Prospects for the Development of Shared Tourism Accommodation in China: From Space Sharing to Culture Sharing
—Taking Airbnb Beijing as an Example

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Abstract—The year 2018 is of great importance to China's sharing economy. After several years' rapid development, China's sharing economy market is being adjusted and differentiated. The tourism industry represented by shared accommodation has been leaping forward, gaining increasingly rising market share and customer recognition. From the perspective of cultural geography theory, this paper deconstructs the culture sharing connotation of shared accommodation, and analyzes the “Minsu space” based on scale nesting and “local” shared accommodation culture sharing system. In addition, taking the development of Airbnb Beijing as an example and in combination with the big data analysis, this paper also outlines the development path of shared accommodation, and outlooks the development trend of shared tourism accommodation, so as to benefit the development of related industries.

Keywords—Shared Accommodation; Tourism; Culture Sharing

I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2018 is of great importance to China's sharing economy. The sharing economy has experienced leaping economic development, attracting massive capital and causing a deep adjustment to capital layout and industry penetration, and market reshuffle. Correspondingly, the true “sharing” has shown obvious late-developing advantages.

With the in-depth connection between the sharing economy and the tourism industry, shared accommodation, as an important branch, has developed rapidly, gaining increasingly rising market share and customer recognition. According to statistics, the revenue of China's shared accommodation market in 2018 was about CNY 16.5 billion, accounting for 6.1% of China's accommodation revenue, an increase of 1.4% over the previous year, and an increase of 3.8% compared with 2015, as shown in Table I. According to the statistics of the Annual Report on China's Sharing Economy Development (2019) issued by the State Information Center: From 2015 to 2018, the average annual growth of shared accommodation income was about 45.7%, which was 12.7 times of the income of traditional accommodation, and the penetration rate of shared accommodation users increased from 1.5% to 9.9%[1].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Shared accommodation income</th>
<th>Income of the accommodation above the designated size</th>
<th>National accommodation income</th>
<th>Percentage of shared accommodation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>2,054.8</td>
<td>2,692</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1,979.6</td>
<td>2,563.7</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1,907.2</td>
<td>2,441.6</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1,803.1</td>
<td>2,279.8</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author believes that the rapid growth of shared accommodation in recent years is related to the rapid development of tourism industry and the changes in tourists' demands in recent years, as well as the influence of the social culture attribute of “host-guest sharing” and “meeting an old friend away from home” on the core market competitiveness. Therefore, taking the development of Airbnb Beijing shared

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Table: Percentage of shared accommodation income in national accommodation income from 2015 to 2018 (unit: CNY 100 million)

* Source: ① The income data of the accommodation above designated size for 2015-2017 is from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, and the data for 2018 is estimated. ② The income data of the national accommodation is calculated based on the third national economic census data and the ratio of the income data of the accommodation above the designated size.
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data analysis from the perspective of cultural geography theory,

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tourism accommodation, so as to benefit the development of

related industries.

II. SHARING ECONOMY AND SHARED ACCOMMODATION

The sharing economy is also known as shareconomy or

collaborative consumption. It was first put forward in

Community Structure and Collaborative Consumption

published by Marcus Felson and Joe L. Spaeth (sociology

professors at the University of Illinois) in American Behavioral

Scientists in 1978. Based on the idea put forward by the human

ecologist Amos H. Hawley that symbiosis is to meet the

demand for sustainable development, they put forward that

collaborative consumption is a daily activity that satisfies daily

demands and establishes relationship with other people[2]. In

What’s Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption

jointly written by Rachel Botzman and Roo Rogers, the

concept of collaborative consumption was also adopted, and

consumers’ demand has shifted from acquiring private goods

to meeting using demands, forming a new consumption


defines sharing economy as follows: A summation of the

economic activities that utilize integration of modern

technologies such as the Internet and share a massive amount

of decentralized idle resources to meet diverse demands[4].

Some scholars have suggested that the sharing economy

includes three basic elements as follows: The first is idle

resources. Network platforms integrate excess capacity through

technologies and convert them into tradable products or

services. The second is shared network platform. This is the

core of the sharing economy; it distributes and promotes idle

resources through network technologies. The third is numerous

participants. Each participant takes the initiative to innovate the

sharing economy to achieve customization and

personalization[5].

As an important branch of the sharing economy, shared

accommodation also has the basic elements of sharing

economy. Compared with other tourism products, the social

culture attribute of “host-guest sharing” and “meeting an old

friend away from home” is stronger. Airbnb is the most typical

example. Airbnb is the abbreviation of AirBed and Breakfast

(“Air-b-n-b”). It is the pioneer of global shared accommodation,

and also a practitioner of sharing economy in the tourism

industry, fully reflecting features of the sharing economy in

terms of “integrating idle resources”. In addition, it emphasizes

the individuals as the supply side to provide houses for other

individuals. Consumers can rent houses from individuals rather

than hotels and truly integrate into the local community. Headquartered in San Francisco, California, Airbnb was

established in August 2008, starting from renting three airbeds.

As of March 2018, Airbnb had more than 6 million unique

housing resources worldwide, covering more than 1,000 cities

in 191 countries and regions. Airbnb has also launched a total

of more than 20,000 interactive products for travel destinations,

covering more than 1,000 cities worldwide”.

III. CULTURE SHARING OF SHARED ACCOMMODATION

A. Culture and culture sharing

Scholars have been conducting detailed research on the

definition of culture from different fields, methods and

perspectives. American anthropologists Alfred Kroebber and

Clyde Kluckhohn have a more comprehensive definition of

culture, that is, "culture includes a variety of explicit or implicit

behavior patterns. It is learned and taught by the use of

symbols, constituting the outstanding achievements of the

human community; the basic core of culture includes

traditional concepts derived and selected from history,

especially value concepts; cultural system can be considered as

products of human activities, but it can also be regarded as

factors that limit human activities"[6]. Therefore, the concept

culture is not only limited to art, traditional excellent

heritage and contemporary excellent ideas, but also

encompasses all aspects of daily life[7].

Culture sharing is determined by cultural characteristics.

Cultural characteristics include the groupment, acquired

character and adaptability, as well as the increasingly obvious

liquidity with the accelerating trend of globalization[8]. The

groupment is the motivation of culture sharing, determining the

difference between cultural groups. The liquidity is the

precondition for culture sharing, including continuous internal

iteration and transformation in terms of the time dimension and

also the continuous outward extension and diffusion in terms of

spatial dimension. The acquired character and adaptability are

the main means of culture sharing and the results of cultural

flow within and between groups.

B. The inevitability of shared accommodation from space

sharing to culture sharing

The shared accommodation has certain inevitability from

space sharing to culture sharing, mainly reflecting as follows:

1) Culture sharing is the main reason for tourism

activities

Although the academic research on the nature of tourism

has always been like “a hundred flowers in bloom”, there is no

doubt that cultural differences are the premise of tourism

activities, and cultural exchanges and experience are the main

content of tourism activities. From the perspective of cultural

geography, the geographical difference of culture makes the

homogeneous space become the differences between each

other. The difference in local culture promotes the

communication between different cultures, and tourism

activities are one of the main forms of its phenomenon.

Tourism activities are essentially a special kind of cultural

communication and sharing. Through tourism, a culture with

geographical attributes has gained access to more distant places

and more people. Tourists share the destination culture through

tourism, satisfying their original intention of finding a sense of

difference through tourism. Shared accommodation, as a

necessary carrier and an important factor for tourism activities,

also follows this important feature of tourism activities.

2 Source: Airbnb China
2) Culture sharing is the core value of shared accommodation

The biggest difference between shared accommodation and traditional hotel is that accommodation reflects the "host’s spirit". Hosts are an important part of accommodation. The features of hosts are not only reflected in the decoration, layout and other hardware, however, but their character and the regional cultural characteristics reflected are also important contents for tourists to choose accommodation. The distinguishing feature of accommodation from traditional accommodation is that tourists can know the destination information from the hosts, exchange life experience with hosts, and experience the destination culture, which is also the core value of accommodation. The population migration, economic development and scientific & technological progress have shortened the spatial distance between people, but have increased their psychological distance. The sociality based on communication- the essential attribute of human has not changed with social changes. Contemporary people are more eager to have the interaction and experience of "being respected, equal sharing, and being cared for". The shared accommodation contained the cultural communication attribute of “host-guest sharing”, “meeting an old friend away from home”, and “experiencing local life” at the beginning of its birth, meeting the needs of contemporary people, especially young people in terms of progressive communication.

3) Space sharing is the material carrier of culture sharing

Material culture is the foundation of human progress as well as social and economic development, the carrier of intangible culture, and the most important medium for cultural transmission. In terms of the shared accommodation industry, space sharing is the foundation and primary stage of culture sharing, and culture sharing is the sublimation and advanced form of space sharing. Shared accommodation provides places for culture sharing. Hosts often decorate the rooms according to their own preferences and local characteristics, and the decoration is, in fact, the concentration of local culture, while the cultural atmosphere that guests feel through the rooms and facilities is precisely a culture sharing process based on cultural flow, and the house is the most important material carrier.

4) Host-guest interaction is a necessary approach for culture sharing

Culture sharing and transmission are based on the interaction of people. In combination with shared accommodation, host-guest interaction is a necessary approach for culture sharing. The culture sharing constructed by the shared accommodation is based on the direct communication between local residents and tourists, and it is the “live” interactive communication of individuals as cultural carriers. The local culture is vividly presented by local people, representing an active, interactive and 3D cultural transmission. Culture is an important way to transform from space to place. The hosts of accommodation who are willing to share their own “home” with tourists are a group of people who are energetic, and hospitable and deeply love their hometown, vividly embodying the local culture. Tourists “escape” from the habitual living environment, chase the “poetic dwelling”, and share the destination culture with the hosts of accommodation, thus getting an immersive experience.

IV. SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS ON THE CULTURE SHARING OF SHARED ACCOMMODATION

A. Connotation of the cultural sharing of shared accommodation

Different research perspectives give different definitions of culture, but the cultural research circle uniformly divides culture into the following four levels at different depths from the outside to the inside: material culture, system culture, behavioral culture and conceptual culture[9]. Although these four different cultural levels have certain differences, they have been interconnected, interacted, and mutually transformed during cultural evolution. This paper attempts to analyze the culture sharing connotation of shared accommodation by referring to the hierarchical research of culture.

1) Sharing of material culture: Sharing of personalized shared accommodation facilities

The material level of culture mainly refers to the material form and symbol form of culture and related objects. In terms of shared accommodation, the accommodation facilities, shared facilities and meals provided by the hosts for the guests belong to material culture. Taking Airbnb as an example, airbeds and breakfast were the basic material content provided by shared accommodation in the early days to meet the short-term accommodation needs of tourists. With further development of the industry, the platform business continues to expand, and the types of accommodation shared by hosts have been constantly enriched from apartments, villas, and holiday houses to treehouses, islands and castles. The space and the furnishings, decoration, and food in the space constitute the material elements of shared accommodation, which are the carriers of shared culture.

2) Sharing of system culture: Communicative system and evaluation & security system

The system culture level refers to the regulations or normal forms that are gradually formed or established by usage on the basis of visible material culture[10]. With in-depth development of the shared accommodation industry, along with a diversified host-guest sharing experience, a series of cultural systems and normal forms have been gradually formed, including online and offline communication mechanism between hosts and guests, complete host-guest security evaluation system, and standardized host-guest interaction and mutual evaluation system, the home-themed house layout & configuration, thoughtful description of hosts, and the surrounding convenient travel tips, etc. It is interesting that some scholars have shown through research that the description of hosts of shared accommodation is gradually becoming more standardized for the purpose of obtaining the preferred choice of guests: Some hosts focus on describing their love for tourism and cheerful personality; some focus on describing their specialty in a certain field or industry[11]. This is also a typical expression of system culture sharing.

3) Sharing of behavioral culture: Ritualized host-guest communication and interaction

Researches on the behavioral culture emphasize the significance of human behavior patterns in culture. Specifically, the behavioral culture sharing in the shared accommodation is
mainly reflected in host-guest interaction. According to Collins’ interactive ritual chain theory, there are various rituals in human society. The interactive rituals in the context are a process with causal association and feedback loop[12]. Each interaction produces a certain amount of emotional energy and group unity, and this interaction result determines the likelihood and frequency of the next interaction. Shared accommodation is essentially a “home”-themed host-guest interaction. In order to provide the cultural awareness of “home”, the hosts not only concentrate their efforts on the room layout atmosphere creation, but also help the guests solve problems through pre-departure exchange, assistance in accommodation, breakfast preparation, travel advice, etc., and get along with guests like family members or friends, thus achieving full behavioral interaction with guests. Hosts and guests are jointly concerned about the construction of the “family culture atmosphere”, including not only the material symbols that constitute the “family cultural atmosphere”, but also the behavioral symbols of the family atmosphere such as friend-like care and sharing of experiences and hobbies[13].

4) Sharing of conceptual culture: Emotional experience and place recognition of “Making home everywhere”, “Destination anywhere”, “Meeting an old friend away from home”, and “Hometown anywhere”

The concept is related to the internalization of culture into the spiritual level of the human heart. The sharing of conceptual culture emphasizes more on the sharing of cultural elements at the spiritual or conceptual level. As analyzed above, the culture sharing at the material, institutional, and behavioral levels is “home”-themed. The hosts create a safe, comfortable and warm experience environment for the guests, which is subtly rooted in the sharing at the conceptual cultural level. The author believes it is mainly reflected in two aspects: the transfer of hosts’ lifestyle or attitude towards life; the cultural recognition of the “home” and its carrier-place.

5) Analysis on the relationships between different cultural levels

In theory, the sharing of shared accommodation facilities belongs to the material cultural level, which is the outermost layer and the loosest part; however, the creation of the home-themed atmosphere symbolizes the innermost layer-conceptual cultural level. The host-guest conceptual culture sharing produces different values that affect people’s behaviors, and different behavior patterns have different requirements for host-guest interaction, which is involved in the sharing of behavioral culture. These behavior patterns form relevant normal forms of shared accommodation, that is, the level of system culture sharing. Vice versa, system culture restricts and normalizes visible material culture sharing and behavioral culture sharing, finally returning to the material culture and behavioral culture levels. This kind of influence is mutual and reversible, radiating from the surface to the deepest layer of culture, thus forming a complete culture sharing system.

Fig.1. Analysis on the connotation of the cultural sharing of shared “minus” based on cultural levels

B. Systematic analysis on the culture sharing system of shared accommodation based on scale nesting

Scale nesting is a commonly used research method in geography research. Taking Beijing Dazhalan commercial community as an example, scholar Zhou Shangyi analyzed the scale nesting relationship between urban community culture and urban culture through landscape records, questionnaire interviews, literature analysis and other methods, and explored how to nest small-scale regional culture in large-scale regional culture and organically combine the cultural suggestions of the community with the municipal and provincial cultural constructions[14]. Combining the cultural geography-related theories and methods, he introduced the concept of scale nesting, and examined the internal laws and function mechanisms of the flow and sharing of culture on the two consecutive scale sequences of shared accommodation from the macro and micro perspectives.

1) Basic framework

Culture carries the events that occur at “places” through the material space of shared accommodation[15]. As a material carrier for culture sharing, shared accommodation connects the place dimension of the two different scales of accommodation and “place” in the common practice of human and material environment, and penetrates into social activities, becoming a kind of material culture space covering the relationship between people and between people and place. Therefore, from the perspective of cultural liquidity and referring to the method of geographic scale nesting, this paper combines the “home”-themed micro accommodation and macro destination with “place” as the unit to explore the dynamic process of culture sharing and its influence on accommodation and “place”.

2) “Home”-themed micro-analysis

In terms of micro-scale, as shown in Fig. 1, the host initially constructed the material form of shared accommodation. When designing and decorating accommodation, the host incorporates his own interpretation of the “place” and “home” culture and the definition of self-identity, constructing the shared accommodation to a place that can reflect the local culture and the warmth and comfort of the “home”, and presents his personality and attitude toward life.

The host’s interpretation of the “place” and “home” and the definition of self-identity come from “place”- the cultural
inheritance and “acculturation” of the tourism destination to the host. Tourists choose shared accommodation and non-material experience activities through a shared platform, and finally achieve conceptual sharing (emotional experience of “meeting an old friend away from home”) through material (facilities) sharing, institutional (normal forms) sharing, and behavioral (host-guest interaction) sharing.

3) Macro analysis with “place” as the unit

The geographical differences in culture make homogeneous spaces different from each other. Cultural differences are the fundamental motivation for the realization of tourism activities. The process endowing space with cultural meaning is the process in which that space becomes a place, and such a process can also be regarded as a process of “humanization”. The connection between people and a certain space makes people establish a sense of place and form a “place identification” [16]. In terms of macro-scale, as shown in Fig. 1, the hosts (residents) of many tourism destinations provide the tourists (hosts) with material-shared accommodation or non-material- non-material experience through a shared platform. The shared accommodation is constructed as a material carrier that carries local cultural attributes and is beneficial for social intercourse between local residents and tourists. Through culture sharing, tourists have a deep understanding of tourism destinations and form “place identification”, which in turn leads to revisiting or recommendation behaviors. Tourism destinations have achieved cultural diffusion through shared accommodation and have reached the ultimate goal of tourism destination marketing. Hosts (residents) obtain new cultural content through cross-cultural communication with tourists, which in turn generates “feedback” to tourism destinations and “reshapes” tourism destination culture.

Through scale nesting analysis, the author believes that shared accommodation, as a material carrier of culture sharing, is a node that shares the relationship between participants and their relationship with different geographical scales. The behaviors and identifications of different participants have been coordinated and re-constructed in the process of culture sharing.

V. CASE ANALYSIS ON AIRBNB BEIJING SHARED ACCOMMODATION BASED ON BIG DATA

Beijing is one of the most important tourism destinations in China. In 2018 alone, it received domestic tourists of 310 million persons, achieving gross earnings of CNY 555.6 billion from domestic tourists. It received overseas tourists of 4.004 million persons, achieving the foreign exchange earnings of USD 5.52 billion. Therefore, the total earnings from domestic and foreign tourists in 2018 alone came up to CNY 592.1 billion [3]. Driven by the rapid development of Internet technologies and the rapid upgrading of tourism forms, the shared accommodation industry in Beijing has been expanding at a particularly fast pace in recent years.

Airbnb, as a world-leading shared accommodation platform, is also very typical in terms of its market development in Beijing. According to statistics, the number of customers booking on Airbnb platform in Beijing in the third quarter of 2018 increased by 91% [4]. According to the development data analysis of Airbnb Beijing in 2018 and in combination with connotation, trend and systematic analysis of the shared accommodation culture sharing mentioned above, the author puts forward the following suggestions for the future development of the shared accommodation in Beijing:

A. Strengthening cultural confidence through culture sharing

General Secretary Xi Jinping has made a series of important statements about the inheritance of Chinese outstanding traditional culture, pointing out that “China has a firm confidence in its path, theory and system, with the essence of confidence in culture based on the inheritance of more than 5,000 years of civilization”. The development process of Beijing shared accommodation should be rooted in the historical and cultural foundation of Beijing, so as to tap into the local cultural “context”, deepen the local cultural experience, and enhance cultural confidence. To tap into the local cultural “context”, local cultural symbols in terms of accommodation culture creation, accommodation environment creation, and cultural experience product development should be highlighted. Specifically, the first is to develop multi-level and multi-form shared accommodation products, attracting guests with themes, stories and feelings, and tapping into the soul and depth of cultural connotation; the second is to explore the “accommodation +” experience products, expand the product industry chain, and experience local folklore and intangible cultural heritage and other projects, with a view to enhancing users’ sense of place and strengthening the local experience, thus enhancing the attraction of culture sharing to tourists and strengthening the local experience of guests in the accommodation process.

B. Promoting culture-tourism integration through culture sharing

In 2018, with the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the completion of the reform of local cultural and tourism institutions, the integrated development of culture and tourism has opened a new chapter. The mutual promotion of culture and tourism has become an inevitable trend for tourism development. As an important element of tourism, tapping into the connotation of culture sharing and innovating the tourism and cultural experience will certainly become one of the important paths for the shared accommodation to follow the policy and market trend. Specifically, the first is to tap into the “local” characteristics, combine the development of material cultural heritage, and enrich the cultural connotation of shared accommodation space, so as to improve the users’ experience; the second is to attach importance to “cultural and creative” development, combine with intangible cultural heritage to achieve cultural accumulation of multi-level and multi-form non-material experience projects, thus promoting cultural protection and inheritance.

C. Creating home-themed culture sharing ecosystem through culture sharing

Shared Accommodation is a field shared by hosts and tourists: Hosts are the originators of space, and tourists are the

3 Source: The Yearbook of Beijing Tourism Statistics 2018

4 Source: Airbnb China
D. Accelerating cultivation of rural shared accommodation through culture sharing

Beijing’s shared accommodation industry should seize the opportunity of rural revitalization, and expand the transformation of point-type accommodation sharing to the area-type rural space sharing. Different from the breakage and reorganization of the cultural inheritance of the cities impacted by foreign culture and modern society, the traditional Chinese villages retain a relatively complete inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, thus extending the production methods, living habits and folk customs, etc., which are the greatest attraction of villages different from cities. Specifically, first, the development of rural shared Accommodation should be rooted in accommodation and lever the sharing of rural space, including the sharing of production modes, life customs and folk experience, etc. This is a larger range of experience sharing beyond the host-guest sharing, and is the endogenous driving force for the sustainable development of rural shared accommodation. Second, realize the synchronous development of rural shared accommodation and rural governance, and achieve the comprehensive upgrading of rural software and hardware environment, which are the exogenous demand for the sustainable development of rural shared accommodation.

E. Speeding up ecological development of the shared accommodation industry chain

As a new product of the supply-side structural reform of tourism, shared accommodation should thoroughly implement the “tourism+” development strategy, and broaden the development space of accommodation, thus forming the ecological development trend of “shared accommodation+” industry chain. First, multi-industry integrated development should be promoted so as to expand the accommodation industry chain. For example, accommodation should be integrated with the cultural and creative industries so as to create a unique additional product system, including accommodation space decoration, handicraft experience activities and local commemorative goods. In addition, it should be combined with agriculture relying on agricultural resources and agricultural products with sightseeing and experience value, and be integrated with agricultural production, farming activities, agricultural product processing, rural culture, and festival activities, so as to pay more attention to consumers’ participation and experience in the agricultural and rural areas, and gain a deeper understanding of local cultural characteristics. Second, importance should be attached to the linkage between upstream and downstream industries so as to establish a comprehensive host service platform. With rapid development of the shared Accommodation industry, the demand for the supporting upstream and downstream service industries, such as cleaning, design, soft decoration, IoT equipment, intelligent management, and other host service intermediaries are increasingly rising. The intermediary service should be strengthened to provide hosts with a one-stop accommodation short-term rental solution. Through the establishment of a comprehensive host service platform, richer shared accommodation methods should be provided for guests, and the management threshold of hosts should be minimized so as to be more conducive to the rapid and healthy development of shared accommodation.

REFERENCES


