

# Research on the Development Strategies of Rural Tourism in Xinjiang under the Background of the Rural Revitalization Strategy

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## Abstract

In his report to the 20th National Congress, emphasized the need to “comprehensively promote rural revitalization”. From “implementation” to “comprehensive promotion”, the achievements in rural revitalization have been remarkable, becoming an important component of China’s new development paradigm and driving the high-quality development of the tourism industry. With improvements in the rural ecological environment and economic development, rural tourism has gained popularity, becoming a key pillar of rural revitalization and poverty alleviation. At the same time, the development of rural tourism increases villagers’ income, enhances their quality of life, and boosts their happiness. In rural economic development, the rural tourism industry and the rural revitalization strategy promote each other. This article reviews theoretical research and practical cases of rural tourism, adopting literature review and qualitative analysis methods to highlight the contributions of rural tourism to economic growth, cultural preservation, and ecological development. It analyzes the impact of rural tourism on rural revitalization efforts. The study identifies the challenges facing the development of rural tourism in Xinjiang and proposes strategies for sustainable growth. It explores how, within the context of rural revitalization, sustainable development of rural tourism can be achieved and how the development of rural tourism can promote economic growth. Specifically, for Xinjiang’s rural tourism, this article focuses on analyzing its impact on rural revitalization and proposes development pathways for rural tourism to promote rural revitalization, providing a reference for the development of rural tourism in other regions.

## Keywords

Rural Revitalization, Economic Development, Rural Tourism in Xinjiang

## 1. Introduction

Rural tourism lacks a unified definition within the industry. From an international perspective, two widely accepted definitions exist. The first, by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), emphasizes the unique “rural” aspect, highlighting its rural quality as essential for product planning and market promotion. The second, by the World Tourism Organization, describes rural tourism as a process of rural experience, learning, and stay. These definitions elaborate on the types of projects related to rural tourism and guide the development of such projects.

In light of the actual development of rural tourism both domestically and internationally, scholars in China have also proposed their own definitions, focusing on aspects such as rural culture, stay activities, and ecological environment experiences. In summary, the definitions of rural tourism within the industry are diverse and continue to evolve alongside changes in social practice and theory. The countryside serves as the foundation for rural revitalization, while rural tourism marks its starting point and also represents the ultimate destination of rural tourism.

Rural revitalization is a comprehensive path that encompasses ecological environment, rural economy, spiritual civilization, and rural governance, as well as a diversified approach. Rural tourism not only incorporates the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries but also entails rich local culture and ecological culture, presenting a broad outlook for its development. The intertwining of local culture and modern civilization provides a fertile ground for rural tourism. The rural tourism industry in Xinjiang supports and advances the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. From the perspective of rural tourism, this exploration seeks to uncover the long-term significance and realization model of the rural revitalization strategy, while also addressing the challenges in the development of rural tourism to find sustainable solutions and pathways.

## 2. The Theoretical Foundation of Rural Tourism in Supporting Rural Revitalization

The initial purpose of developing the rural tourism industry in Europe was to rescue the rural crisis and rejuvenate the rural economy. Karol found that the development of the rural tourism industry plays a crucial role in optimizing the industrial structure and increasing residents' income (Król, 2018). Research has found that the development of rural tourism is beneficial for promoting cultural exchanges between rural areas and the outside world. It also plays a significant positive role in community cohesion and the optimization of industrial structures, driving local economic development and greatly improving the rural environment (Guaite Martínez et al., 2019). However, many scholars believe that rural tourism enterprises still face several urgent issues that need to be addressed, specifically manifested in their small scale, low levels of employment, low income, and limited contributions to the local economy (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). Through his

research on the development of rural tourism in Southern Germany, Oppermann found that rural tourism not only provides more job opportunities for local residents but also greatly aids in changing traditional perceptions among residents and fostering local economic development (Oppermann, 1996). However, the drawbacks of rural tourism are also quite evident, including not only the disadvantages of small scale but also significant seasonal impacts.

In the domestic context, many scholars have also discussed the impact of rural tourism on agricultural development. Tang Jianxiong's research found that rural tourism has yielded positive benefits in promoting the construction of new rural areas and alleviating residents' living pressures (Tang, 2010). The development of rural tourism has made it so that local residents' income increases are no longer dependent on government support, thereby promoting a new mode of rural economic growth (Yuan, 2020). Xinjiang, with its unique natural landscapes and rich local customs, has seen rapid development in rural tourism over the past few years under the backdrop of the rural revitalization strategy. In this process, as rural tourism has promoted well-known attractions within the region, improved tourism facilities in nearby small towns, and upgraded rural infrastructure, the lifestyle of local residents has changed, leading to improved quality of life and increasing happiness indices. However, the development of the tourism industry has also led to regional economic growth, particularly in popular tourist areas where housing prices, commodity prices, and service fees have generally risen, inadvertently increasing the living costs for local residents. This presents a greater economic pressure on low-income groups and exacerbates the wealth gap in the region. Addressing these issues in the development of rural tourism requires balancing economic interests with social and environmental concerns, by enhancing public participation, strengthening environmental protection, and promoting economic equity to strive for the healthy and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

### 3. Research on the Rural Revitalization Strategy

For rural revitalization, it is essential to first ensure the development of the rural economy, enhance rural culture, and guarantee the development level of ecology and people's livelihoods. This requires adherence to seven key principles: the party's leadership in rural work, prioritizing agricultural and rural development, acknowledging the primary status of farmers, comprehensive rural revitalization, harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and tailored urban-rural development. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve "prosperous industries, a livable ecological environment, rural civilization, effective governance, and affluent lives" (Du et al., 2017).

Rural revitalization focuses on extending industrial chains, enhancing development levels, optimizing industrial structures, promoting industrial transformation and upgrading, and providing more job opportunities for rural residents. The core of rural revitalization is to prosper industries, while creating an ecologically livable

environment is of utmost importance. Rural areas possess unique natural conditions and geographical characteristics (He & Ning, 2019). The greatest advantage and most valuable asset of rural areas is their excellent ecological environment. Rural civilization is the soul of rural revitalization. Through education and guidance, villagers learn to enhance their qualities, promote social ethics, professional morals, and personal virtues, contributing to building beautiful villages where everyone is polite, respects the elderly, loves the young, and helps each other to improve the community's overall character. Effective governance, increased villager participation, and continually enhancing rural governance are fundamental to rural revitalization. The ultimate goal is to achieve a prosperous and affluent life.

Through a comprehensive evaluation and comparison of the research conducted by domestic and international scholars on rural tourism, it can be observed that both domestic and international researchers have achieved certain results in this field, with diverse angles and methods of study, though the content and emphasis of their research vary slightly. International scholars tend to focus more on factors influencing entrepreneurial success in rural tourism, visitor experience, and satisfaction, while domestic scholars place greater emphasis on development models and the development and utilization of resources in rural tourism. However, there are still some shortcomings in the research on rural tourism by both domestic and international scholars. For instance, studies related to rural tourism in Xinjiang are relatively limited, and the depth of research is insufficient. In light of this, this paper will explore the development of rural tourism in Xinjiang in the context of rural revitalization.

## **4. The Relationship between the Rural Tourism Industry and Rural Revitalization**

### **4.1. The Impact of Rural Tourism on Rural Revitalization**

#### **4.1.1. Rural Tourism That Facilitates Rural Economic Growth**

Rural tourism is gaining attention as China's economy develops and urbanization accelerates, increasing demand for leisure, vacations, and ecological environments. The national tourism development plan has set strategic goals and policies to promote rural tourism, recognizing it as a vital part of the tourism industry. This policy provides strong support and guidance for rural tourism development in Xinjiang, creating a favorable environment for growth. Rural tourism has become an important avenue for rural reconstruction. As a source of income for the new rural economy, it is thriving, and new forms of economic growth are emerging.

#### **4.1.2. Rural Tourism That Facilitates the Construction of Beautiful Villages**

Rural tourism provides opportunities to create beautiful new villages. The construction of new rural areas is not only reflected in economic development but,

more importantly, in the protection and improvement of the rural ecological environment. A few years ago, factories with low costs, high pollution, and high energy consumption relocated from cities to rural areas to promote industrial development. Large factory buildings began to rise rapidly, and rural areas once became synonymous with “dirt, chaos, and poor conditions”. The large-scale development of profit-oriented tourism often overlooked environmental destruction, which eroded local culture. Similar to rural beautification, hospitality from residents, and environmental landscaping in tourism-oriented villages, the construction of rural civilization dedicated to rural revitalization emphasizes the harmonious co-existence of “people, land, and resources”.

#### **4.1.3. Rural Tourism Contributes to the Revitalization of Rural Culture**

Attracting urban residents to return to nature and rediscover their childhood memories, rural tourism, rural culture, and folk culture are the essence of rural tourism development. At the same time, they introduce civilized living habits and open-mindedness to rural areas, benefiting both the preservation of rural culture and the improvement of villagers’ civility.

Rural tourism has also led to a surge in the “hometown culture” (Li & Shi, 2020). The high population density, high consumption, and high pollution associated with urban development have forced urban residents to “escape the city”, creating the largest demand driver for the development of rural tourism. Through the platform of rural tourism, the once overshadowed local culture has gradually regained people’s attention. On one hand, the resurgence of local culture is attributed to the increasing pressures of urban life and the renewed nostalgia among the public. On the other hand, it is also inseparable from the correct decision-making of rural leadership, which seizes the opportunity for rural tourism development and transforms the demand driver into a source of supply.

#### **4.2. The Development Goals of Rural Tourism and Rural Revitalization**

The development of the rural tourism industry aligns with the goals of rural revitalization. The growth of rural tourism is beneficial for expanding the industrial chain, increasing job opportunities, enhancing farmers’ participation, and improving farmers’ incomes. It promotes the transition of agriculture from quantity-driven production to quality enhancement, contributing to the establishment of a modern agricultural industrial system.

### **5. Overview of the Development of the Rural Tourism Industry in Xinjiang**

#### **5.1. Current Status of the Development of the Rural Tourism Industry in Xinjiang**

Xinjiang is the largest province in China by area. It has a favorable geographical location, bordering eight countries and connecting with three provinces in the

country. Xinjiang is characterized by abundant resources, high density, strong uniqueness, natural beauty, and high recognition. These distinctive features have become the foundation and profound potential for the development of the tourism industry in Xinjiang.

From an economic perspective, Xinjiang is primarily driven by the tertiary sector. The service industry has experienced rapid growth and plays a significant role in supporting and driving the socioeconomic development of the province. In 2021, Xinjiang's regional GDP reached 1598.365 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 7.0% at constant prices. The added value of the tertiary sector was 766.023 billion yuan, a year-on-year growth of 6.9%, accounting for 47.9% of the total added value of all industries for the year.

As a major domestic attraction, Xinjiang has attracted significant attention since the initial outbreak, largely due to its abundant tourism resources and stringent pandemic prevention policies. With the stabilization of the pandemic and the recovery of the tourism market, Xinjiang's tourism activities have gradually resumed, following the practice of not requiring reservations and avoiding unnecessary travel.

Since the reform and opening-up, Xinjiang has further improved its transportation system under the "Western Development" strategy and the "Belt and Road" economic development initiative, resulting in comprehensive changes in its tourism industry. In recent years, the autonomous region has identified tourism as a growth point for the regional economy and one of the most promising industries. The scope of Xinjiang's tourism industry has continually expanded. In 2019, Xinjiang received 213 million domestic and international tourists, an increase of 63 million compared to 2018, representing a growth of 41.96%. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists significantly declined in 2020. Starting in 2021, growth resumed, with 191 million tourists, an increase of 33 million compared to 2020, reflecting a growth of 20.89%. Nevertheless, the well-known tourist attractions in Xinjiang remain limited, necessitating increased promotion to develop smaller tourist sites.

Apart from the well-known attractions, rural tourism spots that are yet to be developed benefit from industry supporting agriculture and cities returning to the countryside. For rural tourism to thrive uniquely, it must rely on support from industry and urban areas. Agricultural and sideline products need to be both self-sufficient and packaged for market sale, convenient for tourists to taste and carry; ecological farming needs to maintain its original eco-friendly and natural state while also considering ecological protection; rural infrastructure should be complete but not excessively luxurious. In the process of rural revitalization, the development of the rural tourism industry needs to leverage advanced industrial technologies to promote agricultural industry upgrades and rely on the increased demand from urban tourists to boost rural tourism traffic. This has significant practical implications for breaking down the urban-rural dual structure and implementing targeted poverty alleviation strategies.

## **5.2. Development Model of Rural Tourism in Xinjiang**

### **5.2.1. Scenic Area-Dependent**

An example of this is the Sayram Lake Scenic Area, which is the highest in elevation and largest in area, known for its clear mountains and beautiful waters in Xinjiang. As a naturally mature scenic area, it possesses unlimited charm and great appeal. It provides development opportunities for regional tourism in both resource and market aspects, benefiting the surrounding rural areas by significantly enhancing local economic development.

### **5.2.2. History and Culture-Dependent**

Tourism in ancient, picturesque towns is a prominent topic in tourism development and represents a unique opportunity. Cultural tourism sites like the Loulan Ancient City, Kashgar Ancient City, and the Karez wells in Xinjiang, with their rich history and excellent ecological environments, attract many tourists and effectively promote local historical culture. The tourism economy development model has been successfully implemented.

### **5.2.3. Folk Culture-Dependent**

Ethnic groups. Over time, the rich and colorful ethnic cultures have led to the creation of folk tourism areas, such as the Xinjiang Grand Bazaar, where visitors can experience local customs and traditions. This enriches rural tourism and significantly promotes the development of the tourism economy.

## **6. The Development Path of Rural Tourism in Xinjiang under the Background of Rural Revitalization**

### **6.1. Unique Rural Tourism: Building One Village, One Characteristic**

To avoid repeating past mistakes, we must take the path of unique rural tourism. With the rise of rural tourism, “characteristic towns” have emerged like bamboo shoots after a rain throughout Xinjiang. However, this wave brings not only a brief economic upsurge in various regions but also the proliferation of similar town issues and a flood of low-level tourism projects. Planning for rural tourism is an important role played by the government and grassroots officials. In some regions, there is blind imitation and replication, developing rural tourism without regard to local conditions. Ultimately, this leads to only fleeting success, with many areas and projects awaiting planning becoming “uncompleted constructions”. This not only wastes public resources but also harms the ecological environment. Over time, rural tourism will significantly lose its appeal to tourists.

Xinjiang’s remarkable landscapes form a natural protection area with high aesthetic appeal, including lush snow-covered firs, crystal-clear glaciers, vast grasslands, and various rare flora and fauna. These features attract urban residents seeking an escape from mundane lives. Known as the “Hometown of Fruits” and the “Hometown of Song and Dance”, these areas are celebrated for drawing tourists. We should preserve and promote these rural traditional cultures and create



tourism products that embody more rural cultural characteristics.

Currently, the popularity of rural tourism is on the rise. By exploring its cultural connotations, we can further promote cultural enrichment projects in Xinjiang to a broader audience. In recent years, Xinjiang has leveraged its advantages in rural intangible cultural heritage, red culture, and folk customs to create many distinctive cultural tourism destinations, attracting tourists from all over the country. For example, in Tograkiz Village of Tohir County, the story of Kurban Tulum riding a donkey to Beijing has been leveraged to develop red tourism, providing countless people with a spiritual baptism of patriotism and love for socialism. In Budai Village of Puchakqi Town in Moyu County, the “non-heritage” culture of Saang paper has been utilized to create a Saang paper industrial park, offering tourists a fresh experience through the production of Saang paper. In Moonland Village of Yengibagh Township in Mulei Kazakh Autonomous County, traditional agricultural culture has been deeply explored, transforming it into a popular social media destination that awakens a shared cultural memory among people. Each of these culturally distinctive villages provides rich cultural nourishment for visitors, allowing different ethnic groups to understand, appreciate, and promote each other through interaction and integration, thereby enhance the identification with Chinese culture and strengthen cultural confidence.

## 6.2. Optimize the Structure of the Rural Tourism Industry

Promote balanced development of rural tourism and optimize the structure of the rural tourism industry. The main challenges in our country’s economic and social development have evolved with the continuous improvement of people’s living standards. The main issue in China’s tourism industry is the growing demand for a better life through tourism versus the imbalance and inadequacy in tourism development. The demand for rural tourism has shifted from extensive, low-level entertainment projects to deeper-level experiences such as leisure tourism. Upgrading the rural tourism industry is an urgent task. A new wave of distinctive, attractive, and contemporary tourism products has emerged, gradually becoming the focus of rural tourism, including boutique homestays, rural resorts, garden-themed parks, and rural clubs. The increasing comprehensiveness of tourism provides a practical foundation for further enhancing production efficiency.

Nowadays, rural tourism in Xinjiang is developing rapidly. Many remote villages are imitating each other by opening homestays and showcasing their landscapes, but they lack a comprehensive and mature system. This has resulted in improper promotion and a failure to highlight key features. While there are unique and charming aspects, the remote and difficult-to-access locations lead to low visitor numbers, resulting in sluggish economic development. Instead of boosting the economy, this has created significant pressure. We should identify one or two unique local characteristics that cannot be easily replicated, focus on developing and promoting them, and strive for excellence while ensuring safety. Additionally, for well-established scenic areas, there should be annual upgrades to



keep pace with economic and social development. It's important that they not only feature beautiful scenery but also offer convenience to people, closely aligning with urban standards of living.

### **6.3. Administrative Departments Lead the Construction and Promote Development Together**

Unlike other tourist destinations, rural tourism stands out due to its cross-departmental and cross-industry nature. In developing rural tourism, relevant government departments must handle tasks such as overall development planning, infrastructure construction, establishing investment and financing channels, talent training, brand promotion, and market marketing—tasks that cannot be accomplished solely by the market or individual farmers. They should also implement quality assessment standards. To promote the development of rural tourism in Xinjiang, the tourism department and the agricultural department jointly established the “Xinjiang Rural Tourism Work Leadership Group” to coordinate and lead the development of rural tourism in Xinjiang.

The involvement of community residents in tourism development must permeate all levels during the rural tourism development process. It should gradually achieve comprehensive community participation, moving from individual involvement to group participation and then to organizational engagement. With farmers as the main participants, we should encourage villagers to engage in providing tourism products, reduce population outflow, and effectively address social issues such as left-behind elderly and children, enabling them to live and work in peace and contentment.

### **6.4. Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in Xinjiang**

Rural tourism leverages the development of the information age and becomes a ‘decompression package’ for urban residents (Meng et al., 2021). The crowded commuters, towering streets, and endless flow of vehicles have seemingly become symbols of modern cities, leading to high pollution and stress levels. Where there is demand, there is supply. More and more people are seeking the natural scenery, simple folk customs, and healthy green food of the countryside, coming to rural areas in search of fresh air, organic cuisine, and ecological sights during festivals. Today, the development of information technology and various online platforms has provided opportunities for promoting scenic spots. With the rapid advancement of information networks, entire villages in Xinjiang have achieved full network coverage, facilitating the promotion of rural tourism. Moreover, local specialties can be conveniently delivered to cities across the country, allowing urban residents to enjoy green and healthy farmhouse meals at any time. It can be said that the trend of rural tourism development in the information age is on the rise. Nowadays, rural tourism is set to unleash even greater potential through the power of the internet and logistics.

Preserve local culture and promote positive energy in rural areas. China has a

saying, “leaves return to their roots”, and many literary classics explore “hometown nostalgia”, reflecting elements of local culture. With the development of the rural economy and social progress, some negative aspects of traditional rural customs have been gradually discarded. In rural tourism, people no longer see “dirt, disorder, and poverty”, but a thriving new countryside. Rural areas are beginning to emphasize civilization and establish new customs, leading to improved educational standards. Some villages are promoting and preserving traditional crafts. Residents are running tourism-related businesses, such as agritourism, grocery stores, and specialty shops. They have started welcoming city tourists, recognizing the benefits of tourism, and are willing to share their daily lives with visitors. This positive interaction between urban and rural areas alleviates regional conflicts and fosters cultural exchange. We must focus not only on economic development but also on spreading culture, enhancing cultural construction in rural and marginalized areas, and promoting positive energy in the countryside.

Align with current trends and respond to national policies. Whether in China’s cities or rural areas, tourism providers with rapidly developing regional economic capacities must keep pace with tourism progression; otherwise, they risk being overwhelmed by the tides of change. Enhance rural development and promote sustainable rural tourism through collaboration among administrative departments. As the saying goes, “To get rich, one must first build the roads.” Today, the roads at the foot of the village have been connected, but the path of the spirit must not be forgotten. The embodiment of rural tourism, in response to national policies, is to follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics and pursue the “rural revitalization” route. Only under the guidance of national policies can rural tourism stand out and continue to innovate and expand in the diversified tourism market.

## 7. Conclusion

This article clarifies the concepts of rural revitalization and rural tourism, as well as their relationship, through research on these topics. Analyzing the current development status of rural tourism in Xinjiang under the rural revitalization strategy, this article offers development suggestions. The overall conditions for rural tourism in Xinjiang are favorable. However, aside from well-known attractions, small and remote rural tourism spots are often overlooked, and the variety of complex tourism products leads to limited coverage. Rural tourism has improved residents’ living environments, preserved historical culture, and stimulated economic development, increasing per capita income. Despite unresolved challenges, it is crucial to seize opportunities and develop plans tailored to the local context, creating a distinctive rural tourism model to ensure sustainable development in Xinjiang.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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