



The Push-Pull-Resistance Model: Integrating Art Revitalization and Ecotourism in Hainan's Coastal Villages

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Rural art-ecotourism integration has become a prominent development approach in China, yet existing frameworks inadequately explain why similar interventions produce divergent outcomes. This gap is especially evident in fragile coastal fishing villages where cultural preservation, ecological protection, and economic transformation generate complex tensions.

Methodology: This study employs theoretical modeling, synthesizing systems theory and push-pull-resistance frameworks. The model is developed through conceptual deduction, drawing illustratively on secondary analysis of policy and case literature from Hainan's coastal context. By integrating systems theory and push-pull-resistance theory, a dialectical dynamic model is constructed, comprising the "Basic Dynamic Layer (Push/Pull) – Core Process Layer (Resistance) – Target System Layer (Dynamic Equilibrium)". This model focuses on analyzing the creative transformation mechanism of "resistance" during the integration process and, based on the model's internal logic, deduces different integrated development pathways.

Results: The study identifies three major dynamic systems driving integration: the "Push" system, centered on endogenous cultural force, policy impetus, and industrial transformation pressure; the "Pull" system, centered on market demand and the attraction of capital and talent; and the "Resistance" system, composed of four-dimensional tensions in culture, ecology, industry, and governance. Crucially, the research highlights that resistance functions as a form of creative tension, actively shaping differentiated pathways rather than serving merely as friction. Consequently, three differentiated pathways are deduced: (1) The Culture-Led Pathway, achieving value reconstruction through in-depth exploration and contemporary expression of local culture; (2) The Ecology-Priority Pathway, internalizing ecological constraints as design principles to develop low-interference experience economies; (3) The Governance-Innovation Pathway, resolving structural contradictions by constructing a networked governance structure involving multiple stakeholders.





Conclusion: The push–pull–resistance dialectical model demonstrates that outcomes depend on how tensions are transformed, not merely on the strength of push or pull forces. It offers both theoretical insight and practical guidance for achieving balanced cultural, ecological, economic, and governance outcomes. The model possesses not only theoretical explanatory power but also offers actionable pathway references for integrated cultural and tourism development practices in Hainan and similar regions. Future research could further test and refine this framework through cross-regional comparisons and longitudinal tracking.

Keywords: Art-led Rural Revitalization; Ecotourism; Coastal Fishing Villages; Driving Mechanisms; Push-Pull-Resistance Theory; Integrated Development

Introduction

Across Hainan, artistic interventions in coastal fishing villages have produced strikingly different outcomes. Some villages have achieved cultural revival and economic vitality; others have experienced cultural commodification, ecological degradation, or governance paralysis. Why do similar interventions yield such divergent results? This paper argues that the answer lies not simply in the strength of push or pull factors, but in how communities transform inherent tensions into productive forces.

Existing studies provide valuable insights but remain limited in three ways. Many adopt a mechanistic view, listing factors such as policy or markets without showing how they interact. Others treat integration as static, overlooking negotiation and tension as part of the process. Still others generalize from inland agricultural villages, failing to capture the distinct logic of coastal communities shaped by mobility, openness, and ecological fragility (Zhang & Ma, 2016; Wu & Xie, 2022; Bao, 2014). These limitations show the need for a framework that highlights dynamic tensions and contextual specificity.

Confronted with these theoretical challenges, this paper argues for an urgent need to develop a new analytical framework that simultaneously addresses the systematic nature of dynamics, the dialectics of process, and contextual specificity. To this end, this paper introduces systems theory and the push-pull-resistance theory, integrating insights from place attachment theory and cultural economics, aiming to construct a "process-hierarchical" theoretical model of dynamic mechanisms. This theoretical endeavor will focus on the following core questions: What hierarchical system do the core "push," "pull," and "resistance" factors that drive and constrain the integration of art-led rural revitalization and ecotourism in Hainan's coastal fishing villages constitute? Within this system, how is "resistance" dialectically transformed from a mere constraining factor into a "creative tension" that drives model differentiation and characteristic





formation? Based on this model, what theoretical integration pathways applicable to Hainan's coastal fishing villages and insightful for similar regions can be identified?

Through in-depth exploration of these questions, this paper aims to transcend the descriptive and fragmented limitations of current research, providing a theoretical tool with enhanced explanatory power and practical guidance for understanding and promoting the deep integration of art-led rural revitalization and ecotourism. This will not only help bridge the gap between the theory and practice of art-led rural revitalization but also offer academic support for the sustainable development of Hainan's coastal fishing villages under the dual imperatives of ecological civilization and rural revitalization.

Objectives: This study pursues four main goals: (1) to construct a Push–Pull–Resistance model explaining the complex integration of art and ecotourism in Hainan's coastal fishing villages; (2) to reconceptualize resistance as a creative force shaping development paths; (3) to identify three distinct integration pathways—culture-led, ecology-priority, and governance-innovation; and (4) to provide policy and governance recommendations for sustainable development.

Literature Review

1. Evolution of Art-Led Rural Revitalization Research

Rural revitalization driven by art has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Early studies emerged from community art practices and cultural geography, emphasizing how artistic interventions reshape local identity and public space (Fang, 2021; Feng, 2023). More recent work has examined art as part of the rural creative economy, linking it to place-making and cultural sustainability (Liu & Xu, 2022; Wei, 2023). Scholars debate whether such interventions preserve authenticity or lead to commodification. Geertz's (2008) "thick description," for example, reminds us that rituals like Hainan's sea-worship ceremonies must be interpreted within daily practices to understand how tourism reshapes them.

2. Ecotourism in Coastal and Maritime Contexts

Coastal ecotourism differs from inland ecotourism because of fragile ecosystems and mobility. Studies on Hainan's coral reefs and mangroves demonstrate ecological risks of unchecked tourism (Zhou, 2004; Xin et al., 2016). Recent work (Gao & Chen, 2021; Zhang, 2024) debates whether "low-intensity tourism" is truly eco-friendly, showing that even minimal interventions can disrupt ecosystems or exceed carrying capacity. Maritime communities also show openness and fluidity, which challenge static sustainability models.

3. Integration and Synergy Frameworks

Scholars theorize the integration of rural revitalization and tourism using various frameworks. Community-based tourism emphasizes participation and equity (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015), while network governance highlights collaboration (Liu, 2021). Recent studies on cultural economies (Huang & Sun, 2022) show that artistic interventions can generate synergies with eco-tourism when governance is inclusive. However, debates remain—some warn of homogenization, while others view integration as a path to resilience.

4. Theoretical Gaps and Research Positioning

Two key gaps remain. First, studies rarely explain how cultural, ecological, industrial, and governance tensions interact dynamically. Second, most frameworks derive from inland contexts, lacking maritime sensitivity. This paper addresses these gaps by proposing the Push–Pull–Resistance model, reconceptualizing resistance as creative tension shaping differentiated pathways.

5. Interconnected Tension System

The four tensions—cultural, ecological, industrial, and governance—interact rather than exist in isolation. Cultural identity affects ecological participation; industrial benefits shape governance. Addressing one alone is insufficient. A holistic systems-thinking approach is needed, justifying the Push–Pull–Resistance model presented next.

Methodology

This paper employs conceptual theory development as its primary methodology. Rather than conducting an empirical investigation of specific villages, it engages in systematic theoretical synthesis and logical deduction to construct a new analytical framework. This approach is appropriate because (a) existing empirical studies of art–tourism integration remain fragmented and contradictory, (b) little empirical work focuses on Hainan’s coastal context, and (c) theoretical development is a necessary step before operationalization and empirical testing.

Stage 1: Theoretical Integration

I synthesize insights from systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1945; Xu & Zeng, 2016), push–pull–resistance frameworks (Gao et al., 2011), and cultural economics (Throsby, 2001; Towse, 2019). This integration is dialectical: tensions between frameworks are identified and resolved through higher-order synthesis. The model is structured in three layers—Basic Dynamic Layer (push and pull forces), Core Process Layer (resistance transformation), and Target System Layer (pathway differentiation and equilibrium).

Stage 2: Logical Deduction

From the integrated model, I deduce the conditions under which different integration pathways emerge. If resistance factors can be transformed creatively (premise 1), and if different



resistance types afford different strategies (premise 2), then distinct pathways follow depending on which tensions dominate and how they are managed. This logical deduction is illustrated with references to Hainan's fishing villages using secondary sources and policy documents.

Stage 3: Theoretical Validation Strategy

Although no empirical testing is undertaken here, I propose validation criteria: (a) the model should explain known variations in art–ecotourism outcomes, (b) it should generate predictions about conditions affecting pathway selection, and (c) it should be operationalizable for empirical research. Future validation could involve case studies, interviews with villagers and artists, and policy analysis to test whether the predicted mechanisms occur.

As a conceptual framework, the model cannot confirm the real-world operation of proposed mechanisms. Empirical validation remains essential for future research. Nonetheless, this theoretical foundation contributes a necessary conceptual tool for subsequent applied studies.

Results

This section presents rather theoretical propositions derived through conceptual deduction. Based on the Push–Pull–Resistance model, three potential integration pathways are proposed. These pathways illustrate how resistance, reconceptualized as creative tension, may generate differentiated development logics. Illustrative examples from Hainan's coastal context, drawn from secondary sources and hypothetical scenarios, are used to make the pathways more tangible.

1. Culture-Led Pathway

The culture-led pathway emphasizes deep engagement with local identity. For example, in villages with strong Danjia heritage, rather than staging simplified performances for tourists, artists might collaborate with elder fishers to record fishing songs and oral histories, transforming them into contemporary exhibitions or interactive installations. Similar approaches have been discussed in studies of cultural revitalization projects in Zhejiang and Fujian (Liu & Xu, 2022). Potential challenges include cultural commodification, limited market demand, and generational gaps in knowledge transmission.

2. Ecology-Priority Pathway

This pathway prioritizes ecological sustainability as the foundation for integration. A hypothetical case could involve restricting visitor numbers in mangrove areas while using art installations made from recycled fishing nets to educate tourists about marine fragility. This resonates with findings in Gao & Chen (2021) on coastal carrying capacity. The key challenge here

is economic: lower tourist volume reduces revenue, requiring alternative financial models such as eco-certifications or conservation-linked subsidies.

3. Governance-Innovation Pathway

The governance-innovation pathway highlights collaborative mechanisms that transform stakeholder conflicts into joint problem-solving. For instance, in a village where tourism development led to disputes between residents and external investors, a co-management committee—comprising villagers, artists, and local officials—could mediate resource distribution and event planning. Comparable governance experiments have been observed in Southeast Asian coastal tourism (Huang & Sun, 2022). Challenges include entrenched power asymmetries and risks of formalistic participation.

4. Contribution to Theory

By illustrating these pathways, the study contributes to theory by expanding the push–pull–resistance model: resistance is shown not only as friction but as a generative force producing distinct development logics in coastal contexts. This expands the model beyond linear tourism frameworks, demonstrating its applicability to maritime cultural economies.

Discussion

This section interprets the theoretical propositions in relation to existing literature and addresses possible critiques. Whereas Gao et al. (2011) applied the push–pull–resistance model at the level of individual tourist motivation, this study extends the framework to institutional and community-level dynamics. This scaling-up reveals emergent properties—particularly how collective responses to resistance create path dependencies that lock in or foreclose development trajectories.

A potential counterargument is that describing resistance as “creative tension” risks romanticizing real conflicts and power imbalances. I acknowledge this concern. The model does not suggest that all tensions are productive. Rather, under conditions of transparent governance, equitable benefit-sharing, and genuine community participation, resistance can be transformed into productive forces. Future empirical research is needed to identify boundary conditions where tensions are generative versus destructive.

In terms of policy implications, the model indicates that strategies focusing solely on mobilizing resources (push and pull) may be less effective than governance innovations that enable communities to transform tensions productively. Yet such approaches require capacity-building and long-term investment, often challenging in political contexts that prioritize quick wins.



The limitations of this approach are also significant. Because the model is abstract and theory-driven, it cannot account for hybrid or sequential pathways that may occur in reality. Moreover, by focusing on village-level dynamics, the framework under-theorizes how regional and national structures constrain local agency. Embedding this model into multi-scalar analysis is a necessary step for future studies.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to rural development theory by reconceptualizing resistance not as friction but as creative tension capable of generating differentiated integration pathways. The proposed push–pull–resistance dialectical model explains why similar art-ecotourism interventions produce divergent outcomes: the divergence arises not from differences in initial resources, but from how communities engage with and transform dominant resistance factors.

Three insights stand out. First, pathway differentiation is endogenous, emerging from tension transformation rather than predetermined conditions. Second, sustainable integration requires dynamic equilibrium across cultural, ecological, economic, and governance dimensions—a systems property beyond optimizing any single factor. Third, Hainan’s coastal fishing villages pose unique challenges compared to inland contexts, shaped by maritime cultural orientations, fragile ecosystems, and historical livelihood patterns.

Practical implications follow. For Hainan, one-size-fits-all rural tourism policies will fail. Villages with strong cultural tensions require support for collaborative cultural production; those constrained ecologically require design expertise translating environmental limits into assets; those experiencing governance conflicts need institutional innovations for stakeholder coordination. Identifying which tensions predominate should guide differentiated policy support.

Future research should prioritize: (1) empirical validation through comparative case analysis in Hainan villages, (2) longitudinal studies of integration dynamics over time, and (3) cross-regional tests in Southeast Asian maritime communities. Such empirical work will evaluate the explanatory power and applicability of the proposed model.

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