

Exploring Differentiated Intervention Models of Rural Tourism for Rural Revitalization in China

Linlin Lu

Faculty of Forestry and Landscape Architecture, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou, 510642, China

Abstract. This article discusses the policy intervention issues faced by rural tourism development in China, which often suffers from a lack of diversity and fails to generate substantial economic and social benefits. To address this situation, the study conducts a comprehensive review of rural tourism literature from both domestic and international sources, and identifies four distinct intervention models, namely, architectural intervention, homestay intervention, red tourism intervention, and religious intervention. Successful cases as illustrations for each model are analyzed and explained. Additionally, the article compares these models across seven dimensions: stakeholders, location, materiality, authenticity, economic effects, social effects, and replicability. This multidimensional analysis reveals the characteristics, impacts, and applicability of each model. The architectural intervention emphasizes attracting tourists through unique architectural projects, heavily relying on the reputation of architects. The homestay intervention demonstrates greater flexibility and wider applicability. This study provides valuable insights into the development of context-specific rural tourism through the principle of place-based development.

Keywords: Rural Tourism; Rural Revitalization; Policy Intervention Models; Literature Review; China.

1. Introduction

Urbanization has had positive impacts on the economy and society, such as increasing employment opportunities, improving infrastructure, and enhancing education and healthcare (Murayama, 2019). However, it has also brought about a series of negative ecological and social challenges. These urban challenges have prompted people to migrate from cities to rural areas, seeking solace in the countryside. These short-term living experiences of urban dwellers in rural areas are considered rural tourism (Irshad, 2010). The demand for rural experiences drives the modernization of rural areas, making tourism an important means of rural development. Different countries employ various methods for rural tourism development. In the United States, agritourism is becoming a means of diversifying agricultural income (Van Sandt, Low, and Thilmany, 2018), while wine tourism in Spanish regions not only increases rural income but also helps preserve traditional culture (de la Torre, 2014). In Norway, the Træna Festival attracts tourists to the Træna Island (Mwesiumo et al., 2022). These diverse forms of rural tourism activities have revitalized rural areas and promoted regional socio-economic development. These examples also demonstrate that rural tourism development requires intervention methods based on local specific factors, rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach (Hu et al., 2022).

The problem of imbalanced urban-rural development in China has become increasingly prominent, and the modernization of rural areas is urgent. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that the most arduous and challenging task in building a socialist modernized country still lies in the rural areas. Against the backdrop of consumption upgrading, rural areas in China have become highly attractive to urban residents due to their uniqueness (Liu, 2018). Therefore, the integration of "agriculture and tourism" is often seen as an important way to build a new socialist countryside. Rural tourism development has a positive impact on the economic and social development of rural areas, with significant contributions to the economy (Liu et al., 2023). Additionally, active community participation in rural tourism enhances villagers'

sense of identity with their own community and culture, which is beneficial for the preservation of local social and cultural aspects (Alumiie, 2003).

In the context of rural revitalization, how to use tourism to lift rural areas out of poverty and promote prosperity has become a research focus in rural tourism. Scholars have combined rural tourism with rural revitalization, believing that tourism has a positive impact on poverty reduction (Zhao, 2019) (Mao Feng, 2016). However, rural areas in China have diverse historical, social, economic, and cultural characteristics, requiring development policies tailored to local conditions (He, 2018). For example, Lee (2009) used the tourism area life cycle theory to argue that rural residents' attitudes toward tourism development vary across developmental stages, suggesting that different strategies should be formulated accordingly (Lee, 2019).

However, in reality, many rural areas adopt a replication approach to develop rural tourism based on successful models, which often results in limited socio-economic effects. This indicates that these rural areas have failed to adapt to local conditions in their tourism development. Moreover, China lacks systematic research on tourism intervention models. Intervention models can serve as an entry point for rural areas to develop tourism and guide their tourism development. Here, intervention is more of a pattern of utilization, relying on specific tourism resources and carriers. It starts from tourism stakeholders such as local governments and enterprises, explores the tourism development potential of rural areas, and selects certain resources or carriers to promote the implementation of tourism projects. Current research mainly focuses on the interaction between rural tourism and rural revitalization, using different methods to guide rural tourism, and paying attention to practical impacts and solutions. However, they are mostly based on specific case studies to illustrate the effectiveness of certain policy intervention models, which has limitations in terms of methodology and regional generalization, and does not contribute to the development of localized rural tourism. Therefore, there is a need for a systematic, comparative, and mechanism-based summary study.

This study reviews the research progress of rural tourism both domestically and internationally, summarizes different tourism intervention models in rural areas of China, and identifies their characteristics and effects to provide development ideas and methodological references for rural tourism. The analysis will cover the following aspects: (1) a review of rural tourism research; (2) classic intervention models of rural tourism in China: analysis of successful cases; (3) comparative analysis of the characteristics and effects of intervention models; and (4) summary and discussion.

2. Overview of Research on Rural Tourism at Home and Abroad

2.1. Overview of Research on Rural Tourism Abroad

2.1.1. Theoretical Research

For a long time, mobility has been the main driving force behind rural transformation (Milbourne, 2014). Initially, the massive outmigration of young people led to population aging and labor loss in rural areas (Johnson, 2019), which affected the population structure and economic foundation of rural communities, shaping the modernization process of rural areas. The influx of working-class tourists and middle-class developers further reshaped the rural areas. Finally, influenced by counter-urbanization, the permanent relocation of middle-class groups became a new trend (Milbourne, 2014).

Rural areas have gone through different stages of development. We can refer to the destination life cycle theory, which proposes six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation (Butler, 1980). It is important to note that different factors can lead to the multi-directional development of tourism at different stages (Streimikiene and Bilan, 2015). Therefore, understanding the development stage and choosing appropriate development models are crucial for ensuring the success and sustainable development of rural tourism. The push-pull theory, as the foundation of tourism behavior research, provides a reference for understanding the different ways in which rural tourism develops from the perspective of tourist motivation (Pesonen, 2011).

2.1.2. Empirical Research

(1) Homestay Type: In the early stages, rural tourism was based on providing accommodation in rural houses. Therefore, homestays have always been an important form of rural tourism. Bed and Breakfast accommodations enrich the rural tourism experience and enhance the attractiveness of communities to travelers (Nuntsu et al., 2004). In Malaysia, although residents benefit from running homestays, local residents are not interested in training for homestay operations, hindering the industry due to cultural and racial differences (Liu, 2004). The development of homestays in Spain has increased the employment rate of rural women and increased rural family income (Gemma, 2002). Due to their unique natural landscapes and regional characteristics, homestays in the Echizen Peninsula and Hakuba Mountains in Japan are popular (Zhou, 2018).

(2) Resource-dependency Type: Leisure farms are a common model of rural tourism, mainly concentrated in France and the United Kingdom. These farms replace the local livestock industry and convert agricultural land into recreational parks (Gemma, 2002). This transformation compensates for the decrease in agricultural and livestock income through the development of tourism, benefiting operators. Additionally, utilizing agricultural and sideline products for rural tourism development is also a method. For example, olive oil tourism (de la Torre, 2017) and wine tourism (Hall, 2000). In both types of tourism, wineries and oil mills are the main attractions. In Australia, the development of olive oil tourism helps minimize external competition (cheaper olive imports) and the threat of rural decline, solving economic and social crises in rural areas (Alonso and Northcote, 2010).

(3) Landscape Appreciation Type: Recent studies have found that large flagship attractions play an important role in rural tourism landscape development, significantly increasing the number of tourists in rural areas (Sharpley, 2007). Israeli scholars combined ecotourism with large artificial attractions, enhancing environmental sustainability and financial feasibility (Reichel, 2008). Flagship attractions can profoundly change the tourism industry in rural areas, forming large-scale flagship attractions characterized by mass tourism. However, these attractions contrast with the small-scale and community-oriented characteristics of rural tourism, providing differentiated tourism experiences (Panzer-Krause, 2020).

(4) Cultural and Artistic Type: The Setouchi International Art Festival in Japan provides opportunities for tourism development and promotes the revitalization of local communities (Qu, 2022). Bonholm in Denmark reshapes rural characteristics through artistic spaces, and to maintain the sustainability of tourism, artists' works are also adapted according to local characteristics and market demands (Prince, 2016). Research on industrial heritage routes in the Silesian Province of Poland found that late-stage artistic construction, suitable for previous production or extraction facilities, effectively preserves cultural heritage, forms new tourism functions, and promotes local economic development (Szromek, 2021).

2.2. Overview of Domestic Rural Tourism Research

When examining domestic rural tourism research, we can focus on the following four aspects:

1. Architecture: Creating architectural landscapes is a means for rural areas to attract tourists, but different approaches can have different impacts on rural communities. Let's illustrate this through two examples. In the case of Wencun, the architectural project is a top-down process where architects maintain authoritative positions, and the local community lacks sufficient involvement (Qian, 2022). In contrast, Shen'ao Village and Daijiashan Village have adopted a semi-vernacular architectural transformation, combining traditional building techniques with modern methods to seek balance (Zhao, 2019). This approach encourages the continuation of traditional craftsmanship and community participation.

2. Homestays: Developing the homestay industry in beautiful environments or near tourist attractions is a popular choice in many rural areas. Moganshan has developed a unique "Yangjiale" model due to its beautiful environment. This model has promoted local rural revitalization but marginalized the

living space of community residents (Xu, 2018). In another case, Jiaochangwei Village has attracted surfers and windsurfing enthusiasts to operate homestays due to its geographical conditions, leading to the restructuring of the village's spatial structure through tourism development (Wang et al., 2019). The development of homestays in rural areas has triggered power struggles between route to market (RTM) and local residents. However, this power relationship is not one-sided, as both groups can benefit from it (Chen, 2021).

3. Red Tourism: Red tourism is a unique form of rural tourism in China. Yan'an, a revolutionary holy site, shapes the image of the Communist Party of China and achieves the goal of propaganda and education by stimulating tourists' imagination through buildings such as museums and stations (Lin, 2015). Fu Jia Road achieves red tourism by constructing iconic buildings, designing tourism experiences to align with certain social and political ideologies and values (Li, 2023). Given the unclear property rights and lagging infrastructure development, Dabie Mountain offers poor tourist experiences (Lu, 2009). In similar conditions, Jinggangshan has successfully developed red tourism through administrative adjustments and infrastructure construction (Yu, 2005).

4. Religion: The motivations for visiting religious sites can be roughly divided into two categories: tourists and pilgrims (Stănescu, 2002). Pilgrims are mainly motivated by faith, while tourists are driven by cultural and entertainment demands. In China, the development of religious tourism is moving towards large-scale and diversified approaches, with many temples hosting comprehensive activities to attract tourists (Cao, 2003), such as Lingyin Temple's Filial Piety Culture Festival and Laba Porridge Distribution. Guangren Temple's Lamp Festival stimulates tourism, helping the temple achieve dual objectives: the inheritance of religious culture and the revival of the temple through the influence of cultural symbols (Pang and Ma, 2014).

In summary, the development paths and models of rural tourism mentioned above are being adopted by local governments, resulting in a "spurt-like" development of similar cases (Wang and Yao, 2022). However, in most cases, local governments or tourism development agencies fail to consider the determinants that contribute to successful cases. This approach leads to homogeneity in rural tourism, making rural tourism products and experiences in different regions become monotonous. To address these issues, it is necessary to strengthen the research on models of rural tourism policy intervention, summarize and consolidate the research results of various cases, and develop more detailed and localized means and strategies for tourism intervention.

3. Classic Intervention Modes in Rural Tourism in China: Analysis of Successful Cases

3.1. Architectural Intervention

In 2012, the government of Fuyang City, under the jurisdiction of Hangzhou, planned to construct a new cultural center. Considering that Wang Shu was the first Chinese architect to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize, the government invited him to design the center. Wang Shu had always hoped to revitalize the countryside through architectural intervention (Berg and Nate, 2017). Therefore, he accepted the commission and requested to use Wencun as their architectural experimental project. In Wencun, he integrated the preservation of traditional culture with the improvement of modern living standards. He not only built new residences but also created additional architectural spaces to support the local silkworm industry (Qian, 2022). Additionally, a portion of the newly constructed houses were used as hotels to increase local residents' income. With the promotion of the star architect's reputation and advertising effects (Yuan and Pan, 2019), Wencun became a shining example of beautiful and livable village construction in Fuyang, earning the well-deserved title of "Internet-famous Village." It thus has attracted numerous tourists and stimulated local economic development.



Fig 1. (Right to light: Before and after the transformation of Wencun, source: https://roll.sohu.com/a/665357361_157906)

In the architectural intervention mode in Fuyang's Wencun, architects played a crucial role. The popularity of rural areas is often driven by the reputation of architects, which is the unique feature of architectural intervention mode. Government support is also crucial: the government designated Wencun as a provincial comprehensive pilot project for the construction of beautiful and livable villages under the new urbanization background and provided startup funding. Furthermore, Wencun has clear regional divisions. The nature of being a "semi-disabled village" and its relatively independent regional divisions facilitated the architects' transformation efforts. Moreover, the success of architectural intervention also benefited from the village's favorable transportation location in the countryside, especially its proximity to major cities, which increased its tourism appeal.

3.2. Homestay Intervention

In 2007, a foreigner established the highly regarded "Naked Stables" at Moganshan in Deqing County, Huzhou. It embodies European and American rural styles and is dedicated to developing the high-end homestay tourism market. It has created the "Yangjiale" tourism brand (Long et al., 2018); (Yang and Yang, 2019). With the fame of "Yangjiale," local residents and capital groups began to invest in the homestay industry. Locally operated homestays are mainly concentrated in Xiantan Village and Houwu Village (Chen and Geng, 2023). Large hotel corporation groups are committed to building branded homestays, usually planned and designed by designers (Yu, 2016), such as Dalezhiye and Huazhu. The homestay industry in Moganshan has become the mainstay of the mountainous economy, making Deqing a highlight and exemplary area of rural vacation tourism in China.



Fig 2. (Naked Stables: <https://www.nakedretreats.cn/naked-stables/zh-CN/>); (Dalezhiye Yucun Store: Feng and Shui,2017)

For Moganshan, geographical location is a key factor in its success. Moganshan is close to Shanghai, and the urban heat island effect makes urban residents desire to escape to the mountains for summer. Additionally, urban residents generally have relatively higher purchasing power and a yearning to get away from city life and connect with nature. Moganshan, with its abundant forest resources and excellent summer resort environment, becomes the tourism choice for Shanghai residents. Furthermore, investments from various entities have improved local infrastructure. In addition to providing unique and diverse living experiences, various novel tourist activities have been developed, such as tea picking, sports, and study tours. The active participation and cooperation of investment companies, local residents, and the government have established a complete tourism service chain in Moganshan and created a unique brand recognition under the intervention of homestays.

3.3. Red Tourism Intervention

In 1929, the 9th Congress of the Chinese Red Army's 4th Army was held in Gutian, Shanghang County, known as the Gutian Conference. The Gutian Conference holds great significance in the history of the Communist Party of China and the development of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. Therefore, the former site of the Gutian Conference was listed as one of the first national key cultural relics protection units. From 2004 to 2011, the government of Longyan City invested hundreds of millions of yuan to develop the Gutian Conference site into a comprehensive tourist attraction (Huang Yufang, 2014). Longyan City, with Gutian as its core, has built a complete red education and training base, providing red education and training services nationwide. The significant revolutionary historical status of the Gutian Conference attracts a large number of tourists, bringing objective economic income to the local area.



Fig 3. (Gutian Conference Site: <http://www.gthyjng.com/>)

Red tourism sites like the Gutian Conference site possess strong political and educational characteristics. Therefore, tourism development is mainly led by the government (Liu and Ming, 2010). The historical status of red heritage determines the attractiveness of its products, and regions with stronger historical significance usually receive more government support. Moreover, convenient transportation does not seem to limit the development of red tourism. As long as the value of the red resources in an area is significant, the Chinese government will vigorously promote the construction of roads and other infrastructure to create red tourist attractions. Additionally, the market for red tourism tends to be fixed, with the majority consisting of employees from government institutions and state-owned enterprises who visit these red tourism sites for ideological training. Student groups also choose these places for study tours.

3.4. Religious Intervention



Fig 4. (The image shows a group of young people consecrating prayer beads in Lingyin Temple. https://www.xiaohongshu.com/explore/6506887c00000000140273cc?m_source=pinpai)

Lingyin Temple is the most popular temple in contemporary Hangzhou, attracting a large number of tourists every year. In the era of the internet, Lingyin Temple has become a "internet-famous" temple by creating the "Yunlin" brand, attracting many young people to visit and take photos. In modern society, the original functions of Buddhist temples have diminished, but their cultural and educational functions remain (Ming et al., 2008). In the past, the main participants in religious tourism were mostly older "pilgrims." However, most of the visitors we see at Lingyin Temple nowadays are young people who seek good luck and aim to achieve their goals through the power of deities. The sale of tickets and Buddhist souvenirs brings objective economic income to Lingyin Temple, enabling its

own operation and driving the development of surrounding industries such as catering and cultural creativity.

The phenomenon of Lingyin Temple reflects a current fact: young people face challenges in terms of economy and life. The current economic prospects are not optimistic, and many young people feel uncertain about their future. They often struggle to find satisfactory jobs, fulfill their development goals, or find partners. In such circumstances, the younger generation seeks solace through religious prayers. They visit religious holy sites and sincerely pray for the blessings of gods and Buddhas, hoping to improve their life situations. Interestingly, although religious sites usually emphasize religiosity, it does not seem to be the primary concern for these young visitors. Instead, young people tend to see religious tourism as a spiritual refuge and emotional release. They place their worries and expectations in religion without necessarily understanding religious doctrines or treating it as a belief.

4. Comparison and Analysis of Characteristics and Effects of Intervention Patterns

Table 1. Comparative analysis

	Subject	Location	Materiality	Authenticity	Economic Effects	Social Effects	Replicability
Architectural Intervention	Government, architects	+++	+++	++	++	+	++
Homestay Intervention	Foreign capital, residents	+++	+++	++	+++	+ / +++	+++
Red Tourism Intervention	Government	+	+	+++	+	+	+
Religious Intervention	Religious institutions, government	+++	+	+	+++	++	+

Note: "+" represents the degree of strength, with "+++" indicating strong and "+" indicating weak.

From the perspective of the main subjects, different intervention models involve different entities. Firstly, in the architectural intervention model, the main subjects are the government and architects. In this model, the government provides funding and invites renowned architects to transform rural areas, and the collaboration between the government and architects is at the core of the project. The main subjects in the homestay intervention model can be divided into foreign capital and individual residents. Homestays invested by foreign capital are usually branded, with higher prices and services targeting the high-end market, while homestays developed by individual residents have lower prices and relatively simple services. Red tourism typically involves politics and historical heritage, so its development primarily relies on a single subject, with the government playing a central role in project planning, management, and financial support. Lastly, in the religious intervention model, the main subjects include the government and religious institutions. Religious institutions are responsible for managing religious sites and activities but need to cooperate with government leadership. The government plays a regulatory and supportive role in religious intervention to ensure the legitimacy of religious activities.

Different intervention models have their own characteristics and requirements in terms of geographical location, materiality, and authenticity. Firstly, in terms of geographical location, architectural intervention, homestay intervention, and religious intervention all have higher requirements for geographic positioning. Being close to metropolitan areas is more advantageous for their development. In contrast, red tourism has relatively lower requirements for geographical location, with the key point of its development being the significance of red resources. Secondly, materiality and immateriality are another important focus. Architectural intervention and homestay intervention rely on material carriers, where tourists typically visit buildings or reside in houses. Conversely, red tourism and religious intervention primarily need to satisfy tourists' spiritual pursuits,

attracting them to seek emotional and religious fulfillment. Lastly, authenticity is also manifested differently in different models. Due to its political education purpose, red tourism requires high authenticity, faithfully conveying historical and political information. In religious intervention, religion may not necessarily be the main focus for tourists; they often seek a place for emotional solace, with lower demands for authenticity. For architectural and homestay interventions, authenticity may be a part of attracting tourists, but to some extent, tourists are more interested in the commodification of local culture rather than genuine authenticity.

When examining the effects of different intervention models, we can see their respective characteristics. Firstly, the economic effects of red tourism are influenced by the relatively homogeneous source of tourists. Due to the strong government dominance in the development of red tourism, community residents have lower levels of participation in decision-making and management. Secondly, in the religious intervention model, changes in consumer groups lead to improved economic effects. The consumption trend among young people drives the development of surrounding industries such as catering and cultural creativity. Both red tourism intervention and religious intervention require specific historical conditions in the local area. These conditions usually cannot be created out of thin air but need to be built upon specific historical and cultural foundations. This limits the replicability of red tourism and religious intervention to some extent. In the architectural intervention model, the renovated buildings can generate income not only as artistic attractions but also as homestays. However, most tourists only come to visit these novel buildings and have less interest in residing or consuming there. While designers consider the living habits of local residents, they maintain a dominant position with limited involvement from the residents. The architectural intervention model requires more opportunities as it usually relies on a renowned architect, which is a relatively scarce resource. In comparison, the homestay model is the most easily replicable, as it doesn't depend on any scarce resources or special opportunities. In the homestay intervention model, due to the nature of homestays, people's consumption generates both accommodation and dining expenses, resulting in relatively higher economic effects. However, different intervention subjects have contrasting social effects. Foreign investments in homestays can easily cause divisions within the local community, while residents have a higher enthusiasm for independently operating their own homestays, which can even attract young people to return to their hometowns, generating positive effects on the community.

5. Conclusion and Discussions

This article discusses the effective development of rural tourism in China's rural areas and presents the challenges faced in the development process of rural tourism. By reviewing research on rural tourism in China and internationally, four intervention models for tourism development are identified: architectural intervention, homestay intervention, red tourism intervention, and religious tourism intervention. The characteristics of each model and issues related to their empirical applicability are discussed through the four success cases as illustration. In particular, in terms of the architectural intervention model, having renowned architects is the crucial condition, besides locational advantages and government demand. But, this model, if to be successful, requires the time-spatial opportunities. The models of red tourism intervention and religious tourism intervention strongly emphasize the present of place-specific historical and cultural assets. The homestay intervention model is more mobile from region to region, while it requires balancing the investment cost and tourism development potential on the ground, namely being realistic and rational with “placeness” (Hu et al., 2021).

This article fills the research gap in the intervention models for rural tourism and provides a systematic study of tourism intervention models. It emphasizes the need to adopt different tourism interventions based on the characteristics and resources of each rural area. When developing tourism using different intervention models, government agencies not only need to seek opportunities and formulate policies to support rural tourism development but also need to pay attention to the issue of community inclusion, ensuring that local residents are truly involved in and benefit from the tourism

industry (Hu et al., 2024). In the future, there is a need to explore more innovative and diverse tourism intervention models to adapt to the dynamic changes in rural tourism.

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