

Article

Rethinking Cultural Creativity and Tourism Resilience in the Post-Pandemic Era in Chinese Traditional Villages

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Abstract: Traditional villages constitute rural systems with rich cultural heritage resources and the potential for tourism development. Improving resilience in the tourism industry in traditional villages in the post-pandemic era must be urgently reconsidered. This study focuses on the Chinese villages of Zhang Guying and Rebala in Hunan Province and uses a qualitative analysis method. Through in-depth study of two case villages, the study finds that traditional Chinese villages, especially tourist-oriented traditional villages, are more vulnerable to the impact of the epidemic than cities and other places. However, because of their unique traditional cultural connotations, traditional Chinese villages have the potential to enhance tourism resilience in the post-epidemic era through cultural excavation and cultural creative production. The embossed patterns, couplet stories, architecture and folk culture of traditional villages can be used for cultural and creative production. The production of digital products and physical cultural and creative products, and the formation of related industrial chains, will help improve the resilience of village tourism. The joint action of villages, attractiveness (scenic spots), production, social capital, government structure, and cultural creativity helps to transform “vulnerable individuals” into “resilient industrial structures”. This research helps to reconsider whether the past tourism concepts (cultural creativity and creative tourism) have an effect on existing tourism destinations (especially Chinese traditional villages) in the context of the post-epidemic era, and whether they can be rejuvenated. Like other small organizational structures facing the threat of the epidemic, Chinese traditional villages have problems such as insufficient costs and reduced resource advantages. This study will focus on these issues to explore how cultural creativity can help improve existing problems and enhance tourism resilience.

Keywords: post-pandemic era; traditional villages; tourism resilience; creative tourism; cultural excavation



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1. Introduction

With the frequent occurrence of natural disasters on Earth and the emergence and normalization of the COVID-19 pandemic, people’s lives and means of production and the natural ecological environment of the Earth are constantly being affected and endangered all over the world. The pandemic has enhanced the vulnerability of ordinary individuals, and the COVID-19 pandemic has affected different groups differently [1]. In addition, the pandemic also broke down the fundamental organizational scale of communities and society [2], causing disordered lifestyles and unusual travel patterns of ordinary individuals as well as the reduction in green public spaces [3,4]. The pandemic has also forced the interruption of the industrial chain in many enterprises, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises. The related reasons include labour scarcity, material scarcity, demand uncertainty and supply inconsistency. Research has shown that in the face of the threat of COVID-19, the organizational resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises can be improved through the application and development of digital technology, and innovation will be the core competitiveness of small and medium-sized organizational structures [5,6].

From a macro level, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a substantial challenge for all human beings and industries. It has damaged industrial structure, lifestyle, tourism behaviour, and people's concept of working [7]. Tourism (as a customer service industry) may have faced more disruptions caused by COVID-19 than other industries [8], for example because of a decrease in the number of tourists, business closures and reduced customer capacity, as well as financial, physical and emotional stress, etc. [9–13]. Research has shown that COVID-19 has impacted travel decisions, destination marketing, technology adoption, and visitors' well-being, with the pandemic forcing the travel industry to experience at the same time dynamics of "rebound and retreat" and "connect and alienate". However, scholars such as Sigala have stated that the pandemic may not be the root cause of the crisis and turmoil in tourism. The crisis and turmoil in tourism is only accelerated and catalyzed by the pandemic [14–16]. In the future, tourism is expected to learn from the experience of the pandemic and learn to deal with the crisis and recover from it. Tourism is a business activity where diverse micro-groups act together; thus, tourism must correspond to strategies that have been formulated in the recovery process [17,18].

Traditional Chinese villages constitute a unique regional system that retains traditional culture and special regional characteristics; thus, they have great cultural heritage value and strong tourism development capacity [19,20]. Like other places that have developed tourism, these villages are faced with COVID-19. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in traditional villages has shrunk compared to other places, and the impact on the organization of these villages has been greater than in other places. It is urgent to improve resilience to boost local tourism [21]. Therefore, research on the resilience of tourism in traditional villages is necessary. However, past research on the resilience of tourism has mainly focused on the theoretical level, and the analysis of specific empirical cases has been relatively lacking. It is more necessary to add to the existing empirical case studies when studying tourism. As a micro-unit in China's regional system, traditional Chinese villages are similar with small organizational structures subordinate to large enterprises, so the difficulties it faces in the epidemic are more and more complicated. Using traditional villages as case studies and discussing the relationship between tourism resilience and cultural creativity can make up for this deficiency [15,22].

In the past, scholars have been split between the two concepts of tourism development and tourism consumptive demand. Some scholars have advocated that research should not reproduce a unified model of touristic products and should instead focus on the balance between "development and protection" and "nature and human utilisation" [23]. However, this situation changed when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the tourism industry. When the tourism industry booms, if the development of local characteristics is not the main purpose of development, the tourism destination certainly loses its core cultural competitiveness. However, in the context of the pandemic, scholars need to rethink how to cope with such environmental crises and sustain tourism in places where tourism has become the main source of reliable economic growth for villages and villagerss. Do creative ideas that have been used before and have been gradually eliminated over time, such as cultural creativity and creative tourism, have a role in the current pandemic [24]? Can these ideas improve the resilience of tourism in traditional villages? In the post-epidemic era, scholars should explore what development problems exist in the traditional village tourism industry which is similar with a small and medium-sized enterprise in danger, and how to help villages improve their tourism resilience through "cultural creativity"—A method that traditional villages paid less attention to in the past. In order to illustrate this problem, this study will select two typical tourism-oriented traditional villages as the research objects, figuring out their current situation of cultural excavation and cultural creativity production mechanism, combined with the increased costs, market weakness, and reduced tourism resilience that the epidemic brought to the villages, rethinking the contribution that creative tourism can bring to traditional Chinese villages.

2. Cultural Creativity and Tourism Resilience

2.1. Cultural Creativity and Creative Tourism

Many aspects of creative and contemporary culture have been defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation as part of cultural tourism, including “art and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and living culture and its way of life, value systems, beliefs and tradition”; these components imply a major fusion of the creative economy and cultural tourism [25,26]. As early as 2000, Richards and Raymond coedited “Creative Tourism”. The concept of “creative tourism” emerged as an extension of the concept of cultural tourism. The fusion of creativity and production and of creativity and consumption has led to the fusion of creativity and tourism. This was the first major move [27,28]. Then, creativity and tourism have come together, gradually becoming foundational for people’s daily life; with the increasing role of popular culture, new media and the internet, the role of “everyday creativity” has also become increasingly important [29–31]. Therefore, tourism has changed from passive watching practices to participation in people’s daily life in the tourist destination [31]. Cultural creativity has been mainly reflected in two aspects of leisure tourism: production and consumption. In terms of production, influenced by the concept of “creativity”, producers of leisure tourism offerings have increased their competitiveness by providing “experience” services and producing “cultural symbols” [31,32]. In terms of consumption, drawing on Bourdieu’s and others’ views on consumption, Richard pointed out that consumers increasingly regarded consumption as the basis for their specific lifestyle and identity. When consumers are engaged in tourism activities, they seek more positive responses from local people, aiming to learn about local knowledge and skills at the destination [31,33]. When participating in consumption activities based on the abovementioned values, consumers are no longer satisfied with nontechnical consumption and seek technical consumption [34,35]. Therefore, in the face of this desire for technical consumption, the “experience economy” has emerged, and providers have started charging for the experience rather than for the actual service, creating higher value added [36].

In summary, the concept of cultural creativity merged with leisure tourism activities. Related research has been promoted by scholars such as Richards, Raymond and Wilson approximately since 2000. Creative tourism has been broadly defined in practice as “a form of tourism that facilitates participatory learning of art, heritage or the specificity of a place for the purpose of participation and authentic experience and provides visitors with a way of connecting with the place and participating in the creation of an activated culture” [37]. Thus, creative tourism has used cultural spaces resulting from cultural creativity, production and consumption, and daily life as carriers to produce symbolic value [38]. Later, scholars have continued to use this definition and concept, based on their knowledge of what creative tourism is and why creative tourism came into being. These scholars have studied the participants in creative tourism activities, the places where creative tourism design has been implemented, and how to cocreate and implement creative tourism practices. Remoaldo conducted factor analysis method and cluster analysis method, studying creative tourism participants from 40 pilot institutions, which were selected for the CREATOUR project based on their sociodemographic characteristics and tourism behaviors, and he obtained three clusters of novelty seekers, knowledge and skills learners, and casual creativity seekers [39]. Souca, Marques and Li discussed the design of creative tourism in villages, cities and communities, analyzed the importance of communities and local individuals in creative tourism and rural revitalization, proposed a “playable city” concept, and continued the discussion on the “creative landscape” [40–42]. Ross relied on the perspective of participatory cocreation to analyze how creative tourism promotes the cocreation of stories about archaeological heritage and solves heritage protection issues. It is this “participatory co-creation” that has made “heritage preservation not only the preservation of traces of the past, but the active (re)creation and maintenance of the reality of a destroyed world in order to reduce its symbolic (symbol) disappearance” [43,44]. In addition, Marques studied digital technology parks and found that although the application

of digital technology in creative cities may be “a kind of distraction from practical problems, imposing a subconscious coercive social force to induce part of social normative behaviour” for some, it also creates a new meaningful travel experience [41].

Some scholars have criticized creative tourism for being dominated by specific groups, centered on attraction as its core strategy, and affected by gentrification, exclusion and continuous reproduction. Thus, places undergo a series of chain reactions that make them gradually lose their uniqueness [45]. However, in some places that benefit from an advantageous location but lack creative production strategies (such as traditional villages or villages with heritage value), highlighting cultural value and creative production are particularly important [40].

2.2. Tourism Resilience

The concept of resilience originated in a discussion by Meyer on adapting to environmental shocks. Scholars have studied the ability of organizations to respond to external shocks, believing that organizations can implement new strategies and put them into practice to respond to external threats. Organizations can respond to external threats through first-order changes and ad hoc training to recover from environmental shocks and maintain resilience [46]. According to Meyer, it is not difficult to conclude that organizations can learn to change and recover when responding to external shocks and crises. Sutcliffe demonstrated that organizations may be more resilient when their information processing, limiting availability and the capacity of their development-related enablers are enhanced [22,47]. Tourism is highly related to social, cultural and economic factors, so improving tourism resilience is also highly related to various social and ecological factors [48]. To improve tourism resilience in the context of COVID-19, individuals, companies, industries (chains), communities and systems will all be included in discussions on resilience.

First, from the perspective of individuals' contributions to crisis and resilience in tourism, individual resilience plays a key role in driving performance and maintaining economic activities [49–51], and ordinary individuals are more likely to encounter financial difficulties in the context of COVID-19, unemployment, and increased psychological stress [52]. In other words, the mental health of individuals, especially those who play a role in the industrial chain and organization, will affect the resilience of tourism during the pandemic [53,54]. Second, from the perspective of enterprises and industrial chains, market downturns, uncertainty and technological progress have intensified competition among enterprises during the pandemic [55]. To cope with fierce competition, enterprises have begun to strengthen their use of digital technology and technological integration. For example, to create added value through cultural heritage-related activities, enterprises have engaged in digital practices and sought to accommodate more stakeholders. However, many issues remain, such as differences in interests, which must be resolved to sustain an organizational strategy that is more conducive to alleviating conflicts among relevant actors and successfully use and update digital technology [55,56]. Furthermore, from the perspective of the community, the improvement of tourism resilience requires the participation of the community and improvements in community resilience as premises because the community has a cohesive social structure and a solid cultural identity rooted in its customs and traditions. The community can maintain a positive outlook in the face of adversity [57]. In addition, the promotion of tourism demand receives positive feedback when community resilience is improved, as demand leads to local economic growth [58,59]. Finally, from a systems perspective, tourism resilience is somewhat correlated with the overall response mechanism of the regional system, and some studies have explored the relative relationship between vulnerability and resilience to illustrate that resilience in different tourism destinations is predetermined. The resilience of tourism destinations is heterogeneous due to their different geographic systems [60].

2.3. The Role of Cultural Creativity in Tourism Resilience

As seen in the previous section, organizational resilience plays an important role in the face of environmental shocks and other external *force majeure* crises. Khlystova found that to achieve sustainable growth, enterprises need to establish a strong interconnected structure between factors and organizational control systems and that creative industries are characterized by entrepreneurship, innovation, sustainability and flexibility and can especially withstand external crises [22,61]. By the same token, activities related to the creative industry (such as information technology, painting and handicrafts, etc.) are diverse and thus considered to be important development elements that make a significant contribution to sustainable and inclusive growth [62–64]. It can reasonably be believed that industries and activities related to cultural creativity play an important role in helping tourism improve resilience and maintain organizational flexibility. Obviously, Khlystova's research not only illustrated the resilience of the creative industry but also revealed that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), freelancers and self-employed individuals in the creative industry have difficulty adapting to changes and maintaining resilience in the face of the pandemic crisis; therefore, social capital is needed as an additional element to improve tourism resilience. Social capital can offer a new form of participation for community and external partners and has been adopted to resist the industrial crisis caused by the pandemic [22,65,66]. In addition, in previous studies on the rise and fall of the rural creative class, scholars have also found that small towns present potential opportunities for creative tourism based on community cohesion, tangible and intangible assets, and traditional lifestyles [28]. Therefore, scholars regard traditional villages that cooperate with social investors, local individuals, enterprises and governments to develop tourism as places where creative tourism design can be implemented.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Site Selection

Two villages were selected for the survey for comparative research. The main object of research design and implementation was the village of Zhang Guying. Zhang Guying is located in eastern Yueyang, Hunan Province, with a longitude of 113°29' E and a latitude of 29°01' N (Figure 1). The village's most valuable cultural heritage is its ancient building complex, which has been perfectly preserved. Important cultural heritage elements in Zhang Guying include "carved wooden beds", "carved window lattices" and "carved wooden doors", which have been preserved on buildings, in folk museums and on embroidered buildings. Most of the wooden beds are decorated with carving patterns. The window lattices are made of solid wood, and the carved patterns are composed of flowers, plants, birds, animals and clouds. The door frames, eaves and door leaves on wooden doors are all carved from solid wood, and the picture of Yin-Yang Taiji is engraved under one door frame. Zhang Guying's architectural heritage demonstrates the fabric of local traditional culture and reflects the imagination of generations of villagers from different ethnic groups.

Another site that served as a reference in our study is the ethnic minority village of Rebala, which is located in the village of Laoche, in Longshan County, Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan Province (Figure 1). Known as "the natural museum of Tujia's original ecological culture" and "the first village of Tujia in China", the village is 29.23 km² large and is home to 477 households for a total population of 1908, of which Tujia people account for 95%. Rebala has retained rich cultural heritage resources. It has the largest Waving Hand Hall in the country (a characteristic tall tower), a wind and rain bridge connecting three villages, and Tujia stilted buildings. Its intangible heritage includes Tujia Brocade, Waving Hand Dance, Mao Gu Si (an ancient Tujia dance in which dancers wear woven grass), Dong Dong Quin (a musical instrument made of slender bamboo, rice and straw) and Da Liu Zi (Tujia drum music). Women there have been taught by women elders at home since childhood and have learned the technique of "Tujia brocade" (a tourism product that is now widely valued as an intangible cultural heritage and has cultural and creative value). Most village members have been good at "waving hand dance" since childhood. Some

villagers have inherited intangible cultural heritage because they are proficient in ethnic minority musical instruments such as “Dong Dong Quin” and “Da Liu Zi”.

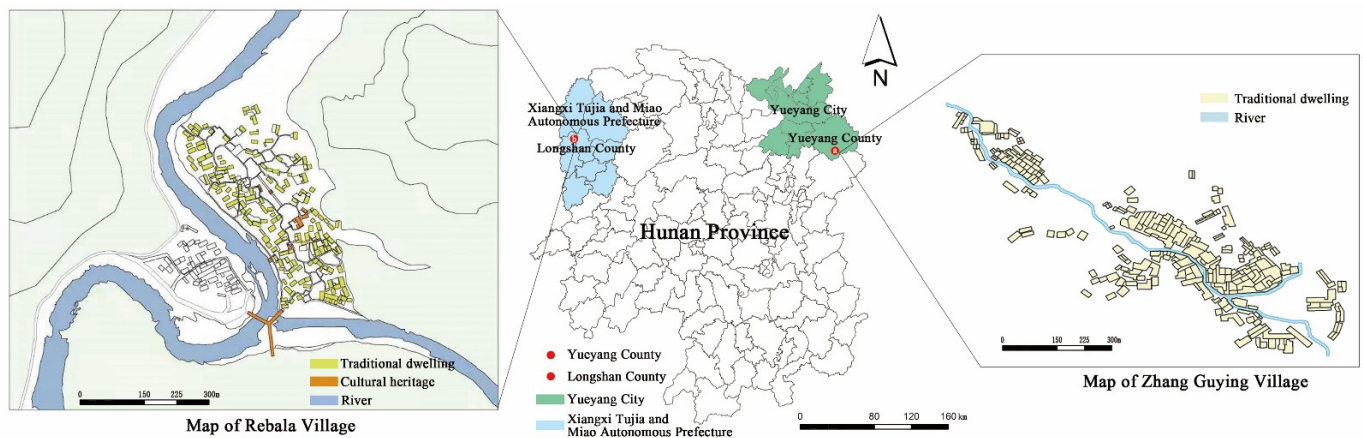


Figure 1. Map showing the location of Zhang Guying village and Rebala village in Hunan province.

Compared with ordinary traditional villages, ethnic minority traditional villages boast richer intangible cultural heritage, benefitting from more materials that can be used for cultural creativity.

3.2. Research Methods

The discussion on traditional village culture excavation, creative production and industrial restoration has involved a variety of social and cultural elements and has been influenced by multiple stakeholders. Qualitative methods are suitable for evaluating people’s experiences, behaviors and opinions in complex cultural environments [67], so this study adopted qualitative research methods to conduct an in-depth exploration of the development of tourism in the villages of Zhang Guying and Rebala. It analyzes that under the era of pandemic, it is necessary for villages to produce cultural creativity and publicity promotion while developing traditional tourism.

In July 2020 and February 2022, the research team went to Zhang Guying and conducted in-depth interviews. The subjects involved in the interviews included 4 tour guides, 4 tourists, 1 scenic spot intern, and 2 senior managers from 2 different foreign enterprises. There were 2 mayors, 1 village party secretary, 5 homestay operators, and 5 ordinary villagers for a total of 24 interviewees. From 20 July to 25 July 2021, the research team went to Rebala for field research and interviewed 2 tour guides, 3 tourists, 2 store staff, 2 government staff, 3 villagers, 1 senior manager from the foreign enterprise, the village party secretary, 2 skilled artisans and 3 homestay operators. A total of 19 people were interviewed in Rebala. The interview topics revolved around Zhang Guying’s tourism and industrial development status, the tourist attraction development process, and the protection and development of cultural heritage (Table 1).

The reason for choosing villagers, tourists, tour guides, homestay operators, enterprise managers, scenic spot managers and government personnel as interviewees was that villagers and homestay operators were the local actors, representing local needs for development and local perceptions of tourism development. Most of the government staff and administrators as well as foreign enterprises were outsiders, representing the external perception and macro-control of the development of the villages’ tourism industry. Although tourists were indirect to the development of village tourism, in fact, as the representative of tourism market demand, they were the reference standard of how tourism suppliers (traditional villages) provided tourism products and what kind of products they should provide. They formed the actor network to make the endogenous and extrinsic sources of tourism resilience enhancement.

Table 1. Interviewee information and interview key points.

| Number | Interviewee | The Number of Interviewee | The Key of Interviews |
|--------|--|---------------------------|--|
| R1–R5 | Ordinary villagers in Zhang Guying village; | 5 | (R) What impact does the epidemic have on the development of villages? Are the residents' income levels high? What do they usually use to make ends meet? Has the government provided enough support for your life and work? |
| R6–R8 | Ordinary villagers in Rebala village | 3 | (H) When did the business start? How did the income compare before and after the pandemic? Has the government provided enough support for your industry? How is the village tourism industry developing? |
| H1–H5 | Homestay operators in Zhang Guying village; | 5 | (A) How is the village tourism industry developing? What are the difficulties in the protection and development of villages? Pay attention to cultural publicity and creation? What is the impact of the pandemic? Are traditional skills still preserved? |
| H6–H8 | Homestay operators in Rebala village | 3 | (G) What are the difficulties in the protection and development of villages? Do foreign enterprises play a big role in tourism development? What tourism development policies does the government have? |
| A1–A5 | Administrators in Zhang Guying village; | 5 | (T) Are you satisfied with the experience of the village tourism products? What are the shortcomings of this tourism destination? Any suggestions? What other villages have you been to like this one? How was the experience? |
| A6–A11 | Administrators in Rebala Village | 6 | (F) When did you settle in the village? What is your contribution and role to the village? What are the difficulties in tourism development? What are your future plans? |
| G1–G3 | Government Staff in Zhang Guying village; | 3 | |
| G4–G6 | Government Staff in Rebala village | 3 | |
| T1–T4 | Tourists in Zhang Guying village; | 4 | |
| T5–T7 | Tourists in Rebala village | 3 | |
| F1–F2 | Foreign enterprises in Zhang Guying village; | 2 | |
| F3 | Foreign enterprise in Zhang Guying village | 1 | |

"R" means "Residents", "H" means "Homestay operators", "A" means "Administrators", "G" means "Government Staff", "T" means "Tourists", "F" means "Foreign enterprises".

Participatory and non-participatory observations were conducted in the study. Participatory observation, mainly from the perspective of tourists, consisted in observing how Zhang Guying and Rebala managed their scenic landscapes, understanding how the tourist routes to the scenic spots were organized, and observing the spatial layout of the villages and local people's daily practices. In addition, the team members also participated in and observed how the village committee managers coordinated work in the village and cooperated with the managers on tourism projects. The non-participatory observation was mainly based on semi-structured interviews. People were interviewed about the development process of village tourism, community residents' perceptions of village tourism development (support or oppose?), the restrictive factors in the development of scenic spots, and whether the rights and interests (economic, social, and economical, psychological and political) of local people were adequately guaranteed. Finally, the author organized the textual data resulting from the field research interviews and observation records to produce primary source materials, which were integrated with secondary source materials, such as government documents related to tourism planning, laws and policies, to create the data for this research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Necessity of Cultural Creativity and Publicity Promotion

To explore the necessity and influence of "cultural creativity and publicity and promotion" on the attraction and popularity of scenic spots, this research compared Rebala and Zhang Guying. Through field research and in-depth interviews, this research found that most local people agreed that cultural creativity and publicity played an important role in the development of village tourism and the construction of scenic spots. Even the local villagers who commuted to urban areas for work and knew their village well and had

been in contact with many products and tourism development and marketing in the city thought so. One villager told us that:

(The village's) leaders changed quickly, and the policy could not be continued. There used to be oil tofu, and the funds were in place, but the person responsible for that project stopped doing it. The village's local specialties are sweet potato flour, dried plum vegetables, and bamboo shoot. The mountains are more famous for oil tofu. For village's another local specialties, there is no direction (development propaganda). Other villages where there have tourism developing are all finding the direction firstly and then developing. We dare not do it even if we have the funds here, because the risks are too great to try. We have ideas for water park facilities, but there is no internet celebrity. It can't develop. The brand is also very important. (R3)

In addition, the staff of the Zhang Guying village Tourist Scenic Spot Management Office also mentioned the following:

Actually, the villagers feel that we have not done anything, but the staff in charge of planning was working truly hard, and some people thought about using personal platforms to promote the project. (A1)

These comments also proved that local individuals, whether they are villagers or managers, actually agreed that publicity, promotion and cultural and creative products were important, but there has been insufficient information in this regard, and local individuals (especially ordinary villagers) have struggled to imagine alternative ways to promote cultural and creative products. Moreover, there has been no relevant technology to support.

Our results show that, compared with Zhang Guying, although Rebala had less transportation accessibility and was less economically developed, its residents were more conscious of the creative production of village tourism cultural products, as well as of the marketing of its most valuable intangible cultural heritage. Among the local actors, the tourism company was mainly responsible for marketing cultural creative production and its related products within the scenic area. For example, signage in the scenic spot (Figure 2) mentioned the local intangible cultural heritage of the Tujia people to guide tourists. For tourists who did not understand the local culture and history, this mention elicited a sense of mystery and gave them a motivation to explore the area. Even the seemingly inconspicuous “La La Du” whose function has been replaced by the “wind and rain bridge” and is out of action now, under the mentioning of signage, has improved its attraction in the historical narrative of the village. Tourists have inexplicably been attracted to this narrative and wanted to know more about it. This promotion of local culture is the key to facing the scarcity of minority cultures, which can be exploited by creative tourism. In addition, using the “experience economy” discourse, the tourism company, as a producer and provider of cultural creativity, has used the skills of Tujia villagers who sing, dance and play special musical instruments to develop activities such as “Weekend Bonfire Party”, “Brocade Experience” and “Waving Hand Dance Teaching and Immersion Experience” (Figure 3), which have captured the minds of tourists and answered their need for participation in local culture and indirectly enhanced the marketing of local intangible cultural heritage. Our results show that Zhang Guying village, which still uses tour guide explanations as its main form of publicity, the “experience economy” discourse is not only necessary for it to strengthen but also urgently needed.

Compared to people in Zhang Guying, local individuals, villagers or tour guides in Rebala consciously used the power of the internet through digital platforms, such as Tik-Tok, to enhance the marketing of scenic spots and products. The tour guides themselves were very familiar with the folk customs of the Tujia people, the local way of life and historical narratives, and they also knew how to use digital platforms to tell “local stories”. These practices were all manifestations of cultural and creative production. In addition, provincial TV stations also promoted the area, focusing on explaining Rebala's intangible cultural heritage and narrating Tujia cultural stories; these activities all contributed to marketing and highlighting Rebala's culture. As a result, all kinds of tourists and repeat

customers came to know and love the village. These practices also showed that the specific cultural displaying and marketing of culture is necessary in tourism development and tourism product development.



Figure 2. Rebala village sign.



Figure 3. Bonfire party in Rebala.

4.2. Cultural Display and Creative Production in Zhang Guying Village

After comparing Rejala to Zhang Guying village, it was obvious that the latter needed to engage in cultural creativity and marketing based on its most valuable cultural heritage elements to make tourists come more spontaneously and to generate secondary tourism demand. In this respect, this research found that Zhang Guying village's traditional buildings was the most valuable. Tourists felt that, in Zhang Guying village, aside from sightseeing and tour guides, there was no meaningful activity available. This sentiment is reflected as follows:

There is also a place like this in Hangzhou. They decorate it and rent it to those young teams. They engage in live broadcasting, the internet, and art teams and attract young people to come here. The rent given is very low, and they live here, so they slowly bring their experience with them. (T1)

There is actually a little bit advantage of transportation here, which is convenient, and there are more remote villages than this. As long as you can drive, it is still convenient. (T1)

The scenic area is too small, and it's all over in one go. If you come by car, it's not worth it ... So it still need the government to introduce capital and build it later. (T2)

There is a stream here, and there are these ancient buildings. These elements seem to be the only one in Yueyang City, and it can be developed here. (T1)

Thus, our findings show that the needs of tourists were multileveled and diversified. People hoped for the village to develop digital and artistic elements. Moreover, the village cultural heritage actors also required these elements to be displayed in a particular way. A tour guide telling a story did not necessarily make tourists connect strongly with the village's emotions and stories, but bodily performances, textual symbols and spin-off products made tourists feel more connected to the village.

Through our field research, it was easily found that the whole village of Zhang Guying had a long history and deep cultural heritage. There were many heritage elements in the village that condensed the wisdom of local people and ancestors. Some of these cultural heritage elements were worth displaying and producing as cultural and creative commodities (Figure 4).

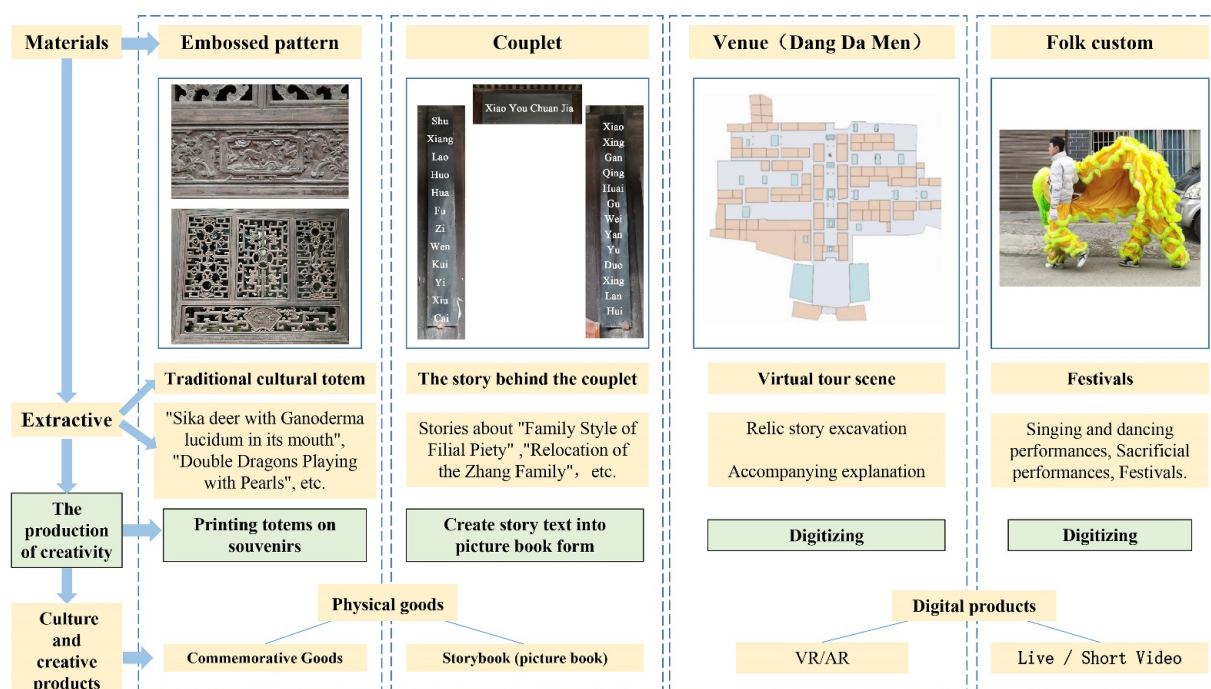


Figure 4. Zhang Guying village's cultural elements and the creative production process.

The window grilles, patio walls, beams, eaves and other elements of Zhang Guying's traditional houses have been all imbued with traditional cultural meaning. For example, the window grilles have been engraved with the sika deer. The sika deer's mouth contains *Ganoderma lucidum*, which means health and longevity. The more common sculpted reliefs included the "Double Dragons Playing Pearls", which echo natural landscapes such as the "Dragon Shaped Mountain", "Dragon Ball Stone" and "Jade Belt River". In ancient times, the dragon was a symbol of the supreme body. In the village, these elements have shown the beautiful vision of the Zhang family after it migrated and settled in the area. In addition, the Zhang family has attached great importance to the culture of farming and reading, believing that diligence and hard work, filial piety towards parents and elders, and kindness towards neighbors were the foundation of family values. Many ancient buildings in the village displayed written poetic couplets that reflected the concepts of "Cultivating farming and reading culture" and "Inheriting filial piety and friendship". For example, the poetic couplet entitled "Xiao Xing Gan Qing Huai Gu Wei Yan Yu Duo Xing Lan Hui, Shu Xiang Lao Huo Hua Fu Zi Wen Kui Yi Xiu Cai" told that the fifteenth-generation granddaughter-in-law Hu cared for her paralyzed mother-in-law for many years during the Xianfeng period of the Qing Dynasty. When the mother-in-law was dying, she took Hu's hand and said, "I wish you a talented son after I die." Hu taught her children to read and write and studied hard, and her hard work paid off. Her son and grandson were both successful, and one of her sons became a scholar. To sum up, Zhang Guying's cultural elements, such as the sculpted patterns on the window grilles, can be selected as cultural symbols and creatively produced in the future. Zhang Guying village can produce creative products with cultural symbols. Moreover, the stories behind the poetic couplets transmitted from various households can be collected into storybooks or picture books to strengthen their cultural symbolism.

In addition to these two forms of cultural and creative production, the very attractive village of Zhang Guying can create cultural and creative commodities around the buildings themselves. It was easily noticed that it is necessary to innovate in and apply digital technology during the pandemic. Therefore, the use of digital technology in buildings is considered to be an acceptable path to creative production. The main buildings in Zhang Guying were Dang Da Men, Wang Jia Duan and Shang Xin Wu. Today, most of Shang Xin Wu's residents have moved out, but there are still traces of the many villagers who lived in Dang Da Men and Wang Jia Duan; and those buildings have retained the imprint of history. Dang Da Men and Wang Jia Duan can be treated as creative virtual scenes. On the one hand, this approach can help the development of virtual games where ancient buildings are featured in the background; and on the other hand, this approach can lead to the creation of a companion explanatory app to connect the physical scene to tourists who are off-site. Tourists can be explained at any point where they are; through the app, they can preview a landscape and obtain information about the village from multiple sources, including audio-visual media.

Except the above research content, some details had been studied, such as 'how Re-bala's tour guides and villagers promoted themselves (TikTok) and found that Zhang Guying could also promote the sculpted window grilles and other cultural heritage elements featured in the ancient building complex in the same way. In the future, young people can recreate and promote cultural products more effectively and rapidly through digital displays and digital platforms on the internet rather than by using official platforms and conventional marketing models. In fact, in Zhang Guying village it is not easy to attract tourists from faraway places. In terms of distance, it is more convenient for local residents to promote their village through word-of-mouth among relatives and friends, and the local governmental tourism office plays a role in promoting short distance trips. However, when the village is further away, potential tourists may not even have heard of the village. Hence, the promotion of digital platforms, live broadcasts of festival performances and other forms of publicity are more convenient and allow tourists who are far away from the destination to discover the village and realize it is attractive.

4.3. Improving Tourism Resilience in Traditional Villages

In Zhang Guying village, local individuals have shown a certain degree of vulnerability when dealing with the tourism crisis caused by the pandemic. As a villager who runs a homestay in Zhang Guying said:

I have cared for an orchard for the last two years, and I failed. It needed to decide on the planting according to the weather in this province. It is unrealistic to plant blindly. I have planted seven or eight kinds of fruit trees, however, while climate changed, they all died, and I have lost tens of thousands of dollars; and the government doesn't invest in me. Even if the government knew that I was working on it, no one help, saying that there was no such project in our town, and there was no money to support it. (R2)

In this situation, both the ordinary villagers and the scenic spot management staff felt powerless, as shown in the following statement by a scenic spot tour guide:

Others come to do business, and they cannot do it for a long time. One or two years, they might not be able to get the benefit and then they went back. After the pandemic, there are some entrepreneurs left, but few. The current peak season is similar with the previous Saturday and Sunday. Look at the hotels now. A few have opened; most of the inns are closed, but they still have accounts on Ctrip, and their internet shops still open year after year. The government distributes dividends (to the village) at the end of the year, but not much. (A1)

In Rebala village, there was a resident proving the opinions above. In Rebala Village, there was a villager who contracted land to carry out ornamental planting business. The villager was originally a government staff who worked in the city. While making a living in the city, he carried out a support plan for the tourism industry in his hometown—Rebala village. He didn't dare to compete with tourism companies, so the production activities of the plantation have not improved. According to this villager, we could see that

"I'm not a traditional farmer, I just contracted the land in 2012 and asked others to do it, because I think this place has become a tourist destination. I can use the contracted land to do some tourism-related industries, but the industries have not been done well"; "(Most of tourism industries are mainly done by the tourism company. We are not easy to do it ourselves, and we have not discussed cooperation with the company. The company itself is now relatively difficult to operate, and the personnel burden is relatively heavy, so it is not easy for us to fight for it."; "I have traveled a lot of places outside, but I still think my hometown have its own characteristics. If it is managed well, it should have good development prospects. But I feel that my personal ability is so limited that I can't do the whole project and support it by only myself"; "After the tourism development of this place, the cost for local labors are very high. After families there earn much money by the land acquisition, people in this village are unwilling to do difficult things, so it is difficult and expensive to hire people to do things."; "Last year, the rapeseed flower festival organized by the travel company took a month, but there were not many tourists viewing at it still, even if the company used Tik Tok platform holding competitions, and the time that spent on it was more than the previous one." (R6)

Therefore, it could be seen that the case studies of Zhang Guying Village and Rebala Village both reflected the vulnerability of individuals in response to the epidemic, the lack of cooperation between various actors, and the lack of the formation of a network of above actors. The cost during the epidemic was to be considered as the most important factor when developing the tourism industries, especially for foreign actors and vulnerable local individuals.

These scenarios showed that individuals have not coped with the pandemic crisis and industrial recession. The improvement in tourism resilience required that the organization play a holistic role. It has been necessary to build a resilient organization and design and implement effective actions to increase the possibility of survival (Figure 5). The production and promotion of physical cultural and creative products and digital products have given

traditional villages an opportunity to build flexible organizations. The diverse network constructed by stakeholders has been more apt and flexible at facing the impact of the pandemic on village tourism and promote the sustainable development of village tourism and the village economy through income generation. The stakeholders involved in the tourism development of Zhang Guying or Rebala include the Yueyang Tourism Bureau, (Scenic Spot) Management Office, Longshan County Government, Village Committee, (cultural relics) maintenance personnel, tour guides and villagers. For cultural creativity to intervene in the villages, artists, teachers and students in the art industry, freelancers in art-related industries and digital studios should also participate. In addition, to go beyond preliminary projects, a certain amount of social capital is required to advance the cost of artistic creation. Therefore, in the process of artistic creation and the production of cultural and creative commodities, cultural heritage foundations, factories, and product workers are also required. The multifaceted network composed of the abovementioned individuals is based on six elements including villages, as well as on scenic spots, cultural production, social capital, government agencies and cultural creativity, promoting tourism resilience and gradually improving the cohesion of the industry.

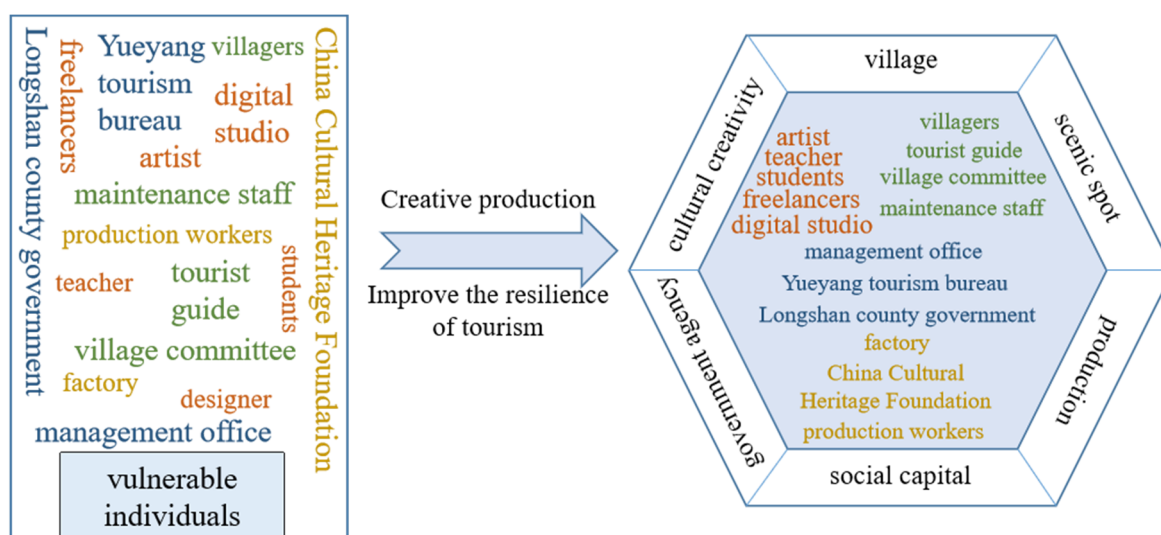


Figure 5. From ‘vulnerable individuals’ to ‘increased tourism resilience’.

It was mentioned earlier that cultural creativity and the creative production of tourism products play a certain role in promoting the development of tourism. Research (especially research on the construction of creative cities) has shown that creative clusters are an indispensable driving force for promoting creativity. However, as a micro-organization, the village cannot support and accommodate a complete and large creative cluster when tourist attractions are just emerging. When funds are limited, the so-called creative production may be more concentrated. Zhang Guying and Rebala should select cultural creative elements among the most valuable products and their derivatives, which are suitable for the creative production of tourism-oriented traditional villages. Therefore, they may be more focused on digital products and physical cultural and creative products. As a result, the industrial resilience caused by cultural creativity, creative production and creative tourism can improve, which is reflected in the following two simple product chains.

As far as the production chain for physical cultural and creative products is concerned, designers design cultural and creative products and factories manufacture them based on the costs. Designers of cultural and creative products can choose freelancers engaged in artistic creation and teachers and students who are engaged in the art industry. The abovementioned individuals are more flexible in production activities and can provide newer ideas. Moreover, these individuals do not cost as much as art studios and cultural and creative companies, and employers can obtain a greater level of performance. Factories

should consider the cost-effectiveness of land rent and distance and choose the most suitable factory nearby, preferably a factory in Zhang Guying Town. To a certain extent, this choice would also solve the employment problem people face in their towns or villages and provide additional income. In addition, the creation of cultural symbols and highlighting of stories are most important in physical cultural and creative products. Outsiders may not be able to restore the original spirit and embeddedness of stories and symbols. Therefore, experienced local elders and tour guides are needed to communicate and teach. The creation of cultural and creative products is essential to make the village more attractive for tourists and restore its productive vitality. Therefore, cultural products need to be returned to the actual scenic spot to be sold there exclusively and by villagers or other relevant stakeholders. This practice would be conducive to facing the scarcity of tourism resources.

As far as the production chain of digital products is concerned, the designers and artists of digital products must be connected, as well as the personnel responsible for digital technology. The development and application of digital products is difficult and technical and needs to be performed by a professional digital studio. Small studios are cheaper than digital companies and are more suitable for scenic spots such as villages. On the other hand, as small and medium-sized enterprises, digital studios face greater pressure than large digital companies. For both villages and digital studios, cooperation is a win-win choice. In addition, people who work on the buildings, such as those who maintain cultural relics; people who perform in folkloric shows, such as villagers, tour guides and elders who have acquired Hunan embroidery and singing and dancing skills, all must participate in digital production. What is more, tourism companies that operate in the villages and are involved in the performance planning are also necessary in this process. The government agencies and scenic spot management offices that coordinate personnel, receive funds, and organize tourism development are the most important actors in connecting stakeholders. The production chain of digital products involves many people and requires more initial investment capital. At this time, social capital intervention is especially needed. The people who were interviewed revealed that Zhang Guying recently introduced the “China Cultural Heritage Foundation” into villages protecting and developing projects as a social capital, which is fully capable of providing some economic support in the early stage of the production and operation of cultural and creative products.

5. Conclusions

This research considered the villages of Zhang Guying and Rebala, two typical traditional Chinese villages. This research focused mainly on Zhang Guying and used Rebala as a reference for comparative research, analyzing the cultural elements in the two villages and explaining the ways in which cultural creativity plays a role in tourism resilience and the importance of publicity and promotion in sustainable tourism development. This research adopted qualitative research methods, using participant observation and semi-structured interviews to obtain data. This research explored tourism development in traditional villages in the context of the pandemic and reflected on how traditional villages could improve the resilience of tourism in the post-pandemic era. This research also examined the role of cultural display, marketing, cultural creativity and creative production in tourism resilience.

Rebala has paid more attention than Zhang Guying to the use of cultural symbols. Both scenic companies and local individuals there have focused on promoting local culture and tourism products through digital platforms, maintaining Rebala’s touristic attractiveness during the pandemic crisis. The case study of Rebala showed that special language, folk customs and skills would attract tourists’ attention more than simply tourism products. Stakeholders in villages should be apt at using these intangible cultural heritage elements and enhance them through new techniques and approaches to cope with the tourism crisis. This research explored the fact that tourism destinations should put culture on display and use digital media communication tools, and Zhang Guying village as well as other tourist-oriented villages in China could learn from these approaches.

Zhang Guying is a tourist-oriented village rich in material cultural heritage. The creative production of tourism there should focus on the cultural component of its physical elements and supplement this approach by disseminating information about its intangible cultural elements. People in Zhang Guying have shown proud filial piety and have been attentive to their ancestors' culture of farming and reading. Therefore, the ancient buildings in the village have retained their symbolic sculptures and poetic couplets that represent Zhang's identity. In the post-pandemic era, tourism development in Zhang Guying has not been as strong as before the pandemic. This result implied that it is thus urgent to find a new development path to restore the vitality of villages' tourism by preserving cultural symbols and creating couplet story picture books, which may help promote the demand for tourism in Zhang Guying and other similar villages after the pandemic. Moreover, the stakeholders and small companies in the villages could interact and develop in a multi-structure. The creation of physical cultural goods will help enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations and help to build and strengthen the cultural symbols of villages so that their brand image can become deeply rooted in the hearts of tourists. In addition, tourist-oriented villages' festival activities could also be enhanced and renewed by the use of digital platforms to attract potential long-distance tourists.

The study found that the establishment and extension of the digital production chain and cultural production chain might help villages like Zhang Guying village improve tourism resilience. The production chain for cultural products can mainly involve creative design actors (designers, artists, art teachers and students, etc.); production actors (factories and workers); and local actors (villagers, tour guides, etc.). Government agencies can also play a role in tourism development by selecting suitable intervening actors. Based on the severe impact of the pandemic on tourism and considering issues such as cost and cost-effectiveness, the selection of cultural and creative actors should prioritize freelancers, flexible designers, teachers and students. These actors may construct a network of diverse 'vulnerable individuals' that help develop 'resilient industrial structures'. The production chain for digital products in villages may involve digital technicians, creative design entities, and local actors. Unlike physical cultural production, digital production has required higher technical levels, and creative design entities and digital technicians need to be bundled with each other to complete cultural creative production. Therefore, priority should be given to digital studios when selecting partners. Compared with that of companies, the work capacity and workload of studios are more suitable for using in scenic spots at the village level. Whether the production of cultural goods or the production of digital products are based on "individuals" or "resilient industries", they are inseparable from the six elements of tourism development, which include villages, scenic spots, production, social capital, government agencies and cultural creativity.

The reason for choosing Zhang Guying Village and Rebala Village is that they are both traditional villages on the protection list of Chinese traditional villages because of their exploitability and tourism value, and the villages on the protection list of traditional Chinese villages currently use tourism development as a means of protection. There are 6,819 villages in total, which are divided into five batches. It can be seen that the number of traditional villages that need to be protected and developed is huge. Both Zhang Guying Village and Rebala Village selected in this study are 4A-level scenic spots. They are not as good as other 5A-level scenic spots, because 5A-level scenic spots have more complete facilities and a large number of tourists. The competition between villages with a larger tourists and villages with a few tourists is similar with a confrontation between large tourism companies and small tourism companies. There are many 4A-level scenic spots in China, but they have something in common—they all lack tourism facilities and the industrial chain needed to be improved, so they are more likely to be eliminated and endangered in the face of the impact of the epidemic. Therefore, this study selected an ordinary village with more serious commercialization, comparing with a more ethnic and cultural village as a result of their universality in China. Through comparing and combining

two tourist-oriented villages, this research illustrated the problems that traditional Chinese villages would face in the epidemic era and ways to improve tourism resilience.

When discussing the impact of the epidemic on the tourism resilience of traditional Chinese villages and figuring out the improvement of cultural creativity on tourism resilience, the objects that need to be involved are traditional villages that develop tourism and transform their industries from agriculture to tourism. The two cases selected in this article are consistent with typical representatives of tourism-oriented traditional villages. The discussion of the case is to go deeper into the village community and reveal the problems existing in the development of tourism in villages in China from the inside out. Scholars should rethink how traditional tourist-oriented villages where scenic spots are located improve tourism resilience through cultural creativity. This theoretical framework aims to use typical cases, assuming the role of cultural creativity, and assuming that under the impact of the epidemic, whether cultural creativity will bring vitality and possibility to traditional villages.

Due to the limited space, this paper lacks further discussion on how to implement and promote tourism resilience in the cultural and creative industrial chain. Thus, this study can be supplemented in the future. This research has focused more on how traditional villages, as cultural heritage and resource-rich tourist destinations, have displayed culture and engaged in creative production. Our results have shown the importance and feasibility of cultural creativity and creative tourism in restoring the vitality of tourism in rural areas facing the pandemic. The biggest contribution of this article is that it is a reconsideration of the feasibility and value of the creative production of tourism traditional village culture in the post-epidemic era.

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