
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Path of Sustainable Cultural Tourism under the Context of Rural Revitalization: Taking Yantianzi, Hong Kong as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Village-based cultural tourism represents a pivotal avenue for cultivating a sustainable economy in Hong Kong. This project focuses on Yantianzi Village in Hong Kong as a cultural tourism destination, with parents and children constituting a substantial potential consumer group. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents planning to visit Hong Kong with their children. Employing rootedness theory, this study conducted a secondary analysis of the interviews, identifying eight categories organized into three main categories. Addressing the research questions, the primary focus centered on the rational development of local tourism resources while integrating environmental conservation. Additionally, the study revealed the potential of parent-child tours in harnessing educational opportunities to support ongoing rural revitalization efforts. Consequently, by amalgamating educational elements with conventional tourism activities like sightseeing and cultural immersion, a culturally-oriented tourism program emerged, aligning economic development with ecological conservation to foster sustainable economic growth for Hong Kong's villages.

KEYWORDS

Traditional villages, Yantianzi, rural tourism, environmental protection.

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1. Introduction

As China's economic landscape evolves, the disparity between urban and rural development intensifies. Traditional villages grapple with resource scarcity, population decline, land abandonment, and environmental degradation, prompting urgent concerns from both the government and society. The 19th CPC National Congress Report underscores the critical importance of rural revitalization, framing it as fundamental to national economic and societal well-being.

The amalgamation of the cultural and tourism industries has garnered heightened attention, especially since the formation of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2018, emphasizing cultural facets within rural tourism. Focused on cultural industry development tailored to rural settings, the Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022) advocates for integrating cultural elements into tourism to foster a new era of rural development (CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2018). This integration not only propels rural revitalization and activates the local economy but also aligns with imperatives for sustainable rural development.

Yim Tin Tsz, nestled on an island in the Sai Kung Sea in Hong Kong, spans less than 1 square kilometer and embodies a 300-year-old heritage that integrates Western Catholic and Chinese Hakka cultures. Blessed with abundant natural resources—mangroves, salt pans, and diverse wildlife—Yantianzi underwent a phase of depopulation and economic decline but underwent restoration

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efforts in 2008. Notably, the restoration of St. Joseph's Chapel earned Yim Tin Tsz two UNESCO cultural heritage awards. Subsequent initiatives, such as the Yim Tin Tsz Arts Festival and the Salt and Light Conservation Center, propelled cultural and eco-tourism, bolstering Yim Tin Tsz's popularity and attracting a surge of tourists. Through a case study of Yim Tin Tsz Village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, this essay delves into the trajectory of sustainable cultural tourism development within the village, aiming to offer novel insights for future rural revitalization.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development, introduced in the 1980s, advocates for enhancing the quality of human life within existing ecological constraints. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) further expounded on this idea in its 1987 report "Our Common Future," emphasizing the importance of development meeting present needs without jeopardizing the capabilities of future generations (Zhang & Qi, 2020). This paper delineates the three facets of sustainable development—ecological, economic, and social—emphasizing the pivotal role of balance and coordination between ecology and the economy in fostering social equity and sustainable social development.

2.2 Rural Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism encompasses various activities enabling tourists to delve into local residents' lifestyles and perspectives (McIntosh, 1985). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) discerns cultural tourism narrowly and broadly, encompassing activities satisfying basic cultural cravings (e.g., festival tourism, folklore tourism) and diverse personal needs aimed at cultural enrichment and knowledge expansion (Wu et al., 2023). While scholars interpret cultural tourism diversely, its core tenets revolve around activity, product, consciousness, and tourism experiences.

As of August 5, 2023, 49,556 pertinent papers have been screened through the China Knowledge Network (CNN) using the keyword "cultural tourism." The prevalence of this topic continues to grow, shifting focus from theoretical exploration to practical applications.

2.3 Territorial Tourism

Territorial tourism posits a tourism development model centered on sustainable tourism by amalgamating tourism resources and offering comprehensive tourism services across a region (Guo & Zhang, 2010). This concept advocates transcending traditional localized tourism approaches to encompass broader geographic scopes. With contemporary tourism trends favoring leisure and entertainment over mere sightseeing and urban-based tourism shifting toward rural experiences, territorial tourism signifies an essential paradigm shift. Embracing regional tourism theory is vital to enhance mass tourism quality, spur tourism evolution, and promote local economic and societal development.

2.4 Research Questions

In recent years, the whole society have witnessed increased attention on rural cultural tourism development in China's tourism landscape. While this model fosters tourism services, it simultaneously stimulates rural economic growth. Nevertheless, rural cultural tourism faces challenges, notably ecological conservation. Fragile rural ecosystems risk exploitation due to tourism development, necessitating careful considerations. Against this backdrop, this paper uses Yantianzi in Hong Kong as a focal point to explore the parallel prospects of ecological conservation and village economic development in cultural tourism. This exploration seeks to provide theoretical and practical guidance for Hong Kong's rural cultural tourism development, serving as a reference for analogous issues confronting other regions or countries in rural tourism development and ultimately promoting sustainable rural cultural tourism.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts semi-structured interviews to examine the prospects of sustainable cultural and tourism development in Yantianzi Village, Hong Kong. The study aims to foster ecological conservation and economic development concurrently. The interview process facilitates capturing key study aspects while enabling participants to express their opinions freely. Previous sections outlined the current status of Yim Tin Tsz Village and identified existing issues. Recognizing that ages 0-12 constitute a critical growth and learning phase for children, the study interviewed six parents with children aged 12 or below.

The research involved six parents with children aged 12 or below as the target subjects. The selection criteria for the interviewed parents include three key factors: the age of their children, the parents' age, and their expressed intention to travel to Hong Kong.

Table 1 Interviewees' information

Respondent	Gender	Age	Respondent's Child
Parent A	Female	33	10
Parent B	Male	35	9
Parent C	Female	37	12
Parent D	Male	43	10
Parent E	Male	43	8
Parent F	Female	35	10

This study employs a qualitative research approach utilizing semi-structured interviews. Prepared open-ended questions guide the interviews, which typically last approximately 30 minutes. The interviewer maintains flexibility, adjusting the question sequence or introducing follow-ups during the conversation to elicit more profound insights and gather comprehensive data. Two methods, online and face-to-face interviews, are used for data collection, with prior consent obtained from participants. Complete transcripts of the interviews are generated and organized. The data is subjected to coding using the rooted theory to extract insights pertinent to Hong Kong's village-based parent-child cultural tourism. These insights serve as crucial reference points for future strategic planning.

4. Data Analysis

The interview text is coded twice using the Zagan theory within the framework of the rootedness theory (Charmaz, 2006). The initial coding extracts "domain" from the raw data, forming the basis for subsequent detailed analysis. This secondary analysis refines these categories, condensing them into "main domains," resulting in the formation of three comprehensive main domains. This structured approach establishes a robust framework for drawing conclusions and facilitating discussion. Table 1 presents the breakdown of the interview text analysis.

Table 2 The framework of rootedness theory

Main domains	Domains	Number of domains	Meaning of domains
Science popularization education	Science education	6	Study of subject areas, such as natural sciences
	Practical social education	4	Exercises for children in bridging school and social life
	Arts Education	2	Cultivating artistic cells and aesthetics
	Political Education	2	Understanding the legal characteristics of "One Country, Two Systems" in Hong Kong
Folklore	Hong Kong Culture	7	Unique customs and cultures in Hong Kong
	Western Culture	2	Historical imprints of the West in Hong Kong
Sightseeing Scenery	Cityscape	5	Sightseeing spots in Hong Kong's downtown area
	Rural Scenery	1	Scenery in Hong Kong's rural areas

4.1 Initial Coding

After organizing and analyzing the textual content from the six interviews, eight general domains emerged: 'science education,' 'practical social education,' 'art education,' 'political education,' 'Hong Kong culture,' 'Western culture,' 'urban landscape,' and 'rural scenery.' These domains helped identify the travel priorities of parents visiting Hong Kong with their children, offering valuable insights for constructive suggestions and development strategies for rural tourism in Hong Kong.

'The culture of Hong Kong' was frequently mentioned, highlighting its unique customs and traditions. Parents emphasized the importance of exposing their children to the distinctive cultural blend of Chinese and Western influences in this global trade hub. For instance, Interviewee B's desire for children to experience a cosmopolitan city and immerse themselves in a different cultural ambiance is illustrative of this sentiment. The objective of broadening horizons and experiencing a thriving international city resonated strongly among parents. Additionally, science education emerged as a significant topic, with parents recognizing the allure of Hong Kong's renowned Science and Technology Museum and Oceanarium for their curious children.

Sightseeing in the cityscape was also considered important, with 'Victoria Harbour' being a primary destination for parents. However, rural scenery, although less frequently mentioned, was a focal point in this study, presenting the challenge of diverting attention to Hong Kong's countryside.

Other recurrent themes included practical social education, emphasizing the development of children's practical skills and social aptitude beyond school education. Furthermore, some parents mentioned art education and political education, adding a unique dimension to the Hong Kong tourism experience. Western culture was also viewed as an attraction, with parents seeking opportunities for their children to practice English and explore Western architecture.

4.2 Main Axis Coding

The main axis code represents a more representative categorization of the initial code, offering a structured framework. The primary coding distilled the text into three main themes: "science education," "folk customs," and "sightseeing." By evaluating the frequency of related content in the interviews, it became evident that education was the foremost aspect for parents in Hong Kong's parent-child cultural tourism. Unlike many visitors prioritizing shopping and sightseeing, education and cultural experiences were more appealing in parent-child tours. Consequently, these main domains offer pivotal insights for Hong Kong's tourism industry, especially in expanding parent-child rural cultural tourism—a significant contributor to Hong Kong's sustainable development and an exemplary case for economic growth paralleled with ecological conservation.

5. Recommendations

This chapter will discuss various categories from the interview text analysis to plan rural parent-child cultural tourism in Hong Kong. As suggested by Guo and Zhang (2010), the development models of rural tourism are categorized into seven types: rural agriculture, agro-entertainment, village and township, leisure and vacation, folklore, science education, and nature tourism. Notably, the three main categories proposed in this study align precisely with the latter three modules, confirming the credibility of interview content coding and bolstering the potential realization of suggested programs.

5.1 Folk Culture

Ancient villages preserve historical memories and cultural heritage. Protecting this heritage while integrating culture and tourism through local cultural symbols and marketing can create unique rural cultural tourism experiences. Emphasizing popular science education activities in cultural relic showrooms or suitable venues enhances family interactions and promotes understanding of Hong Kong's multicultural aspects, enriching parents' and children's experiences.

Moreover, leveraging Yim Tin Tsai's cultural heritage—Hakka, Catholic, and colonial cultures—could frame rural cultural tourism development. Parent-child tours integrating cultural relics, interactive activities, and thematic guidebooks can deepen understanding and interest in Hong Kong's multiculturalism.

Respondent C's comparison between Hong Kong's salt flats and Chaka Salt Lake in Qinghai highlights opportunities for Hong Kong's salt flats to stand out. Leveraging traditional crafts like salt-making workshops, guided tours, and interactive experiences with local craftsmen can promote cultural understanding and sustain economic growth.

Promotional activities through media platforms and collaborations with schools, community organizations, and tourism agencies are crucial for increasing Yim Tin Tsai's visibility and attracting families and tourists to experience its cultural tourism projects.

5.2 Ecological Conservation

Yantianzi's rural environment offers unique educational experiences in geography, nature, history, and humanities. It is meaningful to integrate ecological preservation into the curriculum enabling children to appreciate nature and respect their environment (Wu et al., 2023). Efforts to minimize ecological impact and restore significance are paramount.

5.2.1 Natural Environment

Leveraging Yantianzi's natural resources—such as the salt flats, freshwater sources, and biological habitats—creates opportunities for ecotourism. Programs focused on salt flat restoration experiences, conservation of water sources, and ecological observation enhance children's understanding of nature and promote respect for the environment.

5.2.2 Built Environment

Exploring Yantianzi's architectural features while emphasizing environmental conservation fosters experiential learning. Simulated restoration of wall patterns, architectural sketching, and the use of environmentally friendly materials in construction offer children hands-on experiences while nurturing environmental awareness. Through these initiatives, children gain historical and cultural knowledge, practical skills, enhanced parent-child relationships, improved communication, and ecological awareness.

6. Conclusion

This study used semi-structured interviews and rooted theory to explore pathways for sustainable cultural tourism in Yantianzi Village, Hong Kong. The findings provide valuable insights into the strategic management of rural cultural tourism, offering

guidance to policymakers for governance and development. By implementing targeted strategies, rural cultural tourism can achieve ecological conservation and economic development, invigorating village vitality and fostering sustainable ecological and economic growth.

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