



WORLD TOURISM ALLIANCE



From Poverty Alleviation to Rural Revitalization

China's Practice in Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism



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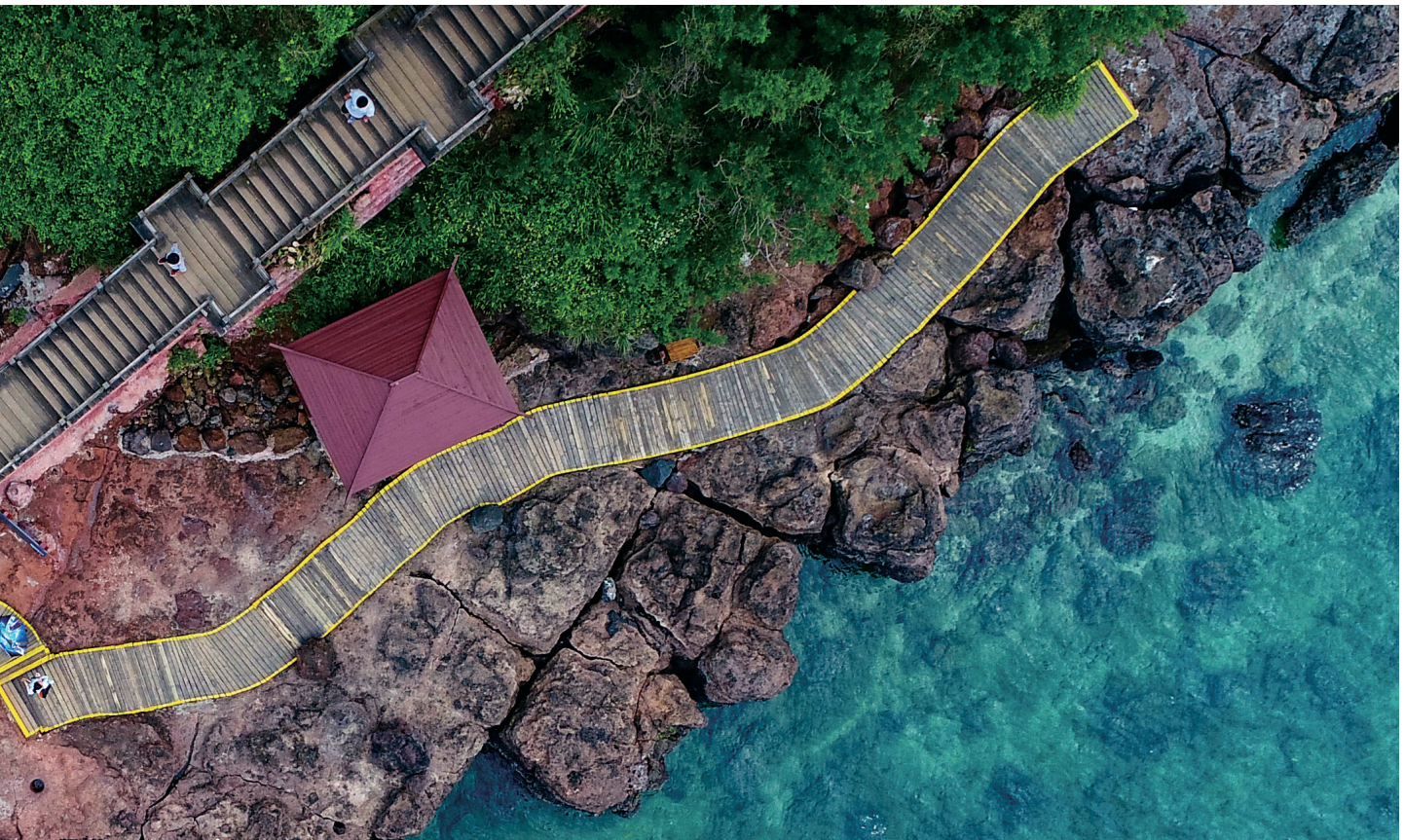
Foreword

Background of the Report

As the world pursues economic and social development, achieving sustainable development remains one of the most critical and urgent issues. In 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) with 169 specific targets, drawing a blueprint for the world to achieve coordinated social, economic, and environmental development by 2030. “No Poverty” comes first among the 17 SDGs as the fight against poverty has become an important issue facing all humanity.

However, currently, we are still far behind every SDG, particularly the goal to end poverty in all its forms

everywhere. In 2022, using the latest purchasing power parity for calculations, the World Bank raised the International Poverty Line (IPL) from USD 1.90 to USD 2.15¹ per person per day to monitor global poverty status. Measured by this standard, some developing countries are still trapped in poverty: the poverty incidence rate remains high and a large number of people still live in absolute poverty; the inter-generational poverty transmission is prominent, as impoverished households struggle to break free from the shackles of poverty due to a lack of access to basic resources such as education and healthcare services. Many countries also face considerable difficulties in other dimensions of sustainable development. Available data indicate that progress toward more than 30% of the targets has stagnated or even regressed below the 2015 baseline². If the



current trend continues, by 2030, 575 million people worldwide will still be living in extreme poverty, and hunger levels may return to those of 2005³.

As the largest developing country in the world, China has made remarkable achievements in promoting sustainable development. By the end of 2020, China had completed the arduous task of eliminating absolute poverty on schedule, lifting nearly 100 million people in rural areas out of poverty and eliminating poverty over entire regions. Data show that from 1990 to 2020, measured by the original IPL of USD 1.90 per person per day, China reduced its impoverished population by 750 million, accounting for 63.7% of the world's reduction in the same period. From 2012 to 2020, the impoverished population of China was reduced by another 85 million, accounting for 48.4%⁴ of the world's reduction in the same period. Even measured by the latest IPL, China had achieved its goal of eradicating absolute poverty by 2020⁵. China achieved the target of eradicating

extreme poverty included in the SDGs ten years ahead of schedule, setting a model for the world's poverty reduction efforts.

Shortly afterward, China quickly entered a new stage (2021-2025) that focuses on consolidating and building on the achievements in poverty alleviation so as to promote rural revitalization. In this stage, through concerted efforts of multiple stakeholders, China has prevented large-scale fall into/return to poverty, cumulatively providing assistance to 5.34 million registered poor people and constantly protecting them from falling into or returning to poverty. In the 832 counties that have emerged from poverty, two to three leading industries have been established, nearly three-quarters of the population that have emerged from poverty have established interest linkage with new types of agricultural business entity, and the number of employed workers among them has maintained over 30 million for four consecutive years⁶. A Chinese



model of rural revitalization is taking shape, featuring multidimensional sustainable development to build rural areas with thriving businesses, pleasant living environment, social etiquette and civility, effective governance, and prosperity.

It is worth noting that poverty reduction through tourism is an important component of sustainable rural development. The rural areas herein refer to those that leverage their rich natural landscapes, folk customs and cultures, historical relics, and other tourism resources to develop rural tourism, increase income, reduce poverty, and gradually achieve rural revitalization. These villages gave full play to the radiating and driving role of the tourism industry and quickly emerged from poverty. After entering this stage of rural revitalization, they have further consolidated and expanded their poverty alleviation achievements by continuously optimizing the tourism industry's structure, improving the quality of tourism services, and expanding the space of regional tourism, ultimately achieving economic and social development in all respects.

This report refers to the evaluation criteria of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) "Best Tourism Villages" to analyze existing problems in China's practices in Chapter Two and proposes suggestions for improvement. The "Best Tourism Villages" initiative strategically aligns with the SDGs, providing systematic guidance for the sustainable development of global rural tourism. Its evaluation criteria cover nine core dimensions⁷: 1) Cultural and natural resources; 2) Promotion and conservation of cultural resources; 3) Economic sustainability; 4) Social sustainability; 5) Environmental sustainability; 6) Tourism development and value chain integration; 7) Governance and prioritization of tourism; 8) Infrastructure and connectivity; 9) Health, safety, and security.

Objectives of the Report

This report aims to analyze the sustainable development journey of Chinese tourism villages from poverty to prosperity and summarize their success models and replicable experiences contained

therein. The research group conducted systematic follow-up visits to 49 practice locations and in-depth research on 10 key practices, and identified operable strategies and paths for promoting sustainable rural development through tourism, to shed light on other countries and regions worldwide. The objectives of this report include:

First, summarizing China's experience in reducing rural poverty and promoting rural revitalization through tourism development. The report reveals the development paths and from the perspectives of momentum sources and development priorities, identifies replicable and promotable development models for the reference of the international community. It analyzes the success experiences of different types of villages from four aspects: policy guidance, collaboration between diverse stakeholders, technological empowerment, and contextual exploration, revealing the internal logic behind the sustainable development of villages that have emerged from poverty through tourism.

Second, contributing to the achievement of the 2030 SDGs. It analyzes Chinese villages' practical achievements in poverty reduction through tourism to provide references for other countries and regions worldwide. Based on a comprehensive analysis of these tourism villages' alignment with the 2030 SDGs, particularly the Goal of No Poverty, the report shares China's approach to developing the tourism industry, meeting the people's basic needs, sustaining economic prosperity, ensuring social justice and harmony, and promoting global cooperation, to help the world achieve the 2030 SDGs in multiple fields such as employment, education, health, and the environment in the final five years.

Third, underscoring the importance of resilience building against poverty. Resilience refers to the ability to bring the roles of stability, recovery, and transformation into full play against various risks⁸.

Poverty is dynamic; therefore, in poverty reduction, we should not only strive to protect those who have emerged from poverty from falling back to it but also stay vigilant against the incidence of "new poverty." Currently, sustainable poverty escapes face severe challenges from extreme weather, geopolitical conflicts, and public health crises, which will become a reality in many developing countries after they eradicate extreme poverty. Therefore, it is imperative to study the resilience needed for sustaining poverty escapes with China as a sample and provide new governance paths for rural development.

Chinese tourism villages' transition from poverty to prosperity is a vivid example of global sustainable development. This report hopes to provide strong support for achieving the SDGs by 2030 worldwide through in-depth research on China's sustainable poverty reduction through tourism, thereby contributing to the building of a more prosperous, open, and inclusive community with a shared future for mankind.

Structure of the Report

This report develops a research system around China's practices in promoting sustainable rural development through tourism and is divided into four chapters. Chapter One reviews the practices of Chinese tourism villages in poverty reduction and sustainable development, and divides this process into four stages: exploration, development, targeted poverty reduction, and transition to rural revitalization. It analyzes macro policies and paths for sustaining poverty escapes and then focuses on specific local practices to lay a foundation for subsequent research. Chapter Two, based on the background introduction in Chapter One and guided by the balanced development philosophy, classifies poverty reduction through tourism models using the IRT-SQEI framework (IRT stands for integrated rural tourism while the SQEI framework is composed of

speed, quality, extrinsic, and intrinsic dimensions), systematically analyzes 49 practices, and focuses on 10 of them with category-specific analysis: external-quality, external-speed, internal-quality, and internal-speed. It draws from the nine evaluation dimensions of the UN Tourism's "Best Tourism Villages" and offers suggestions for improvement. Chapter Three discusses four dimensions: national policy mobilization, collaboration between various stakeholders, technological empowerment, and exploration of local contexts, with an aim to

summarize China's experience and provide references for other countries and regions worldwide. Chapter Four further integrates Chinese experiences into a global perspective, exploring the alignment between the practices of Chinese tourism villages and the SDGs. It reveals strategic inspiration from two dimensions: the logic of fairness and sustainable development, elevating Chinese practices to global inspiration, and presenting the global significance of China's practices in promoting sustainable rural development through tourism.

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Chapter One China's Practice in Reducing Poverty and Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism





Section One China's Journey of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism

Over the past four decades, tourism has evolved into an industry that meets the needs of the times and is vital to the people's livelihoods and well-being in China. With the integrated development of local natural and cultural resources, rural tourism has given rise to various means of livelihood beyond farming. Thanks to its complementarity with traditional means of livelihood, it has developed into an important means for rural residents to earn a living and generate income during slack farming seasons. China's poverty reduction through tourism journey can be divided into the following four stages: the exploratory stage which relied heavily on natural resources, the stage of development-oriented poverty reduction supported by national strategies, the stage of targeted poverty reduction, and the current stage of transitioning to rural revitalization, with increasingly clear objectives and diversified approaches¹.

I. The Exploratory Stage of Poverty Reduction (1978-1996)

After China introduced the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, tourism emerged as a new driver of economic growth. Although the idea of poverty reduction through tourism did not appear in any official government documents, in some underdeveloped regions, tourism development had already begun to have a positive impact on the

local economy. During this stage, poverty reduction through tourism primarily relied on spontaneous market mechanisms, where residents in impoverished areas gradually stepped into related industries such as hospitality, catering, transportation, and tourist guide services.

Having realized the urgency of poverty reduction and the effectiveness of tourism in this regard, China started to establish a management system for poverty alleviation. In May 1986, the State Council's Leading Group for Economic Development in Impoverished Areas was established, prioritizing assistance to poverty-stricken counties and selecting 331 such counties nationwide. In the same year, tourism development was incorporated as an important part of the national strategy into the "Seventh Five-Year Plan" of economic and social development. From then on, tourism started to rise as a separate industrial sector. Poverty reduction through tourism was officially recognized as a local success practice at the National Tourism Directors' Conference in 1991. In 1995, it was incorporated into the *Ninth Five-Year Plan of China for Tourism Development and the Long-term Objectives Through 2010*, followed by research initiatives and operational reviews the following year.

II. The Stage of Development-oriented Poverty Reduction (1997-2012)

During this stage, the practice of poverty reduction through tourism started to be closely tied with national strategies for poverty reduction and its influence expanded from localities to the whole nation. Following the launch of the Strategy for Large-Scale Development of Western China in 1999, the tourism industry, as a crucial component of the strategy, strongly boosted the development of western impoverished areas. In 2000, the first-ever pilot zone for poverty alleviation through tourism was established by the former China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) in Xihaigu, Ningxia, aiming

to accumulate valuable experience. In June 2001, the State Council issued the *Outline for China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2001-2010)*, mapping a blueprint for poverty alleviation and development. Against this backdrop, CNTA issued the *Opinions on Further Accelerating Tourism Development*, making it clear to drive economic and social development in western regions and impoverished areas through the development of the tourism sector.

In 2006, China implemented the strategy of “developing tourism in rural areas” and designated the “Year of Rural Tourism,” elevating tourism as part of the national development agenda. In 2009, the *Opinions of the State Council on Accelerating Tourism Development* proposed to develop tourism into a strategic pillar of the national economy and a modern service industry to better meet the people's demands. In the same year, CNTA officially became a member unit of the State Council's Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation and Development. In 2011, “poverty alleviation through tourism” was officially incorporated into the *Outline for China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2011-2020)*, signifying that it had become an important poverty reduction model in China.

III. The Stage of Targeted Poverty Reduction (2013-2020)

In November 2013, during an inspection tour in Xiangxi, Hunan Province, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the concept of “targeted poverty alleviation,” ushering China's poverty reduction into a new stage. The “targeted” approach emphasizes greater precision and effectiveness, aiming to address issues such as poorly defined objectives and inefficient resource allocation in the previous “extensive” model.

Against this backdrop, the concept of targeted

poverty reduction was deeply embedded in the tourism industry. In January 2014, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued the *Opinions on Reforming Mechanisms to Promote Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development*, in which “poverty alleviation through tourism” was identified as one of the ten priority tasks, reflecting its importance. In the same year, the State Council issued the *Opinions on Advancing the Reform in the Tourism Industry*, aiming to “strengthen targeted poverty alleviation through rural tourism, solidly advance rural tourism projects to increase villagers' income, and lift impoverished areas out of poverty”². Thus, the concept of “targeted poverty alleviation through tourism” was officially written in government documents, marking a new stage for China's poverty reduction through tourism.

IV. The Stage of Transitioning to Rural Revitalization (2021-2025)

After China won a complete victory in the fight against poverty in 2020, the new goal was to consolidate and build on the achievements in poverty alleviation so as to promote rural revitalization, and rural tourism also entered a new stage of transitioning to rural revitalization. During this stage, the economic effects of rural tourism, such as the reverse population siphoning, should be fully unleashed and it should feed back to traditional agriculture to a certain extent³.



I. Main Policies

This report analyzes the policies by extracting keywords from relevant policy documents for promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China and other ministries and commissions from 2021 to 2024 (Figure 1-1):



Figure 1-1 Keywords in China's Policies for Promoting Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism

Source: Created by the author

Integrated development is the core of China's rural tourism policies, aiming to break traditional industrial boundaries, promote the deep integration of rural tourism with other industries, and enhance their integrated benefits.

First, the integration of culture and tourism. The emphasis is on enriching the rural cultural connotations and promoting the development of rural cultural products. For example, the *Opinions on Promoting the Cultural Sector to Empower Rural Revitalization* stresses the role of cultural industries in rural revitalization, to promote the deep integration of cultural industries such as creative design, performances, music, and fine arts with rural tourism⁴.

Second, the integration of sports and tourism. For instance, Guizhou Province has innovatively combined “village super leagues,” “village basketball associations,” village marathons, women’s marathons, and other sports events with tourism and produced scale effects, meeting tourists’ diversified outdoor leisure demands.

Third, the integration of commerce and tourism. For example, activities such as “Touring and Shopping in Rural Areas” were staged to gather new business forms such as folk festivals, township community fairs, intangible cultural heritage-themed experiential activities, agricultural product fairs, guiding industry associations, new media platforms, and e-commerce entities to inject new momentum into rural revitalization.

(II) Building a Multi-Level Collaboration Framework Through Planning and Design

Under the strategy of rural revitalization, a multi-



level collaboration framework has been constructed through macro-level planning and design.

First, clear divisions of labor and functional integration across rural administrative levels. For instance, the *Key Tasks for Rural Industrial Development in 2021* proposed the development of a framework⁵ with well-defined roles and organically integrated functions across county, township, and village levels. At the county level, the focus is on improving transportation networks, formulating supportive policies, and coordinating resource allocation. At the township level, efforts center on developing service hubs for rural tourism by building supporting facilities such as tourist distribution centers and specialized homestay clusters. At the village level, the strategy prioritizes resource development to establish the “One Village, One Product” (OVOP) pattern of development.

Second, rural characteristics are taken into account in tourism planning, with tourism routes tailored based on local rural resources and cultural heritage. For areas with superior natural endowments, this involves developing integrated tourism ecosystems combining eco-sightseeing corridors and outdoor recreation hubs. A prime example is Yangshuo,

Guangxi, where a 10-Mile Gallery Cycling Route is designed to string over 20 natural attractions and allow cyclists to appreciate the karst landscape along the way; it attracted over 21 million visitors in 2023 alone⁶.

(III) Creating a Tourism Ecosystem Through Resource Integration

Existing policies emphasize the organic integration of natural and cultural resources for the development of characteristic rural tourism products. For example, the *Tourism Development Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period* suggests “leveraging distinctive geographical landscapes, natural resources, and ecological assets to enhance comprehensive service capabilities, thereby developing a series of specialized tourist destinations such as mountains, islands, wetlands, ice-snow zones, grasslands, deserts, lakes, hot springs, and wellness retreats”⁷. Rural tourism serves as the best link to promote the sharing of ideas and services between urban and rural areas, tap into idle resources in rural areas, and promote the transformation and upgrading of the rural industrial structure.

Meanwhile, rural tourism is integrated with the

resources of industries such as agriculture, sports, culture, and commerce to foster industrial synergies and share complementary resources. For example, the *Guidelines on Developing the Multifunctional Potential of Agriculture and Promoting the High-Quality Development of Rural Industries* outline strategies to develop a series of experiential products around various functions, business forms, and application scenarios, such as “Rural Landscape Immersion,” “Local Culinary Exploration,” “Cultural Heritage Appreciation,” and “Nostalgic Elements Experience”⁸.

II. Characteristics of Policy Evolution

With the completion of the top-level design for promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism in China, tourism policies have achieved substantial progress in contents and mechanisms, showing the following characteristics:

(I) Continuous Improvement of the Policy System

Since 2021, when China shifted to consolidate and build on poverty reduction achievements to promote rural revitalization, various government departments have issued a series of policy documents, continuously improving the rural tourism policy system from top-level design to implementation:

(1) In 2021, rural tourism policies focused on industrial integration and the cultivation of new business forms. For example, as outlined in the *Key Tasks for Rural Industrial Development in 2021*, the policy emphasizes unlocking the multifunctional value of rural areas, enriching new business forms in rural industrial development, promoting the transformation and upgrading of rural leisure tourism, and laying the foundation for rural tourism development by developing exemplary projects, improving service quality, and introducing new



business forms⁹.

(2) In 2022, policies placed greater emphasis on the deep integration of culture and tourism, as well as improving service quality. For example, the *Opinions on Promoting the Cultural Industries to Empower Rural Revitalization* stressed the role of cultural industries in rural revitalization, promoting the integration of industries such as creative design, performances, and music with rural tourism to enhance the cultural connotations and appeal of rural tourism¹⁰. The *Guidelines on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Rural Homestays* further proposed measures such as improving spatial planning, enriching cultural connotations, and strengthening brand leadership¹¹.

(3) In 2023-2024, policies further expanded and innovated on the basis of previous orientations. For example, the *Pilot Work Plan for Cultural Industries Empowering Rural Revitalization* and the *Notice on Launching the Second Batch of Pilot Locations for Cultural Industries Empowering Rural Revitalization* explored new paths for cultural industries to empower rural revitalization through pilot projects, thereby promoting the deep integration of rural culture and tourism.

(II) Increasing Clarity of Policy Orientation

The policy orientation is increasingly clarified,

featuring an equal emphasis on ecological conservation and cultural heritage preservation and a parallel between industrial integration and innovation-driven development. For the former part, the policies emphasize protecting the red lines of ecological protection and cherishing the unique value of rural culture. For example, the *Notice on Continuously Developing Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshops to Support Rural Revitalization* promotes the deep integration of intangible cultural heritage with rural tourism, providing new conditions for intangible cultural heritage inheritance while enriching the cultural connotations of rural tourism¹². For the latter part, the policies promote the integration of rural tourism with other industries and encourage innovation-driven development. For instance, the *Notice on Launching the 2024 Creative Rural Life Season* stresses the role of creativity in attracting the flow of talent, capital, and technology to rural areas, giving rise to a series of innovative rural tourism products and service models, greatly stimulating vitality for innovation in rural tourism¹³.

(III) Steady Shift in Policy Objectives

As China's rural areas have entered a stage of structural transformation toward revitalization in all respects, the overall policy objectives have shifted from "speed and scale" to "connotation and quality." Specifically, the philosophy of policies has shifted from the pursuit of speed and scale to the pursuit of quality, emphasizing the comprehensive benefits of the tourism industry. For example, the *Opinions on Promoting Cultural Industries to Empower Rural Revitalization* stress the role of cultural industries in rural revitalization, promoting the integration of industries such as creative design, performances, and music with rural tourism to enhance its cultural connotations and appeal¹⁴. The focus of policies has gradually shifted from hardware construction to software improvement, emphasizing the enhancement of tourism service quality and

the deepening of cultural connotations. The implementation of policies has gradually shifted from a government-led model to a market-led model. For example, the *Pilot Work Plan for Cultural Industries Empowering Rural Revitalization* proposes exploring new paths for cultural industries to empower rural revitalization through pilot projects, emphasizing the role of the market in resource allocation¹⁵.

III. Policy Trends

As villages that have emerged from poverty enter the final sprint of transitioning to rural revitalization villages by 2025, tourism policies are being continuously refined. From a long-term perspective, future policies for promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism will exhibit the following trends:

(I) Greater Emphasis on Policy Coordination and Innovation

Policy coordination and innovation aim to unite the strengths of diverse entities, explore pathways, and promote high-quality development of rural tourism.

Policy coordination is reflected in the following aspects: In terms of policy alignment and complementarity, rural tourism policies will be organically integrated with policies related to industrial development, ecological protection,





and cultural heritage within the rural revitalization strategy, ensuring their systematic and coherent nature. Simultaneously, efforts will be made to further strengthen collaboration among multiple departments such as agriculture and rural affairs, culture and tourism, transportation, and commerce. Inter-regional cooperation in rural tourism is also encouraged to overcome geographical barriers and promote bidirectional flows of funds, technology, and talent between urban and rural areas.

In terms of policy innovation, continuous innovation in policy support will be pursued. In addition to traditional fiscal subsidies and tax incentives, diversified support policies such as rural tourism funds and innovative financial products will be explored. Meanwhile, rural land-use policies for tourism will be optimized, while flexible and diverse ways of land supply will be explored.

(II) Greater Emphasis on Technological Empowerment

Digital technology can directly enhance the tourist experience. In the future, the construction of intelligent facilities, such as smart tour guide systems and smart homestays will be promoted for rural tourism, while immersive experience technologies like virtual reality (VR) will be introduced. For instance, VR technology will be introduced to allow tourists to immerse themselves in rural historical and cultural scenes, enhancing their sense of participation and

experience. At the same time, big data analysis will be conducted to study tourist behaviors and preferences in rural tourism destinations, so as to achieve targeted marketing and personalized service recommendations and optimize the allocation of rural tourism resources. Meanwhile, digital management and operational innovation will be strengthened. Smart management platforms for rural tourism will be established to achieve real-time collection, analysis, and management of tourism information, develop digital brand images for rural tourism, and delve into cultural elements unique to rural areas.

(III) Greater Emphasis on Unlocking the Value of the Countryside

With the advancement of rural revitalization, tapping into the value of the countryside will become a highlight in future policies.

First, villages' cultural value serves as the foundation for tourism development. Future policies will place greater emphasis on the conservation and utilization of rural cultural heritage, supporting systematic conservation of intangible cultural heritage and historical and cultural villages. Simultaneously, the deep integration of cultural and creative industries with rural tourism will be encouraged to attract cultural and creative talents and enterprises into rural areas.

Second, villages' ecological and economic value provides further support for tourism development. We should raise awareness of rural ecological and environmental protection, support the development of green industries in rural areas, such as organic agriculture, ecological breeding, and green agricultural product processing, and combine them with rural tourism to promote green rural tourism. Meanwhile, we will continue to introduce new rural tourism business models, strengthen rural tourism e-commerce platforms, and cultivate related

e-commerce talents to boost the development of rural industries.

Section Three Pathways to Sustained Poverty Reduction

I. Incentivizing Self-Growth and Enhancing Endogenous Motivation among the Population Who Have Emerged from Poverty

Rural tourism, as a “hematopoietic” poverty reduction model capable of stimulating endogenous motivation, not only plays a crucial role in poverty eradication but will also provide lasting impetus for sustaining poverty reduction during the transition to revitalization. Specifically:

Rural tourism can effectively stimulate the demand-driven endogenous motivation of households that have been lifted out of poverty and encourage them to consolidate poverty alleviation achievements¹⁶. Before the launch of tourism development projects, many villagers showed conservative mindsets and weak market awareness and adopted a wait-and-see, unsupportive, or even resistant attitude toward tourism development in its early stages. However, after tourism development, with the arrival of tourists, enterprises, social organizations, and other external entities, significant changes have occurred in rural production and living scenarios. The minds of locals have gradually changed as they began to embrace modern lifestyles, and their subjective consciousness has been fully awakened.

Meanwhile, rural tourism enhances the instrumental endogenous motivation of households that have been lifted out of poverty, reducing their risk of returning to poverty and ensuring that poverty alleviation achievements are consolidated¹⁷. Training in rural tourism skills is key to enhancing instrumental endogenous motivation. Through training in rural tourism skills, the villagers can not only acquire

modern knowledge on tourism and enhance their employability but also stimulate their market awareness through daily interactions with the outside world, reshape their value system characterized by initiative and entrepreneurship, and achieve self-growth.

II. Modernizing the Mindset of Those Lifted out of Poverty to Block the Inter-generational Transmission of Poverty

In a certain sense, access to education is more important than assistance in kind. Therefore, strengthening the educational function of rural tourism constitutes an important pathway for sustaining poverty escapes.

At the macro level, it is important to introduce new mechanisms for talent introduction and cultivation in areas that have emerged from poverty, such as establishing employment platforms and attracting tourism professionals into rural areas, and leverage external education resources to modernize the mindset of residents. For example, Gaohuai Village in Deyang City, Sichuan Province, has established mechanisms such as the “Huaishang Commune Committee,” introducing over 100 “new farmers” including intangible cultural heritage inheritors, musicians, plant-dye designers, woodcarvers, and planners. Simultaneously, it has retained local homestay brands such as Qianhe Simultaneously, it has retained local homestay brands such as Qianhe



Nongzhuang. Through collaboration between elites from outside and residents, ultimately, the once impoverished village has transformed into a cultural and creative rural tourism destination. ultimately, the once impoverished village has transformed into a cultural and creative rural tourism destination.

At the micro level, tourism development has subtly transformed rural social structures. Under the influence of external education and culture, local parents began to reflect on their own educational and parenting approaches, trying to align them with modern education philosophy¹⁸. They have continuously increased investment in the education of their children, encouraging their children to study hard, and educating them with examples in their lives, thus avoiding the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

III. Enhancing Villagers' Ability to Make a Living and Strengthening Development Resilience

Rural tourism has significantly enhanced the resilience of the people lifted out of poverty by reconstructing the livelihood capital system. Currently, the risk of returning to poverty is mainly concentrated in remote rural areas with fragile ecological environments, significant geographic disadvantages, and a shortage of human resources. Their traditional means of livelihood, due to poor industrial base and resilience, struggle to sustain the poverty alleviation achievements.

Rural tourism has overcome the limitations of traditional livelihoods through industrial integration, providing pathways for transitions. The market has given rise to diversified income sources such as service-oriented employment and the operation of small and micro enterprises. However, due to factors such as weak human capital, lack of social networks, and shortage of startup funds, the success rate of self-employment is relatively low. Therefore, in this

process, different strategies are to be adopted: For lower-level employment needs in tourist attractions, standardized service training is organized to strengthen their basic employability. Meanwhile, business mentoring is provided to those with the potential to cultivate micro-sized market entities. Additionally, collective platforms such as tourism cooperatives will be established to reduce the self-employment risks through resource sharing.

IV. Encouraging Community Engagement and Enhancing Villagers' Aspiration for Growth

The core of the transition from poverty reduction through tourism to rural revitalization lies in transforming villagers from passive beneficiaries to active participants, thus transforming from a model reliant on external assistance to a self-driven development model¹⁹. This involves the restructuring of the interactive relationship between assistance providers and recipients: The government, enterprises, and social organizations need to institutionalize consultation platforms for information sharing, joint decision-making, and joint oversight, to ensure that the villagers are engaged in project design, implementation, and evaluation at the community level.

A review of China's fight against poverty reveals that the traditional poverty alleviation model lacked community engagement mechanisms, resulting in the long-term marginalization of the poor. Therefore, in the stage of promoting rural revitalization, multi-level paths of engagement should be constructed: At the basic level, villagers may engage in productive activities such as working in scenic spots and selling local specialties to foster primary skills and accumulate market experience. At the advanced level, tourism cooperatives may guide villagers to participate in decision-making processes such as resource allocation. In other aspects, returning migrant workers are supported to start up

businesses in new business forms such as homestay operations and cultural IP development, creating a demonstration and driving effect.

Section Four Local Models for Promoting Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism

I. Changes in Development Models

We extracted and analyzed keywords from the WTA Best Practices of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism (2018-2020) and the WTA Best Practices of Rural Revitalization Through Tourism (2021-2024)

published by the World Tourism Alliance (“WTA”) (Table 1-1, Figure 1-2, and Figure 1-3). The change in keywords from poverty reduction through tourism to rural revitalization through tourism reflects that the logic behind China’s practice of promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism has shifted from a primary focus on economic poverty alleviation and external assistance to rural revitalization in all aspects with endogenous growth drivers, with its development model shifting from “exogenous” to “endogenous.”

The best practices of poverty reduction through tourism reflect an exogenous-dominated development

Table 1-1 High-Frequency Feature Words and Their Frequencies in Case Titles

Ranking	Best Practices of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism		Best Practices of Rural Revitalization Through Tourism	
	Name	Frequency	Name	Frequency
1	Tourism	52	Rural Areas	124
2	Poverty Alleviation	44	Revitalization	93
3	Rural Areas	20	Assistance	62
4	Model	17	Integration	61
5	Poverty Eradication	16	Tourism	52
6	Assistance	13	Model	23
7	Integration	9	Culture and Tourism	20
8	Poverty Reduction	8	Culture	18
9	Targeted	8	Empowerment	16
10	Prosperity	6	Agritourism	15

Source: Created by the author



Figure 1-2 Keywords in China’s Practices in Reducing Poverty Through Tourism

Source: Created by the author



Figure 1-3 Keywords in China’s Practices in Promoting Rural Rejuvenation Through Tourism

Source: Created by the author

model during this period. In the relevant word clouds, words such as “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” and “poverty eradication” are prominent, indicating that the core goal at this stage was to reduce poverty by directly decreasing the number of impoverished people in poverty-stricken areas through tourism development. Words like “targeted,” “assistance,” and “support” appear frequently, reflecting the emphasis on precise targeting of poverty-stricken areas and impoverished populations in the process of poverty reduction through tourism, mainly relying on external targeted assistance from the government, enterprises, and social organizations. Words such as “tourism,” “tourist attractions,” and “all-area-advancing tourism” demonstrate the strategy of poverty reduction by developing tourist attractions and promoting all-area-advancing tourism across poverty-stricken areas to lift residents out of poverty. Words like “economy,” “prosperity,” and “impetus” show that poverty reduction through tourism focuses on boosting economic growth in these areas through tourism and increasing residents’ income. In summary, tourism development in these areas was mainly promoted by external forces to achieve the poverty reduction goals.

The best practices of rural revitalization through tourism, on the other hand, indicate a shift toward an endogenous model. In the relevant word clouds, words such as “rural revitalization” and “integration” stand out, suggesting that the goals at this stage are more macroscopic and comprehensive, with a greater emphasis on revitalization in all respects and the integrated development of tourism with other industries. Words like “ecology,” “culture,” and “protection” reflect the importance attached to the ecological environment and rural culture in the process of rural revitalization, emphasizing the importance of sustainable development. Words such as “endogenous momentum” and “model” reflect the focus on tapping into the inner drive of rural areas and exploring sustainable development models. Meanwhile, words like “agritourism,” “cultural tourism,” and “industry” indicate that the integration of tourism with agriculture, culture, and other industries has become an important means of rural revitalization. Compared with the previous period, this stage no longer relies solely on external inputs but places greater emphasis on the self-development capabilities of rural areas. By deeply exploring the unique ecological and cultural resources of rural



Table 1-2 Spatial Distribution of WTA Best Practices of Poverty Reduction and Rural Revitalization Through Tourism

Type	Number/Proportion			
	East China	Central China	West China	Total
WTA Best Practices of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism	30/33.3%	37/41.1%	23/25.6%	90/100%
WTA Best Practices of Rural Revitalization Through Tourism	68/34.5%	53/26.9%	76/38.6%	197/100%

Source: Created by the author

areas, it deeply integrates tourism with agriculture and cultural industries, forming characteristic tourism industries.

II. Regional Differences

Based on the specific locations featured in the WTA Best Practices of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism (2018-2020) and the WTA Best Practices of Rural Revitalization Through Tourism (2021-2024), and analyzed their spatial distribution patterns from the perspective of East, Central, and West China (Table 1-2).

In terms of overall quantity and the shift in regional focus, during the poverty reduction stage, central China claimed the highest proportion, while in the rural revitalization stage, West China claimed the highest proportion; East China maintained an important position with continually deepened

development in both stages.

Specifically: 1) The proportion of best practices in East China in the rural revitalization stage changed slightly but was still significant, indicating that the development of rural tourism is continually deepened while new development models are explored; 2) The proportion of best practices in Central China decreased significantly though it remains an important area for rural revitalization. This may be because Central China achieved relatively good results in poverty reduction through tourism in the early stage, but has shifted its focus to integration with other industries or integrated development models during the rural revitalization stage; 3) The proportion of best practices in West China increased substantially, benefiting from favorable national policies and the effective development and utilization of its unique tourism resources.

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Chapter Two Case Studies of Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism



Section One The Balanced Development Theory and Model Classification for Poverty Reduction Through Tourism

I. Composition of the IRT-SQEI Framework and the Balanced Development Theory

In the late 20th century, with the acceleration of globalization and urbanization, many rural areas in various countries faced widespread challenges such as population drain, economic decline, and a significant economic gap with urban areas. The issue of underdevelopment in rural areas became particularly prominent. Meanwhile, rural tourism, with its unique natural landscapes, rural life experiences, and cultural heritage, gained increasing popularity. In response to the need for diversified development of rural tourism, in 2000, multiple European countries jointly proposed the initiative of “Supporting and Promoting Integrated Tourism in Europe’s Lagging Rural Regions,” establishing the “Integrated Rural Tourism” (IRT) development framework¹, encompassing seven dimensions: sustainability, empowerment, complementarity, endogeneity, scale, embeddedness, and networking. The framework integrates various dimensions of rural development and involves multiple stakeholders, demonstrating good applicability across different countries and regions, and aiding in a comprehensive assessment of the specific changes brought about by tourism in rural areas².

However, during the promotion and use of the IRT framework, the issue of its comprehensive yet potentially confusing dimensions gradually came under scrutiny. Reasons such as its multi-dimensional structure and the conceptual similarities between dimensions (e.g., endogeneity and embeddedness) may have limited the framework’s wider application. Therefore, without simplifying the existing dimensions of the IRT framework, some scholars combined them into a more comprehensible IRT-SQEI framework,

consisting of the speed and quality dimensions of development, as well as the external and internal dimensions of motivation³.

The IRT-SQEI framework, based on a balanced and holistic way of thinking, not only focuses on the balanced development of people but also on the sustainable evolution of the human-environment relationship. As shown in Figure 2-1, the IRT-SQEI framework categorizes “scale” under the “speed (S)” dimension. The rapid expansion of the industrial scale directly reflects the poverty reduction effects of tourism. “Scale” is defined as “the degree of geographical spatial diffusion of tourism in a region over time.” High-quality rural tourism development needs to avoid vicious competition and resource wastage caused by “involution”⁴. Therefore, this report categorizes “complementarity” and “sustainability” under the “quality (Q)” dimension. “Complementarity” focuses on whether the short-term structural changes in tourism development are beneficial to the impoverished population, while “sustainability” focuses on the sustainable use of the ecological environment, reflecting the impact of tourism development on social and environmental quality. “Networking” is categorized under the “external (E)” dimension⁵, emphasizing the ability to promote the collaborative development of rural tourism with external enterprises, organizations, and personnel, reflecting the capacity to leverage external



resources for tourism development. “Empowerment,” “endogeneity,” and “embeddedness” are categorized under the “internal (I)” dimension⁶. “Empowerment” focuses on local people’s control over local tourism development, while “endogeneity” and “embeddedness” respectively emphasize the capacity for tourism development based on local resources and the dissemination of local culture. These three aspects reflect the capacity for tourism development relying on internal resources.

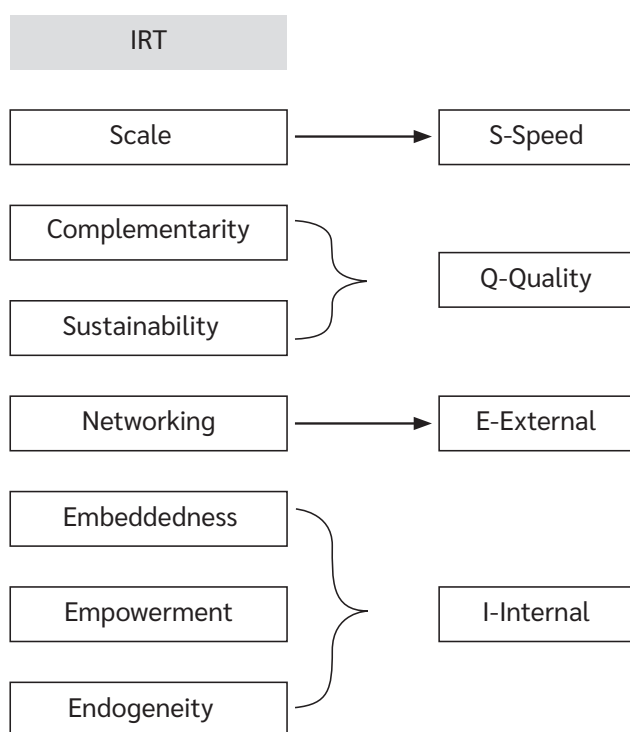


Figure 2-1 IRT-SQEI Analysis Framework

Source: Li Yanqin et al. (2023)⁷

II. Model Classification

In practice, the process of policy formulation and implementation reflects the state’s governance philosophy, significantly aligning with the core notions emphasized by the SQEI framework, which always incorporates the S-speed, Q-quality, E-external, and I-internal factors into comprehensive consideration. The “speed” and “quality” dimensions of the SQEI framework reflect different development focuses, while the “internal” and “external” dimensions

reflect the sources of development momentum. By considering these four dimensions comprehensively, we can classify poverty reduction through tourism practices into four models: external-quality, external-speed, internal-quality, and internal-speed (see Figure 2-2).



Figure 2-2 Types of Models of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism

Source: Li Yanqin et. al.⁸

(I) External-Quality Model

The primary development approach for such a model is “enterprise + employment,” with the specific path being “introducing or mobilizing external enterprises → enterprises’ settling in/whole-process guidance → promoting employment/entrepreneurship → poverty eradication and prosperity.” Sub-model 1: Tourist Attraction-Centered Development Model, where tourist attraction-based enterprises build a sharing economy platform centered on tourism, providing villagers with free tourism-related skill training, entrepreneurship support, employment opportunities, and equity participation and dividends, thus fostering a collaborative and mutually beneficial community of interests between enterprises and residents. Sub-model 2: Village-Enterprise Collaboration Model, where enterprises leverage their

technological expertise to provide whole-process guidance to poverty-stricken villages in optimizing the tourism industry, establishing a profound mechanism of mutual benefit for both parties. Sub-model 3: Loan-Guided Development Model, where external organizations inject funds to guide the targeted development of poverty-stricken areas. Sub-model 4: Technical Guidance Model, where external organizations offer whole-process guidance to enrich tourism products and business forms in villages, improve governance rules, cultivate a spirit of contract, and nurture local villagers with leadership and management capabilities to achieve autonomy.

(II) External-Speed Model

The main development approach of this model is “enterprise + industry,” with the specific path being “support from external enterprises/government → introducing funds/channels/technologies → establishing new platforms/expanding new channels/developing new products → enlarging the tourism market scale → achieving rapid poverty eradication and prosperity.” Sub-model 1: Enterprise Support Model, where large and platform-based enterprises bring professional knowledge and promotion channels, with notable short-term boosting effects. For instance, the “Douyin Helps Rural Tourism Shine” project initiated by Douyin Group used the Douyin short-video platform to customize tourism promotion plans for poverty-stricken counties, rapidly boosting tourism income in the supported areas. Sub-model



2: Government Support Model, where paired support is achieved between economically developed and poverty-stricken regional governments, such as the paired support between China's eastern and western regions, where developed regional governments encourage enterprises and social capital to participate in the efforts.

(III) Internal-Quality Model

The primary development approach of the model is “cooperative + employment,” with the specific path being “forming cooperatives → matching supply with market demand → promoting employment/entrepreneurship/villager return → co-creating a rural community of the future.” Sub-model 1: Cooperative-Driven Development Model, where villagers, under government guidance, establish associations or cooperatives, providing more employment opportunities and a better entrepreneurial environment through corporate-style operations. They formulate industry standards and management norms, continuously attracting more residents to engage in the tourism industry and share the benefits of tourism development. Sub-model 2: Hollowed-Out Village Regeneration Model, where the focus of rural protection and development returns to the better development and utilization of people and cultural heritage. The tourism industry transforms cultural resources into tourism products, generating economic benefits. Through host-guest interactions, it transforms static preservation into dynamic utilization.

(IV) Internal-Speed Model

The main development approach of the model is “cooperative + industry,” with the specific path being “driven by capable individuals/co-created by all → establishing village enterprises/cooperatives → promoting rural tourism development → achieving poverty eradication through collective efforts.”

Sub-model 1: Village Enterprise-Driven Model, where village organizations have the capability to establish travel companies or cooperatives, with capable individuals in the village serving as leaders in wealth creation. Villagers, under the leadership of these capable individuals, can emerge from poverty through equity participation and dividends or getting employed in tourist attractions. Sub-model 2: Co-Created by All Model, which leverages advantageous tourism resources to establish a government-led, market-driven mechanism involving departmental coordination, promoting entrepreneurship and marketing among all villagers.



III. Surveys on the Effects of Tourism on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development

(I) Survey Overview

To gain an in-depth understanding of the current state of poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism in China, the WTA commissioned a research team from Minzu University of China to survey 45 practices selected from the *WTA Best Practices of Poverty Reduction Through Tourism (2018-2020)* and three more from the *WTA Best Practices of Rural Revitalization Through Tourism (2021-2024)*, with an additional case from Zhejiang Province. The questionnaire designed for this purpose covers the overall effects of tourism on poverty reduction, including the time of poverty eradication and the return to poverty, the latest data available on annual tourism revenue, tourist arrivals, and the workforce in the tourism industry. Meanwhile, an IRT-SQEI scale system is established, with questionnaire items categorized into four dimensions: speed, quality, external, and internal, covering the four major aspects of the IRT-SQEI framework.

The survey, lasting from December 10, 2024, to February 13, 2025, was conducted primarily by phone by four graduate students with backgrounds

in tourism management in the form of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The respondents were diverse and deeply involved in local tourism development, including village committee directors, government staff from cultural and tourism departments, tourist attraction managers, and relevant departmental heads from companies. In addition, the research team conducted on-site field surveys in Yunnan's Azheke Village, Guizhou's Rongjiang County, and the Beijing-based Douyin Group on November 24-27, 2024, February 20-24, 2025, and April 10, 2025, respectively, to complement the phone survey.

(II) Overall Performance

In terms of overall poverty eradication, all 49 villages surveyed were lifted out of poverty by 2020. Among them, the first to do so was the Kom-Kanas Mongolian Ethnic Township in Altay, Xinjiang, which accomplished this goal in September 2014. As to poverty recurrence, only in two of them, a very small number of individuals were detected to fall back to poverty due to illness or disaster after 2020, and they have received prompt targeted assistance from local governments and have stayed out of poverty ever since. None of the 49 villages experienced village-wide or regional poverty recurrence.

Table 2-1 Scores across Dimensions in the IRT-SQEI Framework

Dimension	Practices at Village Scale (N=26)				Practices above Village Scale (N=23)			
	East China	Central China	West China	Overall	East China	Central China	West China	Overall
Speed	4.37	4.10	4.56	4.34	4.17	4.33	4.71	4.40
Quality	4.38	4.46	4.30	4.38	4.65	4.38	4.50	4.51
External	4.47	4.42	4.38	4.42	4.67	4.83	4.74	4.75
Internal	4.30	4.21	4.31	4.27	4.33	4.37	4.55	4.42

Source: Created by the author

(III) Performance in Different Dimensions

The questionnaire survey respondents were asked to use the IRT-SQEI scale to “Evaluate the following changes to the practice villages since 2020.” By comparing these villages’ performance before 2020 and afterward, we hoped to explore the sustainable development status of poverty reduction through tourism in rural areas (Table 2-1). The questionnaire scale adopted a 5-point Likert scale.

1. Speed Dimension

The “speed” dimension of the IRT-SQEI framework emphasizes accelerating the development of tourism and increasing its share in the economy. The average score in the “speed” dimension across 26 village-scale locations was 4.34. Specifically, that of those in East China was 4.37, for those in Central China it was 4.10, and for those in West China, it was 4.56. For 23 locations above the village scale, the average score in the “speed” dimension was 4.40: that for those in East China was 4.17, for those in Central China it was 4.33, and for those in West China, it was 4.71.

In terms of the expansion and growth speed of tourism, locations above the village scale scored higher in the “speed” dimension than those at the village scale, reflecting the important role of resource integration and regional collaboration in driving regional tourism development. From a regional perspective, regardless of whether it was at the village or above-village scale, those in West China scored higher than those in East and Central China,

demonstrating that the potential of West China in tourism economic development has been unlocked in recent years, and tourism development has effectively narrowed the economic development gap between West China and the rest of the country.

2. Quality Dimension

The “quality” dimension focuses on the quality and sustainability of tourism development. The average score in this dimension across 26 village-scale locations was 4.38. Specifically, for those in East China it was 4.38, for those in Central China it was 4.46, and for those in West China, it was 4.30. For 23 locations above the village scale, the average score in this dimension was 4.51, and that for those in East China was 4.65, for those in Central China it was 4.38, and for those in West China, it was 4.50.

In terms of the quality and sustainability of tourism development, locations above the village scale had a higher average score than those at the village scale, indicating that tourism development in larger areas





performs more prominently in terms of quality and sustainability. From a regional perspective, East China scored the highest in tourism development above the village scale, demonstrating its leading position in tourism quality and sustainability. West China performed relatively well in tourism development above the village scale but scored lower at the village scale, indicating that it still has room for improvement in the quality of tourism development at the primary level.

3. External Dimension

The “external” dimension reflects the ability to leverage external resources for tourism development. The average score in this dimension across 26 locations on the village scale was 4.42. Specifically, the average score for those in East China was 4.47, for those in Central China it was 4.42, and for those in West China, it was 4.38. For 23 locations above the village scale, the average score in this dimension was 4.75, and for those in East China it was 4.67, for those in Central China it was 4.83, and for those in West China, it was 4.74.

In terms of leveraging external resources to drive tourism development, locations above the village scale had a significantly higher average score than those at the village scale, indicating that tourism development on a larger scale has clear advantages

in utilizing external resources. From a regional perspective, Central China scored the highest in tourism development above the village scale, demonstrating its strong ability to attract external resources. West China also performed relatively prominently in tourism development above the village scale, indicating that thanks to policy support and external investment in recent years, it has achieved remarkable results in tourism development.

4. Internal Dimension

The “internal” dimension reflects the ability to leverage internal resources for tourism development. The average score in this dimension across 26 village-scale locations was 4.27. Specifically, the average score for those in East China was 4.30, for those in Central China it was 4.21, and for those in West China, it was 4.31. For 23 locations above the village scale, the average score in this dimension was 4.42, for those in East China at this scale was 4.33, for those in Central China it was 4.37, and for those in West China it was 4.55.

The survey results indicate that in terms of leveraging internal resources to drive tourism development, locations above the village scale had a higher average score than those at the village scale, suggesting that resource integration on a larger scale for tourism development yields more prominent results. From a

regional perspective, West China scored higher than other regions at both the village and above-village scales, indicating that greater policy support has yielded good results in this region.

Section Two External-Quality Model

I. Tourist Attraction-Centered Development: The Model of Tourism Economic Community in Xuefeng Mountain, Hunan Province

The tourist attraction-centered development model is a poverty reduction approach spearheaded by tourist attractions. Under this model, tourist attraction-based enterprises construct a sharing economy platform around tourist attractions, providing villagers with free tourism-related skill training, entrepreneurship support, employment opportunities, and equity participation and dividends, thereby fostering a collaborative and mutually beneficial community of interests between enterprises and residents.

(I) Case Background

Xuefeng Mountain is the largest mountain range in Hunan, spanning four cities with 16 counties (cities, districts). Villages are scattered deep within the mountains, home to over 40% of the province's poverty-stricken population. Since its founding in May 2014, Hunan Xuefeng Mountain Eco-Culture and Tourism Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as "Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company") has adhered to its core business of tourism and actively worked with local Party committees and governments. It leverages mountain and water resources, prioritizes poverty-stricken villages, and strives for common prosperity through ecotourism. The company has formed a community of shared interests between tourism enterprises and farmers in tourist attractions, establishing a poverty reduction through tourism model based on a shared tourism economic community. According to statistics, from January to

June 2022, Xuefeng Mountain Tourism achieved an operating revenue of 64.53 million yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 2.44%⁹.

The practice in the Xuefeng Mountain scenic area aligns with the tourist attraction-entered development model within the external-quality framework (Figure 2-3). It has taken the following specific measures. First, government-led development of tourist attractions and infrastructure construction. In 2017, Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company successively signed a 3 billion-yuan ecotourism development agreement with the People's Government of Xupu County and established a leading group to coordinate the tourist attraction development, building village roads, fixing farmland irrigation channels, and building flood control dikes and bridges. Second, the Company built a platform for providing assistance by various means. It has constructed a shared rural homestay system, developed tourism products, arranged employment, supported entrepreneurship, facilitated resource equity participation, organized farmer cooperatives, and established traditional cultural performance teams. These efforts have forged a community of interest between tourism enterprises, villages, and farmers in the scenic area, exploring a new model of rural revitalization through tourism. Third, integration of local intangible cultural heritage resources to build cultural and tourism brands. Targeting market demands, the Company continuously innovates cultural carriers, and spares no effort in rescuing and protecting cultural resources and intangible cultural heritages such as Gaomiao culture, Qu Yuan culture, folk culture, and the CPC heritage, which has resulted in the establishment of the tourism brand "Splendid Xiaoxiang, Enchanting Xuefeng." In summary, the Xuefeng Mountain scenic area relies on the tourism company to tap into local mountain and water resources through the tourist attraction-centered development approach, forming a community of shared future between tourism enterprises and

farmers, and embodying the notable advantages of the external-quality development model.

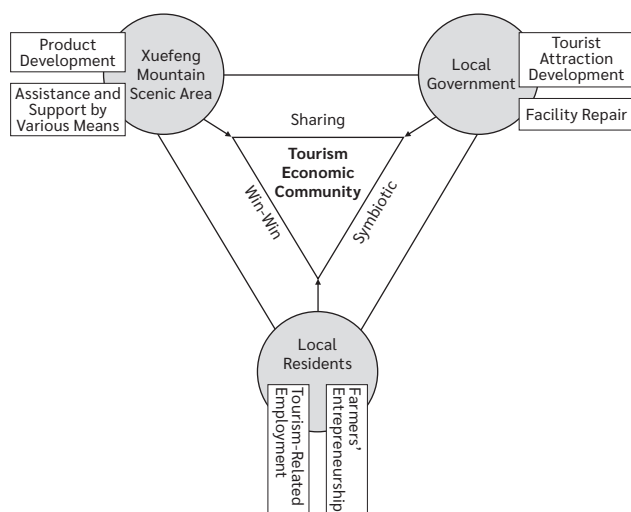


Figure 2-3 Tourist Attraction-Centered Development Model in Xuefeng Mountain, Hunan Province

Source: Created by the author

(II) Benchmarking against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

Based on resource integration, Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company has explored a poverty reduction model based on a shared tourism economic community. Adhering to the principles of prioritizing culture, ecology, and poverty alleviation, the company drives local people out of poverty and toward prosperity through cooperation, equity participation, employment, and charitable donations. Nearly 100,000 people have benefited from the tourist attraction development, covering and driving economic development in 31 poverty-stricken villages in four towns, benefiting over 35,000 impoverished individuals, with a poverty reduction rate of 100%.

2. Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company invested 20 million yuan in constructing a leisure dam and flood control dike in Tongxi River Leisure Town at Chuanyan

Mountain. It invested 5 million yuan in repairing 12 farmland irrigation channels totaling over 20 kilometers in the Shanbei Huayao Terraced Fields and Chuanyan Mountain, improving irrigation for over 66.67 hectares of farmland, ensuring water supply for over 500 people for domestic use, and providing safe and reliable clean water supply for residents' agricultural production and domestic use.

3. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

During the development and construction of the tourist attraction, Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company has established multiple work platforms in management, public communications, tour guide service, passenger transport, catering, and accommodation, creating over 400 jobs and investing millions of yuan to support farmers to start their own business within the tourist attraction. The company has organized free education and training sessions, covering 100% of the residents. Residents have not only secured well-paid jobs but also enhanced their vocational skills working in the tourism industry.

(III) Experience and Inspirations

1. Constructing a Shared, Symbiotic, and Win-Win Economic Community for Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism

The Xuefeng Mountain scenic area has aligned interests between the tourist attraction and residents through various means such as cultivating agricultural produce brands, constructing shared rural homestays, establishing agricultural specialty processing workshops, offering jobs, and supporting startups. These baby steps have converged into a collective force. The win-win cooperation between Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company and impoverished mountainous villages has formed a shared tourism economic community, driving economic growth in 31 such villages and benefiting over 35,000 impoverished

individuals. This shared, symbiotic, and win-win model has achieved remarkable results and was promoted as a “Demonstration Project for Poverty Reduction Through Tourism” by the then National Tourism Administration nationwide.



Figure 2-4 A Scene of a Poverty Alleviation Event Through Tourism at Xuefeng Mountain

Source: Local authorities

2. Prioritizing Culture and Integrating Local Cultural Heritage to Build Ethnic Culture and Tourism Brands

The Xuefeng Mountain scenic area is rich in various cultures, including intangible cultural heritage, farming culture, CPC heritage, and the legacy of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Adhering to the philosophy of “highlighting people, objects, and life,” Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company strives to create a new landmark for the integration of culture and tourism, showcasing the ever-lasting and refreshing vitality of regional culture in the new era. The company organized intangible cultural heritage-themed tourism promotion activities such as the “Culture and Natural Heritage Day” intangible cultural heritage exhibition and shopping festival and cultivated local tourism festival brands. It has not only established training centers and workshops for intangible cultural heritage (ICH) such as Huayao embroidery, Wuwa folk songs, dragon lantern dances, and charcoal flower dances,

and designated ICH villages and markets, but also launched situational dramas like “Huayao Wedding Feast” and large-scale stage plays such as “Xuefeng in the South, Flowers of Huayao.” Additionally, it has organized the Rice Planting Festival and Harvest Festival integrating entertainment, experience, and sightseeing.



Figure 2-5 Laba Festival in Yangquepo, Xuefeng Mountain

Source: Local authorities

3. Establishing a Folk Think Tank with Experts and Scholars and Supporting Local ICH Artisans

The achievements of the deep integration of culture and tourism lie in the offering of dual experiences: the intertwined tourist and cultural experiences. In 2014, the company established the Xuefeng Mountain Cultural Research Association, gathering over 150 historians, archaeologists, folk culture experts, writers, poets, calligraphers, painters, and musicians. This association, dedicated to the research and creation of Xuefeng Mountain's regional culture, has become the first genuine folk cultural think tank in Hunan's tourism industry. It not only enhances the cultural “soft power” of Xuefeng Mountain Tourism but also enriches the cultural lives of residents and tourists. Furthermore, Xuefeng Mountain Tourism Company places great importance on supporting ICH artisans in various forms, such as appointing them as artistic consultants, offering direct assistance, employment opportunities, and workspaces, supporting their research and teaching,

and encouraging them to pass on traditional skills from generation to generation.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration

The core challenge facing the Xuefeng Mountain scenic area lies in the lack of uniform top-level planning, which restricts the integration and upgrading of the local tourism industry's value chain. Due to insufficient coordination among localities and limited enterprise cooperation, it is difficult to achieve economies of scale and fully unleash the brand value of "Enchanting Xuefeng." To overcome this dilemma, a coordinated development strategy should be adopted, where the provincial government takes the lead to formulate a coordinated development plan for the Xuefeng Mountain's tourism industry and a Xuefeng Mountains Culture-Tourism Integrated Development Fund should be established to support the development of value-added products such as ICH products and cultural and creative products. This would drive the transformation of cultural and tourism resources into experiential products and the upgrading from scattered operations to an integrated value chain.

II. Government-Enterprise Collaboration: Overseas Chinese Town (OCT)-Nanshan International Auto Camp in Nyingchi, Xizang to Support Rural Revitalization

Under the government-enterprise collaboration model, enterprises guide the development of tourism projects and optimize the tourism industry in impoverished rural areas with their advantageous technologies. Both parties jointly establish an in-depth mutually beneficial mechanism, investing, collaborating, and sharing the benefits from tourism development, aiming to seek sustainable development and enhance the quality and efficiency of tourism development in impoverished areas.

(I) Case Background

Nyingchi City, located in the southeast of the Xizang Autonomous Region, once faced challenges such as a lack of economic diversity and difficulties in increasing villagers' incomes. In response to these challenges, the OCT-Nanshan International Auto Camp came into being. As a key cross-regional poverty alleviation through the industrial development project of Guangdong Province, the camp was jointly invested in and constructed by Nanshan District, Shenzhen, and the OCT Group. The operating income is used to support poverty alleviation work in Zayu County. The camp is situated in Duobu Village, Bayi District, Nyingchi, close to the intersection of the Nyingchi-Lhasa High-Level Highway and National Highway 318, with convenient transportation access and beautiful natural scenery, attracting a large number of tourists. With the auto camp, Nyingchi has achieved remarkable results in tourism development. In 2023, Nyingchi received a total of 13.17 million domestic and foreign tourists, with a tourism revenue of 11.644 billion yuan¹⁰.

The Nyingchi OCT-Nanshan International Auto Camp conforms to the government-enterprise collaboration model under the external-quality type (Figure 2-6) and has gone through three stages of development. The first stage is collaboration. The government played a guiding and coordinating role, providing land resources and policy guidance for the camp's construction, laying the foundation for its subsequent development. The enterprise was responsible for planning, design, and construction. The district government of Nanshan and the OCT Group jointly invested in and developed the project, providing technical support and capital. The second stage is operation and management. The enterprise is in charge of management and operation, driving the employment and training of residents. The auto camp project has 40 employees, including 13 Tibetans, allowing the villagers to work "at their doorstep"¹¹.

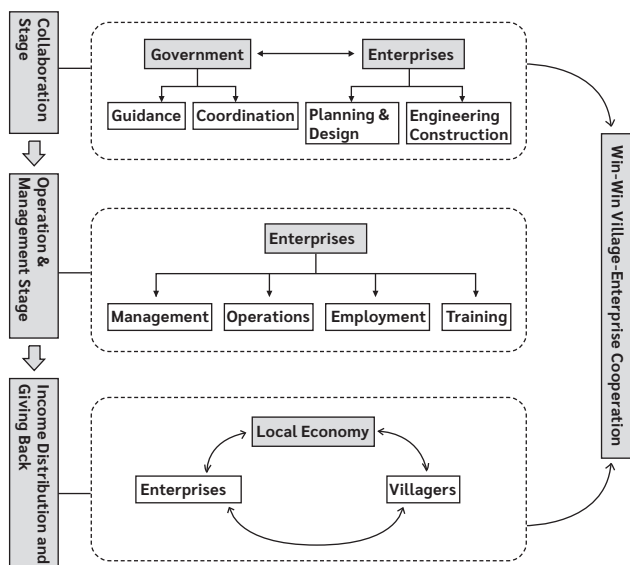


Figure 2-6 Nanshan International Auto Camp's Government-Enterprise Collaboration Model

Source: Created by the author

The third stage is income distribution and giving back to the local community. The camp's operating income is used for targeted poverty alleviation in Zayu County, forming a deep interest linkage between the enterprise and the local community. Villagers work with the camp to earn a living, shedding poverty and increasing income. Through robust operations, the enterprise gains economic and social benefits and enhances its corporate image. In summary, the Nyingchi Auto Camp, through close cooperation between the enterprise and the local government, fully unleashes the advantages of the enterprise and local area to achieve remarkable results in poverty alleviation and rural revitalization through tourism. It demonstrates the effectiveness of the external-quality model for government-enterprise collaboration and injects strong momentum into the region's sustainable development.

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

As a poverty alleviation project, the International Auto Camp helps eliminate poverty through various

means. The camp planted highland barley in the farmland at the entrance and negotiated profit-sharing with villagers, providing them with a stable source of income. It has also employed villagers from 40 local households, helping residents increase their income, including Tibetan, Dong, Bai, and Yi people, effectively promoting progress in poverty alleviation.

2. Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

The camp emphasizes the use of clean energy during its construction and operation and is equipped with 24/7 underfloor heating, Wi-Fi, and smart facilities and equipment. These amenities utilize locally available clean energy sources such as solar energy and hydropower during operation, reducing reliance on traditional non-renewable energy sources and improving the sustainability of energy use, contributing to the goal of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable modern energy for all.

3. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The camp provides skills training for employees, helping them adapt to work standards and requirements of modern societies. Enhancing employees' vocational skills ensures they are competent for their positions and earn decent incomes. Meanwhile, the development of the camp has also spurred employment opportunities in related industries such as catering and transportation, promoting full employment among local residents and driving economic growth.

4. Goal 15: Life on Land

During the planning and construction stage, the auto camp prioritized ecological conservation and pursued green development. The project design adapts to local conditions and takes into account landscapes, products, and flow liens. It utilizes the existing

terrain and vegetation and is designed along the mountain slopes to retain native vegetation such as pine and oak trees as much as possible and minimize environmental damage while effectively protecting the local ecosystem and promoting sustainable ecological development.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Targeting Needs and Expertise: Targeted Government-Enterprise Cooperation Unleashes Development Potential

Targeted cooperation between the government and enterprises is the key to sustainable development. The government should identify local needs, combine them with the expertise of enterprises, and use policies and resource guarantees to attract investment. Enterprises need to drive local development with their expertise. Taking the cooperation between Nanshan District, Shenzhen, and the OCT Group in Nyingchi as an example, the government provides tax incentives, streamlines approval, and ensures land supply to facilitate the progress of the project. The enterprise offers investment, technology, and management, and is responsible for planning, construction, and operation, thereby forming an efficient government-enterprise cooperation model.



Figure 2-7 Bird's View of the Auto Camp

Source: Local authorities

2. Focusing on Regional Endowments: Carefully Crafting Characteristics to Stimulate Development Vitality

Tapping into unique local natural and cultural resources is key to building core competitiveness. When developing tourism or industries, localities should integrate local characteristics into product and service design. The International Auto Camp combines the natural scenery of Nyingchi with Tibetan culture, offering Tibetan-style accommodations and a rich array of cultural experience activities, such as photo shoots in Tibetan costume, which greatly enhances the appeal of tourism products.



Figure 2-8 A Characteristic Hotel at the Auto Camp

Source: Local authorities

3. Deepening Industrial Collaboration to Share Benefits and Seek Win-Win Results

It is crucial to establish close interest linkages with localities during project implementation to achieve mutual promotion. The project should drive the development of local industries and promote economic diversity. It is also essential to ensure that local residents benefit from the project. The International Auto Camp allocates its operating revenue to poverty alleviation efforts, which not only spurs the development of related industries

such as catering and transportation, boosting the employment, income, and living standards of local impoverished residents but also effectively enhances the corporate image, fulfilling the company's corporate social responsibility and producing industrial synergies.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Infrastructure and Public Services

The core challenge currently faced by the Auto Camp is that its infrastructure and public services are unable to meet the demands of tourism development. This is mainly manifested in traffic congestion during peak seasons, inconvenient access to public transportation, unstable water and electricity supplies, insufficient sanitary facilities, and a lack of recreational facilities. Although the camp occupies a certain market share in the tourism industry thanks to its geographical location and unique services, the shortcomings in basic services have constrained its further development. To break this bottleneck, it is advisable to collaborate with the transportation department to optimize the surrounding roads, such as by designing tidal lanes and emergency lanes, increasing the bus trip frequency, and launching direct buses from the urban area to the camp. A comprehensive overhaul and upgrade of water and electricity facilities should be conducted, including increasing water storage and power supply equipment, reasonably adding sanitary facilities, and strengthening sanitation management.

III. Loan-Guided Development: The World Bank Protects Gansu's Cultural Heritage to the Benefit of the People

The loan-guided development model is a poverty reduction approach in which external financial enterprises or organizations inject funds into impoverished areas to guide their targeted development. This model utilizes financial loans as startup capital to steer impoverished areas toward

developing tourism, thereby driving economic growth, increasing income, and reducing poverty among the impoverished population.

(I) Case Background

The Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area in Zhangye City, Gansu Province, is located within the experimental area of the Qilian Mountain National Nature Reserve and is an important cultural heritage site. It was once a key area for poverty alleviation. In 2005, with the approval of the central government, the Gansu Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection and Development Project, funded by a World Bank loan, was implemented, and the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area was included. With its unique grotto culture and the loan from the World Bank, the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area promoted the integration of culture and tourism, strengthened the protection of cultural relics, developed cultural and creative products, improved infrastructure, and organized training for tourism practitioners to enhance service quality. In recent years, the local tourism industry has flourished. In 2024, it received 480,000 tourists and generated ticket revenues of over 24 million yuan, effectively promoting local economic development and rural revitalization¹².

The loan from the World Bank fits Mati into the loan-guided development model within the external-quality approach (as shown in Figure 2-9). The specific operational chain is as follows: First, the targeted investment from external capital. The loans for the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area mainly come from the World Bank, which amounts to 23.5375 million yuan, including a World Bank loan of 2.05 million US dollars and supporting funds of 7.7525 million yuan. These funds were used to strengthen cultural heritage protection, such as grotto restoration and cultural relic reinforcement; upgrade the infrastructure, including the construction and enhancement of roads, water supply systems,

power facilities, and the tourist center; enhance public services and hardware facilities, such as parking lots, toilets, and sewage treatment systems. Finally, the goal of poverty reduction and sustainable development is achieved based on the tourist attraction's improvement and empowerment by employment. With the significant improvement of the environment, the number of tourists has increased substantially, with stable tourist sources. Villagers in surrounding villages such as Mati and Yaocao actively participate in tourism operations, engaging in businesses such as ethnic cuisine, handicraft sales, and horse-leading services. The upgrading and development of the tourist attraction has also created a series of jobs, such as tour guides, security personnel, and sanitary workers, attracting a large number of young people to come back. In summary, relying on loan support from the World Bank and multi-party collaboration, the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area has deeply tapped into the value of cultural heritage and improved the infrastructure, achieving remarkable results under the loan-guided development model and providing strong support for local rural revitalization and sustainable development.

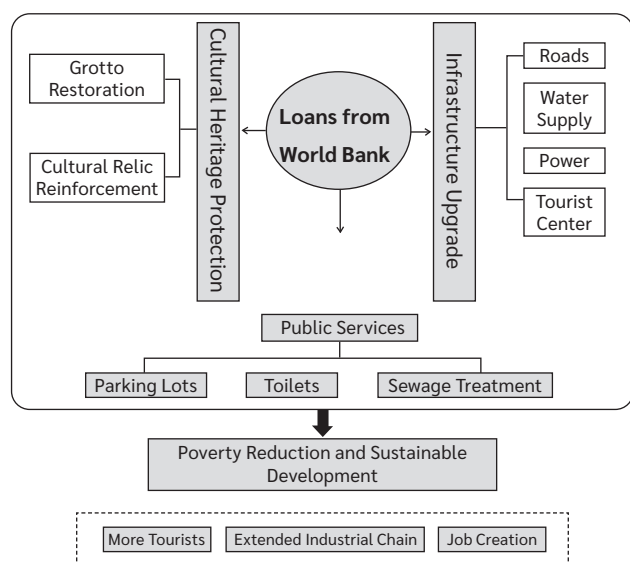


Figure 2-9 Loan-Guided Development Model of Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area in Gansu

Source: Created by the author

(II) Benchmarked against the SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

The development of the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area has increased the income of villagers in surrounding villages such as Mati, Yaocao, Xiaosier, Changling, and Daduma. It has provided villagers with various ways to make more earnings, such as running ethnic specialty restaurants and souvenir stores, and horse-leading services, enabling them to shake off poverty and improve their livelihoods. For example, by opening stores or providing services within the tourist attraction, over 40 villagers from Xiaosier have seen their annual income grow by 30,000-50,000 yuan¹³.

2. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

With its continuous growth and expansion, the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area has created a lot of various jobs for local residents, such as tour guiding, security, cleaning, catering, and souvenir sales. Meanwhile, various skill training programs have been organized to enhance the service quality and skills of employees, enabling residents to secure more decent and well-paid jobs.

3. Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area has emphasized infrastructure construction during its development. New facilities such as parking lots and public toilets have been built, which are freely accessible to local residents, greatly improving local living conditions. Additionally, the development of the tourist attraction has promoted the development of rural tourism in the surrounding areas, boosting the regional economy and enhancing the community's sustainable development, contributing to the building of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.

4. Goal 15: Life on Land

The Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area has implemented a series of environmental protection projects. All staff are mobilized to green and improve the environment while protecting vegetation and wildlife. Over the years, they have monitored the status of vegetation conservation and fed and taken care of wild animals such as blue-eared pheasants, gray magpies, and roe deer. The wild plants and animals have been effectively protected, and the habitats of various biological populations have been further improved.

5. Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

The World Bank's loan support for the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area project has promoted international cooperation and resource sharing, reflecting the important role of global partnerships in driving local development. This cooperation model provides valuable experience for other regions, facilitating exchanges and cooperation in areas such as cultural heritage protection and tourism development among different countries and regions, and contributing to the realization of the SDGs.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Utilizing External Funds in a Targeted Way to Unleash Internal Driving Forces

The World Bank's loans have provided crucial financial support for the development of tourist attractions in major areas such as cultural heritage protection and infrastructure construction, ensuring that external funds can truly stimulate local driving forces and promote sustainable development. Other localities should actively seek external funding that matches their own development needs, introduce funds from international organizations or other external institutions when appropriate, and promote the

implementation of local projects.



Figure 2-10 Mati Temple Tourist Service Center

Source: Local authorities

2. Promoting Cultural Heritage Protection and Improving People's Livelihoods

The Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area regards cultural heritage as an important resource for driving economic development. With the aid of World Bank funds, it has repaired grottoes and improved infrastructure to protect cultural heritage and enhance the appeal of local tourism. The drastic increase in tourist numbers has driven villagers' income growth, achieving a virtuous cycle of "protection, development, sharing." The key to this path lies in recognizing the dual value of cultural heritage, enhancing its economic benefits through reasonable development, and then using the proceeds for further protection and improving people's livelihoods, thus forming a sustainable



Figure 2-11 Waterproof Engineering Construction of the Exhibition Hall

Source: Local authorities

development model.

3. Stimulating Local Potential with International Cooperation

Global experience needs to be integrated with local practice to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach. The World Bank provides funds and technology, while local teams in Gansu lead the implementation and designing of tourism products in line with local characteristics. During the cooperation, international standards are introduced while local traditions are preserved, forming a constantly upgrading partnership through long-term cooperation. This model serves as a good example of international cooperation. Other localities should fully consider local conditions when carrying out international cooperation projects, and unleash local advantages to deeply integrate international experience with local practice.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Promotion and Protection of Cultural Resources

The core challenge currently faced by the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area lies in its relatively traditional promotion methods and undiversified protection measures. Despite its unique grotto culture and the development of the tourism industry with the support of World Bank loans, the unique charm of its cultural resources has not been fully revealed, limiting its appeal to tourists. In terms of cultural heritage protection, there is a lack of innovative initiatives. To address this bottleneck, the Mati Ecological and Cultural Tourism Area should introduce new methods for cultural resource promotion, such as utilizing new media platforms to produce exquisite short videos and organize livestreaming sessions to highlight the charm of grotto culture. Events such as grotto culture festivals, art exhibitions, and academic forums should be organized to attract more tourists’ attention.

IV. Technical Guidance: The “Azheke Plan” for Tourism-Driven Poverty Reduction in Yuanyang, Yunnan

Under the technical guidance model, external organizations send technical teams to offer guidance throughout the project, enriching the products and forms of rural tourism, improving governance rules, fostering a sense of contract and villagers’ leadership and management capabilities, to facilitate local villagers’ autonomy.

(I) Case Background

Azheke Village is located within the core protection area of the Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces in Yuanyang County, Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. It is a typical Hani ethnic settlement, home to 65 households with a total population of 365 residents. Supported and guided by rural tourism, ethnic culture, and local elements of the village, tourism, culture, and agriculture are organically integrated, as the villager explores a new model of rural revitalization in all respects through technology empowerment from outside. Since it kicked off the development of local rural tourism in February 2019, as of December 2024, Azheke had received a cumulative total of 198,000 tourists from at home and abroad, earning a tourism revenue of 5.194 million yuan¹⁴. The “Azheke Plan,” a Chinese model of poverty reduction through tourism, drew a lot of attention worldwide, and Azheke was elected as a “Best Tourism Village” by UN Tourism on November 15, 2024.

Specifically, Azheke Village adopts an internal model based on technical guidance (Figure 2-12). Under the local government’s planning, a dual-track mechanism of “talent deployment + capital injection” is established. Young cadres are selected and stationed in the village, and special startup funds are set up. The School of Tourism Management at Sun Yat-

sen University provides research talent support and technical guidance, offering assistance in fields such as village planning, heritage protection, and tourism development. With these external forces, villagers are guided to establish a travel company, injecting fresh vitality into the village. Based on the concept of tourism attraction rights¹⁵, this model guides villagers to acquire stakes in the travel company with their symbolic tourism attraction rights such as traditional residential buildings, terraced fields, and living cultural landscapes. The company regularly convenes dividend distribution meetings and offers employment opportunities to transform resources into assets and villagers into shareholders in the village. The allocation principle for tourism attraction dividends is as follows: 30% of tourism revenue goes to the company and 70% goes to the villagers. The villagers' dividends are allocated into four parts (40% for traditional residential buildings protection, 30% for terraced-fields protection, 20% for residences, and 10% for household registration). After the plan is implemented, significant changes have occurred to the village. More and more tourists have come from at home and abroad, driving the growth of revenue from tourism and many self-employed individuals have emerged, enabling villagers to earn a living and receive dividends at their doorstep. Moreover, through optimizing the inheritance and promotion of ethnic culture, local talents are cultivated and villagers' awareness of education is enhanced. In general, relying on the technical guidance of the team from Sun Yat-sen University, the local government has sustained the village's tourism development, demonstrating the importance of technical guidance in poverty reduction and rural revitalization through tourism.

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

The stationed team has designed traditional sightseeing and customized tourism projects for

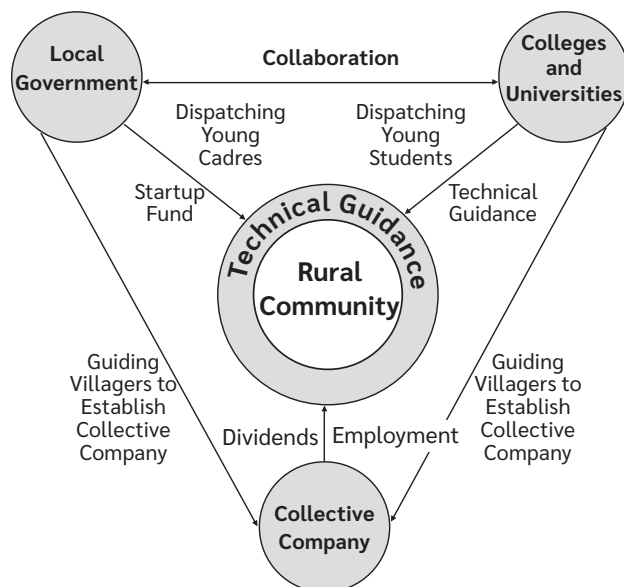


Figure 2-12 Technical Guidance Model of Azheke Village in Yuanyang, Yunnan

Source: Created by the author

Azheke Village. With the concerted efforts of all villagers, as of December 2024, the village's tourism earnings exceeded 5 million yuan and dividends amounted to 2.33 million yuan, with an average of over 30,000 yuan per household, thus lifting all impoverished households out of poverty¹⁶. Led by the project team, every household in the village was able to benefit economically from heritage protection and tourism development.

2. Goal 4: Quality Education

The team has completed the preparatory work for the establishment of a village history museum and built a history and culture exhibition hall, a reading room, and a public communication space. College student volunteers are recruited to form the Azheke Science Society, which regularly organizes cultural and recreational activities, reading, painting, movie-sharing salons, etc. at the village history museum for the children of migrant workers. This stimulates their learning interest, cultivates good study habits, and enhances their understanding of traditional Hani culture, enabling them to enjoy quality education

outside the classroom.

3. Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The aforesaid travel company hires villagers as cleaning workers. By laying down rules and regulations, the villagers committee guides villagers to assume responsibility for sanitation, greening, and orderliness at their doorsteps, and village-wide cleaning efforts are organized regularly. In addition, the company has improved roads, tourist toilets, sewage treatment facilities, and interior renovation of traditional dwellings. The living environment has been significantly improved, making Azheke more livable and business-friendly.

4. Goal 15: Life on Land

In promoting tourism development, the village has always prioritized conservation and safeguarding its living heritage, especially “forests, villages, terraced fields, and water systems,” incorporating heritage protection such as traditional dwellings, terraced fields, and forest and water source conservation into village regulations. A terraced field management committee has been established to regularly oversee ecological and settlement protection work. Traditional farming cultural practices such as the “ditch cleaners” have been revived, contributing to the sustainable development of the mountain ecosystem in the village.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Stationing a Technical Team in the Village to Empower Rural Growth

External forces such as college students continuously empower rural development with their expertise in research and innovation. Over 20 graduate students of Sun Yat-sen University have been sent successively to the village, providing comprehensive technical

guidance for the village’s development. For the travel company, the stationed team not only guides daily management but also provides hands-on teaching to address villagers’ skill shortcomings, such as writing, *Putonghua* (simplified Chinese), bookkeeping, basic English, and computer operations. In terms of culture building, various cultural activities are organized, rural libraries are opened, and movies are regularly screened, enriching villagers’ cultural lives.



Figure 2-13 Tourism Dividends Conference of Azheke Village

Source: Local authorities

2. Introducing an Internal and External Interest Linkage Mechanism to Promote a Virtuous Cycle between Protection and Development

Azheke has established an interest linkage mechanism centered around the aforesaid travel company. Villagers take stakes in the company with resources such as terraced fields and houses to become direct participants and beneficiaries of tourism development. The government promotes tourism infrastructure construction and public service improvement through policy support and capital investment, facilitating local industrial development. The team from Sun Yat-sen University provides technical assistance and intellectual support to optimize and upgrade tourism planning, management, and marketing. This innovative mechanism not only enables the villagers to earn more and get rich but also further stimulates

their enthusiasm for protecting terraced fields and traditional dwellings, achieving a virtuous cycle between protection and development.



Figure 2-14 Assembly of Villagers Organized by Stationed Personnel

Source: Local authorities

3. Awakening Villagers' Awareness of Tourism Attraction Rights and Stimulating Their Endogenous Drive for Growth

Guiding and nurturing local villagers' awareness of tourism attraction rights through technical assistance is a fundamental approach to stimulating rural vitality. Through skill training programs organized by the stationed team, such as training on agricultural technology, tourism service, and cultural heritage, villagers' skills and cultural literacy have been effectively enhanced. Many women have mastered traditional handicrafts such as weaving and dyeing, which not only helps in passing on ethnic culture but also increases their income through the sales of handicrafts. Additionally, targeted educational support has been provided to left-behind children in the village, including establishing rural libraries, organizing the "Azheke Science Society," and setting up educational scholarships, to encourage them to pursue their studies, thereby enhancing their scientific and cultural literacy and laying a solid foundation for the village's long-term development. Practices

have demonstrated that the innovative experiment of "tourism attraction rights" has significantly stimulated the endogenous drive of rural areas, contributing a Chinese proposal for the utilization of tourism resource property rights.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Social Sustainability

The core challenge currently faced by Azheke Village lies in the contradiction between the preservation of authentic heritage and the rapid growth of agritainment operations among villagers. Guided by the stationed team, the village has initially established villagers' autonomy in collectively run companies. However, it remains relatively difficult to manage the business operations of individual villagers, resulting in a potential imbalance between the preservation of rural authenticity and the commercial operations of tourism. To overcome this bottleneck, the village should adopt a strategy of "moderate commercialization," trying to preserve rural authenticity and lives, conduct more market research and analysis, adjust tourism products and services in time to cater to tourist demands, and offer culturally rich tourism products, thus striking a balance between authenticity and commerce.

Section Three External-Speed Model

I. Corporate Support: Douyin Becomes a New Pillar for Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism

Corporate support exemplifies a classic external commensalism model that enables the rapid establishment of a symbiotic network for poverty reduction, in collaboration with governments and communities in impoverished areas. Within this network, large enterprises, leveraging their industry expertise and promotional channels, play a central role, delivering remarkable short-term poverty alleviation results.

(I) Case Background

The economic development of impoverished areas is often restricted due to their lack of ability to promote, tap into market value, and build platforms. In 2018, Douyin Group officially launched the “Douyin Helps Rural Tourism Shine” project to reduce poverty, achieving targeted poverty alleviation through services and support such as new media training, traffic steering, and standards setting. Since 2022, the project has been deepened with Douyin’s lifestyle services, promoting the digital upgrading of cultural and tourism industries in rural areas through features such as short videos and live streaming. With the unfolding of the “Douyin Rural Initiative,” rural areas have witnessed industrial upgrading, cultural dissemination, and increased income for farmers. As of the end of December 2024, the project covered 60,000 rural tourism operators, achieved tourism transactions worth 5 billion yuan and attracted approximately 22.65 million tourists¹⁷.

The aforesaid project launched by Douyin Group conforms to the corporate assistance model within the external-speed approach (Figure 2-15). Focusing on the three key factors of “industry, culture, and talent,” it constructs a path for enterprises to empower rural development. First, transforming “short videos + live streaming” into “new farming tools.” Douyin’s e-commerce and lifestyle services promote the online sales of local agricultural specialties and tourism products through quality content and platforms, providing targeted support for core industries of rural areas. Second, “new business forms” are developed by tapping into local cultures and combining intangible cultural heritage with innovative tourism products. Stories of rural culture are promoted through short videos and live-streaming content created with promotional ambassadors, driving the integration of culture and tourism. Third, “new stages” of rural areas are built through digital training programs and talent programs

such as the “Rural Talent Initiative.” New media training programs are organized for local operators while supporting local pioneers to engage more villagers in e-commerce and cultural and tourism operations, thus cultivating the internal backbone for rural development. In summary, Douyin Group fully leverages its platform-based advantages as an internet company to support the development of local tourism and quickly gains widespread popularity, embodying the advantages of the “external-speed” corporate support model.

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

Douyin Group precisely distributes traffic based on its advantaged algorithms, opening up information channels for impoverished areas and promoting the implementation of poverty alleviation through tourism projects in nine national-level impoverished

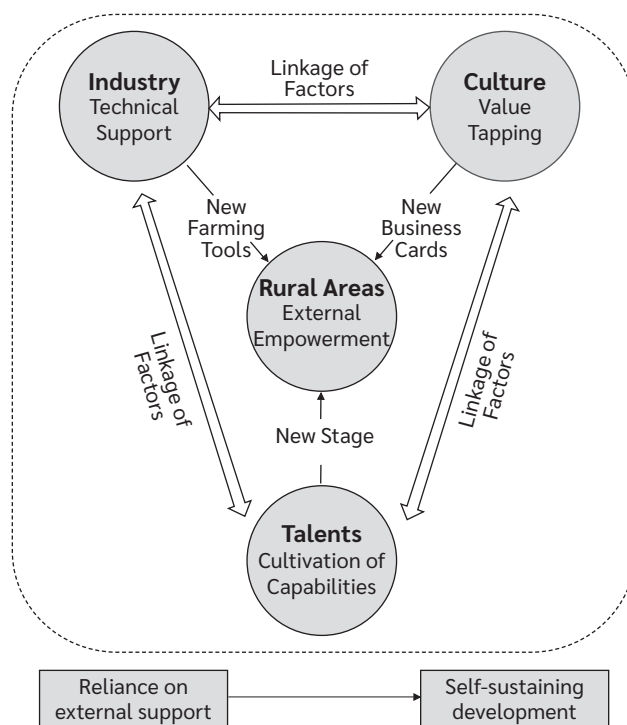


Figure 2-15 Beijing Douyin Group’s Corporate Support Model

Source: Created by the author

counties, including Luanchuan in Henan, Yonghe in Shanxi, and Libo in Guizhou. It has allocated 5.5 billion traffic for impoverished areas, enabling over 100,000 impoverished people to benefit from the tourism industry.

2. Goal 4: Quality Education

Focusing on vocational skills and digital literacy, Douyin organizes new media skills training for impoverished areas to cultivate local talents. Adopting an online-offline training model, it organizes case-based training on topics such as delving into rural characteristics and operations based on online platforms, enabling locals to master skills such as short-video making and live streaming, thereby cultivating forces for rural development.

3. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Douyin Group organizes new media training programs in targeted areas to promote skills such as content creation and live streaming among tourist attraction staff, rural business operators, and content creators. In this way, it cultivates local influencers and professional teams, helping impoverished areas to develop independent capabilities in content production and traffic acquisition and create local employment opportunities.

4. Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Douyin Group deeply integrates technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence into rural tourism scenarios, while promoting the construction and development of digital infrastructure. Through the intelligent POI (Point of Interest) technology, it links up “content, location, and consumption,” enabling tourists to locate tourist attractions and homestays through short videos and complete online transactions. Local enterprises can also claim locations and launch products online, greatly

enhancing their digital operation capabilities.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Addressing the Digitization Gap with Advanced Technologies

Relying on big data and AI algorithms, a system of “technologies plus scenarios” is established. Short videos are linked with offline points such as tourist attractions and homestays, allowing users to directly locate consumption scenarios and complete online transactions while watching videos, thus forming a closed loop of consumption. Meanwhile, precise traffic allocation is achieved with the aid of algorithms, providing targeted traffic support for local projects such as the homestay cluster in Xixinan and the intangible cultural heritage experience of fish lanterns in Huangshan, Anhui. Technologies are applied to drive the development of digital infrastructure projects in impoverished areas, strengthen digital infrastructure, and stimulate the dynamic impetus for rural tourism development with technology.

2. Promoting Integrated Industrial Development in Rural Areas Driven by Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism

With the aid of platform traffic and content ecosystem, market demand is boosted through online traffic. For example, by launching local challenges (such as “Douyin Helps Hunan’s Rural Tourism Shine”) and inviting A-list influencers (such as Fang Qi) to create high-quality short videos, the cultural and tourism resources in rural areas are visualized, attracting the attention and consumption from users. During this process, a series of online marketing and promotion activities such as “short videos + live streaming + product sales” are launched based on tourist guide resources to promote the sales of local agricultural specialties and cultural and

tourism products. Meanwhile, Douyin Group opens express channels for various rural business operators and assigns special staff to help them launch their business and products on the platform, thereby facilitating the integrated development of rural characteristic industries.



Figure 2-16 One-to-one Training on Intangible Cultural Heritage Handicrafts

Source: Local authorities

3. Identifying and Training Rural Young Talents

Based on talent projects, new media operation training is conducted to build a reserve talent pool for rural areas. Through practical courses on new media operation and live commerce, local influencers such as “Qiaofu Jiumei” in Guangxi have been cultivated, who sell and promote agricultural products through short videos and increase the income of farmers. The training system adheres to the basic principle of “combining learning with application,” provides traffic support, and helps trainees master skills such as content creation and online transactions. For example, Douyin Group supports the cultural experience project of the Miao drum inheritor in Dehang Village, Hunan, further attracting other residents to participate in the village’s tourism industry, forming a virtuous cycle of “talents driving the development of industries and thriving industries gathering talents.” As of the end of November 2024,

talent training programs such as the “Rural Talent Initiative” had cumulatively offered 51,000 training opportunities in 25 provincial regions nationwide, including Guizhou, Sichuan, and Shandong, injecting endogenous momentum for rural development¹⁸.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration

The industry chain of rural tourism connects various types of business entities with diverse operational difficulties and digital capabilities. How to maximize the effectiveness and value of operational strategies for business entities at different development stages is a major challenge at present. It is suggested that Beijing Douyin Group adopt tiered management and operation methods for different types of business entities, such as merchants, scenic spots, and homestay operators, and bring the role of different industries and merchants into play in supporting the development of agriculture and maximizing benefits.

II. Government Assistance: Paired Assistance for Guizhou’s Congjiang from Xiaoshan of Hangzhou, Zhejiang

The government assistance model, from the perspective of the entities in building a symbiotic network, mainly refers to pairing economically developed areas with poverty-stricken areas for assistance. The government of the developed area encourages the involvement of enterprises and social capital, through measures such as industrial support, investment promotion, and paired assistance.

(I) Case Background

Located on the remote southeastern edge of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Congjiang County is faced with difficulties in poverty alleviation through tourism. In 2013, it established the paired-assistance relationship with Xiaoshan of

Hangzhou, strengthening cooperation in poverty alleviation through tourism by “going out and bringing in,” which has yielded significant results. Since 2020, the county’s rural tourism economy has been developing. In 2023, the county received 4.1818 million tourists and earned an income of 4.584 billion yuan from the tourism industry, a year-on-year increase of 26.87% and 38.07%, respectively¹⁹.

The aforesaid paired assistance is a typical government assistance model. To effectively address the challenges of poverty alleviation through tourism in Congjiang County, Xiaoshan District has taken a series of measures (Figure 2-17). It has invested in tourism resource development and infrastructure construction. As of May 2021, Xiaoshan had cumulatively invested 164.2 million yuan from fiscal funds and attracted the participation of social capital worth 45.4872 million yuan²⁰ to the county. It also strives to build local industrial platforms and develop local emerging industries based on local endowments. First, developing “Lianghua” homestays, where local villagers contribute their idle houses as equity, participate in the operations, and share the dividends, which has effectively increased the income of impoverished households. Second, opening restaurants for the purpose of poverty alleviation. Through the “Xiaoconghui Poverty Alleviation Restaurant” and the “Xiaoconghui JD Store,” it has promoted the integration of catering, local specialties, and culture. Third, high-end cooperation in agriculture. Xiaoshan led the establishment of a seedling industry cooperative, transformed Congjiang into a cultural sanctuary for ethnic cultures, and invested in the development of intangible cultural heritage. Finally, concerted efforts have been made to promote the consumption of products from impoverished areas, enhancing local tourism marketing, and strengthening talent exchange and cooperation. Xiaoshan promotes the consumption of products from impoverished areas through trade fairs and shopping festivals, deepens exchanges

and cooperation with local culture and tourism authorities in such aspects as tourist attractions, routes, and talent, and supports cooperation between enterprises and media, to continuously consolidate poverty reduction achievements. In summary, with its economic and technological advantages, Xiaoshan has effectively assisted Congjiang in enhancing its tourism development capacity, highlighting the advantage of the external-speed government assistance model.

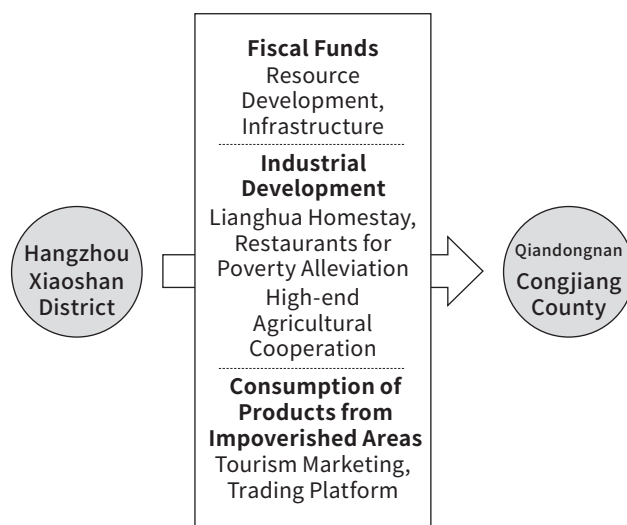


Figure 2-17 The Paired Assistance Model between Xiaoshan and Congjiang

Source: Created by the author

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

At the Luanli Folk Customs Park, the poverty alleviation restaurant is operated by a company under a cooperative model offering annual dividends, increasing the income of farmers and boosting the village’s collective economy. Tourist attractions such as Basha and Jiabang have received over ten thousand tourists from Hangzhou each year, which directly contributes to the income growth of local residents. In addition, Xiaoshan has promoted the consumption of products from impoverished areas through events such as trade fairs and shopping festivals, promoting

the sales of agricultural and sideline products from Congjiang County.

2. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Xiaoshan District values supporting the training and employment in Congjiang County. It has sent experts to Congjiang to organize activities such as class reviews, lectures, and demonstrations. In 2018, Xiaoshan organized 37 enterprises to launch job fairs in Congjiang, providing over 6,000 job opportunities and helping 273 impoverished individuals find a job²¹.

3. Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

Xiaoshan's assistance has not only lifted the county out of poverty but also made significant contributions to narrowing the local income gap and promoting social equality. Through assistance in such aspects as industrial development, education, social security, and employment, the impoverished population of the county has earned more, and their abilities and lives have been improved, which has effectively narrowed the wealth gap and promoted social equity.

4. Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

With its e-commerce advantages, Xiaoshan has dedicated special zones on e-commerce platforms for the sales of agricultural products from Congjiang County. Through measures such as trade fairs and e-commerce, it has carried out a series of promotional and marketing activities with the county to broaden the sales channels for agricultural products. The Xiaoshan district government calls on its enterprises, institutions, and citizens to purchase agricultural specialties from Congjiang, thus increasing the income of impoverished households. The online-offline consumption of products from impoverished areas provides green and sustainable sales channels for agricultural and sideline products from Congjiang County.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Guiding Social Capital to Promote Tourism Development and Establish a Symbiotic Network

Xiaoshan has fully utilized its economic advantages to guide social capital to the development of tourism resources in Congjiang County. The governments and enterprises have worked together to plan and develop a series of tourism projects with local characteristics, such as the "Lianghua" homestay, poverty alleviation restaurants, and the sales of agricultural products. Notably, the high-end "Lianghua" homestay was developed with an investment of nearly 10 million yuan in 2018. Relying on the unique landscapes of terraced fields in Jiabang, it not only provides excellent accommodation experiences for tourists but also forms a symbiotic network with Congjiang's natural scenery and ethnic culture. The tourism industry has become an important driver of the county's economic growth.

2. Advocating Consumption of Products from Impoverished Areas and Broadening Sales Channels to Increase Income from Tourism

Consumption of products from impoverished areas is one of Xiaoshan's strategies in assisting Congjiang's poverty reduction through tourism. Through models such as "purchasing instead of donating," "loving purchases," and trade fairs, it has increased the income of poverty-stricken households. Sales zones dedicated to agricultural products have been opened at tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants, and tourist distribution centers, broadening the sales channels for agricultural products. Additionally, a series of promotional and marketing activities have been launched through trade fairs and e-commerce. For example, during e-commerce promotional sales events, Xiaoshan has leveraged its advantages in e-commerce and launched a special event of "June 18 Trade Fair for Products from Impoverished Areas"

with the “Congjiang Specialty Store” as the carrier, promoting products of Congjiang such as ricefield fish and mushrooms so that “products from Guizhou” reach a wider market.



Figure 2-18 Terraced Fields at Jiabang of Congjiang County

Source: Local authorities

3. Enhancing Personnel Exchanges and Cultivating Local Tourism Professionals for Self-Sustaining Development

To elevate the tourism management and service standards in the county, Congjiang and Xiaoshan have actively promoted tourism talent exchanges. The Alibaba Xiaoshan Industrial Cluster has signed an agreement with Congjiang on e-commerce cooperation. Delivering various online and offline



Figure 2-19 Harvest of Ricefield Fish at Congjiang County

Source: Local authorities

e-commerce training courses enhances the skills and service quality of local tourism practitioners and their skills in e-commerce promotion, enabling them to lift themselves out of poverty and cultivating many professional, experienced tourism practitioners for the long-term development of Congjiang's tourism industry.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Infrastructure and Connectivity

The core challenge facing Congjiang County lies in the underdevelopment of its tourist transportation infrastructure, which has become the key bottleneck to capitalizing on local tourism resources. Despite its rich tourism resources, the rugged mountainous terrain has significantly affected the tourist experience since it takes long hours to go from one tourist attraction to another. The existing road network not only fails to meet tourists' needs for comfortable travel but also impedes the realization of the modern tourism trend characterized by less time on travel and more time in tourist attractions. To overcome this dilemma, Congjiang should prioritize the upgrading of transportation infrastructure and overcome the terrain constraints by developing an easily accessible and interconnected transportation system, thus laying a solid foundation for the high-quality development of the tourism industry.

Section Four Internal-Quality Model

I. Cooperative-Driven Development: Altay, Xinjiang Attaches Equal Importance to Development and Protection of Ancient Villages

The cooperative-driven development model in the internal-speed category draws collective strength, driving tourism development with local human and natural resources and optimizing the industrial ecosystem by setting standards and regulating operations. Engaging local villagers in the tourism

industry allows them to share the development fruits and promotes local economic growth and prosperity.

(I) Case Background

Kom-Kanas Mongolian Ethnic Township in Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, is located in the mid-section of the Altai Mountains. It borders Kazakhstan and Russia to the north and Mongolia to the east, governing two administrative villages: Kanas and Kom. Due to poor geographical conditions and lack of industrial diversity, the ancient villages here once faced challenges such as population drain, dilapidated buildings, and disrupted cultural heritage preservation. In recent years, driven by the rural revitalization strategy, the local government has pinned its hopes on the tourism industry. Horse team cooperatives offer tourists a unique horseback-riding experience, while homestay cooperatives regulate the management of homestays to enhance their competitiveness, driving the development of related industries. In 2024, the Township received over 2 million tourists, with the village collectives' income exceeding 6 million yuan²². Tourism has made outstanding contributions to local sustainable development.

The Kom-Kanas Township exemplifies the internal-quality cooperative-driven development model (Figure 2-20), with the following distinctive features. First, resource integration. Local cooperatives tap into their natural and cultural resources. Horse team cooperatives offer equine tourism routes and homestay cooperatives renovate traditional dwellings while preserving their original look to provide tourists with a unique homestay experience. Second, industrial synergy. Centered around culture and tourism, various characteristic industries such as ethnic cuisine and handicrafts have flourished. For instance, villagers produce delicacies such as baked *nang* (a type of bread) and produce and sell traditional handicrafts like those of the Kazak,

effectively extending the tourism industry chain. Third, cultural heritage inheritance and protection. The Kom-Kanas Township highly values the protection and inheritance of folk culture and organizes Naadam (the biggest festival among the Mongolian ethnic group) and the Aken Aytes fair (or Aken Songs, a folk art form popular among the Kazakh ethnic group), to showcase horse racing, singing and dancing, encouraging young people to learn and inherit intangible cultural heritage like handicrafts and costumes-making. Fourth, participatory development for all. Organized by cooperatives, villagers are actively engaged in various tourism services, including horse breeding, homestay operation, catering, and tourist guide service, and increase their income, which in turn heightens their enthusiasm for tourism-related business, demonstrating the unique advantages and vitality of this model. In summary, the Township leverages local resources of ancient villages, mobilizes participatory development through cooperatives, and has achieved resource integration, industrial synergy, cultural heritage conservation, and benefits for all, bringing the advantages of the internal-quality model into full play.

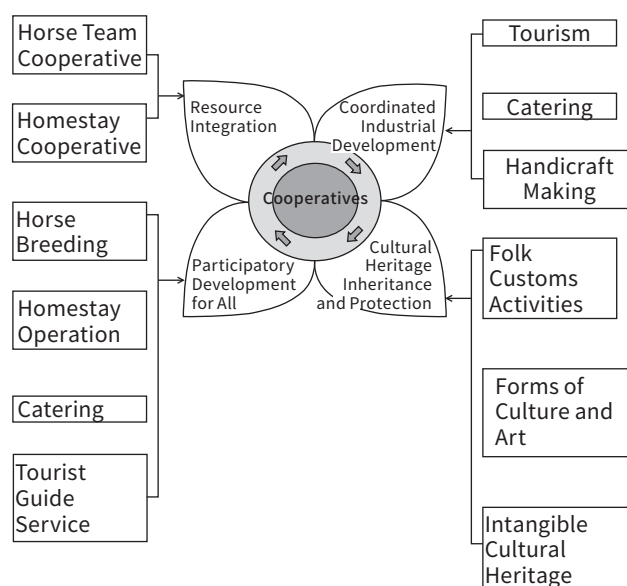


Figure 2-20 Cooperative-Driven Development Model in Kom-Kanas Township, Altay, Xinjiang

Source: Created by the author

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

The Township adopts the cooperative-driven development model to engage local villagers in tourism operations and services to develop the local tourism industry. Horse team and homestay cooperatives have created many jobs, significantly increasing local villagers' income. Currently, the vast majority of the 588 farming and herding households in Kom Village are engaged in winter tourism operations, which alone increased household incomes by approximately 150,000 yuan per year²³.

2. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The booming tourism industry has promoted local economic growth, with tourism revenue accounting for nearly 80% of the Township's total income and showing an upward trend. Simultaneously, it has created a lot of decent jobs for villagers, covering fields such as hotel operations, guided tours, catering, and equine tourism services. It has also attracted college graduates to start businesses and work in homestay and e-commerce, enhancing employment quality and economic vitality.

3. Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

The Kom-Kanas Township focuses on the sustainable utilization and development of resources. It utilizes local resources such as natural landscapes, traditional architecture, and folk culture to develop tourism products, such as horse riding and sightseeing, folk culture experiences, and ethnic homestays. It also emphasizes ecological environmental protection, protects and renovates ancient buildings, and inherits and promotes traditional folk culture. In this process, it has reduced environmental damage, coordinated efforts to boost economic growth and protect the environment, and promoted sustainable consumption

and production.

4. Goal 15: Life on Land

During tourism development, the Township attaches great importance to eco-environmental protection and actively protects the mountain ecosystem, forest resources, etc. For example, the local government has invested in improving human settlement, protecting the ecological environment around ancient villages, and reducing the negative impacts of human activities on the ecosystem, thus promoting the sustainable utilization of terrestrial ecosystems. It also protects habitats for rare species like the Mongolian beaver, contributing to biodiversity conservation.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Establishing Cooperatives Based on Local Resources and Promoting Participatory Development for Shared Tourism Dividends

The Township taps into local resources such as horses, folk culture, and traditional architecture and has established horse team cooperatives, homestay cooperatives, etc. All villagers are actively involved in equine tourism services and homestay operations to promote the development of local tourism and share the economic benefits, making the tourism industry a key driver of local economic growth and income increase. According to statistics, in 2023, the per capita income in Kom Village reached 45,000 yuan. Along with the rapid growth of the local tourism industry, the villagers' income has also increased significantly²⁴.

2. Promoting Industrial Integration to Extend the Industry Chain and Enhance the Comprehensive Competitiveness of Local Tourism Industry

Centered around the tourism industry, local governments integrate agriculture with tourism

by offering agricultural specialties and farming experiences to tourists. The Township aggressively promotes the deep integration of the horse industry and tourism and develops programs such as horseback touring, equestrian performances, and horse culture experiences. Simultaneously, it continuously extends the industry chain, with new industries such as mare's milk processing and handicraft making, enhancing the comprehensive competitiveness of local tourism and providing tourists with a rich array of tourism products and services.



Figure 2-21 Traditional Dwellings at Kom-Kanas Township

Source: Local authorities

3. Conserving Cultural Heritage and Blending It into Tours

The Township attaches great importance to the protection and inheritance of traditional folk culture and ancient craftsmanship. Organizing folk customs activities and cultivating intangible cultural heritage artisans allows tourists to deeply understand local culture and adds cultural depth to the tourist experience. For example, folk customs activities such as horse racing, wrestling, and Aken Songs performances are organized regularly to showcase the cultural and artistic forms of Mongolian and Kazak ethnic groups. Villagers are encouraged to learn traditional craftsmanship like fur ski board making, to give it a new life in the development of modern tourism.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Economic Sustainability

The core challenge facing the Township lies in the poor sustainability of its tourism economy, mainly manifested by the lack of industrial diversity, a significant income gap between peak and slack seasons, and the vulnerability of tourism enterprises against risks. Although the tourism industry has brought certain economic benefits during the peak season, it excessively depends on traditional sightseeing tours and homestays and lacks diversified profit-making products and services. The tourism income of practitioners drops sharply during slack seasons, and businesses struggle to keep their heads above water. To address this dilemma, differentiated tourism development strategies should be adopted



Figure 2-22 Characteristic Activities at Kom-Kanas Township

Source: Local authorities

and tourism products with local characteristics should be further developed to attract tourists interested in ethnic cultures, and broaden the income sources. Meanwhile, the ice and snow resources should be better utilized to enrich the consumption scenarios of winter tourism, thereby establishing a pattern of tourism development with distinct seasonal characteristics to sustain the growth of the tourism economy.

II. Hollowed-Out Village Regeneration: Suichang County, Zhejiang Enhances Locals-Visitors Interaction to Address the Hollowing-Out Problem

People and culture play an essential role in rural village protection and development. For hollowed-out villages where many young and middle-aged residents have left for work in other areas, leaving their aged parents behind, and the traditional culture has declined, poverty alleviation through tourism should prioritize transforming cultural resources into tourism products to generate economic benefits, boosting village regeneration through creativity, and transforming static protection into dynamic regeneration through interactions between locals and visitors.

(I) Case Background

Suichang County, Lishui City, Zhejiang Province, is located at the southern foot of the Jiulong Mountain, a national natural reserve. Due to its remote location and low efficiency of its agriculture, Suichang once faced a series of problems brought about by village hollowing-out, such as a lack of income sources, a large elderly population whose children have left for work in other areas, and a declining traditional culture. By introducing Shenzhen Leling Company to jointly explore a rural revitalization model, the government selected Chayuan, a typical semi-hollowed-out village, as a pilot site, where old houses were renovated, wasteland cultivated, industries reorganized, and migrant workers returned. As of the end of 2024, Suichang had two towns rated as provincial-level AAAAA tourist attractions, one village rated as Gold AAA tourist attraction, and 18 villages rated as AAA tourist attractions. In 2023, the county's income from tourism amounted to 4.750 billion yuan, receiving 4.12 million tourists²⁵.

The pilot poverty reduction through tourism project in Chayuan fits the hollowed-out village regeneration

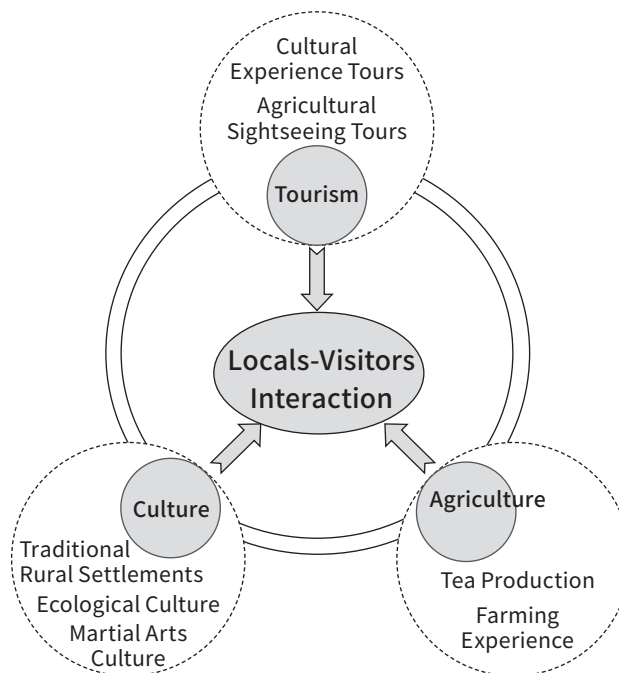


Figure 2-23 The Hollowed-Out Village Regeneration Model in Suichang County, Zhejiang

Source: Created by the author

model (Figure 2-23). First, Suichang insists on integrating culture and tourism, transforming Chayuan into a “National Eco-cultural Village” through “authentic renovation.” The village’s original appearance and basic structure are maintained using the model of “renovation to their original state + mingling of old and new residents,” preserving the elements of traditional rural settlements such as mud-walled houses and stone-paved roads. Centering on the essence of Chayuan Village’s martial arts culture, the rural culture and the homestay culture bring out the best in each other. Second, Suichang promotes the integration of agriculture and tourism, building the Dazhe Tea Garden in the second phase of the project and developing tea-themed leisure tourism products. Following the idea of “promoting the development of agriculture and tourism through the tea industry, and increasing farmers’ income,” the industrial chain is extended with an increase in added value. Suichang strives to create a new model of shared prosperity based on tea production, cultural experience, and sightseeing. Last but not least,

Suichang implements the principle of “locals-visitors interaction” and actively calls for villagers and urbanites to share their lifestyles. It has developed and introduced rural products and folk activities such as making *maci* (a glutinous rice cake) and *qingtuan* (green rice balls), and “Banchun Quannong” (a traditional farming ceremony) for tourists. In summary, Suichang fully utilizes local tea garden resources to develop high-end characteristic tourism products, highlighting the advantages of the internal-quality model for the regeneration of hollowed-out villages.

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

With the rise of the rural tourism industry, residents can find tourism-related jobs and earn more at their doorstep. Before 2016, the per capita income in Chayuan was about 9,000 yuan. In 2023, the income of agritainment operators across the county reached 930 million yuan, and the per capita disposable income of rural permanent residents reached 29,239 yuan²⁶.

2. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

As Suichang fosters its tourism industry, residents can work in tourist attractions and are given priority for employment opportunities in sojourner services and crops growing at the agricultural bases. Shenzhen Leling Company also utilizes its members and platforms to help farmers sell over 20 types of local specialties such as bamboo tube wine, winter bamboo shoots, camellia oil, kiwi fruit, and wild honey, maximizing the value of products and providing farmers with stable sales channels for their products.

3. Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

Suichang promotes the “mingling of old and new

residents,” advocating “villagers and urbanites to share their lifestyles.” The Community Development Association of Chayuan Village has been established, bringing together the village Party branch committee, the villagers’ committee, enterprises, and urban elites to jointly govern the village, and has refined its organizational structure and revised village regulations. This initiative effectively narrows the psychological distance between urban and rural residents, promotes equal exchanges, and strengthens emotional bonds among different groups.

4. Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Leling Company has established a Lifestyle Development Department centered around the tea garden economy, combining the Chayuan Village project with local culture and folk customs to develop rural lifestyle content, such as farming experiences like making *maci*, tofu, and *qingtuan*, as well as local activities such as zither (a traditional Chinese stringed instrument) playing, calligraphy, painting, yoga, martial arts, tea ceremony, and flower arranging. These experiential activities are characterized by low pollution, low energy consumption, and high participation, contributing to the sustainable development of the local green economy.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Creating Something from Nothing: Bringing Local Tourism Resources into Full Play

Despite limited local tourism resources in hollowed-out villages, Suichang has tapped into existing local resources and added a heart-moving human touch. For example, it revokes urban visitors’ “nostalgia” for the country life with Chayuan’s preserved original appearance and traditional dwellings, highlights the “hermit” spirit as the essence of Chayuan’s martial arts culture, and has erected stone-shaped signage and built rammed earth walls and sloping roofs,

while elements of the novelist Jin Yong's martial arts culture are cleverly incorporated.

2. Being a Pioneer: Introducing and Developing New Forms of Rural Tourism

Suichang has always been a trailblazer in the development of rural areas, taking the lead in many pilot initiatives such as “Clean Villages,” “Rural E-commerce,” and “Future Villages” in Zhejiang Province and even nationwide. Through village-enterprise cooperation guided by Party-building work, Chayuan highlights its resource endowments in natural landscapes, architectural styles, and homestay culture through renovation to its original state, planning, and designing a batch of tourism products for sightseeing, leisure, and experience.



Figure 2-24 Traditional Rural Settlement in Chayuan Village

Source: Local authorities

It has developed over 20 service scenarios and new forms of business, including a rural art gallery, a cliff café, and Qishan plank roads.

3. Respecting the Market: Moderately Delegating Power to Stimulate the Enthusiasm of Market Entities

In promoting the development of rural tourism, Suichang is deeply aware of the importance of market mechanisms. Only by fully motivating market entities

can the prosperity of rural tourism be sustained. Therefore, the county government has moderately delegated its power in planning, construction, and operation of rural tourism projects, granting market entities greater freedom and flexibility. The government has instead taken on the roles of service



Figure 2-25 Cliff Café in Chayuan Village

Source: Local authorities

provider and regulator, providing policy support and guidance for market entities.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration

The core challenge facing Suichang is the lack of influential iconic tourism IPs, making it difficult to form a complete industrial value chain and achieve economies of scale. Although Suichang is blessed with the only active gold mine site in the Yangtze River Delta and unique geothermal springs, it only uses them for sightseeing, with a serious problem of product homogeneity, and without a differentiated competitive edge or a sustainable profiting model, making it difficult to attract mid-to-

high-end customers and increase per capita tourist spending. To address this dilemma, Suichang can further explore government-enterprise cooperation, integrate county-wide tourism resources, construct an industrial chain of “core attractions + derivative business + community involvement,” and enhance the market visibility and appeal of the county as a tourist destination through targeted marketing, thereby transforming its resource endowments into advantages for industrial development.

Section Five Internal-Speed Model

I. Village Enterprise-Driven Development: Guangdong Village of Yanbian, Jilin Launches Folk Customs Tours under the Guidance of Capable Leaders

The village enterprise-driven development model is a collaborative poverty-reduction approach led by local forces and drawing on collective wisdom and strength. At its core is the guidance of capable leaders and collaboration among villagers. It leverages the resources and capabilities of capable leaders, and organizes villagers to engage in the tourism industry through equity participation for dividends sharing and employment in tourist attractions, thereby achieving common prosperity for both villagers and the village collectives.

(I) Case Background

Guangdong Village is an ethnic Korean settlement in Helong City, Yanbian, Jilin Province, with ethnic Koreans accounting for 98% of the population. It boasts beautiful natural scenery and profound cultural heritage, but they were underdeveloped and played a limited role in the local economy until 2011 when Yang Lina established Yanbian Guangdong Korean Folk Customs Tourism Service Co., Ltd. Yang planned the development of the village’s 10,000-*mu* ecological rice fields by incorporating its folk customs

and culture. By integrating ecological resources and renovating Korean-style dining and accommodation facilities, she successfully developed the Rice Field Cultural and Tourism Project. Additionally, by tapping into Korean folk culture, she developed a variety of tourism products with Yanbian characteristics, effectively increasing the number of tourists received. In 2023, Guangdong welcomed 600,000 tourists, generating tourism revenue of 10.1776 million yuan, with the village collective receiving 430,000 yuan in dividends, and helping many villagers get rid of poverty and become better off²⁷.

Guangdong exemplifies the village enterprise-driven development model within the internal-speed framework (Figure 2-26). Based on the guidance of capable leaders, it promotes collaborative development among enterprises, village collectives, and farmers. First, a capable leader (Yang Lina in this case) sets up a company, integrates rural folk cultural resources, and develops and designs tourism products and characteristic homestays, to create a competitive rural tourism product line. For example, Guangdong transformed 60 vacant houses into Korean-style homestays with differentiated characteristics. Second, Guangdong expands its market and promotes tourism through multiple channels to enhance its influence. It cooperates with over 200 travel agencies across Northeast China and uses platforms like Douyin and WeChat Channels for tourism promotion, attracting more tourists. Finally, villagers are engaged by such means of equity participation and dividend sharing, employment in tourist attractions, folk performances, and the sales of agricultural products. For instance, the company works with the village collective to organize folk dance teams, register trademarks for agricultural and sideline products, and develop study tours, thus increasing villagers’ income. In summary, leveraging its rich Korean folk culture and agricultural resources, and the guidance of capable leaders, Guangdong has promoted village-enterprise cooperation, transitioning its economy from

traditional agriculture to rural tourism, demonstrating the potential and prospects of internally-driven development.

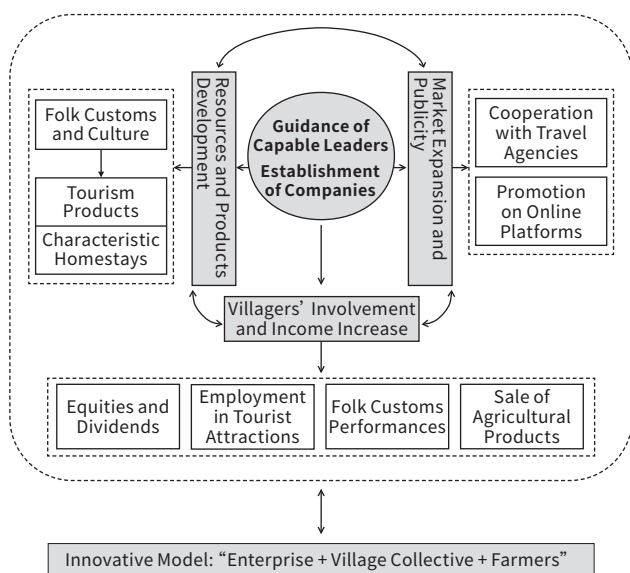


Figure 2-26 Village Enterprise-Driven Development Model in Guangdong Village, Jilin

Source: Created by the author

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

Guangdong as a whole eradicated extreme poverty in 2017, in which village-enterprise cooperation played a crucial role. The village actively developed rice processing, homestays, and homestay leasing businesses, expanding the village's collective economy. In 2023, the village collective's income reached 1.44 million yuan, nearly 13.4 times²⁸ that of 2015, strongly accelerating poverty alleviation.

2. Goal 5: Gender Equality

In the course of development, Guangdong has created more and more employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women who used to earn a meager income from farming; now, they can work at homestays, prepare Korean food, and participate in folk performances, generating much more income

all year around, which in turn has elevated their economic and social status, contributing to gender equality. The entrepreneurial spirit embodied by Ms. Yang Lina also inspires more women to participate in the development of rural tourism.

3. Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Guangdong actively promotes industrial innovation and applies technology to empower tourism development. For example, it collaborates with the Chinese Academy of Sciences in rice breeding to increase the output of the rice industry. Meanwhile, it develops tourism projects appealing to young people, such as Korean-themed music festivals, camping festivals, and other nighttime activities, utilizing sound and light technology to create characteristic nightscapes and light shows, diversifying nighttime consumption scenes.

4. Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Guangdong attaches great importance to responsible consumption and production. Tourism development makes proper use of local resources, such as converting vacant houses into Korean-style homestays. It promotes local agricultural products and has registered brands like Guangdong Village Rice and Guangdong Village Edible Fungus, selling them through online and offline channels, reducing waste and achieving efficient resource utilization and sustainable management.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Capable Individuals Leading the Way and the Rest of the Village Following

The case study of Guangdong demonstrates that the guidance of capable leaders is an important driving force for rural revitalization. In 2011, Yang Lina established a tourism company, seizing the

opportunity of rural tourism, tapping into Korean folk culture, and developing folk customs-themed experiential tours and characteristic homestays, enhancing the village's appeal and bringing considerable income to the village collective. The village also strengthened cooperation with enterprises. In 2023, the first secretary dispatched by China FAW helped Guangdong create an organic rice brand, develop the organic rice industry, and promote green planting, promoting the village's agricultural products to the rest of the country.



Figure 2-27 Yang Lina, the Entrepreneurial Role Model of Guangdong Village

Source: Local authorities

2. Tapping into Local Natural and Cultural Heritage and Promoting Local Folk Customs with Concerted Efforts

Guangdong has achieved industrial integration by playing up its geographical advantages and folk

culture. It grows rice on the Pinggang Plain and promotes it via trade fairs and on e-commerce platforms, attracting 21 rice processing enterprises to settle here. It also improved the industrial chain to promote local economic growth. Meanwhile, centered around folk customs and the organic rice brand, the village explores the integration of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, building itself into a new destination of pastoral tourism offering tourists agricultural products, folk customs experiences, sightseeing, and Korean ethnic cuisine.



Figure 2-28 Folk Customs Performance at Guangdong Village

Source: Local authorities

3. Exploring Development Paths Through Innovation and Optimization for Shared Prosperity between Enterprises and the Village

Guangdong adopts the “enterprise + village collective + farmer” model for its characteristic development. By integrating resources such as rice paddies, homestays, and the Rice Field Children's Paradise, it has established mechanisms for market-oriented operation and collaborative development of rural resources, promoting in-depth linkage among enterprises, the village collective, and farmers, forming a synergy of “1+1+1>3.” In terms of industrial development, Guangdong promotes the deep integration of agriculture, culture, and tourism. In

agriculture, enterprises and villagers jointly develop shared farming, with villagers planting organic rice and enterprises responsible for sales and branding. In culture and tourism, villagers lease their vacant houses to tourism companies which turn these houses into homestays and organize folk performances and other tourist services. The Rice Field Children's Paradise project enriches the tourist experience, promoting the integration of tourism and service.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration

The core challenge currently facing Guangdong lies in the tourism industry's lack of integration and innovation, making it difficult to meet the increasingly diverse needs of tourists. Although the village has achieved certain success in folk customs-themed tours, most of its tourism products are limited to folk performances and sightseeing, lacking in-depth experiences and originality, thus limiting the enhancement of added value. To overcome this bottleneck, the village should strengthen industrial chain collaboration. Under the "enterprises + village collective + farmers" model, a complete industrial chain from agricultural product planting and processing to tourism product sales can be established to enhance the added value and appeal of local products. Through these measures, the village can upgrade its tourism industry and attract young migrant workers to return and talent to come to the village, and thus seek win-win results in cultural heritage inheritance and economic development.

II. Participatory Development: Rongjiang, Guizhou Promotes Deep Integration of Agriculture, Culture, Tourism, Sports, and Commerce Through the "Village Super League"

The participatory development model is a diverse and open approach to promoting poverty alleviation through tourism. Based on advantageous tourism

resources, a mechanism for tourism development is established, featuring government guidance, the leading role of the market, cross-departmental collaboration, and community-wide participation. The key to this model lies in engaging the whole community, where local people are encouraged to engage in the tourism industry and promote coordinated social development in all respects.

(I) Case Background

Rongjiang County, located in the Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture of Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, is in an ethnic minority area and was one of the last counties in China to shake off poverty. Its local football match has a history of 80 years, cultivating a strong atmosphere for the sport. On May 13, 2023, Rongjiang held the "Harmonious Countryside Football Super League," known as the "Village Super League" (VSL), or Cunchao in Chinese, a whole-of-a-village event, which quickly gained popularity. In September of the same year, the VSL signed a memorandum of strategic cooperation with the Premier League of the UK, initiating a mutually beneficial partnership and attracting global attention. According to statistics, in 2024, Rongjiang received 9.4618 million tourists, with a comprehensive tourism income of 10.803 billion yuan, representing year-on-year increases of 24.36% and 28.64%, respectively²⁹. The VSL event has garnered over 100 billion views across all online platforms, effectively driving tourism consumption and releasing economic vitality.

Rongjiang exemplifies the participator development model in the internal-speed framework (Figure 2-29). First, Rongjiang spontaneously promotes the deep integration of agriculture, culture, tourism, sports, and commerce through community-wide participation. Based on its comparative advantages and long-standing football tradition, it integrates football events, ethnic culture, and tourism resources. For example, using the VSL as an open platform

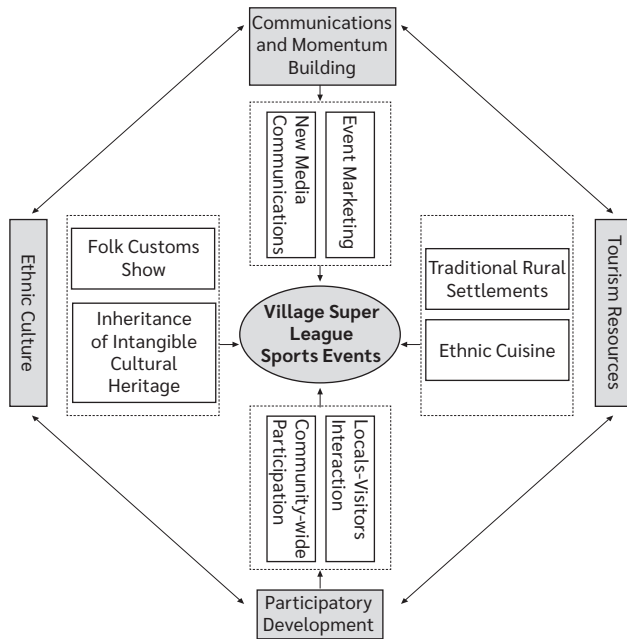


Figure 2-29 The VSL Participatory Development Model of Rongjiang, Guizhou

Source: Created by the author

for interaction between locals and visitors, it has launched the “Super Saturday Night of Football.” At the VSL venue, the local residents stage folk performances such as Dong ethnic group’s Grand Song and Miao ethnic group’s Lusheng Dance, as well as food-themed activities, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in local customs. Second, Rongjiang mainly promotes the VSL-related IPs on new media platforms. It actively develops new business forms such as short videos, e-commerce live streaming, and online marketing, constructing a new media communication matrix combining the main account and sub-accounts of the VSL, thereby greatly enhancing its popularity and influence. In addition, Rongjiang skillfully utilizes event marketing to continuously create buzz and generate hot topics for the VSL. By hosting a series of events such as the National Gourmet Football Friendly Match, the Guizhou “Village Super League & Village Gala” event, the Sino-French Youth Friendly Match, and the “Chasing Dreams” Girls’ Football Charity Match, the county continuously enriches the cultural connotations of the VSL brand and enhances its value

and image. In summary, based on local resources and community-wide participation, Rongjiang has seized development opportunities brought by the VSL, highlighting the significant advantages of the internal-speed model and exploring a new path for rural revitalization in ethnic minority areas.

(II) Benchmarked against SDGs

1. Goal 1: No Poverty

As the VSL gains popularity and influence, Rongjiang promotes the progress of local catering, accommodation, agricultural and sideline products, and other related industries, creating employment opportunities for residents and diversifying their income sources, effectively supporting the eradication of absolute poverty. As of January 2025, since the VSL was initiated, Rongjiang has earned a cumulative tourism income of 17.995 billion yuan³⁰.

2. Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

Centering on the VSL football matches, Rongjiang works to enhance the health and well-being of tourists and local residents. Promoting football activities in communities, schools, and kindergartens, contributes to the improvement of the physical and mental health of the public. In addition, it showcases local healthy lifestyles and natural environments through the VSL events, further raising people’s awareness of health and well-being.

3. Goal 5: Gender Equality

The participator development model has played a positive role in promoting gender equality locally. The county encourages women to participate in various activities, such as in the Dong ethnic group’s Grand Song and Miao ethnic group’s Lusheng Dance. For example, “Watermelon Girl” Xiong Zhuqing, after the VSL went viral, has led local villagers in growing

watermelons and helped broaden sales channels, selling local mountainous agricultural products to the rest of the country, with an annual income exceeding 1 million yuan.

4. Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

While developing the local tourism industry, Rongjiang actively reaches out to domestic and foreign partners. For example, it has signed a memorandum of strategic cooperation with representatives of the UK's Premier League, and attracted France U20, Liberia Social Union, and Cambodian Musicians Football Team, among other foreign teams to participate in competitions, thereby enhancing Rongjiang's international popularity and influence. On this basis, Rongjiang has planned a "Three-Step Action"³¹: host the Village Super League International Exchange Match in 2024, the "Belt and Road" Village Super League Friendly Match (Village Super League Mini World Cup) in 2026, and the first Village Super League World Cup in 2028, to gradually build the VSL into a global sports and cultural brand and further promote the development of global partnerships.

(III) Experiences and Inspirations

1. Building the VSL Brand with an Internal Driving Force and Boosting the Influence of VSL with Community-Wide Participation

In the building of VSL, the county relies on the internal drive and taps into local characteristics. It stimulated the community's enthusiasm to participate in the event, constructed a participatory development model, and organically integrated local characteristics and ethnic customs into activities that were highly engaging and popular, thus imbuing the brand event with cultural depth and warmth. Since the VSL surged in popularity, the county government has regularly organized brainstorming sessions and working seminars on its brand building, making

systematic plans covering event organization, cultural connotation, publicity, and promotion to enhance its influence.



Figure 2-30 Dong Ethnic Pipa Song Performance

Source: Local authorities

2. Promoting the Deep Integration of Agriculture, Culture, Tourism, Sports, and Commerce Through Amateur Sports Events

Rongjiang attaches great importance to the development of amateur sports and deeply taps into the market value and potential of the VSL. Relying on the brand event's influence, it has established a "Super Economy" (comprising "Super Delicious Food," "Super Comfortable Accommodation," "Super Convenient Transportation," "Super Enjoyable Travel," "Super Great Shopping," "Super Fun Activities," and "Super Attractive Investment"), integrating football sports with cultural and tourism resources such as ethnic culture, intangible cultural heritage, and food culture. Taking advantage of the brand event's surge in popularity, it has developed tourist routes

integrating the brand event and traditional rural settlements with local characteristics to leverage the VSL to attract more tourists and boost economic growth.



Figure 2-31 Local Villagers Cheer on for the Teams

Source: Local authorities

3. Digitizing Agriculture and Enhancing the Brand Event's Influence

As the popularity of the VSL continues to rise, Rongjiang seizes the opportunity to gain a developmental edge by cultivating new business forms such as short videos, e-commerce live streaming, and online marketing, establishing a new media communication matrix that has driven online and offline sales of local agricultural specialties like watermelons, monk fruits, and Qingbai tea, generating an income of over 146 million yuan³². Drawing on the VSL's success, it proposed to turn

smartphones into new farming tools, data into new agricultural resources, and live streaming into new farming tasks, promoting the deep integration of the rural economy with digital technology. Meanwhile, to sustain the VSL's popularity, it adopts the event marketing strategy to deepen the cultural and value connotations of the brand event.

(IV) Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: Tourism Governance and Policy Priority

The core challenge Rongjiang currently faces is the structural shortage of cultural and tourism professionals. Although the VSL has become a huge magnet for traffic, the county lacks professionals in tourist attraction operations and product planning. This has slowed down the development of local resources and the integration of farming culture and intangible cultural heritage, making it difficult to maximize the value of local cultural and tourism resources. To overcome this bottleneck, the county should make the cultivation of cultural and tourism professionals a strategic priority in its policies. By cultivating local talent and recruiting talent from outside, it should focus on enhancing the professional skills of local practitioners in areas such as product design and content operation, gradually establish a sustainable talent development system led by professional teams and sustained by a local talent pool, and ultimately translate event traffic into industrial upgrading.

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Chapter Three Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism: China's Experience



Section One National Policy Mobilization: Leaving No One Behind

In promoting poverty reduction and rural revitalization through tourism in China, the effective mobilization and scientific guidance of national policies have ensured that no area, village, or individual is left behind in this process.

I. Leaving No Area Behind

“Leaving no area behind” reflects China’s resolve to consolidate achievements in poverty alleviation and achieve rural revitalization in all respects. The Chinese government has released a series of targeted policies after fully considering the practical problems of weak foundations and insufficient development capabilities in poverty-stricken areas. For example, the *Guidelines on Promoting the Sustainable Development of Characteristic Industries in Areas That Have Been Lifted Out of Poverty* states that long-term support should be offered to the cultivation of characteristic industries in these areas to expand the space for added value creation and efficiency enhancement¹. By developing rural tourism, these areas can turn their rich natural and cultural resources into economic advantages and achieve sustainable development.

In practice, the central government actively guides resources to tilt toward areas that have been lifted out of poverty. Government spending supports the construction of tourism-related infrastructure in

these areas, to improve transportation services, water and electricity supply, and communications services, thus enhancing access to the once-inaccessible villages and attracting more tourists from county seats and surrounding areas. At the same time, favorable policies such as tax incentives and financing support are implemented to reduce the costs for enterprises to develop tourism in these areas and attract the investment of social capital. For example, in the Huangling Scenic Area in Jiangxi, an enterprise made a huge investment in the early stage of scenic area development, focusing on the restoration of ancient houses and cultural heritage protection, while local government stepped up infrastructure construction in the surrounding areas. The two parties have established a close partnership.

In addition, the central government also values the long-term cultivation of the tourism industry in these areas. Industry-leading enterprises were organized to build tourist attractions in these areas. For example, led by Hubei Culture and Tourism Group Co., Ltd., a diversified and collaborative industrial ecosystem has been developed in the Enshi Grand Canyon in Hubei, where local and surrounding residents have been widely involved in the tourism industry. At the same time, the cultivation of tourism professionals has been stepped up in these areas. In Tianjin’s Guojiagou Village, the village collective invited professionals to deliver service training and established a vocational school to deliver service skills training among local villagers. It plans to offer training on live streaming and short video production and cultivate talents for promoting local tourism resources, equipping local villagers with skills needed for rural tourism development, and providing talent support for the tourism industry.

II. Leaving No Village Behind

Top-level policy design and targeted policy implementation guarantee that no village is left





behind on the path to rural revitalization, which is manifested in the following aspects:

The multi-faceted value of villages is explored with targeted planning. Local governments conducted investigations in villages that had been lifted out of poverty, classified them based on their characteristics, such as natural landscapes, folk cultures, and agricultural resources, and planned accordingly. For example, for mountainous villages with beautiful natural scenery, eco-tourism is taken as the core direction of development, and infrastructure such as viewing trails and cable car systems are built and special travel routes such as hiking exploration and high-altitude trips designed to attract outdoor enthusiasts and sightseeing tourists.

Meanwhile, policy support is stepped up to address the development weaknesses. In terms of financial subsidies, special tourism funds for rural revitalization are established, which are directly used for the development of tourism projects and the improvement of infrastructure in villages, ensuring that infrastructure such as roads, transportation, water, and electricity supply in remote villages is

improved. All this has enhanced the quality of life of local residents and the tourist experience. In terms of land policies, the needs of construction land for tourism are prioritized. Through reasonable planning of land use, supporting facilities such as parking lots and tourist service centers are built in rural areas, thereby optimizing the tourist experience at the hardware level and enhancing the comprehensive competitiveness of villages.

III. Leaving No Individual Behind

The key lies in preventing the return to poverty². Specifically:

First, precise identification and status tracking. With the help of advanced information technology and a well-established primary-level governance system, the population that has been lifted out of poverty is identified accurately and tracked on a dynamic basis, in particular, those who face risks in the development of the tourism industry, such as those whose income may plummet due to fluctuations in the tourism market or sudden family crisis. By establishing an indicator system covering tourism income, asset

status, and changes in family size, the government collects and analyzes data regularly to identify risks of falling back into poverty and provides a scientific basis for subsequent targeted assistance.

Second, livelihood diversification and resilience building. Villagers are encouraged to engage in diverse tourism-related businesses, such as commodity sales, cultural performances, and farming experiences in addition to traditional agritainment and homestay operations. In Xiaonanhe Village, Heilongjiang Province, many farmers, in addition to farming, make handicrafts or specialty foods out of local mountainous resources. For example, they make delicious kimchi from wild vegetables and sell dried wild mushrooms, promoting these local commodities to the market.

Third, skills enhancement and knowledge empowerment. Skills training is organized for villagers. In Xiazhazi Village, Beijing, Beiyuan Grand Hotel organized tourism service and etiquette training for farmers, teaching them how to receive tourists warmly and professionally, thereby creating a differentiated brand image for local homestays and establishing a core competitive edge. Meanwhile, villagers were encouraged to learn on their own and integrate local folk culture, historical stories, and traditional skills into tourism products. In Shibadong Village, Hunan Province, villagers integrate Miao ethnic intangible cultural heritage such as Miao embroidery, songs, and dances into tourism projects. Tourists can try Miao embroidery-making in the village, immersing themselves in the charm of Miao culture.

Fourth, interest linkages and basic services. A sound, fair interest linkage mechanism is established. The rights and obligations of all stakeholders are clarified under the “company + farmers” and “cooperative + farmers” development models to safeguard the interests of villagers in tourism income distribution. For example, at the tourist attraction of Zhu De’s

Hometown in Sichuan Province, the tourist attraction-driven development model is adopted. Local residents benefit from tourism development by working for the tourist attraction, operating guesthouses and homestays, and selling agricultural products.

Section Two Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Cross-Sectoral Resource Integration

Government bodies, enterprises, social organizations, villagers, tourists, and other key groups all play an important role, and they intertwine and collaborate to promote the dynamic, cross-sectoral integration of resources in rural tourism.

I. The Government Taking the Lead

Chinese government departments at various levels have incorporated the tourism industry into the strategic planning for the development of rural areas. They formulate tourism development plans, set key goals and tasks for different stages, and identify directions for multi-stakeholder collaboration. During the fight against poverty, they identified the resource endowments and tailored tourism development plans for poverty-stricken areas. With efforts to sustain poverty reduction and rural development, the government gave tourism a bigger role in rural revitalization. With a medium-term development period of five to ten years, the aim is to create well-



known rural tourist destinations, with a focus on integrating and consolidating the scattered tourism resources and designing themed travel routes. For instance, at Xiajiang Village, Zhejiang Province, the government tapped into the local Party building culture, natural scenery, and agricultural resources, and developed a travel route featuring “CPC heritage + pastoral experience,” connecting the Party-building Culture Hall, beautiful pastoral landscapes, and U-pick farms.

II. Enterprises Driving the Development

Large enterprises, with their advantages in capital, technology, and talent, are deeply involved in significantly stimulating and reshaping the development pattern of tourism in rural areas with a strong driving force³.

First, capital investment is the direct way for

enterprises to directly promote the upgrading of rural tourism. For example, Wanda Group invested a large amount of capital in the protective development of natural landscapes in Danzhai, Guizhou. The Danzhai Wanda Town project fully taps into and incorporates the folk customs of local ethnic groups such as the Miao and Dong peoples. The town retains ethnic architectural styles, such as traditional buildings such as green-tiled wooden houses and wind-and-rain bridges to echo with the surrounding mountainous and pastoral scenery. The local rustic charm is preserved and modern aesthetic designs are adopted, making the town a popular destination among the tourists.

Second, the introduction of innovative technologies and management talents has improved the local software conditions. For example, Tencent initiated and has actively participated in the project of “Digital Agriculture, Culture, and Tourism of Guangdong and Guangxi for Shared Prosperity in Rural Areas.” The project cultivates young villagers in Jinjiang Village, Guangxi, into rural professional managers who can skillfully use digital tools and have the ability to make good use of idle resources, introduce new business forms, and sustain operations. They are responsible for the operation and management of Jinjiang Cultural and Tourism Company. Through talent cultivation and digitization, Jinjiang has built a brand, “Jinjiang Shengguocang,” for local passion fruit and monk fruit, two pillars of the local economy, further driving the development of the local economy.

Lastly, a multi-stakeholder collaboration model is established through the close cooperation among enterprises, local governments, and communities. Under this model, tourism enterprises, with their market insights and professional operations, take charge of project planning, marketing, and daily operations, and work closely with other stakeholders, achieving targeted integration and dynamic allocation of local resources. Moreover, their frequent





interaction and collaboration have enhanced the awareness of a rural tourism community with shared interests and risks. For example, Trip.com Group Country Retreats actively employ local residents, with the proportion of local residents on the payroll of some retreats exceeding 95%, and even reaching 75% in ethnic minority regions like Xinjiang.

III. Social Organizations Empowering the Development

Social organizations, as “providers” of professional services and “adhesives” connecting various parties, play an important role. They carry out education and tourism skills training programs for poverty alleviation, build rural libraries, organize cultural lectures to broaden villagers’ horizons and provide targeted training to help villagers master professional skills. For example, in December 2024, more than 70 social organizations of the cultural and tourism industry in Guangxi, including the Guangxi Tourism Association, carried out rural revitalization-themed activities⁴ such as cultural and artistic performances, “All-in-One-Street” services, service tours, exchange meetings, continuously energizing local resources and empowering rural tourism.

At the same time, they organize various public welfare activities to attract social attention to rural tourism and provide material and human support for it. For example, the YouChange Social Entrepreneur Foundation initiated the comprehensive development project “A Beautiful Encounter with Villages.” Over the past six years, adhering to the philosophy of “enabling counties and villages to reinforce one another’s development,” the project has been implemented on a pilot basis for rural revitalization in three villages: Longtang and Shuizhai in Guizhou and Mahai in Guangxi. These pilot villages have set an example and generated direct economic benefits of over 15 million yuan. The project was awarded the honorary title of “Outstanding SDG Solution of the 2024 GoldenKey SDG Solutions”⁵.

IV. Villagers as the Main Force

Villagers are the hosts of rural tourism. Their participation is a significant feature of poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism. They acquire stakes in cooperatives or enterprises of rural tourism with their assets such as land and houses. Land is no longer just a farming means of production and houses are no longer

used for living only, but transformed into capital and deeply integrated into the economic cycle of rural tourism. For example, in Zhonghaoyu Village in Shandong, villagers actively responded to the village's development plan and converted their land, houses, and other assets into equity in Youyougu Travel Company. The land, once used only for farming, has now become a valuable asset for creating farming experiences and building tourism facilities. The houses, originally used for living only, have been transformed into homestays of different styles. With the growing rural tourism industry, villagers can now receive dividends according to their shares based on the equity allocation mechanism, sharing the benefits from tourism development.

V. Tourists Contributing to Local Development

As the core subject in the integration of rural tourism resources, tourists traveling from afar break the geographical and social boundaries of rural areas. This dynamic exchange not only promotes the two-way flow of information, capital, technology, and other factors but also drives the chain-like upgrading of the industrial structure. It is worth noting that the increasing number of tourists will inevitably bring

various pressures such as congestion, environmental governance, and cultural discontinuity⁶. This supply-demand imbalance not only affects the tourist experience but also poses a continuous threat to the rural ecosystem. In response, many localities have explored management models involving tourists. For example, Baoding City in Hebei Province promotes the use of personal credit points in the culture and tourism sectors, such as tourist attractions and hotels.⁷ A multidimensional governance network is established. It is supervised by the government, operated by enterprises, empowered by social organizations, and involves villagers and tourists alike, shifting from one-way service to multi-stakeholder joint governance.

VI. Roles of Other Groups

In addition to the government, enterprises, social organizations, villagers, and tourists, other stakeholders are also indispensable in the cross-sectoral integration of rural tourism resources. Banks and other financial institutions have launched diversified financial products and services for rural tourism projects, providing low-interest loans to enterprises, operators, and villagers for infrastructure



construction and product development, etc. At the same time, insurers offer various insurance products such as tourism liability insurance and agricultural product quality insurance to safeguard the development of rural tourism and reduce operational risks.

Research institutions and universities provide intellectual support for rural tourism with their solid research resources⁸. They conduct field research with their know-how, analyze the natural endowments, history, folklore, and industries of rural areas, and formulate science-based, reasonable, and practical tourism development plans to guide the development of the rural tourism industry. Meanwhile, they establish internship and training bases, sending students majoring in tourism management, rural revitalization studies, etc. as interns to participate in project planning, operation, and marketing in rural areas. For example, Anhui Agricultural University has established a social practice station in Xiaonanjing Village, Anhui. The arrival of agricultural experts and students has injected fresh vitality into local tourism.

Section Three Technology Empowerment: Equal Emphasis on Poverty Alleviation and Access to Education and Training Needed

Under the guidance of the rural revitalization strategy, rural tourism empowered by modern technology has become the general trend. Specific measures are taken at the three levels of individuals, organizations, and communities.

I. At the Individual Level: Enhancing Their Self-Development Ability

Traditional mindsets are changed. First, a tourism training network of collaboration among multiple stakeholders is constructed to enhance villagers' technology awareness and foster their market-oriented mindset. For example, the Market



Management Department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, Ant Foundation, China Foundation for Rural Development, etc., jointly initiated the “Digital Mulan” Homestay Manager Training Program, mainly targeting women in rural areas, with an aim to cultivate a group of competitive and innovative female homestay managers in the digital era, helping rural women seize tourism-related employment opportunities and increase their incomes⁹. Second, tourism-related technology products are introduced into rural areas and have brought forth substantial changes to local ways of production and life. For example, in 2024, Xiaohongshu launched the “Rural Roaming” public welfare program in 32 pilot villages of three provincial regions, offering online and offline cultural and tourism industry training to over 2,200 people, with over 1 billion exposures of related content online, and over 200,000 posts¹⁰. This program innovates the business forms of rural tourism by promoting popular lifestyles such as camping, new Chinese style, and hiking on Xiaohongshu, exploring the flow and integration of urban and rural factors.

Knowledge and literacy programs are organized for villagers. First, villages work actively with research institutions and relevant enterprises to organize skill training and village transformation regularly. For example, villagers and artisans at Xikou Village of Inner Mongolia worked with the Academy of Arts & Design of Tsinghua University and other fine art



institutions to create 20 pieces of public artwork, and completed the artistic transformation of seven households, and the renovation of one rural art museum with the theme of “The Long Summer”¹¹. The collaboration between locals and visitors in in-situ art creation not only integrates art design and rural tourism but also creates an art space of rural tourism shared by villagers and visitors. Second, local governments deploy projects in rural areas to create community spaces for local and external technical talents. For example, Yucun Village in Zhejiang launched a global partner recruitment project. DN Yucun and many entrepreneurial projects are concentrated in the Dayucun Youth Talent Community, forming a new space for rural development with a system of “maker space + incubator + accelerator + industrial park.”¹²

II. At the Organizational Level: Building a Multi-Stakeholder Joint Governance Structure

It is essential to actively advocate a multi-stakeholder participation mechanism. First, in empowering rural tourism through technology, the strengths of various stakeholders should be pooled to build an interactive platform for sharing and communication with the aid of modern information technology. LY.COM, in its Thousand Villages Project, utilizes Internet technology to integrate idle resources in rural areas and create a smart tourism platform,

facilitating the transformation of rural economic focus from traditional agriculture to the modern tourism and vacation industry, and achieving efficient collaboration among the government, enterprises, and villagers. Guided by the development goal of “applying the big data technology to the hotel and homestay industry,” an intelligent homestay management platform has been introduced in Dali, Yunnan. Through a mini-program, tourists can control room amenities with one click and book a place for an intangible cultural heritage experience trip. The system can also create tourist profiles and generate personalized data reports¹³. Second, it is crucial to fully tap the potential of technology and build a comprehensive big data system. Data should be collected and analyzed from all aspects such as the distribution of rural tourism resources, tourist traffic trends, the status of agricultural product sales, and villagers’ needs for everyday life.

It is also necessary to continuously improve the service capacity of rural organizations. First, rural organizations can enhance their cohesion by skillfully applying Internet technology and establishing online communication platforms such as QQ groups and WeChat groups to promote real-time interaction and communication among villagers against time and space constraints. Events in Guizhou such as “Village BA,” VSL, and “Village Gala” have strengthened collective cohesion and brand communication through community-wide participation in new media marketing, where villagers spontaneously shoot short videos and share them on social platforms. Second, rural organizations actively introduce cutting-edge technologies to significantly improve villagers’ capabilities in tourism operations. For example, Qufu of Shandong has incorporated homestays, cultural and creative industries, and scenic spots into a platform-based management system, enhancing the performance of collective organizations in tourism cooperation and management¹⁴. The Cuicun Town of Beijing has implemented the model featuring “Party

building + science and technology specialists + agricultural, cultural, and tourism services,” forming a technical team comprising backbone Party members to empower the smart transformation of agricultural, cultural, and tourism industries with technologies such as converged media¹⁵.

III. At the Community Level: Improving the Governance System

It is necessary to clarify the roles of governance entities. During the digital governance of rural tourism, it is essential to clarify the positions and responsibilities of the government, village collectives, enterprises, villagers, and tourists, and integrate their resources into the governance network by creating different scenarios on digital platforms. For example, Heshun Town of Yunnan has concentrated functions such as tourist services, tourist attraction management, emergency response, and comprehensive governance in a digital governance network, building a primary-level social governance community for incident handling, conflict resolution, and social risk assessment¹⁶. Shichuan Town of Gansu,

with the support of the China Internet Development Foundation, has established a smart service platform for rural tourism, mainly targeting the government, travel agencies, tourists, and residents, offering public services and cultural protection services, greatly extending digital momentum to rural areas¹⁷.

It is also necessary to develop a scientific governance structure. Linked by big data, an integrated resident service system is constructed by removing the information barriers between government departments such as culture and tourism, agriculture, and transportation, and entities such as enterprises and rural communities. For example, *Nanfang Nongcun Bao*, a newspaper in Guangdong, initiated China’s first-ever rural tourism service platform “Zhenxiang,”¹⁸ whose services cover ancient villages and towns, boutique tourist routes, rural cuisine, angling and camping, U-pick farms and research tours, surrounding attractions, local specialty purchases, agricultural investments, and other aspects. It also releases popular lists such as “Must-Eat Foods” and “Must-Stay Homestays,” welcoming visitors from all over China to “Tour in Guangdong” and “Tour in the



Countryside.” Wusi Village in Zhejiang has constructed a “Digital Village Map” covering five major fields of village planning, operation, environment, services, and governance through business coordination, forming a model integrating primary, secondary, and tertiary industries dominated by floral and nursery plants and integrating business forms such as homestays, education on the CPC heritage, and maker spaces for young entrepreneurs¹⁹.

Section Four Exploration of Local Settings: Development Based on Local Conditions

Regional differences are a typical feature of rural China, so sustainable rural development shows



distinct temporal dependencies. That is to say, some regions that were lifted out of poverty later and lack inherent advantages face the primary task of consolidating poverty alleviation achievements, while some others that were lifted out of poverty earlier and have certain first-mover advantages are more likely to have the foundation for achieving rural revitalization in all respects.

I. Respecting Differences: Clarifying Development Goals and Orientations Through Classification

There are significant differences in the severity of poverty, the causes of poverty, and their transmission mechanisms across different regions of China²⁰. Their stages of rural development, dilemmas faced, transformation directions, and paths to revitalization also vary. This indicates that to achieve sustainable development, we cannot rely on a single, homogeneous policy and institutional framework²¹. It is necessary to clarify the functional positioning and development orientation of rural areas from a national perspective and based on the region and stage of rural development.

Rural areas in eastern coastal regions benefit from superior geographical locations, being closely integrated with urban economic circles, and have built a diversified and three-dimensional transportation system including expressways, railways, and urban rapid transit, greatly shortening the urban-rural spatial-temporal distance. Their developed economy provides strong capital accumulation for the development of rural tourism, and the R&D and widespread application of cutting-edge technology offer technical support for the high-quality development of smart rural tourism, while various professionals are attracted by the industry clusters. Therefore, rural tourism in Eastern China tends to focus on refined business forms such as high-end leisure and vacation, and urban agricultural sightseeing business. Specifically, many coastal

fishing villages have undergone a systematic process of tourism development and have been transformed into coastal resorts boasting beaches, docks, sea-view villas, etc., attracting tourist groups such as urban white-collar workers and business elites. Urban agricultural sightseeing, deeply integrated with modern technology, allows tourists not only a first-hand experience with modern high-tech agriculture but also an immersive experience in vegetable/fruit picking and parent-child planting, achieving a leap from sightseeing to experience demands.

Central China, connecting East and West China, has a profound and long-standing farming tradition, with many ancient farming tools and techniques preserved to this day, serving as vivid samples of rural culture. At the same time, some rural areas of Central China have seized the opportunity of industry transfer and, combined with their own industrial status, initially established a certain industrial foundation. Against this backdrop, the development of rural tourism in Central China shows a comprehensive model of deep processing and sales of agricultural specialties and an organic integration of folk culture inheritance and display. For example, Dajianan Village in Shanxi has created a shared farm called “Qingqing Apple.”²² Tourists can farm on the land they have claimed and enjoy what’s harvested from their work while receiving on-site help and guidance from professional agronomists. The shift from “selling fruit trees” to “buying fruit trees” is achieved. In addition, the farm offers leisure picking and study tours, developing a study tour base with multiple functions such as parent-child education, farming experience, natural science education, outdoor team-building, and handicraft DIY workshops.

West China is blessed with natural landscapes such as snow-capped mountains, grasslands, deserts, and canyons, and a history of multi-ethnic integration, which has nurtured unique ethnic cultures. Ethnic groups such as Tibetan, Mongolian, Uyghur, and Hui



still preserve their distinct ethnic identities in terms of clothing, architecture, festival customs, etc., which have become highly attractive cultural resources. However, constrained by multiple factors such as complex geographical conditions, rural areas in West China have a relatively weak economic foundation. Therefore, their development path closely revolves around eco-tourism and ethnic cultures, offering original and differentiated tourism experience products. For example, relying on natural grasslands, horse-riding tours have been developed, allowing tourists to deeply feel the authenticity of nature and integrate into local culture.

II. Strengthening Commonality: Promoting the Balanced and Coordinated Development of the Rural Tourism Industry in an Orderly Manner

On top of respect for regional differences in rural tourism development, “balanced and coordinated development” has become key to the orderly improvement of the rural tourism industry. This is implemented at various levels such as policy formulation, industry layout, and resource integration, with an aim to strike a balance in coordinated development despite regional differences and elevate the rural tourism industry to the next level.

From the perspective of policy formulation, governments at all levels emphasize overall guidance and coordination of policies. General policies covering rural infrastructure construction,



service quality improvement, and ecological protection are formulated to ensure the basic direction and quality requirements of rural tourism development. Meanwhile, differentiated support policies are formulated based on local conditions and characteristics. The economically and technologically advanced East China tends to encourage high-end tourism products and empowering technology. Central China, with its rich farming heritage and industry foundation, focuses on promoting the in-depth integration of characteristic industries and tourism. West China, with its unique ecological and ethnic cultural resources and a relatively weak economic foundation, concentrates on increasing infrastructure investment and ecological and cultural protection.

In terms of industry layout, emphasis is placed on regional coordination and complementary advantages. Cooperation and exchanges between the eastern, central, and western regions are strengthened, regardless of the boundaries between administrative regions, to share resources and tourist sources and build the market together. East China,

with its developed market system and marketing network, helps the central and western regions promote their rural tourism products. Central China, serving as a connecting link, facilitates the integration of tourism resources between the eastern and western regions. West China provides unique ecological and cultural tourism experiences for tourists from East China, forming a benign interaction. At the same time, the coordinated advancement of urban and rural industries is promoted, organically integrating rural tourism into the urban tourism system, and striving to build an urban-rural tourism industry chain. For example, tourism products of “urban leisure + rural mini-vacation” are developed to expand the depth and breadth of the tourism market.

Resource integration also constitutes an important link in “balanced and coordinated development.” Nationwide, efforts are made to promote the establishment of a rural tourism resource database, sorting out and integrating various resources such as natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and folk customs in various regions. Big data and Internet technologies have made resource sharing and optimal

allocation possible. Furthermore, various regions explore and develop their resources based on their conditions to avoid homogeneous competition. For example, Weishan County in Shandong has overcome geographical limitations, established the Nansi Lake Tourism Alliance and joined hands with tourist attractions in Yutai County, Tengzhou City, etc., to complement resources and achieve win-win cooperation²³.

In summary, China has established a four-dimensional collaboration model with practical significance for the Chinese context in promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism (Figure 3-1). In the entity dimension, a rural governance network is constructed, which is led by the government, driven by enterprises, empowered by social organizations, involving local villagers

and tourists, and linking other relevant entities, achieving cross-sectoral resource integration. In the institutional dimension, the “leaving no one behind” strategy is adopted to ensure that all areas, villages, and individuals that have been lifted out of poverty are incorporated into the rural revitalization framework. In the technological dimension, poverty alleviation and education and training programs are implemented side by side to enhance the self-development capabilities of individuals, the co-governance structures of organizations, and the governance systems of communities. In the contextual dimension, while highlighting differentiated characteristics through classification, we strengthened regional balanced and coordinated development through the regulation and improvement of industries, stressing the importance of tailoring to local conditions.

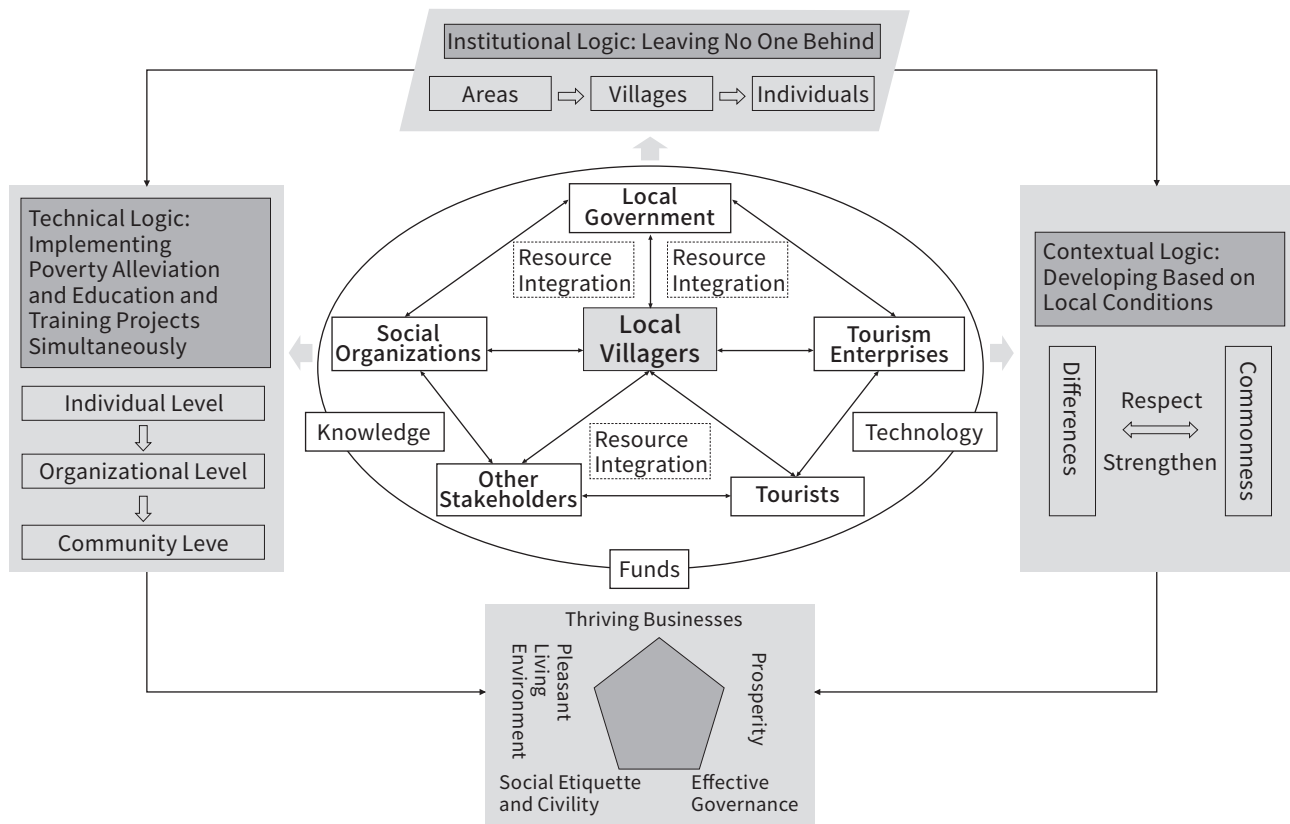


Figure 3-1 The Four-Dimensional Collaboration Model for Promoting Poverty Reduction and Rural Sustainable Development Through Tourism

Source: Created by the author

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Chapter Four The World Value and Strategic Implications of Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism



Section One China's Progress toward Poverty Reduction Targets of SDGs

I. Alignment between China's Practice and SDGs

In the global pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural areas emerge as strategic regions deserving a lot of attention. Unlike urban areas, rural areas often grapple with challenges such as inadequate transportation facilities, weak industrial foundations, talent shortages, and limited employment opportunities, which become critical barriers to realizing the SDGs.

Since the UN established the SDGs in 2015, China has worked actively to advance them under the guidance of science-based national policies. In November 2015, the Chinese government officially launched the battle against poverty, elevating poverty eradication in rural areas to a national strategic priority. After six years of arduous efforts, by the end of 2020, China achieved a complete victory and fulfilled the Goal of “No Poverty” which comes first among the SDGs, eradicating absolute poverty across rural China. However, China's journey toward rural development did not end there. In 2017, China officially proposed the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, followed by the issuance of the *National Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022)* in 2018, the first of its kind, marking a new phase in China's rural development. In the No. 1 Central Document of 2021, the Chinese government further clarified the goals and tasks of rural revitalization, emphasizing the need to consolidate and build on the achievements in poverty alleviation to effectively drive rural revitalization, aiming to address relative poverty among rural residents.

With the SDGs deadline just five years away, in early 2025, the Chinese government issued the *Plan for Achieving Rural revitalization in All Respects (2024-2027)*, positioning rural revitalization in all respects



as a major national policy. Greater emphasis is placed on “in all respects,” with the overall requirements of “thriving businesses, pleasant living environment, rural etiquette and civility, effective governance, and prosperity,” aiming to promote all-round sustainable rural development, which aligns closely with the SDGs. The Chinese government has repeatedly stressed that rural revitalization is not merely about economic growth but encompasses diverse aspects of business, talent, culture, ecological environment, and organization. China's rural revitalization strategy not only responds to domestic development needs but also actively contributes to global SDGs, embodying a profound integration of global sustainable development philosophy with China's local practices.

In practice, China leverages the natural scenery and simple lifestyles of rural areas, making the development of rural tourism a vital pathway for achieving poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. Among the 17 SDGs, Goal 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth,” Goal 12 “Responsible Consumption and Production,” and Goal 14 “Life Below Water” all directly mention tourism. China's practices in rural tourism development hold significant exemplary significance, providing feasible paths for China's rural revitalization and valuable references for other developing countries worldwide to achieve SDGs.

To delve deeper into how China's rural tourism practices align with the SDGs, this report draws

inspiration from the “SDGs Wedding Cake” model proposed by the Stockholm Resilience Center (Figure 4-1), categorizing the 17 SDGs into three levels: biosphere, society, and economy. This model emphasizes that the natural ecological environment serves as the foundation for global sustainable development, upon which the synergistic development of social well-being and economic prosperity is built.



Figure 4-1 “SDGs Wedding Cake” Model

Source: Stockholm Resilience Center¹

(I) Biosphere-Related SDGs

1. Cultivating Distinctive Tourism Business Forms and Advocating a Green Economy

In promoting poverty reduction through tourism, China integrates the distinctive rural tourism business forms with ecological and environmental protection. Rural China taps into its unique natural resources and cultural heritage, cultivating a series of regionally distinctive tourism business forms that replace traditional industrial or agricultural development models, driving the development of related industries such as catering, accommodation, and shopping, and forming green industrial chains, injecting new vitality into sustainable rural development. For example, the Hubei Longfengshan Group, based on green and

organic agricultural production and leveraging the CPC heritage in the Dabie Mountains, is driving the integration of primary and secondary industries with the tourism industry, overcoming the long-standing bottleneck to rural development.

2. Improving Rural Sanitation and Reducing Emissions

In promoting poverty reduction through tourism China has intensified efforts to improve rural sanitation and effectively reduce rural emissions. The improved rural sanitation has enhanced not only the ecological environment and residents' health but also tourists' impressions, further promoting the development of rural tourism. For instance, Anhui's Doushahe Village opened a “Model Supermarket” where residents can purchase various daily necessities without cash but with credit points they earned for good manners and deeds and contributions to keeping the village clean.

3. Protecting the Natural Ecological Environment and Attaching Equal Importance to Development and Protection

In the process of rural tourism development, China consistently prioritizes ecological conservation, coordinating efforts in development and protection. When planning rural tourism projects, it takes into account the carrying capacity of the natural ecological environment, strengthens the protection



of ecologically sensitive areas, and promptly identifies and addresses ecological damage through ecological environment monitoring and management. For example, Inner Mongolia's Uxin Banner established an Ecological Environment Protection Committee, enforcing strict environmental inspections and clarifying environmental protection responsibilities, promoting the installation of automatic surveillance facilities at key enterprises to ensure effective ecological protection.

(II) Society-Related SDGs

1. Increasing Tourism Employment Income and Eradicating Regional Poverty and Hunger

In promoting rural poverty reduction through tourism, China has significantly increased residents' employment opportunities through the development of tourism, effectively alleviating regional poverty. For example, in Sichuan's Bashan Grand Canyon scenic area, a large number of residents shook off



poverty as the scenic area developed and saw a significant increase in their income. Many young people who had previously migrated to cities for work have returned and engaged in tourism-related businesses such as homestays. Some villages have also received dividends by investing in travel agencies and companies through tourism cooperatives, a stable source of income that effectively improves their living conditions.

2. Integrating Culture, Sports, and Tourism to Enhance Residents' Health and Education Levels

In promoting rural poverty reduction through tourism China emphasizes the deep integration of culture, sports, and tourism, enhancing residents' health and education levels through various cultural activities and sports events. For instance, Ningxia's Longwangba Village established a Rural Revitalization Training School. The school organizes many education, training, and study tour projects, enabling tourists and participants to gain knowledge and experiences during their visits. In recent years, with the favorable ecological environment and local enthusiasm for amateur sports events, excellent opportunities have emerged for the integration of sports, health, and rural tourism. For example, Anhui's Xiacang Town hosts the Huanghu Dragon Boat Race annually², driving tourism development while further promoting China's outstanding sports culture.

3. Providing Equal Employment Opportunities and Enhancing Women's Social Status

The development of rural tourism in China has provided more employment choices for rural women, significantly enhancing their social status. Fujian's Xiadang Village established the "Xiadang Daughters-in-Law" brand, organizing local women to participate in volunteer activities and start tourism-related businesses. They made significant contributions to the village's Covid-19 response, poverty alleviation,

and rural tourism development. Hebei's Shuiyu Village also fully leverages the unique role of women in rural revitalization and has developed a batch of tourist courtyards based on the Western Evergreen scenic area and the fast-growing homestay industry, promoting employment and entrepreneurship among female villagers³.

(III) Economy-Related SDGs

1. Offering Quality Employment Opportunities and Promoting Social Equality

The thriving rural tourism industry has created a large number of decent employment opportunities for various groups and effectively promoted social equality. Many tourism companies have introduced new poverty alleviation models, prioritizing the protection of residents' labor rights, and forming a "tourist attraction plus farmer" community with a shared future. For example, Hainan's Binglanggu Scenic Area prioritizes the employment of local villagers, customizing a flexible model of "half-day farming + half-day work" for them. It also funded the Huinong Street project, with uniformly designed shops

that were allocated free of charge to local villagers who have entered a partnership with the scenic area, thus creating many employment opportunities.

2. Improving Rural Infrastructure and Encouraging Innovation and Entrepreneurship

In developing rural tourism China places great emphasis on infrastructure construction and improvement, which provides a solid foundation for the development of tourism-related public services and improves the quality of local lives. Guangxi's Chashan Village consolidated funds for projects such as poverty alleviation, tourism, transportation, and housing construction, and used them mainly to build roads inside and outside the village, public parking lots, public toilets, a tourist center, and leisure facilities. Additionally, it prioritized the application of the Internet and other information technology. It is connected to the "Fuchuan Cyber Information Smart Platform" and has launched the 5G-powered "Digital Chashan" project to provide smart tourism, smart agriculture, daily information services, and live streaming of tourist attractions for tourists and villagers.





3. Promoting the Consumption of Products from Rural Areas and Advocating the Sustainable Development Philosophy

The combination of consumption and poverty reduction effectively promotes the sustainable development philosophy. In practice, this model encourages tourists and enterprises to directly support rural economic development by purchasing local specialties and participating in tourism activities. For example, Shaanxi Tourism Group launched the “Shanhua Project—Trunk Action,” a rural poverty alleviation through tourism project. It leverages its credible platform to promote local consumption and online sales of agricultural and sideline specialties and continuously allocates traffic to the products from target villages. It also partners up with tourist attractions and physical stores, facilitating the in-depth integration of “tourism + internet + agriculture.”

II. Alignment between China’s Practice and Poverty Reduction Targets of the SDGs

Poverty is one of the core challenges to global sustainable development. Poverty eradication is not only crucial for driving economic growth but also an important prerequisite for improving people’s livelihoods and achieving social equity and justice. “No Poverty” comes first among the SDGs, underscoring its foundational and overarching

strategic role. By tapping into local natural and cultural resources and developing distinctive tourism projects, China has not only created employment opportunities and income sources for the impoverished population but also driven the development of related industries, forming integrated development models for poverty reduction featuring “tourism + agriculture,” “tourism + culture,” and “tourism + ecological conservation.”

(I) Increasing Tourism Income and Achieving Decent Employment for All People

The key to poverty reduction through tourism lies in creating employment opportunities and income sources for the impoverished population through tourism development. In China’s rural tourism development, emphasis is placed on including the impoverished population in the tourism industry chain, providing them with employment opportunities in areas such as guided tours, catering, accommodation, and handicraft production to help them achieve stable income growth. For example, Xijiang Miao Village in Leishan County, Guizhou, encourages farmers to turn their own houses into agritainment businesses, homestays, and souvenir shops or rent them out to increase income. In 2024, the county achieved a tourism income of 14.715 billion yuan, with a per capita disposable income of farmers at 15,460 yuan⁴.

In promoting poverty reduction through tourism, local governments focused on shifting from reliance on external support to a self-sustaining model, enhancing the employment capabilities of the impoverished population through skill training to ensure they are competent for tourism-related positions, thereby achieving decent employment. For instance, Xuan’en County in Hubei Province emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders in developing all-area-advancing tourism, providing comprehensive and systematic training for tourism

industry practitioners, including those engaged in traditional tourism businesses such as travel agencies, catering services, and homestays. Even crew members on tourist cruise ships were trained on *Putonghua* and local history and endowments. All this has enhanced the practitioners' professional competence and skills while improving the tourist experience.

(II) Improving Infrastructure and Strengthening the Social Security System

Improved infrastructure is a crucial support for poverty reduction through tourism. In promoting poverty reduction through tourism, China has made substantial investments in transportation, communications, water and electricity, and other infrastructure, providing a solid foundation for the development of tourism in impoverished areas. In addition to local government funding and manpower inputs, numerous social organizations and social capital have also contributed to improving rural infrastructure. For example, the Railway Tourism Branch of the China Association of Travel Services organizes approximately 120 special tourist train trips annually to Xizang and Xinjiang, with the number increasing year by year. The tourists mainly come from the developed eastern regions, heading to tourist destinations in western regions such as Lhasa, Xining, Turpan, Korla, and Hotan. The railway transportation service has significantly increased the number of tourists to these remote areas, directly boosting local

income from tourism.

In promoting poverty reduction through tourism China not only encourages the impoverished population to participate in tourism-related economic activities but also ensures they can enjoy basic social security services. Through policy support, the government encourages tourism enterprises to provide stable employment opportunities and benefits for their employees, ensuring long-term stable income growth for them. Targeted poverty alleviation, as an important measure in China's poverty reduction efforts, ensures the effective utilization of resources for poverty alleviation through precise identification of the impoverished population and tailored assistance plans. For example, Jiyuan City in Henan Province precisely identifies impoverished families through household registration and provides them with tourism-related skill training, entrepreneurial capital support, and paired assistance with enterprises, as well as medical assistance, education subsidies, and old-age insurance, among other social security services.

(III) Promoting Social Equality and Equal Access to Resources for Men and Women

The development of rural tourism in China has provided diverse employment opportunities for women. Through skill training, entrepreneurial support, and other measures, the government helps women enhance their capabilities and achieve economic independence, and ensures equal access to tourism resources and employment opportunities for men and women. For example, the Lu'an Women's Federation in Anhui Province deeply promotes the "Women's Action for Rural Revitalization." It leverages distinctive rural tourism brands such as Lu'an Tea Valley, Jianghuai Fruit Ridge, Xishan Herbal Medicine Depot, and the Ninety-Li Landscape Corridor, and has launched rural theme tourism routes featuring the CPC heritage, parent-child activities, and





culinary delights⁵. Such tourism activities highlight the powerful force of women in economic and social activities, inspiring the growth of women in rural areas.

In promoting poverty reduction through tourism, China not only promotes gender equality but also facilitates equal participation of different groups. In practice, through policy support and resource allocation, China ensures different groups can equally access tourism resources and employment opportunities. In ethnic minority areas, local governments attach great importance to the inheritance and utilization of ethnic cultures, transforming their cultural resources into economic advantages by developing ethnic tourism projects, and providing numerous employment opportunities for ethnic minority populations. Meanwhile, for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled, the government provides special training and targeted assistance to help them better participate in tourism-related economic activities. Additionally, the government ensures that their basic living needs are satisfied while they participate in tourism-related economic activities by refining social security policies. These measures not only promote income growth for

vulnerable groups but also enhance their sense of social participation and belonging, driving inclusive social development.

Section Two Inspirations from China's Practice in Promoting Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Rural Development Through Tourism

I. The Logic of Upholding Fairness: Market Orientation and Government Coordination

In promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism, China adopts the dual-drive model of “market orientation + government coordination,” overcoming the dependence on the traditional path of development, forming a logic of upholding fairness with Chinese characteristics. Specifically, this model, through the establishment of collaboration mechanisms between locals and visitors, urban and rural areas, and different regions, coordinates market efficiency with governmental guarantees for fairness, reconstructs the value chain of rural development, and provides new strategic insights for solving the global challenges of rural poverty and sustainable development.



(I) Meeting the Shared Needs of Locals and Visitors to Promote Social Integration

Rural tourism development not only creates economic value but also reconstructs social relationship networks through the cultural clash between locals and visitors. Rural tourism development often emphasizes experience design, which has greatly changed the traditional role of tourists. In the past, tourists were often seen as “onlookers,” with a certain sense of distance from the local community. However, with the transformation and upgrading of rural tourism models, tourists are encouraged to deeply participate in rural life and even in the decision-making processes of rural communities, gradually becoming “participants” in the villages. Moreover, tourists have brought new social circles to rural communities and established friendships and partnerships based on common interests and experiences with residents. This cross-regional and cross-cultural social network has gradually expanded into an ecosystem of value co-creation between locals and visitors, not only broadening the social horizons of rural residents but also further promoting the social integration between locals and visitors.

(II) Leveraging Urban-Rural Resource Integration to Break the Dual Structure

Rural tourism, as a lever for coordinated urban-rural development⁶, taps into dormant resources by market-oriented means and stimulates the two-way flow of urban and rural factors. With the spillover of the influence of the rural tourism industry, urban resources have been attracted and aggregated into rural areas. The first is capital. The focus is on the development of rural tourism projects, such as high-end homestay clusters and characteristic tourist attractions, greatly reshaping the spatial pattern of rural areas. Then technology comes. With the application of smart products such as intelligent ticketing systems and online guide platforms, technology is embedded into rural tourism operations. Finally, professional talent is brought in to empower the development of rural tourism, providing operational guidance and service training, and empowering the human capital of rural tourism.

Conversely, rural areas, with their own ecological resources and cultural heritage, export high-quality resources to cities. For example, eco-friendly agricultural

products are directly supplied to urban consumers, labeled as green and organic products, meeting the high-quality dietary needs of urban residents. Folk cultural resources, in the forms of traditional festivals and folk arts, attract urban residents to visit rural areas, allowing them to experience the charm of local culture and the complementary advantages of urban and rural resources.

It is worth noting that this report finds that compared to village-scale cases, cases above the village scale score higher in the four dimensions of speed, quality, external factors, and internal factors, indicating that resource integration and regional linkage play important roles in regional tourism development. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on developing income-generating industries such as rural tourism, at the county level, promoting the transition of urban and rural areas from “physical adjacency” to “organic integration.”

(III) Catalyzing Regional Coordinated Development to Narrow the Development Gap

From a macro perspective, rural tourism plays the role of a catalyst for the coordinated development of developed and underdeveloped regions. Developed regions, with their solid and vast tourism markets and capital strength, have paired up with underdeveloped regions to assist the latter in developing the rural tourism industry. For example, they work together to plan cross-regional tourism routes, attracting continuous streams of tourists from developed regions to underdeveloped regions and stimulating the latter’s economic vitality through the multiplier effect of tourism. By sharing marketing platforms and integrating communication resources, they have effectively enhanced the market visibility of rural tourism brands in underdeveloped regions. In return, underdeveloped regions, with their pristine natural landscapes and folk cultures, provide differentiated experiences for tourists from developed regions.

Long-term tourism interactions have prompted different regions to draw strength from each other in terms of resources, markets, and mindsets, constructing a cross-regional value network guided by the logic of fairness and gradually narrowing the regional development gap.

In general, the core of China’s “market + government” dual-drive model lies in opening up the closed loop of “resources, capital, benefits, redistribution” through institutional innovation, which can unleash market vitality and safeguard the rights and interests of vulnerable groups through government intervention. This “people-centered market economy” provides key insights for global rural sustainable development: Only by pursuing efficiency while guaranteeing fairness can we truly achieve inclusive growth.

II. Upholding the Sustainable Development Philosophy: Collaboration for Balanced Development and Harmonious Coexistence

(I) Collaboration for Balanced Development: The Action Guide

Collaboration for balanced development emphasizes striking a dynamic balance among the economic, social, and environmental dimensions to ensure sustainable development while encouraging multi-stakeholder collaboration to create value together.



In the economic dimension, it is necessary to balance the short-term economic benefits with the long-term healthy development of the rural economy. Existing resources of rural areas are utilized to develop characteristic tourism projects, driving capital inflows through short-term and efficient projects, increasing villagers' incomes, and enhancing the vitality of the rural economy. From a long-term perspective, greater investment should be made in rural infrastructure construction to improve transportation and Internet access, laying a foundation for the sustainable development of the rural economy. At the same time, rural areas should strengthen the cultivation and recruitment of talent, encourage college graduates to return to start businesses and attract professionals to support rural development. By enhancing human capital and promoting the transformation and upgrading of rural industries, they can shift from relying on a single resource to the coordinated development of tourism and other industries.

In the social dimension, social harmony is promoted by respecting the differences in rural multiculturalism. Various rural cultural activities are organized to create stages for villagers to showcase their local culture, and enhance their sense of identity and pride in their own culture. These activities can also lure tourists and enhance intercultural exchanges and interactions, thereby enhancing the cohesion of rural communities. Meanwhile, a harmonious and inclusive environment can be created in rural society at different levels by respecting local cultural customs and lifestyles, allowing villagers' representatives from different cultural backgrounds to participate in decision-making, and formulating village regulations that meet the requirements of multiculturalism.

In the environmental dimension, ecological protection and tourism development endeavors are advanced side by side to promote green development. The protection of natural ecological resources is stepped up, with ecological protection areas strictly delineated

and tourism development activities prohibited in core ecological zones. Meanwhile, the eco-friendly tourism village initiative is advanced. Tourism infrastructure is built with eco-friendly materials, green travel methods are promoted, environmental regulation during tourism-related activities is strengthened, and tourist manners are advocated.

The collaboration mechanism runs through the process. The government provides strong guarantees for the development of rural tourism projects through policy guidance and financial support. Enterprises promote the development of tourism products with their market experience and resource advantages. Villagers, as the owners of the rural community, actively provide homestays and catering services. Through continuous exploration and expansion in projects and business forms, stakeholders inside and outside rural areas deepen their collaboration in the creation of diversified value.

(II) Harmonious Coexistence: The Ideological Guide

The value of harmonious coexistence is deeply rooted in the soil of traditional Chinese culture⁷, embodying



a dynamic evolutionary perspective of endless vitality and a sense of community with holistic thinking⁸. It provides intrinsic guiding value for poverty reduction and rural revitalization through tourism.

During the period of poverty reduction through tourism, the pursuit of harmonious coexistence means closely linking residents in poverty-stricken areas with the development of the tourism industry, forming a relationship of mutual dependence. In other words, impoverished villagers are no longer simply seen as receivers of assistance but as important participants and beneficiaries of tourism development. The relevant practice essentially represents a transformation of development ethics, from one-way assistance from outside to a symbiotic and collaborative self-sustaining development model. Practice has proven that when impoverished groups transform from “objects of development” to “subjects of development,” they can not only create more sustainable economic benefits but also achieve a virtuous cycle of cultural consciousness.

As we enter the stage of promoting rural revitalization, the pursuit of harmonious coexistence will further promote collaboration among various stakeholders

and construct an organic ecosystem for rural development. It guides different groups within rural areas, such as local villagers, returnees starting businesses, and distinguished locals with outstanding contributions, to jointly plan the overall development of the village. Externally, close connections are established between villages with enterprises and universities. Cities provide markets, capital, and technical support for rural areas, while rural areas provide ecological products, leisure spaces, and cultural experiences for urbanites, thus achieving complementary advantages and harmonious coexistence between urban and rural areas and among different stakeholders. Specifically, “harmonious coexistence” means integrating the forces of the state and society and pooling various tangible and intangible resources inside and outside rural areas in rural tourism practice to achieve mutual complementarity and promotion, coexistence, and shared prosperity.

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Postscript

The year 2025 marks the final year for China to consolidate and build on achievements in poverty reduction so as to promote rural revitalization and a critical juncture in the global advancement toward the 2030 SDGs. This report traces China’s journey of promoting sustainable rural development through tourism, and based on a research framework of “practical exploration, a summary of experience, elevation in value,” systematically explores the theoretical and practical logic behind rural China’s rise from poverty to prosperity. The following core conclusions are drawn:

First, the practice of promoting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development through tourism in China exhibits a distinct “policy-value” synergy. The policy transition from poverty reduction to rural revitalization not only reflects the dynamic adaptability of the state governance system but also

enhances the resilience of rural tourist destinations in poverty reduction through the internal and external synergy of “cultivating internal driving forces plus empowerment by external resources.”

Second, the IRT-SQEI framework is introduced to break away from the material-oriented focus of previous studies on poverty reduction that overly emphasized economic value. It incorporates the concept of balanced development into analytical dimensions, providing a new analytical framework for explaining differentiated models of poverty reduction through tourism in complex contexts. On this basis, a focused study of 10 best practices showcases a collaborative governance pattern involving the government, market, and society.

Third, under the synergy of “entities, institutions, technology, and contexts,” the value spillover of

China's experiences is manifested in the profound integration of the "logic of fairness" and the "sustainable development philosophy" inside rural areas. Through mechanisms of local-visitor interaction, mutual nourishment between urban and rural areas, and regional coordination, it offers valuable insights for resolving complex contradictions in the global poverty reduction efforts, contributing to the achievement of the 2030 SDGs.

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