

# Research on Experience Tourism Products in Rural Tourism — a Case Study of Dongtou District of Wenzhou City

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**Abstract:** *With the development of the economy, the demand for tourism is increasingly diverse, and rural tourism is also developing rapidly. When not working, urban people are more willing to go to rural areas to experience the natural scenery and rural life. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the experience and lessons of rural tourism development by studying the development and current situation of rural tourism in Dongtou District of Wenzhou City. This is done by analyzing the needs of the current rural tourism market, and developing a more effective development model of rural tourism products in Dongtou District of Wenzhou City, so that on the basis of existing rural tourism in Dongtou District of Wenzhou City a series of rural tourism products with rich cultural connotations, strong participation and prominent themes are added to construct a distinctive and high-quality tourism product. The development of a high grade rural tourism product system mainly includes characteristic folk tourism villages, new forms of rural tourism, agricultural and fishery science and technology sightseeing parks, as well as experiential tourism products of folk festivals.*

**Keywords:** *experience tourism, rural tourism, tourism products*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Chinese rural tourism has developed rapidly. Taking Dongtou District, Wenzhou City as an example, in 2015, the region received approximately 1.4 million tourists, which represents an increase of 12.6% year-on-year (Xu, 2006). During the process of rapid development, particular prominence has been placed on the development of rural tourism, especially in the form of experiential tourism products (Wu, 2017). By attracting urban tourists to the countryside to experience rural life, a series of experiential rural tourism products is created. In the process of developing and marketing these products, the tourism industry chain of rural tourism has been continuously improved, but at the same time, a series of problems and development bottlenecks have also emerged in that period (Zheng, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to further study the advantages of experiential tourism products in rural tourism and to analyze the problems and bottlenecks, in order to propose corresponding measures to promote the further development of rural experiential tourism products.

### 1.1. Research Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the experience generated from rural tourism development, by studying the development and current situation of rural tourism domestically and internationally, therefore we could fully investigate the development status, existing problems, resource conditions, market conditions, and regional conditions for the development of rural tourism in Dongtou District, Wenzhou City (Huang, 2017). In addition, we can analyze the needs of the current rural tourism market, and develop more effective rural tourism products in Dongtou District along with the marketing model. The popularity of rural tourism products in Dongtou District could be improved not only by learning and adopting advanced experiences at home and abroad, but also by expanding the marketing methods of rural tourism products, which makes the rural tourism industry in Dongtou District add a series of rural tourism products with rich cultural connotations, strong participation, and distinguished themes (Jiang, 2014). Thus, a system of rural tourism products with distinctive features and high quality would be built. The development mainly

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includes folklore tourism villages, new forms of the rural tourism system, sightseeing parks of agriculture, fishery science, new technology, and experiential tourism products of different festivals (Yu & Guo, 2017).

## 2. Research Overview and Methodology

### 2.1. Research Overview

The main content of this paper is divided into six sections; the first part mainly introduces the research background, purposes, and main research contents of the paper. The second part integrates the related terminologies and collects some definitions of these concepts. The third part analyzes the development of experiential rural tourism products in Dongtou District, through SWOT analysis. The fourth section explains the design of the questionnaire and the data collection process. The fifth part is the analysis of the data. The sixth part is based on the results of the analysis, to find the problems and list solutions, and make conclusions and summaries.

### 2.2. Research Methodology

Literature analysis method - by reading relevant literature and searching for relevant network information, the relevant background, the development status, and research progress of the subject could be understood; and corresponding theoretical supports are set to be provided.

Quantitative method - by designing, distributing, collecting, and analyzing the questionnaires, similar characteristics will be found and corresponding conclusions are planned to be drawn.

Figure 1: Research Method



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition Clarification

#### 2.1.1. The Definition of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism refers to the use of rural areas as venues for activities, using the unique natural environment, rural scenery, folk customs, farming culture, rural ethnic minority people and other resources to provide urban residents with a variety of tourism business activities, such as sightseeing, leisure, vacation, fitness, entertainment, and shopping (Yang, 2016). Rural tourism is not new abroad. Rural tourism began in Europe as early as the 1830s. With the development of industrialization, rapid economic development, changes in demographic structure, increasingly convenient transportation and accelerated pace of life, urban residents enjoyed the comfort brought by the industrial civilization. While living a material life and a rich spiritual life, residents must bear the pain of the deteriorating living environment brought by industrial civilization (Yan, 2016). On the other hand, the vast grasslands, forests, lakes, and good ecological environment in the countryside are gradually welcomed by tourists. In the countryside, the natural beauty will inevitably become a good place for urban residents to visit. Therefore, urban residents have gradually stepped out of

the reinforced concrete city and moved to the beautiful countryside with an earthy atmosphere, and the rural tourism has been born.

### 2.1.2. Definition of Experiential Tourism Products

The book *Guidelines for Rural Characteristic Tourism Construction* compiled by the editorial board of *Rural Tourism Practitioners Series* mentioned that experiential tourism refers to "providing tourists with participatory and personally experienced activities, so that tourists can feel pleasure from perception." Experiential tourism is more focused on bringing tourists an experience different from their own life, such as providing urban people with the experience of rural life (Xia, 2012). With the increasingly rich travel experience of tourists, the increasingly mature concept of tourism consumption, and the increasingly high requirements of tourists for experience quality, they are no longer satisfied with popular tourism products, they are more eager to pursue personalized, experiential, emotional, relaxing and beautifying travel experiences (Song, 2007).

According to Fan (2008) based on previous studies, the author believes that experiential tourism products in rural tourism refer to attracting tourists to the countryside to experience rural life, participate in rural production activities, and experience rural cultural customs and natural landscapes.

## 2.2. A Review of Related Research at Home and Abroad

### 2.2.1. Review of Domestic Literature

Xu (2006) believes that experiential tourism is a pre-designed and organized tourism method that requires tourists to actively invest time and energy to participate, has little impact on the environment, and has high added value. Besides, through interaction with tourism products, tourists gain tourism experience and realize self-worth. Song (2007) defines experiential tourism from the perspectives of tourism providers and tourists. She believes that experiential tourism is a kind of tourism to pursue psychological pleasure. and that the development model of experiential tourism is very different from the development model of mass tourism and sustainable tourism. The former pays special attention to the personal feelings of tourists and tries to create a real experience for tourists.

### 2.2.2. Review of International Literature

In the research on rural tourism development, Sharpley (2002:133) believes that the main challenges of rural tourism development are lack of support, lack of training, lack of local tourism attractions and facilities, low occupancy rate (significant seasonality), and inefficient market promotion. Taking Cyprus as an example, it is found that rural tourism has a high cost and low income due to the lack of basic skills of operators. To change this situation, long-term financial support and technical support are needed. Goodwin (1998:158), meanwhile, believed that the role of the government in the development of rural tourism should be changed from the original governance to the current governance. More emphasis is placed on cooperation between the government and NGOs. The government's regulatory role in the development of rural tourism is the premise to ensure the coordinated development of rural tourism.

## 3. SWOT Analysis of Experiential Tourism Development under Rural Tourism in Dongtou District

### 3.1. Strengths

Dongtou District, Wenzhou is the only designated national 4A-level scenic spot throughout the whole country. It is in Wenzhou, which is a famous city of commerce and trade. It is part of Zhejiang Province, a

major industrial and commercial province, and has special conditions for the development of "global tourism" and "rural tourism."

As far as the tourism target market is concerned, the Yangtze River Delta market has a strong demand for rural tourism. The Yangtze River Delta, where the level of urbanization is relatively high, suffers from problems such as air pollution in large cities. Therefore, rural tourism is booming, and more urban residents like to go to the countryside to experience the natural scenery (Zheng, 2009).

When it comes to tourism destination development, Dongtou District has certain basic conditions for tourism development. For example, in terms of transportation, there is the "Five-Island Bridge" project connecting the mainland, and the urban light rail goes directly to the airport and the urban area; in the construction of scenic spots, there are seven major scenic spots and more than 400 scenic spots in the whole area (Ruan & Wu, 2015). In 2018, there were more than 100 scenic spots. In terms of rural tourism construction, it includes nine leisure farms, six homestay agglomeration areas, fishermen's paradises, and other characteristic rural tourism projects in Dongtou. In terms of hotel accommodation, there is one five-star hotel and two three-star hotels, with a total of 180 accommodation reception resorts. Currently, there is a five-star intercontinental hotel under construction. At the same time, in the construction of rural tourism, there are six fishing village homestay gathering areas and dozens of boutique homestays. In the development of rural tourism, the infrastructure is relatively complete, covering all aspects of "food, accommodation, travel, shopping, and entertainment", and tourism products have been continuously developed and improved (Jin, 2016).

### **3.2. Weaknesses**

#### **3.2.1. Aging Population and Talent Crisis**

As an island city, Dongtou lacks large-scale industrial enterprises, resulting in a large exodus of young people. The lack of motivation for talent introduction has led to an increasingly aging population. The employees in the tourism industry are older and have a lower education level, and most of them are local residents (Zhu & Liu, 2015). The lack of scientific guidance and scientific and technological support in tourism development leads to low quality of tourism products, which further weakens the Dongtou tourism brand and is not conducive to the introduction of high-end tourism industries and talents.

#### **3.2.2. Homogenization of Tourism Products**

Zhejiang Province has a long and narrow coastline and has the largest archipelago in the country: Zhoushan Archipelago. The phenomenon of homogeneity in island tourism development is serious. The development of homogeneous tourism products is basically carried out around the beach coast, and there is no distinction in the development of rural tourism, all focus on the development of homogeneous products in rural fishing villages and agricultural fisheries (Fan, 2008:20). In terms of tourism development, Dongtou City lacks both the construction of innovative products and the support of branded products, and it lacks a competitive advantage over other island and rural tourism development.

#### **3.2.3. Insufficient Development of Tourism Resources**

The existing tourism resources in Dongtou, whether it is natural landscapes such as Dashao and Xiandieyan, or cultural landscapes such as the Strait Military Theme Park and Wanghai Tower, are still relatively underdeveloped and the supporting facilities are not perfect (Song, 2007). As far as rural tourism is concerned, it is not feasible for rural tourism development to only focus on homestays and sightseeing, which will lead to the lack of substantive experiential tourism projects. At the same time, with the process of urbanization and the loss of population, traditional rural life gradually disappears. Furthermore, rural

tourism resources are not only lacking in development but also lacking in protection, and the countryside is gradually turning into an empty shell with only houses left.

### 3.2.4. The Natural Environment Needs to Be Improved

From the perspective of fishing village landscape construction, the marine environment restricts the development of fishing village tourism. Dongtou is located at the estuary of the Oujiang River. The Oujiang River carries a large amount of sediment and garbage pollution into the Dongtou sea area, which seriously affects the seawater environment of Dongtou and destroys the quality of the beach and the coastal landscape (Xu, 2006). In terms of rural landscape construction, despite the high vegetation coverage in Dongtou, there is still a lack of landscape construction. It is necessary to highlight the further integration of natural landscape and human landscape in the process of integrating rural landscapes.

## 3.3. Opportunities

In terms of economic development, tourism has become a new growth point under the new economic normal. Taking Dongtou District as an example, the tourism economy accounts for up to 15% of the region's GDP (Yu & Guo, 2017). At the same time, Wenzhou City also regards tourism as an important economic development method, which provides new opportunities for the development of Dongtou tourism.

In terms of policy support, Mr. Li Jinzao, the former director of the China National Tourism Administration (now the deputy minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism), proposed the "general tourism" development strategy to find a new direction for the development of rural tourism in Dongtou District. Dongtou is the only 4A-level scenic spot in the country named after the whole area, which means that the tourism development of Dongtou District is not developed around the scenic spots only but an all-round development of the whole area, including urban construction, rural development and natural scenic spots. It also seeks a new direction for the development of experiential tourism products in rural tourism, and integrates rural life, rural landscape, rural culture, nostalgia, and nostalgia to build a comprehensive experiential rural tourism.

In terms of social development, the development of rural tourism has promoted rural revival, stimulated employment, promoted economic development, and led to the re-development of rural areas. Taking Dongtou District as an example, tourism practitioners in Dongtou District account for 20% of the employed population (Yu & Guo, 2017). At the same time, Dongtou District has the highest per capita GDP in Wenzhou City, which benefits from the development of tourism. The resident population of Dongtou District is small, so the development of other industries lacks labour and resources. Tourism not only brings many floating population and capital inflow, but also further boosts the development of Dongtou's social economy and social production.

## 3.4. Threats

Internal challenges: The "hollowing phenomenon" in Dongtou village is getting worse. Take Banping Mountain in Dongtou District as an example. Banping Mountain is a small island in the Dongtou Archipelago close to the island. In the past, there were residents on the island who did farming and fishing and lived on the island for a long time. But nowadays, young people have basically left Banping Mountain, and went to the island or the urban area of Wenzhou and other big cities. Some elderly people gradually died, and some also left with their children. Nowadays, there are basically only some empty houses in Banpingshan (Yang, 2016). Under the development of rural tourism, these houses are developed as homestays, and Banping Mountain is also used as a tourist attraction for everyone to visit, but the feeling of life in the countryside has basically disappeared. How to protect and develop the countryside, how to

integrate tourism and countryside, how to integrate humanities and nature, a series of problems and challenges hinder the development of Dongtou countryside.

**External challenges:** Within Wenzhou region, marine tourism such as Pingyang Nanji Islands, Cangnan Yuliao Scenic Spot, and Ruian Tongpan Island have developed well in recent years, forming competition with Dongtou marine tourism (Wu, 2017).

Within the scope of southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian, tourism destinations such as Yandang Mountain-Nanxi River, Taishun Covered Bridge-Radon Hot Spring, Taimu Mountain-Baishuiyang and other tourist destinations have developed maturely, and have strong brand appeal and influence in the region, and divert the Dongtou tourist source market. It has a certain shielding and squeezing effect on the tourism image of Dongtou (Huang, 2017).

Within the scope of Zhejiang Province, tourism in northern Zhejiang represents the highest level in the province and even the whole country. Anji, Tonglu, Deqing, Tongxiang, and other rural tourism economies are booming. In comparison, there is still a big gap between Dongtou and the above areas in tourism development. Dongtou is one of the first provincial-level pilot counties for comprehensive tourism reform, and one of the three core sectors in the tourism economic circle in southeastern Zhejiang, with the same tourism value as "Yandang Mountain-Nanxi River" and Xianju National Park (Zheng, 2014). However, the characteristics and potential of Dongtou tourism have not yet been brought into play, and the brand value needs to be further explored.

## **4. Study Design and Data Collection**

### **4.1. Questionnaire Design**

By reading studies conducted by Wu (2017), Huang (2017), Xu (2006), and Song (2007), the content of this questionnaire was designed. It mainly covers three aspects: first, tourists' willingness and inclination to consume experiential tourism products in rural tourism in Dongtou District; second, tourists' sense of experience and participation in experiential tourism products in rural tourism in Dongtou District; third, tourists' opinions on experiential tourism products in rural tourism in Dongtou District

### **4.2. Questionnaire Distribution and Collection**

The questionnaire survey was carried out from March to April 2019, which is a total of one month. This questionnaire is issued by the author through a field visit to Dongtou District, Wenzhou City, to tourists who participate in rural experience tourism. The questionnaires were distributed in the form of paper forms. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, of which 276 were valid questionnaires, and the recovery rate of valid questionnaires was 92%. The questionnaire survey and results are attached in the appendix.

## **5. Data Collation and Analysis**

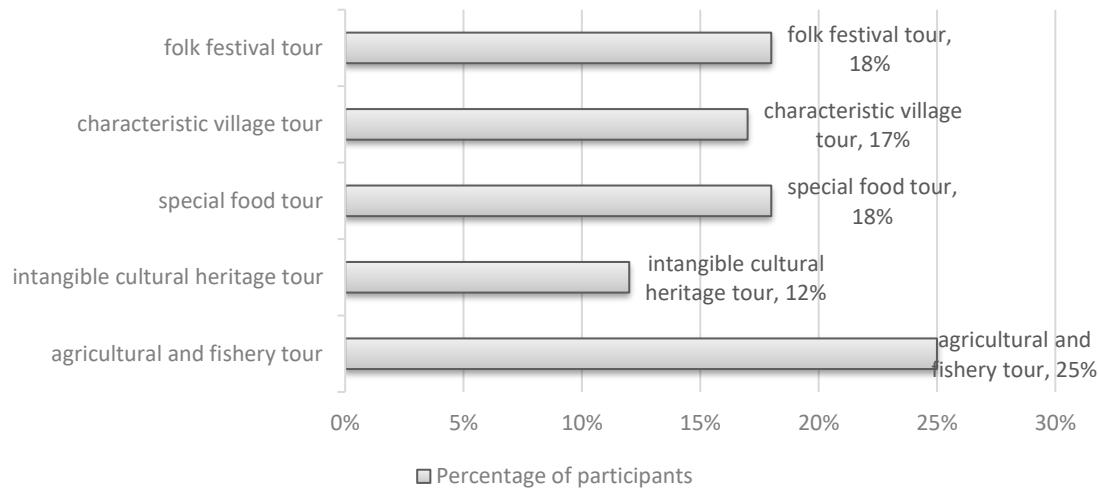
### **5.1. Tourists' Willingness and Tendency to Consume Experiential Tourism Products in Rural Tourism in Dongtou District**

Through a questionnaire survey, it was found that 59% of tourists had participated in similar rural tourism experiential tourism products, and only 24% of tourists had never participated in similar products. And this product also expressed a strong willingness to revisit. 76% of tourists indicated that they would still be willing to participate in such products in the future. Experiential tourism products in rural tourism have a larger tourism market, are more attractive to tourists, and have a higher revisit rate. For tourism

development, especially for rural tourism development, similar products can be further promoted and developed to promote the future development of rural tourism.

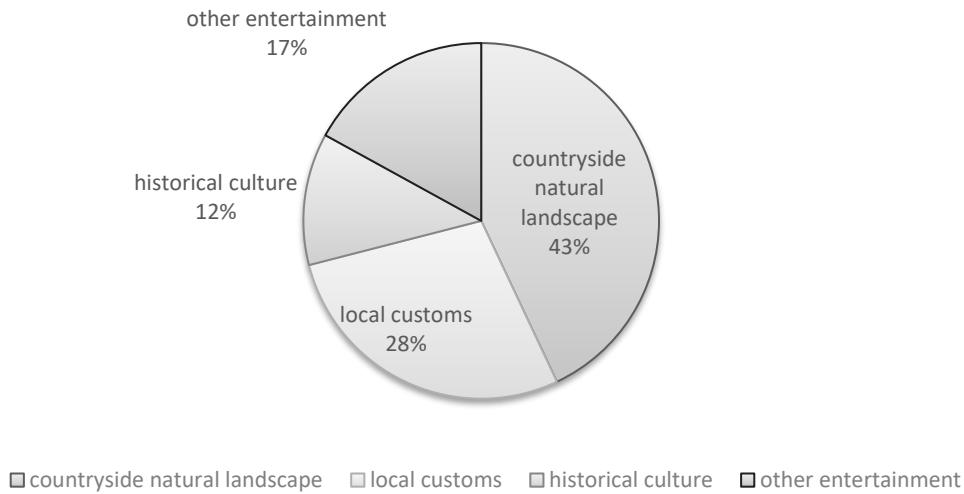
In Figure 1, for the types of experiential tourism products that tourists choose in rural tourism, the distribution is relatively uniform. Among them, the most selected is the agricultural and fishery tour, accounting for 28%, and the representative product is: "being a fisherman for a day", which is going out to sea fishing with a boat and experiencing the life of a fisherman. The special food tour and the folk festival tour account for the same proportion of 18%, which respectively refer to participating in the production and tasting of special food and participating in folk festival activities. The characteristic village tour refers to the residential villages with characteristic homestays established based in the countryside, accounting for 17% of the population. The least proportion is the intangible cultural heritage tour, which only accounts for 12%, which refers to participating in the production of local intangible cultural heritage, such as shell carving crafts. The development of different experiential tourism products is essential for rural tourism, and at the same time, it is necessary to increase the attractiveness of each tourism product to meet the needs of the target market.

Figure 1:Types of experiential tourism products in rural tourism that respondents participated in



In Figure 2, for rural tourism experiential products, the most attractive tourist attraction for tourists is the natural landscape of the countryside, while the lowest is the historical culture. It can be seen that for experiential tourism products in rural tourism, the most important thing is to protect the natural landscape of the countryside, preserve the local customs, integrating the natural landscape with the human landscape, and give people a good tourism experience. As for the history and culture of the countryside, we should focus on the experiential development and protection of traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage to ensure that history and culture can be integrated into experiential tourism products, not just reserved in museums.

Figure 2: The most attractive features for rural experiential tourism products

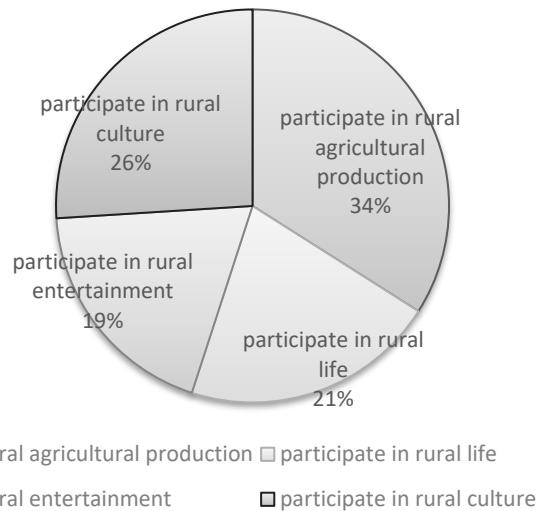


## 5.2. Tourists' participation in rural tourism experiential tourism products in Dongtou District

Through the questionnaire survey, it is aimed at whether tourists can fully participate in the survey of rural experience tourism products. The results show that only a small number of tourists can have a complete experience, and nearly half of the tourists can only experience the natural scenery, but cannot feel the cultural customs. It can be seen that rural tourism experiential tourism products should pay more attention to the development of comprehensive tourism experience, rather than just stop at ornamental tourism experience.

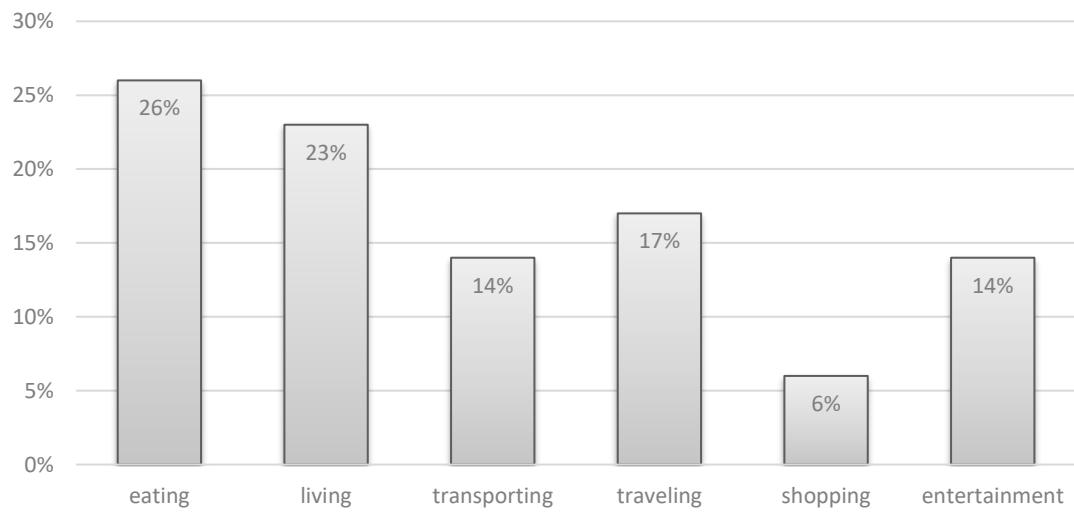
As shown in Figure 3, tourists believe that the most distinctive item of experiential tourism products in rural tourism is the ability to participate in rural agricultural production. Therefore, it is possible to integrate rural production labor with tourism to develop experiential tourism products and form a unique tourism model for experiential tourism products. At the same time, it can integrate rural culture, rural life, rural entertainment, and tourism, giving tourists a better experience, and can more comprehensively integrate rural resources and tourism.

Figure 3:Tourists' participation in rural tourism experiential tourism products



As shown in Figure 4, for the six elements of "eating, living, transporting, traveling, shopping, and entertainment", tourists pay more attention to "eating" and "living". Product development should pay more attention to the tourist experience of tourists. For example, the production and tasting of special food should be developed; the development of homestays should also incorporate rural elements. The tourist experiences those tourists least pay attention to is shopping, which only accounts for 6%. It can be seen that in the development of experiential tourism products, unnecessary tourism shopping marketing activities should be reduced to give tourists a better tourism experience.

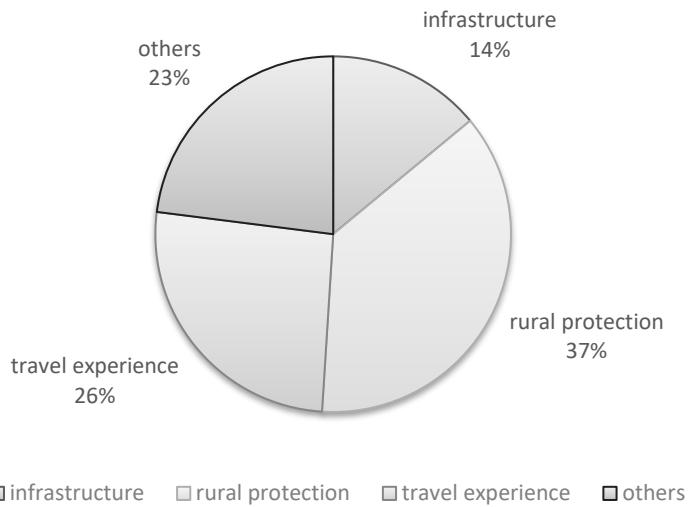
Figure 4: Aspects where rural experiential tourism products should be developed



### 5.3 Tourists' Opinions on Rural Experiential Tourism Products in Dongtou District

As shown in Figure 5, the biggest problem of experiential tourism products in rural tourism in Dongtou District is the lack of rural protection. Owing to the outflow of the young population and the gradual reduction of the elderly population, the demise of the population is accompanied by the demise of rural production and the stagnation of rural construction, which eventually leads to the gradual demise of the countryside. Therefore, it is urgent to protect the countryside. At the same time, through the development of tourism and the development of rural tourism products, the vitality of the countryside and the rejuvenation of the industry are stimulated, and the integration of the countryside and tourism has become a development requirement. And most tourists believe that the rural scenery and way of life should be completely preserved, which reflects the urgent concern for rural protection.

Figure 5: Problems existing in rural experiential tourism products in Dongtou District



In addition to the tourism experience and infrastructure, the respondents also talked about other specific issues, which are summarized here: single project form, homogeneous projects, template projects, lack of tourist participation, lack of cultural protection and development, imperfect management of scenic spots, relatively backward development level, etc.

These problems are numerous and targeted accordingly, reflecting that the current level of development of rural experiential tourism products is relatively backward. Whether it is funds, talents, management, or other aspects are insufficient. Therefore, the further development of rural tourism and experiential tourism products should solve the problems that arise, and provide corresponding human, financial and material support, so that the rural experiential tourism products can be more perfect.

## 6. Conclusion and Suggestions

### 6.1. Conclusion

Tourists have a strong willingness to consume tourism products of rural experiential tourism in Dongtou District, and tend to choose tourism products that combine agricultural production with tourism. At the same time, they are more attracted by the natural landscape of the countryside, but less interested in the history and culture of the countryside.

Tourists have their own unique experience of rural tourism experiential tourism products in Dongtou District, but this experience is still relatively simple, lacking the integration of natural landscape and humanistic customs. The experience requirements of "eating" and "living" are relatively high, while the shopping needs are relatively less strong.

Tourists believe that there are still some problems with rural experiential tourism products in Dongtou District, especially the protection and development of rural areas is a serious problem at present. Due to the current rural development situation, the village is gradually dying out. At the same time, there are areas that need to be improved for tourism development, and there is a lack of investment in capital, technology, and talents.

## 6.2. Suggestions

The countryside is the driving force for the development of rural experiential tourism products. In order to experience the local customs and customs of the countryside, the premise is that the countryside must be protected, that is, the production and lifestyle of the countryside must be protected. Make the countryside full of popularity and make farmers and fishermen affluent, so as to promote the gradual development and improvement of rural life that is different from urban life. And then dig out the tourism resources of the countryside. Feel the slow-paced life different from the city from the rural life; feel the labour method different from the city from the rural agricultural production; feel the simplicity from the interpersonal relationship in the countryside. The people of the city live in harmony with nature. These are all based on the protection and development of the countryside, and it is difficult to build rural tourism without the countryside. Even after commercial development, there are accommodation and business circles here, but the simplicity unique to the countryside is lost. In this kind of tourism, tourists cannot feel the existence of the countryside, and it is more like an unmanned scenic spot, so rural tourism disappears, along with the disappearance of the countryside.

Experience is the core of the development of rural experiential tourism products. Tourists' experience types can be roughly divided into four types, called "4Es" (Entertainment, Education, Escape, Estheticism), namely entertainment, education, escape, and aesthetics. Tourists leave the environment of daily living (escapism), accept the washing of rural life (aesthetic), enjoy leisure time (entertainment), and obtain spiritual growth (education) through a series of sensory stimulation and spiritual feelings. (Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2005). Hence, the most important thing to experience is participation. Through the participation of tourists, tourists can deeply experience every detail of tourism consumption, experience the connotation and charm of tourism products, and obtain a more intuitive and profound tourism experience. Therefore, for the experiential tourism products in rural tourism, how to increase the sense of participation of tourists has become the key point, not only in the viewing experience but more importantly in participating in live production, food production, festival activities, culture. From the comprehensive experience and cognition of customs and so on, a unique experiential tourism mode in rural tourism is formed.

Coordination is the requirement of rural tourism product development. Rural tourism is the product of urbanization and industrialization, so it essentially needs to undertake the responsibility of coordinating multiple aspects. First of all, we must coordinate the relationship between human beings and nature. In a society where urbanization and industrialization are accelerating, air pollution and environmental damage have become obstacles to social development. In the era of increasingly severe air pollution and increasingly prominent environmental problems across the country, a pure land like the countryside is needed to ease the relationship between human beings and nature. When the urban population is eager for green water, green mountains, and blue sky, rural tourism has become the best way for people to get along with nature. In addition, it is necessary to coordinate the relationship between the city and the countryside. In the process of urbanization, the influx of rural population to the city has caused the surplus of the labour force and the diseases of the big cities, and also caused the demise of the countryside. Under the same

pressure on both sides, rural revitalization came into being. Rural tourism is required to drive the development of other industries. At this time, it is necessary to develop more experiential tourism products to make tourism more radiant to other industries, to promote the industrial revitalization of the entire countryside.

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