

Does rural tourism revitalize the countryside? An exploration of the spatial reconstruction through the lens of cultural connotations of rurality

Abstract

Rural revitalization has drawn increasing attention from the academia, public and industry. Using remote sensing imagery, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, this study explores the content and mechanism of rural spatial reconstruction driven by tourism development in a rural area of China through the lens of cultural connotations of rurality. Results indicate government-led tourism development has transformed the focal village from a traditional rural society based on kinship ties into a commercialized rural tourism community with economic interests at its core. The interplay of space, value, power and capital constitutes the mechanism of spatial reconstruction. Findings emphasize the importance of rurality for the sustainable development of rural tourism and have implications for both governments and developers.

Keywords: Sustainable rural tourism; Rural revitalization; Spatial reconstruction; Rurality

1. Introduction

Research on the impacts of tourism development in rural destinations has long been a focal area and has demonstrated positive and negative effects of tourism on the economy, social culture and environment of the destination (Confente & Scarpi, 2020; Su et al., 2019). Space as an important carrier of rural economic and social development has aroused high attention from academia. One mainstream applied Lefebvre's spatial production theory (Lefebvre, 1991) to explore the social aspect of rural area (e.g. Guo & Huang, 2020; Wang & Zhou, 2022; Wei et al., 2021). Other studies used geographical techniques to visualize the impact of tourism on rural spatial materiality (Ma et al., 2018). Under the spatial cognition of multi-dimensional attributes, there is limited systematic deconstruction of the tourism-induced changes from the cultural perspective. Further, emphasis has been dominantly placed on the consequences of spatial reconstruction (Sharpley, 2014). Comprehensive mechanism behind the impact consequences is largely underdeveloped, which hinders the rural revitalization in practice and should be prioritized in the impact research agenda. Methodologically, when measuring consequences, research adopted either a quantitative approach or a qualitative approach. Multidisciplinary research incorporating both objective and subjective data is neglected, which is urgently needed to deeply analyze the impacts of rural tourism.

In rural tourism destinations, rurality is the core that differentiates them from urban tourism settings and regarded as rural idyllic or rural nostalgia (Panzer-Krause, 2020). Rurality is a fuzzy concept and its meaning depends on many aspects (Shen et al., 2019). Different scholars define and measure rurality based on different aspects, including descriptive definitions and socio-cultural definitions (Nelson et al., 2021). From the perspective of descriptive definition, rurality is conceptualized as a space far away from

urban areas (Nelson et al., 2021), and can be further differentiated from urban areas by a series of indicators, such as population density, demographics, commuting patterns, migration, and distance to various sized population centers (Cloke, 1977). Descriptive definitions have been criticized and questioned for their subjectivity (Wood, 2011). Sociocultural definition highlights the cultural value of rural areas, including social and cultural characteristics of rural residents, their social and cultural environment and their construction and perception of rural areas (Woods, 2011). Inheriting the definition from a socio-cultural perspective, this study holds that rurality is essentially the embodiment of rural culture. We should return to the rural culture to reflect and measure the rurality, which is called the cultural connotation of rurality. Although rurality is essential to rural tourism, there are few studies to measure either the cultural connotation of rurality in rural tourism or the relationship between the two (Shen et al., 2019). Therefore, adopting a spatial and cultural perspective, the purpose of this research is to systematically deconstruct the impact of tourism on rural space and the influencing mechanism. Three specific research questions are investigated: (1) What changes have taken place in the rural space driven by tourism development? (2) What is the dynamic mechanism? (3) Do the results really contribute to rural revitalization?

Different from Western countries, government plays a leading role in the development of rural tourism in China (Ma et al., 2020a; Wang & Wall, 2007; Zhou et al., 2017). The government is a complex organization made up of many layers of departments (Su et al., 2019; Zuo et al., 2017), including the central government and local governments (Lin, 2021; Zuo et al., 2017). The central government puts forward a series of policies to promote the rural tourism development, including the national agricultural tourism demonstration sites, the construction of beautiful leisure villages, and the rural revitalization strategy (Ma et al., 2020b). Local governments are responsible for implementing the policies of the central government and taking charge of the specific development of local tourism, including formulating tourism plans, financing policies and coordinating relations among different stakeholders (Liu et al., 2020; Ruhanen, 2013). However, due to China's vast territory, uneven economic development and other conditions, different rural areas have adopted different development modes, leading to heterogeneous results of rural spatial reconstruction. According to the leading party, rural tourism development can be divided into government led, community residents led, developer led and mixed model. However, in the vast remote and least developed rural areas, the mixed mode of government-led with external capital injection has become the dominant mode of tourism development (Ma et al., 2020a). In this mode, residents are largely neglected and marginalized due to lack of knowledge and capital (Xu et al., 2019). This pattern is not unique to China but occurs in many other developing countries (Xu et al., 2019). This study takes China's government-led rural tourism development model with external capital injection as the research context to explore the impacts of tourism on rural space under this model, the specific reconstruction content and formation mechanism. The research results provide theoretical guidance and practical reference for developing rural tourism in similar developing countries worldwide.

2. Literature review

2.1. Rural tourism development and the impacts

Rural tourism generally refers to tourism activities in rural areas (Lane, 1994). In the 1970s, the depression and decline of rural economic and social structures in developed countries made rural tourism a key tool for the revival of rural areas and achieved remarkable progress to this end (Su, 2011; Su et al., 2019). Starting in developed countries, rural tourism is now emerging in both developed and developing countries (Su, 2019). Studies have shown that rural tourism promotes rural economic growth (Sharpley, 2014), enriches employment opportunities (Su, 2011), **improves entertainment and cultural facilities (Lin et al., 2017)** and promotes the protection of natural and cultural heritage (Su, 2011). However, many studies have shown that the impact of tourism on the countryside is two-sided (Su et al., 2019). Although tourism development brings positive changes to rural areas, it also gives rise to corresponding challenges and threats (Su et al., 2019). **Consistent with other types of tourism, rural tourism increases the living cost of residents (Gannon et al., 2020), brings conflicts between different stakeholders (Sharpley, 2014), generate pollution (Lindberg et al., 2021) and disrupts the livelihoods of rural residents (Su et al., 2019). Sharpley (2002) analyzed the challenges and problems faced by rural tourism entrepreneurs, including the dominance of mass tourism operators, low tourism demand, a lack of essential skills, high development cost but low returns. Rural tourism entrepreneurs have high investments in renovating old houses, marketing, etc., but receive low income and government financial subsidies (Sharpley, 2002). Further studies on the impact of tourism on rural areas have divided the impacts of tourism into three domains: economy, society and environment (Confente & Scarpi, 2020; Lyon et al., 2017; Sharpley, 2014). A large number of studies focus on residents' attitudes and support behavior towards the three impacts of tourism (Confente & Scarpi, 2020; Lyon et al., 2017). Latest research on the impacts explored residents' life quality (Wang et al., 2023), and willingness (Scarpi et al., 2022), etc. However, existing studies on the impact of tourism are reflected from the perspective of residents (Scarpi et al., 2022), lacking the reflection from the village space and its culture.**

2.2. Rural spatial reconstruction

Studies have shown that rural reconstruction is a systematic project, involving diverse content and rich connotations, including spatial reconstruction, economic reconstruction and social reconstruction, which are complementary but mutually restrictive dimensions (Long et al., 2016). Spatial reconstruction is the carrier of economic and social reconstruction, and the contents of economic and social reconstruction are presented through spatial reconstruction (Long, 2014). Land is not only an important resource for rural space production but also a space for rural social and economic evolution (Ma et al., 2018; Yao & Xie, 2016). Therefore, land consolidation is an important process in rural spatial reconstruction (Gao & Cheng, 2020; Long, 2014). Rural reconstruction inevitably changes the land use mode and configuration pattern (DeMarco & Matusitz, 2011; Ma et al., 2018). Rural settlement,

the most basic spatial unit in the countryside (Xi et al. 2013), is another focus of rural spatial reconstruction research. Spatial reconstruction gives rise to rural resettlement, different forms of which affect residents differently (Lo et al., 2016). As a comprehensive embodiment of social connections and production relations (Bański & Wesołowska, 2010), determining the optimal reconstruction of rural settlements has become a key issue in rural revitalization (Kong et al., 2019). Dong et al. (2022) identified four types of rural settlements and their restructuring directions. Ma et al. (2022) analyzed rural livability and population flow intensity, and identified four types of rural settlement spatial reconstruction.

Tourism-driven rural spatial restructuring is driven by diverse stakeholders including government, local residents, tourist market, and enterprises (Gao & Cheng, 2020). Under the spatial social turn, studies of the tourism impacts on rural space focus on the sociality of rural areas. The change of specific space in rural village can represent the impact of tourism on its sociality, such as home space (Guo & Huang, 2020) and public space (Wei et al., 2021). Guo and Huang (2020) identified the multidimensional production and the construction of home space. Wei et al (2021) explained the production mechanism and internal logic of village public space under the influence of rural tourism. To summarize, these studies adopted Lefebvre's space production theory to analyze the social elements and content of space. However, the cultural level and connotation of rural spatial reconstruction through tourism development have yet been fully explored and deserve a thorough investigation.

2.3. Sustainable rural development, rurality and rural revitalization

Given the differentiated impacts of rural tourism on different regions, rural tourism as a panacea for rural development has been criticized and questioned (Sharpley, 2002). At the same time, rural areas have undergone substantial changes under the influence of tourism, leading to rural spatial reconstruction (Su, 2011). As the essential characteristic of rural tourism (Lane, 1994), rurality is a key indicator for measuring and judging the development of rural tourism (Li et al., 2015). Rurality is a social construct that is closely linked to the cultural domain (Cloke & Milbourne, 1992), indicating that the countryside is a place with profound cultural connotations (Woods, 2011). Rural tourism is essentially a cultural transformation (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015). Therefore, this study defines rurality as rural culture and reflects the influence of tourism on rurality through rural culture, which is called the cultural connotation of rurality. In other words, only those rural tourism which is based on rurality and ultimately protecting rural culture can actualize rural revitalization and promote the long-term sustainable development of rural areas. However, few studies are conducted to measure the impact of rural tourism on rurality and the relationship between them (Shen et al., 2019). This study hence analyzes the impact of tourism on rural destinations from the view of cultural connotation of rurality and deconstructs the mechanism of action, aiming to provide guidance for the rural sustainable tourism development.

3. Theoretical framework

The spatial turn of Western humanities in the 1970s broke the traditional dichotomy between material space and spiritual space. Pioneering the social space research, Lefebvre (1991) developed a conceptual triad consisting of three dimensions of socially produced space, namely spaces of representation, representations of space and spatial practices, which embody the material, spiritual and social attributes of space. Though this theory emphasizes the sociality of space and challenges the traditional view of space, it does not explore the cultural levels and meanings embedded in space. Inspired by Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996) proposed three divisions of space from the perspective of cultural research. He defined 'firstspace' as the 'real' space – the urban built form of physical buildings that can be mapped and seen; 'secondspace' as the 'imagined' representational space (i.e., how the space is perceived, seen and argued over); and 'thirdspace' as the 'lived and experienced' space (Soja, 1996). Compared with Lefebvre, Soja understood space from a cultural perspective, providing a new paradigm for space research. However, on the one hand, although Soja's theoretical concept is based on cultural perspective, the division of space does not proceed from cultural classification per se, but according to real and imaginary standards. On the other hand, both Lefebvre's (1991) triadic conception of space and Soja's (1996) three categories of space were proposed to solve the prominent contradictions and problems in urban space, rather than rural space, against the background of industrialization.

Rural society is a social form that is significantly different from urban society (Lane, 1994), and its core lies in rurality (Lane, 1994; Woods, 2011). The essence of rurality is internalized in the culture of the countryside (Woods, 2011). Gao and Wu (2017) constructed a framework of sustainable rural tourism-based traditional village revitalization (RTTVR) model for traditional villages, offering a cultural perspective of the rural revitalization through tourism. This model divides the traditional village environment into three levels based on the trisection of culture, including: material culture, social culture and spiritual culture. RTTVR clearly demonstrated that cultural perspective itself is an important embodiment of rurality. Although this model innovatively understood the relationship between rural tourism and rural revitalization from a cultural perspective, it did not connect the cultural change with rural space reconstruction. In fact, space itself is a complex system. As a carrier of rural economy and society, it can fully reflect the impact of tourism on rural areas.

Based on the above theoretical concepts, an analytical framework of rural tourism-driven spatial reconstruction is put forward which focuses on the cultural connotations of rurality to deeply understand the relationship between rural tourism, rurality, rural space and rural revitalization. Specifically, material space, social space and spiritual space are first proposed according to the classification by RTTVR model (Gao & Wu, 2017), and the indices representing the cultural contents of each level of space are also constructed. Specifically, the material space is the physical carrier of human practices and can be perceived (Gao & Wu, 2017). Land, as the spatial carrier of rural social and economic evolution (Ma et al., 2018; Yao & Xie, 2016), and residential architecture, which is the necessary construction of local space (Chen, 2018), are the most important factors in material space. The social space is the category constructed by people in their

production practices (Lefebvre, 1991). The spiritual space is an abstract space, representing the psychological perceptions and ideologies of local people (Gao & Wu, 2017). These cultural indicators and carriers identified from the literature will be applied to lead the development of manifestations for each space level, and thoroughly understand the rural space reconstruction and their cultural connotation with reference to rurality.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research context

A typical and traditional rural village in northern China, Wudaoliang, was chosen as the context for this study (Figure 1). Located in the hinterland of the Yanshan Mountains, the residents of Wudaoliang have long upheld traditional agriculture as the main form of production and way of living. Before 2016, the residents' traditional spatial social production featured natural growth and mutual assistance among neighbors. However, under the influence of the rising tide of the commodity economy, the village has shown signs of gradual decline in its economic, living and production conditions. Due to its inconvenient geographical location, Wudaoliang's social and economic development level is low, and its per capita annual income is less than 4,500RMB (US\$712). As young people gradually move out to work and buy/rent houses in the county to seek better living conditions, features such as aging population and hollowing out of the village emerged. **The statistics showed that there were 76 households, including 228 people (before tourism development) in the village.** Under this background, Wudaoliang's excellent ecological environment, unique Ming Dynasty ancient Great Wall and paleontological fossils and other rare tourism resources have attracted the attention of tourism developers.

On April 11, 2016, local government and tourism developer (Tianxing Jiuzhou Investment Co. Ltd) from Beijing signed the agreement on the tourism development of Wudaoliang. **In order to achieve the purpose of the project, the developer decided to relocate the residents of the village, aiming to establish a new tourism destination that fully serves tourists. The decision to uproot the residents caused most local residents leaving their home village.** The original space of Wudaoliang has changed, which aligns with the subject of this study and reflects rural transformation under the government-led tourism development model, making the village representative of the vast number of least developed rural areas that are undergoing rapid transformation and development. Therefore, using Wudaoliang as the case facilitates a deep understanding of the content and mechanism of the spatial reconstruction caused by government-led, external capital intervention in rural tourism development.

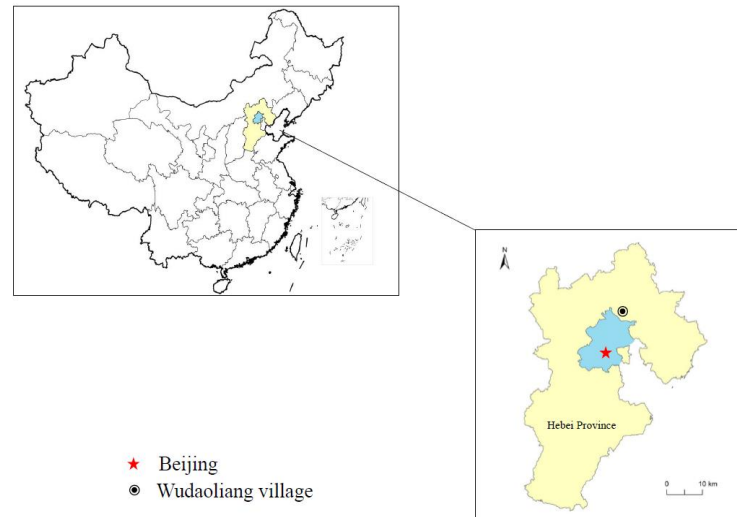


Figure 1. Study area

4.2. Research methods

Rural space is a complex system that requires a thorough and multi-perspective investigation (Gao & Cheng, 2020). In view of the different characteristics of space at different levels, the geographical technique of remote sensing imagery, ethnographic methods, such as semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation were adopted to give full play to their respective capability to investigate the specific changes of rural space driven by tourism and the mechanism of forming such changes. The authors also took photos during each field investigations for visual representation to present and verify the spatial variation in the elements more intuitively. A large number of secondary data, such as the official announcement on village tourism development issued by the government, the planning text and drawings of tourism development and media coverage were also collected and studied to verify the occurrence and development of the developing process.

Remote sensing imagery is a technique for humans to obtain ground objects through recording the electromagnetic wave size of them (Feng et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2018). It mainly refers to aerial photos and satellite photos (Li & Liu, 2021). Remote sensing images include spatial resolution, spectral resolution, temporal resolution and radiometric resolution and has been widely used to analyse transformed content of the material space (Feng et al., 2022). In this study, the satellite photos recorded by remote sensing images in different periods were mapped to compare and detect the change of land use in the material space of the case site. Specifically, Google Earth was used to collect high-resolution remote sensing images of Wudaoliang before (in 2016) and after (in 2019) its tourism development. Technical methods for tracking the physical boundaries of objects were used to extract land forms, building layouts and architectural styles. In this way, the changes in the overall layout and form of the material space were recorded.

Semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation were conducted to

reveal the cultural connotations of the social and spiritual spaces and the mechanism of rural spatial reconstruction driven by tourism. The author team visited the site for 45 days during the period of 31 March to 15 April 2016, 28 December 2017 to 10 January 2018 and 5 to 19 August 2019 for the fieldwork and interviews. At the beginning of the study, several attempts were made to interview government officials and developers but were politely declined. As Wudaoliang adopts a government-led tourism development model with external capital injection, residents as the owners of village space become the key actors passively accepting tourism development, and tourism development measures such as the change of land use type and resettlement have brought earth-shaking impacts on their production and life. Therefore, interviews were conducted with residents to obtain the tourism influence on village space. To supplement the remote sensing data and the interview data, non-participant observation and secondary data were used. Non-participant observation was used to clarify the interaction between different stakeholders in the process of tourism development and the consequences of the tourism development.

Regarding the resident interviews, influenced by traditional agricultural culture, the family unit has become the basic unit. Therefore, authoritative and representative household heads were approached by purposive sampling approach. Specifically, those representatives of villagers who have lived in villages for a long time and are well aware of the development of villages are selected consciously and purposefully. There are a total of 76 households in the village, and 41 households who live in the village and familiar with the village information are recommended for interviews by the village committee and the authority in the village. Thus, the author team visited 41 households, of which 33 agreed for interviews (Table 1). The interview questions focused on the changes in Wudaoliang regarding the three spatial layers, including “what impacts do tourism bring to the village? What exactly has changed? What are the specific changes to the way you and your family work and live? How do you see these changes?” The information obtained from the interviews started to repeat from the 28th household onwards. To capture the perceptual change at different times of tourism development, the same 33 respondents were interviewed twice in 2016 and 2019 respectively, and the duration of each interview was kept between 45 and 180 minutes, with an average length of 68 minutes, so as to obtain rich information regarding the comparability of data and clarify the influence before and after tourism development. The interviews adopt semi-structured interviews to encourage residents to express the changes brought about by tourism and explore the deep connotation behind the changes. The interview questions focused closely on the changes in Wudaoliang across the three spatial layers (see Appendix 1 for details). The language used in the interview was the local dialect and transcribed into English after verification by three team members familiar with both the dialect and English.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of respondents

The number	serial	Gender	Age	Occupation	Family size
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1	Male	55	Village cadres	5
2	Male	52	Farmer	2
3	Female	43	Farmer	4
4	Male	49	Farmer	4
5	Male	47	Farmer and cattle raiser	6
6	Female	62	Farmer	2
7	Male	52	Farmer	4
8	Male	68	Farmer	2
9	Male	66	Farmer	2
10	Male	48	Farmer	4
11	Female	45	Farmer	4
12	Female	42	Farmer	4
13	Male	66	Farmer	2
14	Male	61	Farmer	1
15	Male	37	Farmer	3
16	Female	44	Farmer	4
17	Male	49	Farmer	4
18	Female	57	Farmer	1
19	Female	37	Farmer	3
20	Male	54	Farmer	4
21	Female	73	No occupation	2
22	Male	67	Farmer	2
23	Male	26	Artisan	2
24	Male	50	Farmer	4
25	Female	47	Farmer	4
26	Female	33	Farmer	3
27	Female	56	Farmer	3
28	Male	64	Farmer	2
29	Male	46	Farmer	5
30	Female	35	Farmer	3
31	Male	50	Farmer	4
32	Female	22	College student	4
33	Male	57	Farmer	2

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318 All of the authors analyzed the interview data using Braun and Clarke's (2006)
319 six-phase guide for performing thematic analysis. The six phases consist of (1)

familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the report. To compare the specific content of rural space before and after tourism development, the comparative analysis method (Paniagua, 2014) was adopted. This allowed for a comprehensive comparison and analysis of the interview data acquired in different time periods to be conducted while implementing the thematic analysis.

To further ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the principles suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to assess its credibility. The coding results were compared and discussed among the authors and verified by geographical experts. In this study, remote sensing image technology of geography is used to analyze the impact of tourism on rural space, and index elements representing different spaces are constructed based on existing literatures and actual situation of cases. Therefore, experts in cultural geography not only verified the analysis process and results of remote sensing images, but also confirmed the rationality of constructed representational indicators. To query and trace the information, the interviewee information is identified and presented in the findings according to the respondent's assigned number, gender and interview date.

5. Findings: Spatial reconstruction in Wudaoliang

Using evidence obtained from the field investigation and the existing literature, specific manifestations was established for the different levels of space in Wudaoliang (Table 2). Among them, the material space includes the land utilization type and architectural style. The social space includes livelihood and social relations. The spiritual space includes folk convention and place identity. A detailed explanation of each manifestation is presented in the following sections.

Table 2. Spatial dimensions and their manifestations

Spatial dimensions	Manifestations	Literature sources
Material space	Land utilization type, architectural style	Ma et al (2018); Yao and Xie (2016)
Social space	Livelihood, social relations	Gao and Wu (2017); Kong et al (2019);
Spiritual space	Folk convention, place identity	Gao and Wu (2017)

5.1. Material space

Land utilization type. The change in land use type in Wudaoliang caused by tourism development was determined by mapping and calculating the remote sensing imagery data (Figure 2). The remote sensing results show that the nature of land use has changed dramatically across the entire village since tourism development began. On the one hand, with the increase of space demand for tourism development, the total area of various land uses in the village has expanded from 146.65 acres to 154.07 acres. On the other hand, data reflects a change of the main service type and function of land.

Tourism development has transformed the land use of traditional space, which mainly serves local residents for agricultural production and daily life (i.e. cultivated land and cemetery land), into modern consumption space with the core purpose of tourists and facilitating tourism development (i.e. forest land, transportation land, landscape land and recreation land). It should be noted that although the settlement land and construction land originally used for local residence have increased significantly, due to the resettlement policy, the resident-based space has now been moved to the nearby location which was originally used for farming, and the original village central location has been occupied by tourism-based space serving outsiders.





Figure 2. Landscape of Wudaoliang before tourism development in 2016 (up) and after tourism development in 2019 (down)

Note: The illustration was developed by the first author after detailed data calculation based on remote sensing imagery from Google Earth

Architectural style. With the completion of various projects, the field investigations revealed that the traditional residential architecture, characterized by low building density and low development intensity in rural areas of northern China, has been replaced by villa buildings organized with greater building density and higher development intensity (Figure 3). Before development, the village's 55 rural dwellings were all one storey with a sloping roof structure. Furthermore, the building density and floor area ratio of the whole rural settlement were only 13.52% and 100%, respectively. Most of the buildings were made of stone from local mountains and complemented by brick materials. With the development of tourism, the original one-storey old-fashioned villagers' buildings were replaced by two-storey modern-designed villas favored by urban tourists to improve the dilapidated and poorly conditioned buildings in the village. Both the building density and floor area ratio of the whole rural settlement have also nearly doubled, increasing to 24.49% and 200%, respectively.



Figure 3. Appearance and style of Wudaoliang residential buildings before tourism development (left; photo taken by the first author in 2016) and after tourism development (right; photo taken by the first author in 2019)

5.2. Social space

Livelihood. Due to poor accessibility and low economic levels, the daily communication and contact between the village residents and the outside world were low before tourism development. The residents maintained their self-sufficient production and lifestyle in a traditional agricultural society. Furthermore, their daily production and living spaces were limited to the surrounding villages and areas. The residents mainly relied on farmland to cultivate agricultural crops and forest land to collect medicinal herbs and mushrooms. The economic development level of the whole village was low, with an annual per capital income of only RMB4,500 (US\$712) in 2016 which is far lower than the national average (i.e. RMB52,622, US\$8,330).

The conditions here are simple. We are located in the mountains, and the economy is very weak. We [residents] make a living by farming and the annual income is very little. (Participant 5, Male, 20160405).

Since tourism development, the cultivated land has been completely expropriated by the developer for building land and the residents' houses have been demolished and relocated to other places. Thus, agricultural production is no longer the core of the residents' way of life. They have begun to flock to the county seat or the surrounding big cities to make a living. According to village committee statistics, more than 200 people have moved out of the village to work. They serve the county's social production, including supermarket shopping guides, property security and corporate cleaning staff. Thus, tourism development has given rise to more diverse forms of income, changing the residents' original life orientation of self-service in an agricultural society to the production orientation of serving others within a more detailed division of labour.

Everyone has scattered to the town or followed their children to the surrounding big cities. They no longer engage in farm work, but have become a workman. (Participant 30, Female, 20190806).

Social relations. Before tourism development, Wudaoliang was a typical traditional rural acquaintance society. The social relations in Wudaoliang were simple

413 and close, due to the remote geographical location (in the mountain) and the pure
414 composition of its population. This kind of social relationship is a non-hierarchical
415 relationship with strong cohesion formed by blood and geography. Weddings, funerals,
416 house building and other events in the residents' families were not individual events for
417 individual families, but events that all residents engaged in together.

418 *Before the tourism development, our village had a small local population and very*
419 *simple social relations (neighborhood based on geography and kinship based on blood).*
420 *We all know each other. No matter which family needs help, everyone will join hands*
421 *to help each other.* (Participant 9, Male, 20160922).

422 The change brought to the residential space as a result of tourism development has
423 significantly enhanced social mobility. As a result, the core elements of blood
424 relationship and affection that linked the traditional residents with other residents have
425 gradually disintegrated. Neighborhoods have become strangers and the village's
426 acquaintance society has become a 'half-baked society', characterized by a significant
427 reduction in the residents' contact and degree of closeness.

428 *In the past, it was convenient to contact neighbors in the countryside. Now*
429 *everyone has moved to a house or bought a building in the county. The contact is*
430 *becoming less and less [possible] and the relationships are becoming more and more*
431 *indifferent.* (Participant 17, Male, 20190810).

432 5.3. Spiritual space

433 **Folk convention.** An ancestral temple is a place to worship ancestors. The space
434 of its architecture and clan culture shapes a psychological environment for residents.
435 Before tourism development, the village's ancestral temple and small outside square
436 were important places for rural residents to relax, discuss things and exchange feelings.
437 More importantly, it was an important channel through which residents could
438 communicate with the gods and a centre for them to organize traditional and customary
439 activities. During the traditional festivals, such as Spring Festival, the residents would
440 burn incense and pray for blessings with a sense of ritual in the ancestral hall and
441 conduct collective activities with families as units. These traditional activities were also
442 an important way for the residents to show their emotions. The residents built a simple
443 spiritual space with the help of various collective activities.

444 *During festivals, we [residents] all gather here and take part in traditional*
445 *activities and chat together. It's very lively.* (Participant 25, Female, 20160409).

446 Since tourism development in Wudaoliang village, the land function has evolved
447 from a traditional rural settlement into a new village. Notably, its ancestral hall has been
448 completely demolished and replaced with a luxurious and spectacular valley concert
449 hall with a construction area of 0.24 acres.

450 *The ancestral hall was demolished. [Now] there is no place for all of us [residents]*
451 *to gather together, and the traditional and customary activities of the past have been*
452 *totally lost.* (Participant 32, Female, 20190806).

453 As an imported product of the rural society, the valley concert hall is more of an

entertainment space for tourists. The transformation of the ancestral hall into a valley concert hall reflects the transformation from a closed space for residents' daily life to a space for mass leisure consumption. The change of space has also led to a change in the content of the activities that take place in the space. The customary activities attached to the traditional ancestral hall have become diversified entertainment activities for tourists' pleasure. As a result, the collective memory of the residents has gradually diminished.

Place identity. In traditional Chinese morality, which is centred on the culture of filial piety, the cemetery carries families' affection for their deceased kin and serves as an expression of their ownership of a specific geographical space. Influenced by traditional customs, as the entire village is essentially one large family, the graves of the ancient ancestors of the residents in Wudaoliang were built on the eastern edge of the settlement in an orderly top-down layout from the oldest to youngest.

Our ancestors have lived here for generations. Look at the rows of graves. Our ancestors chose a treasure for us very early. (Participant 21, Female, 20171229).

Before tourism development, all of the residents demonstrated collective grave-sweeping behaviour during major festivals. Since tourism development, most of the residents have relocated their ancestors' graves in response to persuasion by the developer with different economic incentives. The collective grave-sweeping behaviour of all of the residents has disappeared and has been replaced by scattered individual behaviors based on individual families. The residents' cemetery space, which reflects their ownership of the village, has been completely lost. It is now only an imagination preserved in the memories of the local people.

What we are selling is the land of our forefathers! We can't go back. It's not our home anymore. We don't have a home now. (Participant 11, Female, 20190810).

6. Discussion and implications

6.1. Mechanism of spatial reconstruction

Based on the cultural connotation of rurality, the results of the three-level spatial reconstruction show that the government-led rural tourism development does not revitalize the countryside of Wudaoliang. The next objective is to investigate how does such kind of rural tourism development lead to the negative results?

By further analyzing non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the mechanism behind the phenomenon is summarized and refined. The non-participant observation clearly revealed that the spatial reconstruction process of Wudaoliang is mainly directed by two key actors, namely the local governments and the tourism developers, representing different forces in this tourism development process. Driven by the national acceleration of tourism leveraging rural revitalization, the two actors work together on rural areas, and their unique interaction modes and forces trigger the reconstruction of space, leading to profound impacts on the original cultural connotation of rurality. By investigating the interaction between the local government who faces the pressure of village development and makes the decision, and the tourism developers who inject development capital, the internal mechanism leading to the

spatial reconstruction of Wudaoliang is delineated. As presented in Figure 4, power (local governments), capital (tourism developer), space (the cultural connotation of rurality) and value work together to influence rural spatial reconstruction.

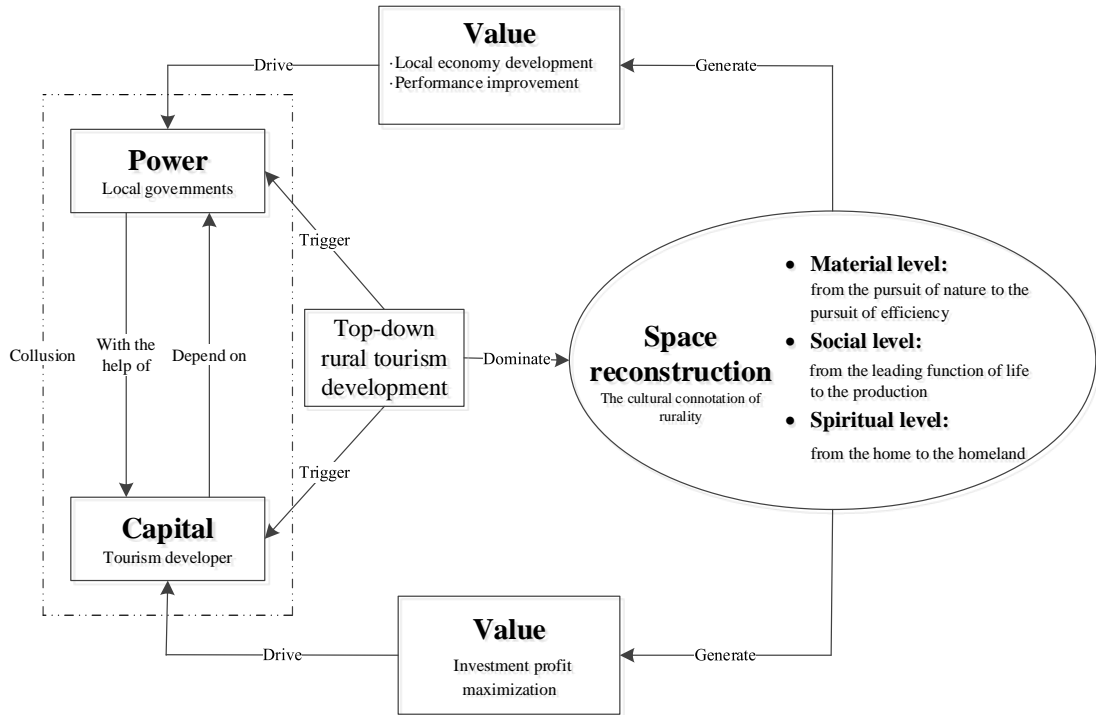


Figure 4. Internal mechanism of the rural spatial reconstruction driven by tourism development from the cultural connotation of rurality

Specifically, Wudaoliang's unique tourism resources have made it a valuable rural space and a suitable place for tourism development. Like most of the country's rural tourism development motivation, under the dual stimulus of developing the local economy and improving performance evaluations (Zhou et al., 2017), powerful local governments that dominate local development drive tourism development in rural spaces. However, local governments lack the capital required for such development. Therefore, tourism developers in pursuit of profit maximization have become the key economic driving force supporting the tourism development in poor rural areas under the vision set by local governments (Ying & Zhou, 2007). Developers strongly support the plans of local governments by making advance payments to local governments for land purchase, storage and demolition. With the help of developers' capital, local governments provide a series of preferential development policies and measures in exchange for their capital subsidies. Thus, local governments, which have local power and dominant positions, can conspire with tourism developers with capital to promote local tourism development (Ma et al., 2020a). In this process, values for local governments are local economy development and performance evaluation improvement, whereas the tourism developers aim to maximize their profit in investment. This process of rural spatial reconstruction through tourism development and the interaction between different actors in this development could be reflected in residents' interviews:

Everyone [residents] knows exactly the relationship and the connection between them [local governments and tourism developer]. One has power but no money [local governments], and the other has no power but money [tourism developer]. They conspire to develop the village together; indeed both will change the poor economic status of the village, the problem is that they also have their own interests to pursue. Governments have nice performance evaluations from higher levels, and developers make money by investing money. In the competition for interests, our interests were completely ignored, we had no voice, and we were moved away. (Participant 20, Male, 20190815).

Under such coalition between local governments and tourism developers with reciprocal interests, the rural spatial reconstruction is the outcome of tourism production. In this production process, space is the carrier of various cultural connotations, which are prerequisites for rural tourism development (Guo et al., 2012). In this study, the rural tourism model led by the local government has dramatically changed the rural space and led to the loss of rurality rooted in rural culture. In specific, the material level space changes from the pursuit of nature to the pursuit of efficiency; the social level space changes from the leading function of life to the production; and the spiritual level space changes from the home to the homeland.

6.2. Discussion

Adopting the material-social-spiritual analysis framework combined with the cultural connotations and attributes of the case setting, this study establishes the manifestations of spatial reconstruction and deconstructs the specific content and mechanism of tourism-driven rural spatial reconstruction.

Rural space has changed dramatically as a result of tourism development, and its materiality and significance have been constantly reproduced (Galani-Moutafi, 2013). Tourism development has transformed Wudaoliang village from a traditional agricultural production space into a tourism consumption space. Land and residential areas are of the interest in geography studies (Ma et al., 2018; Yao & Xie, 2016). Being consistent with the literature, the land use mode and configuration pattern have been changed by rural space reconstruction (Ma et al., 2018). The uniqueness of this study lies in the excavation of the inner culture of space. Culture is a key element in interpreting the connotations of a geographical space (Gao & Wu, 2017). Using the cultural connotations of rurality perspective to examine the results of this tourism development demonstrates that reconstruction has led to a loss of rural characteristics. In the material space, the pursuit of nature has become the pursuit of efficiency. In terms of land use results, it is consistent with the research of Xi et al (2013) that the land originally used mainly for rural production transforms into various land types to fulfil the needs of tourism. Consistent with the results of Brandth and Haugen's (2011) work, tourism development has subversively changed the rural residents' social networks, lifestyles and livelihoods due to the residents' relocation, leading to the weakened social relations between residents. In their new industrialized society, the changes to the social space have transformed the nature of neighbors' relationships from mutually supportive

564 to self-serving. Finally, the spiritual space has been transformed from a place of
565 residence into a place of nostalgia due to the traditional conventions and the place
566 identity as 'Wudaoliang residents' are lost. This finding contrasts with some studies that
567 have found that tourism development strengthens local identity and increases local
568 residents' sense of place (Gao & Wu, 2017). This difference lies in the damage to the
569 material foundation of local identity (i.e., the complete demolition of the ancestral
570 temple, the relocation of the cemetery and the relocation of residents to other places).
571 The local roots have been seriously damaged. Thus, the place identity attached to them
572 has gradually dissipated.

573 Furthermore, tourism impact research has long attracted much attention from both
574 the academia and the policy making group. This study also reveals a contrasting reality
575 in which the countryside does not necessarily benefit from revitalization and may even
576 lose the original cultural connotations of rurality embedded in different spatial layers.
577 Considering the general requirements and ultimate goals of the rural revitalization
578 strategy, namely business success, a pleasant living environment, social etiquette and
579 civility, effective governance and prosperity, rural tourism in the case area has not
580 realized rural revitalization as intended. Although tourism development seems to have
581 achieved the economic and governmental goals of the revitalization strategy, the living
582 environment and social etiquette and civility have been destroyed. However, rurality is
583 the key to the sustainable development of rural tourism (Gao & Wu, 2017; Shen et al.,
584 2019). Considering the criteria for the cultural connotations of rurality, Wudaoliang
585 village has largely lost its original traditional flavour in terms of its material space,
586 social space and spiritual space. Therefore, tourism development has not contributed to
587 rurality but has weakened the characteristics of rurality. The reason lies in the different
588 development models. In a top-down tourism development scenario, tourism
589 development is a political concept, in which power has a substantial impact on the
590 production of space and dominates the production of tourism and reconstruction of
591 space accordingly (Roth, 2008).

592 Although the spatial hierarchy is divided according to different criteria, this study
593 also assesses the results of the spatial reconstruction based on the spatial views of
594 Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996, 2010). The material space corresponds to the spatial
595 practices dimension by Lefebvre (1991) or firstspace by Soja (1996). The elements in
596 the space have undergone a thorough renewal and a great transformation has taken place.
597 The social space corresponds to the spaces of representation dimension by Lefebvre
598 (1991) or thirdspace by Soja (1996), in that it has been completely transformed from a
599 space dominated by local residents to a consumption space dominated by meeting
600 tourists' needs. In addition, changes such as the local identity of residents, the relocation
601 of residents and the demolition of cemeteries and ancestral temples have transformed
602 or even destroyed the deeper spiritual connotations. The reason for the loss of rurality
603 is that the true village owner-residents are largely excluded in this development process.
604 The traditional rural space is now occupied by tourist-centered infrastructures, forcing
605 residents to leave their homes and become the city's cheap labor force, struggling to
606 live in the city. This is consistent with the true portrayal of the spatial injustice proposed

by Soja (2010) in the rural tourism development in some least developed areas of China. The imbalance of urban and rural development further leads to the injustice of space. The space for justice is open, rooted in active, diverse, and communal consultation, and seeks the productive path of building solidarity through differences (Soja, 2010). Only rural tourism development that considers the interests of multiple subjects and rural sustainable development can promote the integration and coordinated development of urban and rural areas in China.

6.3. Theoretical contributions and practical implications

This study contributes to the theories in the following aspects. First, this study identifies the cultural connotation of rurality with reference to rural tourism destinations. Though the definition of rurality has been discussed in the literature (Nelson et al., 2021), it lacks clear indicators and has yet to be well explored in rural tourism destinations (Shen et al., 2019). Inspired by Soja's (1996) view of social space theory from a cultural perspective and RTTVR theory, this paper focuses space research on the countryside, and further divides rural space into material space, social space and spiritual space. Rooted in previous literature and field research, corresponding manifestations are established to represent the rurality of rural space at different levels (as shown in Table 2). Second, this study assesses the impact of tourism development on rural spatial reconstruction referring to the cultural connotation of rurality. Previous studies on tourism impacts have focused on the impacts of tourism on destination economy, social culture and environment from the residents' perception (Confente & Scarpi, 2020; Lyon et al., 2017; Scarpi et al., 2022). This study innovatively integrates space and culture to examine the impacts of tourism on rural destination, which supplements the tourism impact research. Third, this study delineates the internal mechanism of rural spatial reconstruction with the interactions between power, capital, space and value. Previous studies dominantly investigated the consequences of tourism impact on rural areas but ignored the internal mechanism behind the consequences. This top-down approach to tourism development makes a good comparison with the well-promoted bottom-up and community-based approaches to tourism development, which extends the literature on spatial reconstruction. **In this mechanism, rurality is the key to rural tourism. Not limited to rural areas, the logic of this mechanism can also be applied to explain the spatial reconstruction caused by similar top-down tourism development in other cities or coastal areas.** Last, methodologically, this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach by applying multiple techniques to comprehensively explore the rural spatial reconstruction. Most studies on tourism impacts used survey and other forms of primary research to investigate the impact of tourism (e.g., Ma et al., 2020b; Scarpi et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). This study integrates remote sensing image analysis techniques in geography with ethnographic methods of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The combination of the objective spatial data of geography and the subjective interview data of ethnography shows the impact of tourism on rural space in a three-dimensional and all-round way.

The study also offers important practical implications. Rural recession and transformation are global challenges (Liu & Li, 2017). The innovative cultural

perspective of this study can guide reflections on the sustainable development of rural tourism. It is necessary not only to maintain the rural character of the material environment of the village, but also to retain the rural cultural charm at the social and spiritual levels as reflected by the residents, which are at the core of the village. In this case, the decision of completely moving residents out of the original village leads to the loss of rurality. The residents themselves form a very important part of the rural culture. Therefore, rural destinations should continuously enhance the residents' sense of place identity to the village and revive their traditional conventions, to promote the inheritance and sustainable development of rural culture. Findings can be helpful in the development of rural tourism in rural destinations adopting a similar development model. In the vast remote and least developed rural areas, the government plays a leading role in the development of rural tourism (Ma et al., 2020a; Wang & Wall, 2007; Zhou et al., 2017). Local residents in this study, as the main body of rural areas, are marginalized in the rural tourism development due to their lack of knowledge and power (Ma et al., 2020a; Xu et al., 2019). The collusion between government and capital and the absence of residents lead to the loss of traditional rurality in the development of rural tourism. Therefore, the government should give full play to its political role of power and scientifically guide the planning, construction and sustainable development of rural tourism (Long et al., 2012). Further, tourism developers should not only pay attention to economic benefits but also care about the sustainable development of the destination. Residents form the social and culture aspects of the attraction, and should be involved in different stages of tourism development.

7. Conclusion, limitations and future studies

This study explores the transformation of a village in China from the connotations of rurality combined with spatial reconstruction. Remote sensing imagery and semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the data from March 2016 to August 2019.

Tourism development has transformed rural society based on kinship ties into a commercialized rural tourism community with economic interests at its core. In its material space, the pursuit of nature has been replaced by the pursuit of efficiency. In its social space, the leading function of life has been replaced by the leading function of production. In its spiritual space, the place of residence has been replaced by a place of nostalgia through loss of traditional conventions and place identities. External capital is the fundamental force that leads to the reconstruction of power, value, capital and space in this rural society. The collusion of political power and market interests seriously undermines traditional rural attributes. Therefore, the rural tourism development led by external capital and government does not necessarily lead to rural revitalization but may instead lead to the destruction of rural traditions.

As with other studies, this study's limitations require consideration. First, taking government-led rural tourism development as the research context, this study discusses the content of rural spatial reconstruction when external capital is the main driver.

Under the political and cultural system of China, power plays a strong role in the spatial reconstruction of rural tourism in this case, and the inappropriate function mode of power and capital leads to the decline of rurality. Other tourism development modes led by different stakeholders may have different outcomes (Randelli et al., 2014). Future studies should also consider the differences of destination cultural background and conclude the general rules of tourism-driven rural spatial reconstruction through comparative studies. Second, the evolution of space is dynamic (Roth, 2008). In addition, data in this research was collected before the COVID-19 outbreak. COVID-19 has brought dramatic influence to the tourism industry globally, and the role of tourism as a lever for rural revitalization needs to be revalidated. Further studies focusing on post-epidemic rural tourism development could potentially offer new insights to the literature regarding rural spatial reconstruction.

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