



Research on the Application of Family Life Cycle Theory in Leisure and Tourism

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Abstract: The family is the most important and basic unit of social formation. In the study of leisure and tourism, studying leisure and tourism behavior from the perspective of the family is a hot issue abroad, and the Family Life Cycle Theory is a very key perspective. However, this issue has not yet attracted attention in the domestic research field. This article explains the theoretical development and connotation of the Family Life Cycle, and extends it to the field of leisure and tourism research to clarify its significance and research value.

Keywords: Family Life Cycle; Leisure; Tourism

In human society, the family is the most basic, longest and most important social organization. Especially Chinese society has always been regarded as a family-centered society, and the organization of society is usually family-based. The form, stage, and relationship of family members all profoundly affect the social behavior of family members. The theory of Family Life Cycle reveals the changes in the family's life course and the laws of movement by describing the process of a family from birth to death and examining its characteristics at different stages^[1]. The theory has been widely used in demography, sociology, economics, consumer behavior and other research fields since it was proposed.

The Family Life Cycle is derived from the Family Developmental Theory. The development process of the family is like a series of processes such as birth, growth, maturity, and death in a person's life. The characteristics and events of the family at different stages will affect the way family members interact and their relationships. The basic assumption is that most families will gradually go through several stages under normal development situations, and at each stage, it has a unique financial status, lifestyle and consumption behavior. The concept of the Family Life Cycle was first proposed by Rowntree in 1903^[2]. However, the first model of the Family Life Cycle was constructed by Sorokin and other scholars in the 1930s through the systematic model, in which the family life cycle is divided into four stages: newly married families, families with minor children, families with adult children, and elderly families^[3]. The article *The Family Cycle* published by the Glick scholar in the *American Sociological Review* in 1947 is considered to be a sign of the creation of the Family Life Cycle theory^[1]. He used the conclusion of marriage and the first and the last child, and the death of a husband or wife as the main dividing points, dividing the life cycle into 7 stages^[4]. Since then, many scholars have divided the family life cycle according to their own research needs, and have continuously expanded the content covered by the Family Life Cycle theory. Scholars are concerned that the traditional Family Life Cycle model cannot cover some non-traditional family types, such as homosexual families and divorced families.

There are many ways to divide the Family Life Cycle. The simplest way is to divide the couple into three stages based on the age of both spouses: youth (under 35), middle age (35-60) and old age (after retirement)^[6]. On this basis, other classification criteria such as marital status, whether there are children, the growth stage of the children, and economic status can be introduced for further classification according to different research needs. Generally speaking, there is no uniform standard for the division of the family life cycle. Changes in the social environment, the diversification of family structure, and the cultural differences of different regions require scholars to study the theory according to their chronological background and the research purpose to choose the appropriate classification standard.

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Compared with foreign studies, domestic studies on the Family Life Cycle mostly refer to foreign theories and models, and the division of Family Life Cycle models is relatively simple. The research is mostly aimed at normal families with less consideration of non-traditional families. According to the China Family Development Report 2014 issued by the National Health and Family Planning Commission^[5], in recent years, China's family types have shown a diversified development trend. However, the proportion of normal families has continued to decline, the proportion of elderly living alone has increased, and the numbers of single-parent, DINK, and intergenerational families have increased rapidly. At the same time, due to China's vast territory and significant differences in regional cultural and economic levels, it is difficult to build a complete model from a certain region or a small amount of data to fully measure and observe the changes in the life cycle of Chinese households. This has become one of the difficulties and obstacles in this field of research.

Consumers' behavior is affected to a certain extent by the stage of their family's life cycle. Generally, people's discretionary money and time for leisure activities change with different stages of the Family Life Cycle^[7]. When people move from one life stage to another, they may stop participating in certain leisure activities, start some new activities, or replace old activities with new ones. Since the nature of family leisure activities is closely related to the Family Life Cycle, in different stages, motivations and obstacles are also different. The concept of leisure encompasses many factors, and the boundaries between leisure and tourism are very blurred. However, if leisure is regarded as a continuum, both leisure and tourism are included in this continuum. Foreign countries usually regard tourism as an integral part or a type of leisure, and regard it as an extremely important part of profitable leisure and leisure industry, but it is different from daily leisure in terms of time, money, and energy. Other aspects may be different. However, domestic research results on the application of Family Life Cycle theory to the field of tourism are still few. Qu Jiajia^[8] found that different Family Life Cycles are significantly related to tourism motivation, tourism resource preferences for tourism products, tourism methods, number of tours, number of days to travel, travel time, online information collection, online reservations or purchases. Zhang Ting and Ye Li^[9] investigated the differences in the recreational demand intentions of Changsha residents at different Family Life Cycle stages, and the results showed that the family structure has a significant impact on the recreational purpose, information channels, organization methods, means of transportation, the length of tours and annual consumption level, but have little effect on destination types and optimal time period intentions.

Looking back at the research of Family Life Cycle theory in the field of leisure and tourism, it is found that scholars pay more attention to its application in preferences, decision-making, consumption, etc. In the field of marketing, the family is a very important market segmentation variable. There are many research results on family tourism abroad, but most of them tend to research on tourism decision-making, which concerns families. Domestic research on family tourism started relatively late, and there are few theoretical and applied research results on the Family Life Cycle theory. There is still a lack of research depth and breadth, and little systematic analysis of the problems faced by families in different life cycle stages. Since there are many types of tourism products, the factors involved, their nature, and their characteristics are different. The obstacles faced by tourists may be quite different. Therefore, when using the Family Life Cycle theory to study tourism obstacles, it is necessary to consider specific types of tourism that are distinguished.

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