of tourism for indigenous cultures. Through a comparative analysis of Western and Chinese tourism websites, this paper identifies differences in the way these cultures are depicted. Western depictions tend to romanticize and commodify indigenous cultures, portraying them as "noble savages" and emphasizing their poverty, isolation, and need for external protection. Closely linked to Western colonial history, Christianity and romanticism, these portrayals reflect a paternalistic view that often disregards the agency of indigenous communities. In contrast, Chinese depictions are influenced by Taoism and Confucianism, emphasizing harmony with nature, collectivism and social order. These depictions focus on the connection between aboriginal people and their environment, depicting them as models of ecological balance and collective living. The study also explores the historical and colonial contexts that have shaped such Chinese portrayals, reflecting China's history of internal upheaval and resistance to cultural imperialism. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for a more nuanced and respectful approach to indigenous tourism that recognizes the agency, resilience and vitality of these communities, moving beyond mere stereotyping and commodification.

Keywords: Amazonian indigenous culture; tourism; colonialism; religious belief.

1. Introduction

The evolution of tourism from its ancient origins to the global industry it is today has had profound impacts on indigenous cultures. Historically, tourism can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where travel was primarily for trade, religious pilgrimages, and exploration [1]. For instance, the ancient Greeks and Romans traveled to attend the Olympic Games or visit famous sites like the Oracle of Delphi [2]. The Romans built extensive road networks that facilitated travel across their empire, allowing citizens to visit distant provinces and famous landmarks. During the medieval period, religious pilgrimages became widespread, with large numbers of people traveling long distances to visit holy sites such as Santiago de Compostela in Spain and Canterbury in England. These journeys were often arduous and undertaken for spiritual fulfillment rather than leisure. The concept of leisure travel emerged during the Renaissance, as the European aristocracy began to embark on "Grand Tours" of the continent, seeking cultural enrichment and education [3]. This practice laid the groundwork for modern tourism, which significantly expanded with the advent of industrialization in the 19th century. The development of railways, steamships, and later, automobiles and airplanes, made travel more accessible to the masses, transforming tourism into a major global industry. The establishment of organized travel companies, such as Thomas Cook in the mid-1800s, further revolutionized tourism by offering package tours and standardized itineraries [4], making it easier for ordinary people to explore new destinations.

Tourism's impact on indigenous cultures is multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Economically, it can provide significant benefits for indigenous communities, creating jobs and generating income through various sectors such as guiding, hospitality, and the sale of traditional crafts. This increase in income often translates into improved standards of living, better infrastructure, and increased social welfare, etc. Additionally, the development of infrastructure like roads, healthcare facilities, and schools, driven by increased tourism, benefits both tourists and residents. From a cultural standpoint, tourism can play a crucial role in the preservation and revitalization of indigenous traditions. The increased visibility and appreciation of indigenous cultures among tourists can foster a greater respect for and interest in preserving these traditions. The revenue generated from tourism can be reinvested into cultural preservation projects, such as the restoration of historical sites and the support of traditional arts and crafts. Moreover, tourism can enhance community pride, as indigenous people showcase their culture and traditions to the world, fostering a stronger sense of community identity and cohesion. Interaction with tourists also provides educational opportunities, exposing indigenous people to different cultures and perspectives, and enhancing language and communication skills.

However, tourism also brings challenges. The pressure to cater to tourist expectations can lead to the commercialization of indigenous traditions and rituals [5]. Cultural performances, crafts, and ceremonies may be altered or simplified to appeal to tourists, resulting in a loss of authenticity and sacredness. As younger generations engage more with tourism-related activities, there is a risk of losing traditional knowledge and practices that are not seen as economically beneficial. Furthermore, the development of tourist infrastructure can displace indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, causing a loss of traditional livelihoods and social structures. The economic benefits are often not evenly distributed, with profits frequently going to external businesses and investors, exacerbating existing inequalities. Environmentally, increased tourist activity can lead to the overuse and depletion of natural resources that indigenous communities rely on for their subsistence. Pollution and habitat destruction caused by tourism can disrupt the ecological balance essential to indigenous ways of life. Overall, the influx of external influences can lead to an identity crisis among indigenous youth, who may struggle to balance traditional values with modern tourist expectations.

Inspired by the cultural differences observed in earlier research, this paper explores how these distinctions might manifest in the portrayal of Amazonian indigenous people in travel guides from China and the Western world. The research employs a combination of primary and secondary sources, carefully analyzing the content to construct a detailed portrayal of indigenous people as depicted by both Chinese and Western media. Specifically, it examines more than three sources from each cultural context, allowing for a comprehensive comparison of these portrayals. By juxtaposing these representations, the paper draws connections between the differences observed and the underlying philosophical ideas, religious beliefs, and cultural values that inform them. This approach not only highlights the divergent ways in which indigenous cultures are viewed but also offers insights into the broader cultural differences between China and the European and American world.

2. European and American Views

Travel guides and tourism sites in Europe and America often present a simplified, stereotypical view of Amazonian indigenous cultures. They romanticize these communities,

turning them into marketable attractions. This trend is rooted in a long-standing Western interest in the "exotic" and "primitive." Such portrayals overlook the rich complexity of these cultures. For instance, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) often depicts indigenous Amazonian people as impoverished and underdeveloped. As shown in Figure 1, the website uses images of a wary young girl, a woman in traditional dress with face paint, and an elderly man in rags, suggesting otherness and vulnerability. The captions on the picture write: "Left to right: 1. Maria, daughter of an amazonian rubber tapper Alto Juruá Extractive Reserve Acre, Brazil; 2. Kayapo Indian Chief Kanhok Gorotire Amazonas, Brazil; 3. Capones, peasant farmers live in extreme poverty on the edges of tropical rainforest, just surviving to feed themselves, Brazil" [6]. The captions describe these individuals as extremely poor or as symbols of a fading, traditional lifestyle. This reinforces the idea that such communities are disconnected from modernity, stuck in a past that is disappearing.
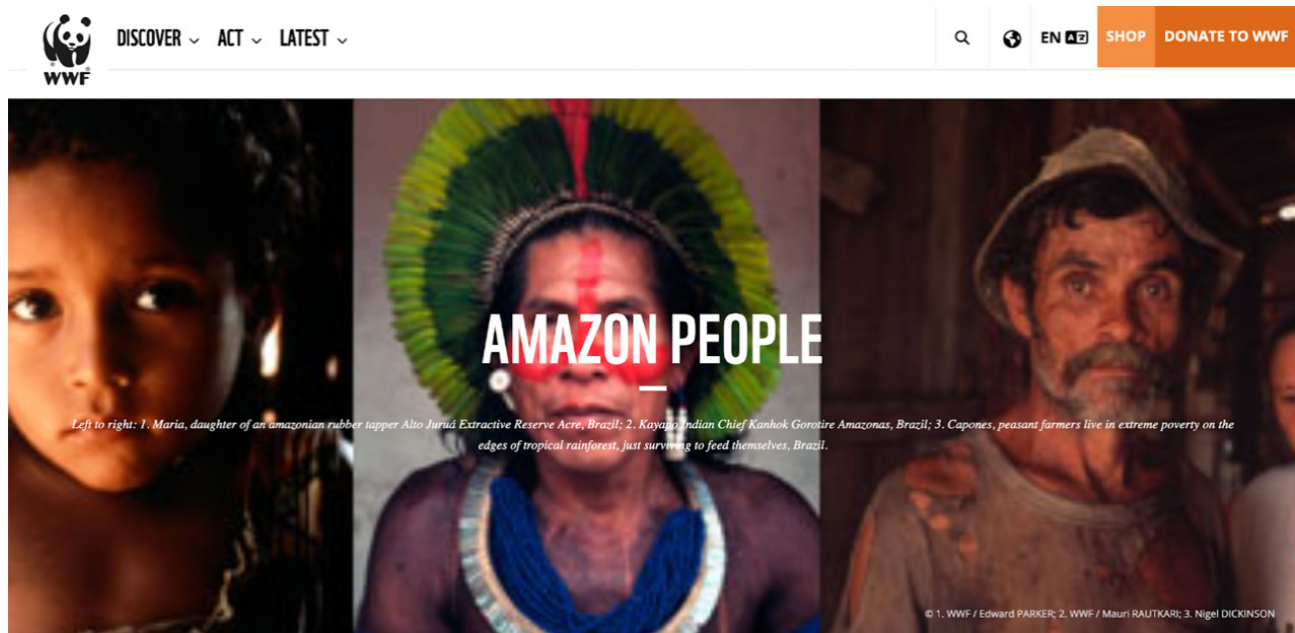

Fig. 1 Home page of amazon people on WWF's website

Western depictions of Amazonian indigenous peoples often frame them as primitive, often phrased as the "noble savage" stereotype [7]. These communities are viewed as relics of the past, with cultures frozen in time. Their lifestyles seem in need of protection from modernity. This viewpoint highlights poverty and isolation but also shows a fascination with the perceived purity of these cultures. On the other hand, the "noble savage" stereotype also portrays indigenous people as living in harmony with nature and possessing lost wisdom of how to interact and coexist with nature. Such portrayals romanticize and objectify these communities. They are seen as morally superior in their simplicity yet also as vulnerable and in need of pity. Tourism companies such as Gondwana Ecotours and Responsible Vacation published travel guides that demonstrate how Western tourism takes advantage of Amazonian indigenous cultures, portraying them as exotic relics of the past [8,9]. These guides frequently focus on the conflict between preserving traditional ways of life and adapting to modern influences, depicting Indigenous communities as caught between two worlds. For example, in Figure 2, an old man wears a modern-style shirt with special jewelry that represent traditional customs; in Figure 3, younger generation of indigenous people are dressed in modern clothes, looking almost indifferent from outsiders. The inclusion of images of elderly individuals wearing traditional attire, alongside younger generations in modern clothing, creates a sense of cultural dissonance, suggesting that the indigenous way of life is gradually disappearing. The narrative of these travel websites often conveys a sense of urgency, warning tourists that they must visit these communities before their cultures are lost. This message perpetuates the stereotype that indigenous cultures are static and unchanging, disregarding their dynamic histories and the ongoing challenges they face.

Fig. 2 Portray of Amazonian indigenous people on Gondwana Ecotour's official website

Fig. 3 Portray of Amazonian indigenous people on Responsible Vacation's official website

This depiction of Amazonian indigenous cultures is deeply intertwined with the Western notions of conservation and preservation. Websites like Responsible Vacation often promote the idea that tourism can preserve indigenous cultures by providing economic support to these communities. However, this perspective is fraught with contradictions. While tourism can indeed bring much-needed financial resources to indigenous communities, it can also lead to the commodification of their cultures. Rituals and customs may be altered or simplified to meet tourist expectations, and the very traditions that tourists seek to experience may become commercialized and lose their authenticity. Moreover, the focus on the "untouched" and "pure" aspects of Indigenous life often ignores the complex realities these communities face, including their interactions with the modern world and their struggles to assert their rights and autonomy in the face of external pressures.

In summary, the European and American views of Amazonian indigenous people, as depicted in tourism-related websites, are shaped by a combination of romanticism, primitivism, and commodification. These perspectives emphasize the exotic, primitive, and static nature of indigenous cultures, often reducing them to objects of fascination and pity. The portrayal of Amazonian Indigenous people as vulnerable and in need of protection reflects a broader Western narrative that both romanticizes and objectifies these communities. While tourism is promoted as a means of preserving indigenous cultures, it can also contribute to the erosion of authenticity and the commodification of cultural practices. This complex and often contradictory portrayal of Amazonian Indigenous cultures underscores the need for a more nuanced and respectful approach to indigenous tourism, one that recognizes the agency, resilience, and dynamism of these communities rather than reducing them to mere spectacles for tourist consumption.

3. Chinese Views

Chinese tourism websites often depict Amazonian indigenous cultures as closely linked to nature. This view aligns with traditional Chinese philosophies, especially Daoism. The sites describe Indigenous people in rituals or engaging with nature. For example, shamans might be seen in ceremonies, or tribespeople could be shown gathering resources. Such depictions reflect the Daoist belief in harmony with nature [10]. They suggest that these peoples' lifestyles are deeply connected to their environment. This portrayal fosters respect for Indigenous life, implying their knowledge comes from this connection. Chinese tourists find this theme appealing and exotic.

In addition to the emphasis on nature, Chinese tourism websites often highlight the exotic and adventurous aspects of visiting Indigenous communities. Descriptions focus on the thrill of venturing into remote and "dangerous" territories, portraying the journey as a rare and mysterious encounter with a world vastly different from the modern, urbanized environment familiar to most tourists. This narrative plays into the stereotype of the "noble savage," where Indigenous people are depicted as pure and in harmony with nature, untainted by the complexities of modern life. This portrayal appeals to the adventurous spirit of Chinese tourists, offering them a form of escapism where they can experience something both thrilling and culturally enriching.

Moreover, these websites frequently emphasize the theme of collectivity within indigenous cultures. Images often depict entire tribes rather than individuals, showcasing communal activities that highlight the group's cohesion.

This focus on the collective aligns with Confucian values that prioritize community, family, and social harmony. The portrayal of Indigenous communities as close-knit groups reflects the Chinese cultural emphasis on the importance of social order and the collective over the individual. This is further reinforced by the depiction of hierarchical structures within these communities, where elders or shamans are shown in positions of respect and authority. Such images convey a sense of order and respect for tradition, mirroring Confucian ideals of a well-structured society.

Education is another significant theme in Chinese portrayals of Amazonian indigenous cultures. There is a tendency to depict these communities as being at a crossroads between tradition and modernity, where the introduction of education and technology plays a crucial role in their development. Chinese tourism websites often highlight efforts to provide education within these communities, framing it as a necessary tool for preserving indigenous culture while also integrating them into the broader global society. This reflects the Chinese cultural emphasis on education as a means of achieving societal progress and maintaining social harmony.

These portrayals, however, are not without criticisms. There is an underlying acknowledgment that media and tourism marketing often stress stereotypes of purity and poverty to attract tourists. This emphasis on the exotic and the adventurous can lead to a distorted understanding of indigenous realities, reinforcing an "us vs. them" mentality. The portrayal of indigenous people as both noble and primitive creates a paradox that can undermine the authenticity of their culture, reducing it to a mere spectacle for tourist consumption. This misrepresentation is clear in how these communities are depicted. They are often shown as needing protection or on the verge of disappearing. This can entrench stereotypes and obscure the true diversity and resilience of Indigenous cultures.

Chinese tourism websites portray Amazonian indigenous peoples in a way that highlights cultural values. They emphasize the connection to nature, collective living, social order, and education. These depictions aim to attract Chinese tourists but risk reinforcing stereotypes and oversimplifying Indigenous lives. This representation reflects the broader challenges of cross-cultural understanding and the ethical issues in cultural tourism.

4. Comparison of Western and Chinese Views

The portrayal of Amazonian indigenous cultures by European and Chinese tourists is shaped by profound historical, cultural, and philosophical factors. These portrayals

differ significantly, influenced by each culture's unique historical context, beliefs, and worldviews. The relationship between the West and indigenous peoples, historically rooted in conquest and colonization, contrasts sharply with China's history of imperial dynasties, internal turbulence, and relatively limited interaction with indigenous groups in Latin America. These divergent historical experiences, coupled with the philosophical foundations of Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Enlightenment thought, contribute to the differing images and narratives surrounding Amazonian indigenous cultures in Western and Chinese tourism.

4.1 Differences in Beliefs and Religions

The religious and philosophical frameworks of China and the West profoundly shape their respective portrayals of Amazonian indigenous cultures. In China, Confucianism and Daoism play crucial roles in shaping perceptions. Confucianism, with its emphasis on social harmony, respect for tradition, and hierarchical relationships, influences the depiction of indigenous peoples as having structured social roles and a cohesive communal life. Confucian values, such as respect for elders and the importance of moral development, resonate in portrayals that highlight the indigenous communities' adherence to deep-seated traditions and moral values [11]. This view aligns with the Confucian ideal of a well-ordered society where individuals contribute to the collective good, reflecting the perceived stability and cohesion of indigenous communities.

Daoism promotes harmony with nature and the natural order. It paints Indigenous peoples as examples of ideal environmental relationships. Key Daoist values are simplicity, spontaneity, and non-interference [10]. These match the view of indigenous communities as ecologically balanced and spiritually connected to nature. This philosophy highlights the worth of indigenous lifestyles, showcasing their sustainable practices and deep ties to the natural world.

In contrast, Western perspectives are shaped by Christianity and Romanticism. Christianity, with its focus on stewardship, humanitarianism, and individual salvation, often frames indigenous peoples as needing protection and moral guidance [12]. This perspective reflects a paternalistic attitude rooted in the belief that indigenous peoples require Western intervention for their betterment. Christian values emphasize the moral duty to aid and uplift those perceived as vulnerable, influencing portrayals that highlight the need for external support and intervention in Indigenous communities.

Romanticism, on the other hand, idealizes indigenous peoples as "noble savages" living in a state of purity and harmony with nature. This romanticized view contrasts the perceived corruption of modern civilization with the simplicity and authenticity of indigenous lifestyles. Romanticism contributes to a portrayal of indigenous cultures as pure and untainted, yet in need of protection from the encroaching forces of modernization. This idealization can lead to cultural commodification, where indigenous practices are presented in a way that aligns with Western fantasies rather than their lived realities.

4.2 Differences in Core Values

Core values play a significant role in shaping the portrayal of indigenous cultures in both China and the West. In China, collectivism is a fundamental cultural value that emphasizes group cohesion, social harmony, and communal well-being over individual interests. This value system is reflected in the depiction of Indigenous communities as tightly knit, cooperative groups with strong social bonds and a collective sense of identity. The focus is on how these communities maintain harmony and balance within their social structures, aligning with Confucian and Daoist ideals of social order and environmental balance.

Collectivism highlights the importance of community and mutual support, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals within the group. This perspective views indigenous cultures through the lens of their collective social organization and communal practices, portraying them as embodying ideals of cooperation and unity.

In contrast, Western values of individualism shape the portrayal of indigenous cultures through a focus on individual rights and autonomy. Individualism emphasizes personal achievement, self-expression, and independence [13]. This value system often leads to portrayals that highlight individual stories and personal struggles within Indigenous communities, reflecting a broader Western emphasis on individualism and personal agency. Western narratives may frame indigenous peoples as needing support to achieve individual goals or to integrate into a modern, individualistic society, often overlooking the collective nature of their social structures.

The emphasis on individualism can lead to a portrayal of indigenous peoples that centers on personal narratives and achievements, potentially overshadowing the communal aspects of their cultures. This focus on individual stories reflects Western values of personal autonomy and self-expression, which may not fully capture the collective nature of indigenous societies.

4.3 Historical Reasons

Historical experiences have also shaped the perceptions of

indigenous cultures in China and the West. In China, the historical context of dynastic changes and internal strife has influenced its perspective on indigenous cultures. The rise and fall of various dynasties created a context of continuous change and adaptation within China. This historical experience fostered a cultural emphasis on resilience and the preservation of traditional values amid shifting political landscapes. Chinese portrayals of indigenous cultures often reflect an appreciation for the endurance and continuity of traditional ways of life, highlighting the adaptability and cultural richness of these communities in the face of external pressures.

China's history of dynastic changes also contributes to a sense of historical continuity and cultural preservation. The ability of indigenous communities to maintain their traditional practices and cultural identity in the face of external influences is viewed with respect and admiration. This historical context underscores the value placed on resilience and continuity in the portrayal of indigenous cultures.

In the West, industrialism and the Enlightenment have shaped views on indigenous cultures. The Industrial Revolution sparked technological and economic growth. This shift led to a focus on progress and a belief in the superiority of industrialized societies. Consequently, indigenous cultures were seen as outdated. Meanwhile, the Enlightenment emphasized reason, science, and improvement. It further pushed the idea that indigenous peoples should adopt Western values and technologies to modernize.

The Enlightenment's focus on reason and progress contributed to a perception of indigenous cultures as inferior or outdated, reinforcing the idea that they required modernization and intervention. This historical context has shaped Western portrayals that emphasize poverty, underdevelopment, and the need for external aid, reflecting the colonial mindset that positions Western societies as the benefactors of indigenous cultures.

4.4 Colonialism

Colonialism has had a profound impact on Western portrayals of indigenous cultures, shaping perceptions through a history of conquest and colonization. Western powers were deeply involved in the colonization and conquest of indigenous lands across various continents, including the Americas. This colonial legacy established a framework in which indigenous peoples were viewed as needing Western intervention and modernization. The history of colonial expansion has led to portrayals that emphasize poverty, underdevelopment, and the need for external aid, reflecting the colonial mindset that positions Western societies as the benefactors of indigenous cul-

tures.

The colonial experience has also contributed to a paternalistic attitude towards indigenous peoples, framing them as needing protection and support from Western powers. This perspective often overlooks the agency and resilience of Indigenous communities, focusing instead on their perceived deficiencies and the need for Western intervention.

In contrast, China's experience with colonization was markedly different. Although China was subjected to foreign intervention and unequal treaties during the 19th and early 20th centuries, it did not engage in the same form of colonial expansion as Western powers. This history of being colonized, coupled with the lack of a colonial empire, has shaped China's perspective on indigenous cultures by fostering a sense of empathy and resistance to cultural imperialism. Chinese portrayals often emphasize the resilience and autonomy of indigenous peoples, reflecting a desire to avoid the exploitative practices associated with Western colonialism.

In short, China's colonization experience has fostered a deeper respect for indigenous cultures, acknowledging their independence and strength against outside pressures. This view differs from the Western colonial legacy, which often sees indigenous peoples as needing external help.

5. Conclusion

The unique historical, philosophical and cultural context of each region heavily influences Western and Chinese tourism portrayals of indigenous Amazonian cultures. In Western depictions, colonial history, and Enlightenment thinking have profoundly influenced the way they think about Indigenous peoples, often viewing indigenous cultures through romanticism and authoritarian lens. This view tends to emphasize the poverty and vulnerability of these communities, portraying them as pure but endangered "noble savages" in need of protection and intervention from the modern world. This portrayal is a direct consequence of the West's historical relationship with Aboriginal peoples, characterized by conquest, colonization, and a perceived moral obligation to civilize.

On the other hand, the portrayal of China, shaped by Confucian and Taoist philosophies as well as China's unique historical experience, offers a different perspective. These depictions emphasize the aboriginal people's connection to nature and reflect Taoist values of harmony and balance. They also emphasize collective life and social order, resonating with Confucian ideals. In contrast to the West's focus on individualism, Chinese depictions emphasize the collective nature of aboriginal life, viewing these communities as cohesive units embodying cultural continuity and resilience.

Furthermore, whereas Western depictions are influenced by the legacy of colonialism, which frames indigenous people as groups in need of Western assistance and protection, Chinese portrayals are influenced by the turbulent past, with more than ten dynasties and foreign invasions during the 19th century. This experience has cultivated empathy and respect for the autonomy and resilience of indigenous cultures. As a result, Chinese portrayals sometimes emphasize the dignity and self-sufficiency of indigenous peoples, avoiding the exploitative narratives that are common in Western tourism.

The different depictions of Amazonian indigenous cultures by Chinese and Western tourists reflect a wide range of cultural values, philosophical beliefs, and historical experiences. While there are advantages and disadvantages to both perspectives, it is important for tourism narratives to move beyond stereotypes and describe indigenous communities in a more nuanced and respectful manner. This approach not only recognizes the complexity and diversity of these cultures, but also contributes to a more ethical and informed form of cultural tourism.

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