

Strategic Significance and Implementation Pathways of Renaming Jinghong City to “Xishuangbanna City”

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Abstract This study addressed the practical issue of the misalignment between the administrative name of Jinghong City and the overarching tourism brand of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. It investigated the strategic rationale, implementation feasibility, and anticipated comprehensive benefits of renaming Jinghong to “Xishuangbanna City.” The research was structured around 5 key dimensions: enhancing international visibility, upgrading the tourism industry, fostering coordinated regional development, deepening international exchange and cooperation, and promoting sustainable development. Drawing on the successful precedents of Shangri-La and Pu'er City in Yunnan Province, the analysis highlighted the multifaceted effects of such a renaming, including the release of brand value, optimization of resource allocation, and strengthening of cultural identity. The study concluded that this initiative can effectively resolve the current brand fragmentation, serving as a crucial catalyst for high-quality development in the border areas of southwestern Yunnan and boosting the region's international competitiveness. Furthermore, it offered theoretical insights and practical references for urban brand building and policy formulation in China's border ethnic regions.

Keywords City renaming, Brand integration, Tourism upgrade, Regional coordination, Jinghong, Xishuangbanna

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“Jinghong” is a name of Dai origin, where “Jing” means “city” and “Hong” means “dawn”, thus translating to “City of Dawn”. The Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture was established in 1953 (renamed from an autonomous region in 1955) and formally separated from the Simao administrative area in 1973. It currently administers Jinghong City, Menghai County, and Mengla County, with its capital located in Jinghong. “Xishuangbanna” also derives from the Dai language: “Xishuang” signifies “twelve thousand”, and “Banna” means “rice fields”. The name originated from the year 932 of the Dai calendar (1570 AD), when the Xuanweishi (a local chieftain) Zhao Yingmeng established 12 administrative units called “Banna” for the allocation of tribute obligations. These 2 names carry distinct cultural connotations: “Jinghong” evokes a sense of poetic mystery, conducive to emotional marketing, while “Xishuangbanna” bears the weight of history and serves as a regional identifier, offering a brand narrative with greater breadth and depth. The relationship between the names “Jinghong” and “Xishuangbanna” provides a typical case for exploring the integration of administrative place names and tourism branding.

The impact of city renaming on tourism brand value is a complex issue involving historical, cultural, and economic dimensions. In 1994, Jinghong's transition from a county to a city

promoted resource allocation and infrastructure optimization through an administrative upgrade, indirectly enhancing its value as a tourism hub. This historical precedent offers a reference for considering the potential benefits of a name change. However, as the political, economic, and cultural center of Xishuangbanna Prefecture, Jinghong City still faces limitations due to its urban scale and industrial structure, and its capacity to drive regional development needs strengthening. Notably, a significant cognitive disconnection exists between the current administrative name “Jinghong City” and the internationally renowned tourism brand “Xishuangbanna”. This disconnection leads to fragmented brand communication resources and difficulties in recognition for international tourists. Therefore, the proposal explored in this paper—renaming Jinghong City to “Xishuangbanna City”—is fundamentally an initiative aimed at achieving strategic alignment between the administrative place name and the premier tourism brand. Its core objective is to resolve brand inconsistency, not to correct historical administrative divisions.

Place names are not merely geographical identifiers; they are also cultural carriers and brand assets. A city name with global recognition played a crucial role in its development, particularly in tourism^[1]. A city name change for tourism purposes required comprehensive

consideration of multiple factors, including the city's character and cultural heritage, to ensure scientific decision-making^[2]. Renaming based on historical and cultural context could yield positive impacts, and urban planning must deeply explore the soft power of history and culture^[3]. Against this backdrop, a systematic study of the strategic significance of renaming Jinghong City to “Xishuangbanna City” holds substantial theoretical and practical value for integrating the “Xishuangbanna” brand value, driving tourism industry upgrades, and promoting regional coordinated development. From the perspectives of brand integration, tourism upgrade, and regional coordination, this research systematically explored the strategic significance, comprehensive benefits, and implementation pathways of this proposed renaming.

1 Case studies from Yunnan: the inspirations of city renaming in Shangri-La and Pu'er

1.1 Shangri-La: from literary Utopia to world-class tourist destination

The renaming of Shangri-La (formerly Zhongdian County) has been a paradigm for successfully transforming a literary concept into tangible brand value. The term “Shangri-La” originated from the fictional paradise “Shangri-La” depicted in British author James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. In December

2001, with the approval of the State Council, Zhongdian County was officially renamed Shangri-La County. This renaming has been widely regarded as a successful instance of cultural positioning and brand marketing, which profoundly anchored a fictional “ideal land” to a real geographical space in northwestern Yunnan, swiftly gaining recognition from global tourists seeking mysterious and secluded experiences. In December 2014, Shangri-La transitioned from a county to a city (“Che Xian She Shi”). This move not only elevated its administrative status but also served as an official confirmation and reinforcement of the value of the “Shangri-La” brand on the world stage. Today, located in the heart of the “Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas”, a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site, Shangri-La has been transformed from a remote border county into a core tourism brand of Yunnan Province and an internationally renowned tourist destination.

1.2 Pu’er: urban brand rebuilding with tea as the medium

The renaming of Pu’er City exemplified a strategic approach that elevated local produce and its associated culture into a core driver for urban development. Historically, the name “Pu’er” has been renowned both as a place name and as the name of its famous tea. In 2007, the former Simao City proactively implemented a brand strategy to deeply integrate urban development with Pu’er tea culture by renaming itself Pu’er City. This was not merely a reversion to an ancient name but a systematic brand-building initiative. It aimed to forge a unique identity centered on “building the city upon tea”, leveraging the profound historical heritage of Pu’er tea (such as the Ancient Tea Horse Road and millennium-old tea forests) and the diverse ethnic cultures (like those of the Blang and Dai villages). This strategy achieved a milestone in 2023 with the successful inscription of the “Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of the Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er” on the *UNESCO World Heritage List*. Following the renaming, Pu’er successfully transformed the cultural capital of Pu’er tea into a core emblem for urban development, ushering in new opportunities for growth.

2 The strategic significance of renaming: multi-dimensional value restructuring

The strategic value of city renaming extends far beyond a mere change of name; it essentially

represents a systematic restructuring of a city’s internal and external relationships and resources. To thoroughly analyze the profound impact of renaming Jinghong to “Xishuangbanna City”, this section will provide a systematic discourse from 5 core dimensions: brand, tourism, regional coordination, cultural identity, and sustainable development.

2.1 Brand integration: from “cognitive disconnect” to “unified image”

Xishuangbanna is situated in the Lancang-Mekong River basin at the junction of China, Myanmar, and Laos. It is a key cooperation area within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, boasting prominent geographical advantages^[4]. Currently, “Xishuangbanna” is a tourism brand covering the entire prefecture and enjoys international acclaim. However, the administrative name of its political, economic, and cultural center, Jinghong City, fails to fully inherit and reflect this brand value. This leads to fragmented brand recognition and internal friction in marketing efficiency. Renaming to “Xishuangbanna City” would directly achieve a high degree of alignment between the administrative place name and the core tourism brand. It would forge a strong associative perception of “the brand is the city, the city is the brand”, thereby maximizing the release of the accumulated international recognition and positive reputation associated with the “Xishuangbanna” brand and creating a powerful brand aggregation effect.

2.2 Development upgrade: driving tourism-city synergy and high-quality development via “Pareto Improvement”

High-quality urban development entails integrating internal and external factors such as population, economy, space, society, and coordinated development from a systemic perspective, propelling the urban development system toward a Pareto optimal state. Different stages of urban development corresponded to their respective suitable optimal states^[5]. The city’s image serves as a prerequisite for attracting tourists, and city toponyms-acting as both a window and a calling card for this image-play an even more critical role. Renaming is not merely a change of brand identifier; it is a key strategic lever to propel Jinghong’s transformation from a tourism “transit point” to a deep-experience “destination” and to promote the city’s overall high-quality development. This process can be explained by referencing the economic principle of Pareto Improvement: within the urban

development system, the renaming initiative optimizes resource allocation, aiming to generate a net benefit enhancement for both the tourism industry and overall urban development without harming the interests of any stakeholder, ultimately approaching a more optimal state of synergy.

3 Enhancement of international visibility

Currently, a significant disparity exists between the international recognition of “Xishuangbanna” as a well-known ecological and cultural brand and that of its administrative center, “Jinghong City”. This disparity leads to a fragmentation of brand assets, constraining the enhancement of the region’s overall international image and the attraction of high-level resources.

Renaming Jinghong to “Xishuangbanna City” would fundamentally achieve a high degree of unification between the administrative entity and the core brand, thoroughly resolving this cognitive misalignment. Post-renaming, the strong associative effect of “the place name is the brand” would significantly eliminate confusion among international tourists and investors. It would focus and amplify the unique values embodied by the iconic symbol “Xishuangbanna”—such as tropical rainforests, Dai culture, and Pu’er tea. This move would systematically attract international investment and high-end talent, particularly clustering towards advantageous industries like cultural tourism, wellness, and green agriculture. Drawing on the successful experience of places like Shangri-La, post-renaming efforts should focus on the international expression of the exclusive “Xishuangbanna” IP. Under the premise of strictly protecting the ecological foundation and the authenticity of ethnic culture, there should be innovative development and promotion of intangible cultural heritages (Fig.1-4). The goal is to create world-class attractive cultural tourism landmarks and experiential scenarios, continuously boosting the brand’s international exposure and reputation.

4 Tourism industry development: marketing synergy and product upgrade

Tourism has now evolved into an industry that combined high cultural value with comprehensive economic benefits^[6]. The tourism industry in Xishuangbanna, centered on its profound Dai cultural heritage and scarce

tropical rainforest ecosystem, and leveraging its cross-border location along the Lancang-Mekong River and the international corridor of the China-Laos Railway, has formed a distinctive industrial system. It serves as the core engine driving regional development. However, the current disconnection between the name “Xishuangbanna” (tourism brand) and “Jinghong City” (administrative center) has led to inefficient allocation of resources and blurred brand recognition in tourism promotion, constraining the further enhancement of the industry’s overall capacity.

Renaming Jinghong City to “Xishuangbanna City” is a key strategic measure to break through the aforementioned bottlenecks and achieve leapfrog development in the tourism industry. The renaming would fundamentally and decisively resolve the marketing fragmentation caused by the misalignment between the administrative entity and the brand subject. Firstly, it would achieve the concentration and synergy of marketing resources. Budgets and promotional efforts at both the prefecture and municipal levels could focus on the unified “Xishuangbanna City” brand, which is expected to significantly enhance marketing efficiency and return on investment. Secondly, it would thoroughly simplify tourists’ decision-making pathways and cognitive maps. The complex notion of “traveling to Jinghong City within the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture” would be simplified to the clear concept of “traveling to Xishuangbanna City”. This would greatly reduce market education costs and increase the destination’s appeal.

5 Regional coordination: from “Single-Point Breakthrough” to “Holistic Linkage”

Renaming to “Xishuangbanna City” would significantly strengthen the “leading” role of the capital city. It would enable Jinghong to better play a guiding and radiating role in regional planning, resource allocation, and tourism route design, thereby driving the coordinated development of surrounding counties and cities such as Menghai and Mengla. Ultimately, this would foster a high-quality development pattern characterized by “the city leading the prefecture, with city and prefecture integrated as one”. This synergistic effect should not be confined to the prefecture but should extend its vision to the entire province and even the international arena.

5.1 Strengthening provincial heritage corridor linkages and building differentiated tourism clusters

World Heritage sites served as premier resources and core connectors for regional tourism synergy and development^[7-8]. Xishuangbanna can proactively integrate into Yunnan Province’s “World Heritage Tourism Corridor” system. By forming resource complementarity and itinerary connections with other heritage sites within the province, it can achieve a transition from a single destination to a pivotal hub. Yunnan’s rich array of World Heritage resources, including the Old Town of Lijiang (Fig.5-6) (inscribed in 1997), the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas (2003) (Fig.7), the South China Karst (2007, including the Stone Forest in Yunnan) (Fig.8), the Chengjiang Fossil Site (2012) (Fig.9), the Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces (2013) (Fig.10), and the recently inscribed Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of the Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er (2023) (Fig.11-12), exhibit strong synergistic potential with Xishuangbanna in terms of spatial distribution, resource attributes, and thematic appeal. These sites, diverse in type, core value, and geographical location, provide a solid foundation for joint development.

From the perspectives of spatial linkage and collaborative value, these diverse heritage resources can form a multi-dimensional synergistic network with Xishuangbanna. The Old Town of Lijiang (Cultural Heritage) in northwest Yunnan and the rainforest ecosystem of southwest Yunnan echo each other across the province, both belonging to Yunnan’s core cultural tourism belt. They can be linked to create premium cultural tourism circuits themed on ethnic culture and natural ecology. The Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas (Natural Heritage), spanning northwest Yunnan, shares the Lancang River basin with Xishuangbanna. Its north-south ecological corridor provides a natural link for constructing a “Golden Ecological Cultural Tourism Corridor” in western Yunnan. The South China Karst (Natural Heritage) in southeast Yunnan and Xishuangbanna belong to 2 major ecological zones in the province (east and west). Their combination can help create a comprehensive Yunnan natural tourism belt featuring both geological wonders and tropical rainforests. The Chengjiang Fossil Site (Natural Heritage) in central Yunnan can act as a crucial cross-regional node. Linking with Xishuangbanna, it can

facilitate the development of thematic tourism focused on biological evolution education and paleontological research, effectively connecting central and southwest Yunnan tourism circles. The adjacent Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces (Cultural Landscape) is closely connected to Xishuangbanna along the Lancang-Yuan River basin. Together, they can build a southern Yunnan cultural tourism belt showcasing agricultural ingenuity and diverse ethnic customs. The newly-inscribed Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of the Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er (Cultural Heritage) is geographically a part of the same tea-producing region in southwest Yunnan as Xishuangbanna and historically connected via the Ancient Tea Horse Road. Their linkage is of core strategic significance for creating a world-class tea-origin cultural tourism destination centered on “tea-tourism integration” and “cross-border cooperation”.

Based on the above analysis, the renamed Xishuangbanna City, leveraging its strategic positioning as the “Core of Southern Yunnan and a Cross-Border Hub”, can perform 2 key synergistic functions. First, for internal linkage, it can utilize backbone transportation networks like the China-Laos Railway and the Kunming-Mohan Expressway to proactively design and promote thematic tourist routes connecting the aforementioned heritage sites. This will integrate Yunnan’s dispersed world-class resources into a cohesive network, propelling the provincial tourism model from “single-point sightseeing” towards “regional linkage and in-depth experience”. Second, for external connectivity, it can utilize the unified international brand image and recognition of “Xishuangbanna” to package and promote this rich Yunnan heritage corridor as a whole to the Southeast Asian and global markets. This strategy aims to attract international tourists for cross-regional, long-duration, in-depth cultural and ecological journeys, thereby significantly enhancing the region’s international tourism competitiveness and comprehensive benefits.

5.2 Aligning with international standards to enhance cross-border services and experiences

To achieve genuine “holistic regional linkage”, it is essential to align both software and hardware with international standards. On one hand, the successful inscription of the Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of the Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er should serve as a

benchmark. Proactive efforts should be made to pursue international certifications for the region’s tropical rainforest ecosystems and Dai cultural landscapes, thereby strengthening the

global narrative on local ecological and cultural conservation. On the other hand, significant optimization of cross-border tourism services is required. Key focus areas include international

payment systems (achieving comprehensive acceptance of international bank cards in major tourism scenarios), multilingual services (providing professional foreign-language guides



Fig.1 Water-Splashing Square in Dai Ethnic Garden



Fig.2 Grand Buddha Temple in Jinghong City



Fig.3 Xishuangbanna Dai Ethnic Garden



Fig.4 Traditional Dai Architectural Landscape



Fig.5 Old Town of Lijiang



Fig.6 Architectural Landscape of Lijiang Old Town



Fig.7 Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan

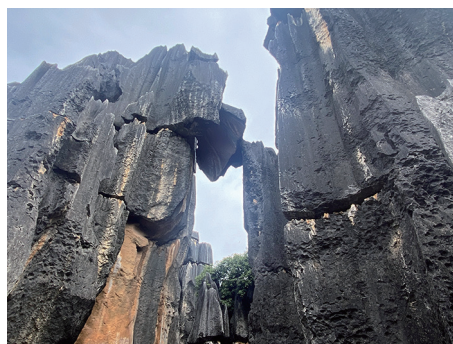


Fig.8 Stone Forest of Yunnan



Fig.9 Chengjiang Fossil Site



Fig.10 Honghe Hani Rice Terraces



Fig.11 Old Tea Forest Landscape



Fig.12 Old Tea Forests of the Jingmai Mountain

and signage systems), and enhancing cross-border travel facilitation. These measures are crucial for tangibly improving the experience and satisfaction of international tourists, laying a solid market foundation for regional coordinated development.

6 International cooperation

Situated at the juncture of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area and the North-South Economic Corridor of the Indochina Peninsula, Xishuangbanna is a vital component of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the Mekong-Asia Economic Corridor^[4]. As a critical node in GMS cooperation, renaming to “Xishuangbanna City” will significantly enhance its visibility and level of participation in international collaboration. This is conducive to deeper integration into the China-Laos Economic Corridor and will promote practical cooperation in areas such as cross-border tourism, ecological protection, and infrastructure connectivity. Ultimately, this positions the region to become a high-quality cross-border tourism destination for Southeast Asia.

Leveraging its geographical advantage of “one river connecting six countries”, the renamed Xishuangbanna can further deepen cross-border tourism cooperation with neighboring countries like Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, focusing on policy synergy, facility connectivity, joint product creation, and institutional alignment. Specifically, it can advocate for establishing a joint conference mechanism for cross-border tourism synergistic development. In collaboration with cultural and tourism departments and tourism enterprises from neighboring countries, this mechanism would coordinate route development, mutual recognition of standards, and market regulation, aiming to resolve practical bottlenecks such as visa facilitation, language services, and emergency response coordination. Simultaneously, utilizing carriers like the China-Laos Railway cross-border tourist trains and Lancang-Mekong River Golden Waterway cruises, innovative products such as “China-Laos Railway Cross-Border Study Tours” and “Lancang-Mekong River Basin Cultural Exploration” can be developed to promote the orderly cross-border flow of tourism elements.

Building on this, Xishuangbanna should actively collaborate with neighboring countries to establish joint cultural and tourism exchange platforms. By co-hosting events like cross-border ethnic cultural festivals and rainforest ecological

forums, it can deepen public trust and cultural mutual learning, jointly fostering the regional tourism market. Establishing cross-border tourism cooperation zones and constructing international tourism corridors traversing Southeast Asia will contribute to jointly creating a “Golden Tourism Circle” encompassing China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. This will further consolidate Xishuangbanna’s position as China’s forward gateway for cross-border tourism to Southeast Asia, continuously enhance its international visibility and brand influence, and inject robust cross-border momentum into regional coordinated development.

7 Sustainable development: a long-term pathway of upholding core assets and achieving integrated symbiosis

The sustainable development of Xishuangbanna is fundamentally rooted in its 3 core advantages: tropical rainforest ecology, distinctive Dai culture, and its cross-border location. Its essence lies in adhering to an inviolable principle: prioritizing ecological protection and cultural preservation above all else in development. By strictly observing ecological conservation redlines, establishing a dynamic ecological environment monitoring system, and promoting the living inheritance of cultural heritage, Xishuangbanna will transform its most precious ecological and cultural resources into sustainable core assets. This approach fundamentally avoids overdevelopment and homogeneous competition, safeguarding the foundation for long-term growth.

Under this premise, the pathway to achieving sustainable development focuses on deep integration and systemic transformation. This involves using cultural-tourism integration and the quality enhancement of cross-border tourism as core drivers to shift the tourism economy from scale expansion to quality improvement. Concurrently, by linking with characteristic agriculture, green industry, cultural and creative industries, and port economy, a diversified green industrial system characterized by “tourism+” and “+tourism” can be constructed. This broadens channels for economic growth and solidifies the economic foundation for sustainable development.

Ultimately, the goal of sustainable development is to achieve the synergistic advancement of multi-dimensional values. By continuously optimizing tourism services and urban public

facilities, the benefits of development can be shared by local residents and tourists alike, realizing a virtuous cycle of ecological conservation, cultural prosperity, economic growth, and livelihood improvement. This not only forges a high-quality development path for Xishuangbanna itself but also provides a “Xishuangbanna Model” of upholding core assets and achieving integrated symbiosis for the sustainable development of similar regions in China and globally.

8 Conclusion

Renaming Jinghong City to “Xishuangbanna City” in Chinese is far more than a simple administrative name change. It represents a profound and systematic restructuring rooted in regional cultural identity, aligned with the principles of brand economics, and serving national opening-up strategies. At its core, this initiative aims to fundamentally correct the long-standing issues of “brand cognitive dissociation” and “resource efficiency drain” by achieving complete unification between the administrative name and the premier tourism brand. This marks a critical leap from a “geographical identifier” to a “strategic brand”.

The core value of the renaming lies in the systematic activation and strategic repositioning of the intangible asset—“Xishuangbanna”. It constitutes not only a deep integration and optimized allocation of urban brand resources but also a recalibration and elevation of regional development positioning. This move holds the potential to fully unleash the international recognition and cultural appeal accumulated by “Xishuangbanna” over decades. It can catalyze synergistic forces driving tourism industry upgrading, deepening cross-border cooperation, enhancing ecological and cultural protection, and fostering regional coordinated development. Ultimately, it seeks to maximize the realization of brand value, economic value, and social value.

Looking ahead, if implemented, the renaming will enable Xishuangbanna to transcend its current development framework. It will evolve from a well-known regional destination into an “International Reception Hall” that leads Lancang-Mekong regional cooperation and showcases China’s achievements in ecological civilization and ethnic culture. This will not only inject strong and unified brand momentum into the high-quality development of Jinghong-Xishuangbanna but also provide a systematic,

(To be continued in P59)

effectively resolving the long-standing problem of superficiality in ideological and political education. However, the experimental data show that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the functional logic dimension, and it also clearly points out the current technological boundaries of AIGC. Its image generation advantage cannot automatically transform into the rigor of spatial engineering logic. The core of design education still lies in the systematic analysis of site issues and the solid adherence to engineering norms. Therefore, future courses in the digital design of landscape architecture should not stop at technical application, but should further strengthen traditional professional core competencies while leveraging AIGC to expand visual expression and cultural narrative capabilities. Only by adhering to the dialectical relationship of “taking humans as the decision-making subject and AI as an empowering”, can we hold onto the fundamental of professional education in the technological wave and cultivate outstanding landscape architecture talents who not only possess innovative capabilities in the digital era but are also deeply rooted in patriotism and engineering rationality.

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referential solution and an innovative practical model for exploring “regional holistic development driven by brand strategy” in China’s vast border ethnic regions. It will chart a new chapter in the distinctive development of border cities under the opening-up conditions.

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