

## Article

# Analysis of the Effect of Rural Tourism in Promoting Farmers' Income and Its Influencing Factors—Based on Survey Data from Hanzhong in Southern Shaanxi

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**Abstract:** Five years after the implementation of the tourism precision poverty alleviation strategy, how effective it has been in alleviating poverty remains to be tested. This study, through a study of 241 farm households in 10 national tourism poverty alleviation key villages in the Qinba Mountain region of Hanzhong, southern Shaanxi, finds that rural tourism has contributed to a general increase in farm household income, but the effect of income increase varies significantly between households that have escaped poverty and non-poor households, and there is no significant difference in income between those who participate in tourism and those who do not. The study concludes that the poverty-reducing effects of tourism are conditional, with the poor quality of human capital being the main obstacle to farm households' income growth, the institutional mechanism for tourism participation is inadequate, effective farm household tourism participation is significantly low, and non-farm work constitutes a substitute for farm households' tourism livelihood options. The primary stage tourism scenic spots have a limited role in driving the income of farming households, and the geographical location limits the effective participation of farming households. Accordingly, the following countermeasures are proposed: (1) in terms of strategic decision-making options, establish a screening mechanism for tourism participation in poverty alleviation and implement diversified poverty governance; (2) in terms of tourism development strategies, encourage the integration of multiple industries and synergistic development, realize the two-way interaction of "+ tourism" and "tourism +"; (3) in terms of development methods, adhere to the participatory development path, improve the institutional mechanism for tourism participation, stimulate the endogenous motivation of farmers, and explore the dynamic participation path of "bottom-up". (4) In the development of endogenous power, strengthen skills training, improve the comprehensive quality of farmers and their participation level and ability; (5) In the coordination and protection, play the coordinating and leading role of grass-roots party building, and continuously cultivate and strengthen tourism cooperative organizations.

**Keywords:** farm households; income increasing effect; influencing factors; rural tourism; Hanzhong

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## 1. Introduction

During the "13th Five-Year Plan" period (2016–2020), in order to promote the in-depth development of tourism precision poverty alleviation work, the Chinese government has implemented the rural tourism poverty alleviation key village project in two batches in 22,600 poor villages with conditions for developing rural tourism, which has achieved good poverty alleviation results. The rural revitalization strategy in the post-poverty eradication era has become the main task in the new phase. As one of the key industries

to be developed in poverty alleviation areas, the question of how sustainable the rural tourism industry is and whether it can effectively enhance the economic risk-resistance of areas that have been lifted out of poverty, promote sustainable income growth for those who have been lifted out of poverty, and thus prevent those who have been lifted out of poverty from returning to poverty again, is an issue that must be seriously considered in the stage of rural revitalization to consolidate the results of poverty alleviation. "Since the 13th Five-Year Plan, Hanzhong in the Qinba Mountains of southern Shaanxi has achieved remarkable results in poverty alleviation through the implementation of a precise poverty alleviation strategy through tourism. A great deal of literature has focused on the effects of tourism poverty alleviation, but not much has been written on the role and significance of the effectiveness of tourism on rural revitalization during the transitional period of consolidating the results of poverty eradication and implementing rural revitalization strategies. In particular, during the transitional period between consolidating the results of poverty eradication and implementing the rural revitalization strategy, it is a new question we need to think about; how rural tourism develops in the vast areas that have been lifted out of poverty through the implementation of rural tourism poverty alleviation policies, and whether their policies need to be adjusted during the rural revitalization stage. Through the research in this paper, we can get a clear picture of the effectiveness of the previous poverty eradication efforts. Using research data from the rural tourism poverty alleviation stage, we investigate the household income increase of 241 rural households in Hanzhong's tourism poverty alleviation communities and analyze the household income of participating and non-participating tourism farmers, and poor and non-poor households, as well as their influencing factors; on this basis, we summarize the effectiveness of the rural tourism poverty eradication attack, and propose response measures and optimization strategies for the subsequent development of rural tourism in Hanzhong, in order to consolidate the results of the poverty eradication attack and effectively dovetail with the subsequent rural revitalization development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Research on the Effect of Rural Tourism on Poverty Alleviation and Income Generation

Rural tourism poverty alleviation refers to a regional economic development model that promotes rural economic development by supporting the tourism industry in poverty-stricken areas with certain tourism resource conditions, geographical advantages, and market basis, and then realizes poverty alleviation and prosperity [1]. Since the late 1990s, when the Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) and Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) programs were introduced, a large number of studies have focused on tourism for poverty alleviation and its income-generating effects. There are two main views on this. One view, based on the tourism multiplier effect, holds that tourism poverty alleviation plays a positive role in promoting economic growth [2], stimulating employment [3], contributing to GDP [4], and increasing household income [5] in poor areas. On the other hand, tourism development has caused serious economic leakage in poor areas and even caused serious harm to the society, culture, and environment in poor areas, aggravating the depth of poverty, e.g., Feng Xufang [6] visited the village of Xiyagou scenic spot in Lingchuan County, Shanxi Province, and showed that rural tourism development has fully benefited the community residents, with per capita income increasing from 211 Yuan in 1997 to 3500 Yuan in 2005, and the villagers' economic situation has improved significantly; Li Jia and Tianli's [7] survey of poor households in three different types of tourism communities in Tibetan areas of Sichuan showed that the average annual household income of the three types of tourism communities increased from 6088 yuan, 16,205 yuan and 30,316 yuan before tourism development to 16,956 Yuan, 29,900 Yuan and 65,442 Yuan after tourism development. The effect of tourism to increase income is obviously improved. Rural tourism breaks the closed state of poor areas and promotes the improvement of the production, processing, and sales chain of traditional rural handicrafts and local specialties. Rural tourism plays a positive role in upgrading the industrial

structure of poor communities and increasing the income of poor people. However, some scholars point out that under the unbalanced economic development model, the “trickle-down effect” of tourism is limited. The increase of household income will not automatically realize synchronous growth with the growth of the community economy. A study by Zhou Bo and Li Yi [8] found a positive correlation between rural tourism development and farm household income, but its pulling effect is limited, and the effect of farm household income increase is not obvious [9–11]. Due to the different development stages of rural tourism, different development modes of rural tourism, and different support policies of local governments, farmers’ incomes will be differentiated [3]. The individual difference of farmers is also one of the main reasons for their income difference [12]. In conclusion, rural tourism poverty alleviation practice shows that there are regional differences, development stage differences, and individual differences in poverty reduction effects of tourism [1]. In fact, there are still controversies about the effect of rural tourism on poverty reduction. Fortunately, researchers are aware of the differences in poverty reduction effects of rural tourism. At different stages of tourism development, different tourism development models and government policies will make the income of farmers different [7].

## *2.2. Rural Tourism Participation to Increase Income Effect*

Among the many factors that affect the income of farmers, community participation takes people as the core of community development. Community participation respects the will of community development, values the role of residents in tourism development, and advocates community members to share the fruits of development. It has received wide attention from the academic community. Tosun believes that participatory development can create better opportunities for local people to gain greater and more balanced benefits from local tourism development, thus promoting the sustainable development of local tourism [13]. Lu Lijuan, Cao Wukun, et al. [12] believe that tourism participation can provide more employment opportunities for poor areas and thus increase the farmers’ income. However, some scholars have pointed out that community participation may not be a panacea for increasing residents’ income and solving various problems in tourism communities [14]. In many economically underdeveloped areas, communities have lost control over the form of local tourism development, the scale of development, and the mode of participation [15]. Tourism communities face problems such as insufficient job creation [2], poor participation [16], and an overall low level of participation [17]. In terms of factors affecting farm household participation, Gartner et al. (2012) conducted a study on the Nkata Bay area in Malawi and found that the way of tourism participation has a significant impact on the income of farmers, and the labor remuneration of tourism accommodation practitioners is more than 10% of the local minimum wage standard. Thomas (2014) found that tourism resource endowment is an important factor affecting farmers’ income, and residents in poor areas with higher tourism resource endowment can obtain higher tourism development value in his study on Mali in Laos. Holden A (2013), on the other hand, argued that tourism development policies do not take into account the interests of poor groups. It is the main reason for low community participation and poor poverty reduction in the Emia region of Ghana [18]. In China, Li Fan et al. (2018) argued that the high level of community participation directly affects the benefits of community residents [19]. Wang Zhaofeng and Xiang Qiushan (2019) argued that residents’ ability to participate has the most significant impact on community participation in tourism to increase income [20]. The above-mentioned studies show that participation mode, resource endowment, transportation conditions, and participation system all have important effects on effective participation and income enhancement effects of farm households. The purpose of this paper is to test whether the participation of farmers in tourism promotes the increase of family income. Community participation is widely regarded as a sustainable development mode of rural tourism, which factors of restrict the effective participation of farmers.

### 2.3. Non-Poor Population and Poor Population Benefit from Tourism Participation

Human capital theory suggests that human capital is expressed in the various forms of productive knowledge and labor and management skills that people possess, which constitute a determining factor in economic growth and social progress, and which can generate benefits such as wages for their owners. At the heart of human capital is the quality of people, and education is an important way of improving that quality. The role of human capital in the process of economic growth is greater than that of physical capital, so it is important to pay attention to human capital in the input of production factors [21]. Although tourism poverty alleviation provides a large number of employment opportunities and livelihood options for people in poor communities, due to the heterogeneity of human capital, the fact that poor people are not a homogeneous social group with different capabilities and assets, and the uneven distribution of tourism benefits among farm households, poor people are unlikely to benefit equally from tourism poverty alleviation projects, and for the poorest 20% of the poor population, the probability of benefiting from tourism is small or even negative [22]. Compared to the non-poor, the poor are ultimately prevented from participating in tourism by conditions such as lack of skills, rights disadvantage, gender discrimination, and physical fitness, and even if some of the poor do participate, they are limited to low-skilled labor jobs with low barriers to employment, with restricted levels of profitability and ability, which can even exacerbate the relative poverty of such people. Whether there are significant differences between the income levels of poor and non-poor households in the Qinba Mountains of Hanzhong and what factors influence their income growth are elements that we need to study in order to provide a basis for decision-making on disaggregated policy.

## 3. Data Sources and Research Methods

### 3.1. Data Sources

Hanzhong City is located in the hinterland of Qinba in the southwest of Shaanxi Province, relying on the Qinling Mountains in the north and the Ba Mountain in the south, with an area of about 27,200 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 3.86 million, with two districts and nine counties under its jurisdiction listed as prohibited or restricted development zones. The tourism resources in the region are of various types, and the ecological resources are contiguous and rich in high quality. There are one world man and biosphere reserve, nine national nature reserves, four national forest parks, three national water conservancy scenic areas, 19 national A-class tourist attractions, eight provincial tourist specialty towns, and nine provincial rural tourism demonstration villages [23]. As of August 2016, 84 key villages of national rural tourism poverty alleviation have been approved in two batches in Hanzhong City [24]. This paper adopts a combination of general survey and typical survey, taking into account the convenience of research and data availability, and focuses on Chen village in Yangchun town, Nanzheng county, Washixi village in Liping town, Liujiaying village in Chenggu county, Hongshiyao village in Huayang town, Yang county, Zhaobishan village in Tonggousi town, Mian county, Erdaohe village in Hanyuan town, Ningqiang county, Tiefosi village in Baishuijiang town, Madao street village in Madao town, Liuba county, Wuguanyi town, Liuba county (Figure 1). The sample basically covered all counties in Hanzhong, and the geographical distribution covered diverse geographical distribution characteristics such as basin, shallow hills, and mountains, and the sample structure was consistent with the research needs and had strong representativeness.

The research was conducted in January–March and July 2018, respectively, and in several visits to the above-mentioned villages during June 2019, with each visit lasting 1–2 days. The research was based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in households. The specific operation process was to first talk with village cadres and members of the two committees in the village committee for about 30 min to understand the development of rural tourism, focusing on grasping the stage of rural tourism development, the number of tourism poverty alleviation projects, the type of tourism resources that the villages rely on and the distance from tourist attractions, etc., and filling out the rural

tourism village questionnaire (village form), followed by household interviews. In view of the need of the study, the sample was selected in two ways: one required that no less than 10 households each of farm households involved in tourism and non-participating in tourism be randomly selected; the other required that the sample contain at least 10 households out of poverty and an equal number of non-poor households. Two hundred-and-fifty questionnaires were distributed to farmers, and 241 valid questionnaires were returned, with an efficiency rate of 96.4%. Among them, including 101 households out of poverty and 140 non-poor households; there are 117 farming households involved in tourism and 124 farming households not involved in tourism, accounting for 48.96% and 51.04% respectively.

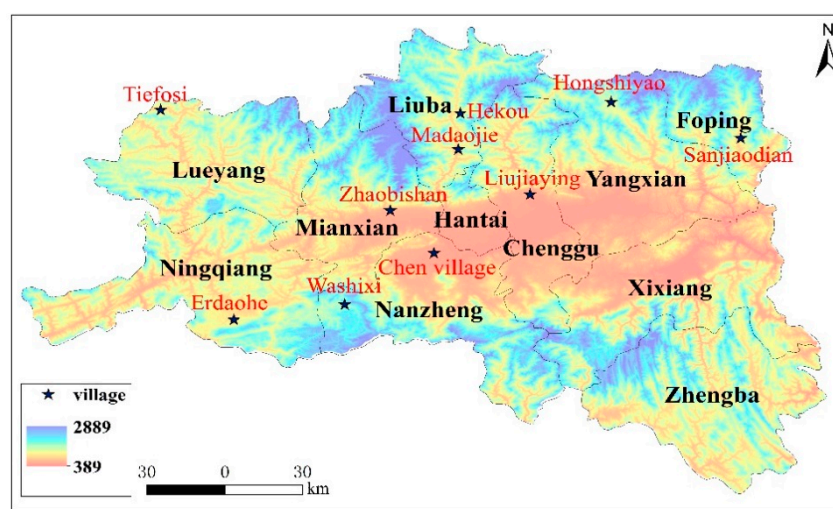


Figure 1. Location distribution map of sample villages (marked in red above).

### 3.2. Variable Setting

The variable setting in the paper involves two parts, in the analysis of the impact of rural tourism on farmers' household income, the annual per capita income of farmers' households is selected as the explanatory variable, tourism participation is taken as the core variable, and farmers' household characteristics and farmers' village characteristics are taken as control variables; in the examination of the factors influencing farmers' participation effectiveness in rural tourism, whether farmers participate in rural tourism is taken as the explanatory variable. Participation in examining the factors influencing farmers' participation effectiveness in rural tourism, whether farmers participate in rural tourism as the explanatory variable, participation attitude and willingness, participation policy, participation mode and its participation barriers as the explanatory variables, and farmers' household characteristics and their village characteristics as the control variables. At the same time, the beneficiary effects of rural tourism development and their differences between households who have escaped poverty and non-poor households are examined.

Drawing on existing research results, at the village level, three variables were selected: distance of farm households from tourist attractions, development stage of tourist attractions, and type of tourist attractions; at the farm household level, four dimensions were selected, including farm household characteristics, participation mode, participation policy, and participation barriers. Among them, the variables of farm household were selected as "whether poor household", "whether involved in tourism", "age of household head", "education level of household head", "household size", "number of household laborers", "annual per capita household income", and "main source of household income". Participation is based on a multiple-choice choice of "employment", "provision of stalls", "shareholding and dividends", "land transfer" and multiple-choice questions with five options, such as "opening a farmhouse hotel". The barriers to participation are multiple-choice questions with five options: "lack of finance", "lack of skills", "lack of experience",

“lack of rights” and “lack of manpower”. The participation policy includes two dimensions: “the degree of policy disclosure” and “the degree of clear participation channels”, and the indicators are assigned from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. The specific variable definitions and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Variable definitions and descriptive statistics.

Variable Type	Variable Name/Symbol	Variable Description and Assignment
Village Features	Tourism Development Stage	“≤5 years” = 1, “5–10 years” = 2, “10–15 years” = 3, “≥15 years” = 4
	Type of tourism resources	“Nature-based scenic spot” = 1, “humanistic scenic spot” = 2, “comprehensive scenic spot” = 3
	Distance from tourist attractions	“≤5 km” = 1, “5–10 km” = 2, “10–15 km” = 3, “15–20 km” = 4, “≥20 km” = 5
Family Features	Households out of poverty	1 = yes; 0 = no
	Participation in tourism	1 = yes; 0 = no
	Age of head of household	“Aged ≤ 30” = 1, “Aged 31–45” = 2, “Aged 46–65” = 3, “Aged ≥ 65” = 4
	Education level of head of household	illiterate = 1, primary = 2, junior high = 3, senior high = 4, undergraduate and above = 5
	Size of the family	Discrete variable, Number of family members
	Household labor	Discrete variable, Number of family labor
policy system	Annual family income	Logarithm of net household income per capita
	Main sources of household income	Tourism business = 1, non-farm work = 2, farming = 3, other part-time work = 4
	Participation in Policy Disclosure	Categorized variables, 1–5: Very unimportant–very important
participation ways	Open participation procedures	Categorized variables, 1–5: Very unimportant–very important
	Placement in employment	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Provision of stalls	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Dividends from shares	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Land transfer	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
Obstacles to participation	Running a farmhouse hotel	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Lack of finance	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Lack of skills	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Lack of experience	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Lack of rights	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no
	Lack of manpower	Virtual variables, 1 = yes; 0 = no

### 3.3. Research Methodology

A Binary Logistic regression model was used to analyze farm household participation in tourism and its influencing factors, and the maximum likelihood estimation method was used to test the model. SPSS22.0 establishes the Binary Logistic regression model as follows:

$$Y_i = \ln\left(\frac{p_i}{1-p_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_j X_j + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

$$P_{ij} = \text{Prob}(\Phi_{ij} = 1)$$

In Formula (1),  $p_i$  is the probability of farmers participating in tourism,  $1 - p_i$  is the probability of farmers not participating in tourism.  $Y_i$  is the explained variable, which is the logarithm of odds.  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_j$  are explanatory variables.  $\beta_0$  is the intercept, which is a constant term.  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_j$  are regression coefficients, indicating the size of the influencing factors.  $\varepsilon_i$  is the error term. The values of  $i$  and  $j$  are 1, 2, 3, ...

In order to investigate the effect and difference of tourism participation between participating farmers and non-participant farmers, the Mann-Whitney U test method in

two independent samples tests was used to analyze the sample data. The method assumes that the two samples compared come from the same distribution and are equal in position. For the overall sample is a random sample, the test of small sample size and orderly sample data has certain advantages.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistical Results

The effective sample distribution and basic data information of farmers are shown in Table 2. At the farm household level, middle-aged and elderly people aged 45 or above accounted for 65.1% of the respondents, and those with junior high school education or below accounted for 79.2% of the respondents, indicating that the surveyed group is characterized by old age and low education level. The majority of households are six or more in size, with a workforce of three; 21.5% of households have an average annual net income of over 10,000 Yuan, and the main income of households comes from working outside the home, accounting for 66.8%.

**Table 2.** Statistical frequencies and factors affecting farm household income.

Variable	N (%)	Mean ± Standard	Deviation Statistic	p-Value
Households out of poverty				
yes	101 (41.9%)	5660.21 ± 212.43	−8.978 <sup>①</sup>	0.000
Non-poor households	140 (58.1%)	10,512.15 ± 475.52		
Whether to participate in a tour				
Yes	117 (48.1%)	8648.84 ± 462.34	−0.541 <sup>①</sup>	0.588
No	124 (51.9%)	8087.56 ± 467.60		
<b>Gender</b>			−1.355 <sup>①</sup>	0.175
Male	138 (57.3%)	8770.15 ± 393.44		
Female	103 (42.7%)	7599.75 ± 565.58		
Age of head of household			1.683 <sup>②</sup>	0.641
≤30 years	4 (1.7%)	10,692.50 ± 3239.64		
31–45 years	80 (33.2%)	8643.59 ± 602.37		
46–59 years	97 (40.2%)	8327.19 ± 462.28		
≥60 years	60 (24.9%)	8356.48 ± 713.71		
Level of education of the head of household			68.963 <sup>②</sup>	0.000
illiterate	49 (20.3%)	5645 ± 334		
primary	89 (36.9%)	6883 ± 244		
junior high	53 (22.0%)	9095 ± 645		
senior high	40 (16.6%)	13,864 ± 997		
undergraduate and above	10 (4.1%)	11,764 ± 2198		
Number of family members			16.922 <sup>②</sup>	0.002
≥6 persons	113 (46.9%)	8636.45 ± 497.73		
5 persons	75 (31.1%)	8063.27 ± 521.81		
4 persons	37 (15.4%)	9606.49 ± 1049.86		
3 persons	10 (4.1%)	5194 ± 605		
≤2 persons	6 (2.5%)	4388 ± 641		
Number of household laborers'			84.326 <sup>②</sup>	0.000
≥4 persons	58 (24%)	12,362.07 ± 801.31		
3 persons	93 (38.6%)	8223.77 ± 404.20		
2 persons	68 (28.2%)	6594.31 ± 458.96		
1 persons	20 (8.3%)	4580.90 ± 328.00		
0 persons	2 (0.8%)	2836 ± 24		

Table 2. Cont.

Variable	N (%)	Mean ± Standard	Deviation Statistic	p-Value
Main sources of household income			−2.411	0.016
Tourism business	34 (14.1%)	8399.48 ± 961.36		
non-farm work	161 (66.8%)	8616.69 ± 537.54		
farming	59 (24.5%)	7983.53 ± 475.95		
other part-time work	64 (26.6%)	9145.25 ± 972.87		
Distance from tourist attractions			5.628 <sup>②</sup>	0.131
≤5 km	39 (16.2%)	7220.08 ± 691.91		
5–10 km	58 (24.1%)	8884.72 ± 714.75		
10–20 km	59 (24.5%)	8464.08 ± 649.50		
≥20 km	85 (35.3%)	8789.47 ± 569.49		
Length of tourism development			8.700 <sup>②</sup>	0.034
≤5 years	41 (17%)	7389.12 ± 655.93		
5–10 years	135 (56%)	8989.73 ± 439.53		
10–20 years	48 (19.9%)	8977.48 ± 883.91		
≥20 years	17 (7.1%)	5640.91 ± 390.42		
Type of tourism resources			18.620 <sup>②</sup>	0.000
Nature-based scenic spot	176 (73%)	9065.04 ± 410.63		
Humanistic scenic spot	28 (11.6%)	5445.30 ± 376.77		
Comprehensive scenic spot	37 (15.4%)	7985.59 ± 676.42		

Note: <sup>①</sup> z-value; <sup>②</sup> kruskal-wallis test value.

At the village level, 73% of the tourist attractions in the area where the poor villages are located are new attractions that have been developed for less than 10 years, indicating that local tourism development is basically at a primary stage of development; poor villages are generally far away from tourist attractions, with 59.8% of them being more than 10 km away; natural-type attractions are the main types of attractions that poor villages rely on to carry out tourism poverty alleviation, accounting for 73% of the total.

#### 4.2. The Role of Rural Tourism in Increasing the Income of Farming Households

The statistical results show (Table 2) that the role of rural tourism in increasing the income of farm households is limited, and the effect of increasing income differs between households that have escaped poverty and non-poor households. Among the 101 out-of-poverty households and 140 non-poor households, the annual per capita income of the out-of-poverty households (RMB 5660.21) was significantly lower than that of the non-poor households (RMB 10,512.15), with a difference of RMB 4851.94 and a significant difference between the two ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Although the level of income of households that have escaped poverty (RMB 5660.21) exceeds the standard for escaping poverty (based on the standard line of RMB 4000 for escaping poverty in 2020), the difference between the income of households that have escaped poverty and that of non-poor households is larger. This suggests that the trickle-down effect of rural tourism is limited and that there is a difference in the effect on households that have escaped poverty and those that have not. The average annual per capita household income of the 117 households that participated in tourism was RMB 8648.84, while the average annual per capita household income of the 124 non-participating households was RMB 8087.56. The per capita income of the participating households was slightly higher than that of the non-participating households, with a difference of RMB 561.28. This indicates that participation in tourism has contributed to a certain extent to increasing the income of farming households, but the effect of this increase is limited. The effect of participation in tourism and non-participation in tourism on the household income of farm households was not significant, and the difference between the annual per capita household income of the two was not significant ( $p = 0.588 > 0.05$ ).



#### 4.3. Factors Influencing Rural Tourism on Farm Household Income Growth

##### 4.3.1. Poor Quality of Human Capital Limits the Ability of Farmers to Participate in Tourism to Increase Their Income

Schultz's theory of human capital suggests that the variety of productive knowledge and the skills of labor and management that people possess constitute the determinants of economic growth and social progress and can generate benefits such as wages for those who own them. The core of human capital is the quality of the population, and the level of educational attainment is an important indicator of the quality of human capital, with higher levels of human capital giving farmers greater access to non-farm work. Among the characteristics of farm households, the level of education of farm households has a significant impact on their household income, with the higher the level of education of farm households, the higher their average annual household income, and there is a significant difference in the level of education between the out-of-poverty and non-poor farm households ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) (Table 2). In particular, the average level of education of households that have escaped poverty is 'primary school', which directly leads to a lack of skills in tourism services, with 37.3% of households considering the lack of skills in tourism services to be an important obstacle to their participation in the development of the tourism industry. On the other hand, the lower level of education leads to a poorer ability to learn relevant guidance and preferential policies, limiting the opportunities for farmers to participate in tourism, with only 14.4% of respondents indicating that they were more aware of the participation procedures, while 16.6% were unsure of how to participate in tourism industry development. These factors directly limit the ability of households who have escaped poverty to participate in tourism.

##### 4.3.2. Farm Household Size and Labor Force Size Together Have an Impact on the Average Annual Household Income of Farm Households

Generally speaking, the average annual income of farm households is positively related to the number of household laborers and inversely related to household size. Household size ( $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ) and the number of laborer's ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) had a significant impact on the average annual income of farming households (Table 2). The higher the level of education of farming households, the higher the average annual income of farming households, and the higher the number of laborers, the higher the average annual income of farming households. Analysis of the data shows that when the household size is four and seven persons, the average annual income of farm households is significantly higher than other household sizes. The highest level of per capita household income was recorded when the number of household members was four, at RMB 9606.49. As the number of household members increases, the annual per capita household income gradually decreases, reaching RMB 9541.55 when the number of household members reaches seven. The research analysis concluded that the average annual income of farming households is influenced by the interaction and influence of household size and the number of household laborers. When the household size is certain, the more the number of household laborers, the higher the average annual household income; on the contrary, when the number of household laborers is certain, the larger the household size, the lower the level of average annual household income.

##### 4.3.3. Primary Stage of Tourism Scenic Spots and Humanistic Type of Scenic Spots Have a Weaker Ability to Drive Income for Farm Households

As shown in Table 2, among the village characteristics, the stage of tourism development ( $p = 0.034 < 0.05$ ) and the type of scenic spot ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) had a greater impact on the income of farm households. The primary stage of tourism scenic spots (less than 5 years old) and old scenic spots that have been developed for more than 20 years have a weaker ability to drive income for farm households. Among the types of scenic spots, natural scenic spots have a stronger effect on increasing the income of farmers than integrated scenic spots, while humanistic scenic spots have a weaker effect on increasing the income of farmers. The

study concluded that natural scenic spots are the main resource carrier for rural tourism, and most of the rural tourism in the sample villages is at a preliminary stage. The tourism products offered by the scenic spots are mainly traditional “tourist-oriented products”, or are facing a shift from “tourist-oriented products” to “leisure and holiday-oriented products”. Tourism infrastructure needs to be further improved, and the management level of tourist attractions and professional tourism service skills are relatively lacking. Visitors are mainly “polycentric” and have not yet formed a relatively stable source of visitors. The “trickle-down effect” is weakened by the limited number of jobs available to the community in the tourist attractions. The low level of tourism products, the limitations of the source market, and the inadequacy of the management level have led to the spillover effect of tourism consumption not being effective, and the income-generating effect on farmers is not obvious. Older scenic spots that have been in development for more than 20 years are at risk of being replaced due to weakened attractiveness of tourism resources, aging facilities, and equipment, or changing tourist preferences, which is in line with Butler’s development trend of the life cycle theory of tourist places.

#### 4.4. Analysis of Barriers to Farmers’ Participation in Tourism

Table 3 demonstrates the factors influencing farm household participation and non-participation in tourism.

**Table 3.** Factors influencing community participation in rural tourism.

Indicators	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig. (Double-Tailed)
Distance from tourist attractions	5969.500	12,990.500	−2.477	0.013
Length of tourism development	6361.000	13,382.000	−1.839	0.066
Type of tourism resources	7067.000	14,088.000	−0.451	0.652
Whether the household is out of poverty	6660.000	10,401.000	−0.011	0.991
Gender	6394.500	18,484.500	−0.609	0.543
Age of head of household	6573.500	10,314.500	−0.183	0.855
Level of education of the head of household	5799.000	9540.000	−1.771	0.077
Number of family members	6163.000	9904.000	−1.012	0.312
Number of household laborers’	5790.000	17,880.000	−1.772	0.076
Main sources of household income				
Tourism business	6697.000	13,718.000	−1.717	0.086
non-farm work	6193.000	13,214.000	−2.411	0.016
farming	6761.500	14,387.500	−1.230	0.219
other part-time work	6513.000	14,139.000	−1.789	0.074
Engagement Policy				
Level of participation in policy openness	6651.000	13,672.000	−1.185	0.236
Clarity of participation procedures	6794.500	13,815.500	−0.917	0.359
Clarity of participation channels	5166.000	12,187.000	−4.463	0.000
How to participate				
Placement in employment	6620.500	18,710.500	−0.132	0.895
Provision of stalls	5892.000	9633.000	−2.190	0.029
Dividends from shares	6656.000	18,746.000	−0.048	0.962
Land transfer	6563.500	10,304.500	−0.279	0.780
Farmhouse hotel	5333.000	9074.000	−3.450	0.001
Barriers to participation				
Lack of funding	5526.500	10,677.500	−3.049	0.002
Lack of skills	6179.000	16,049.000	−1.975	0.048
Lack of experience	6245.500	16,115.500	−1.794	0.073
Lack of power	5748.500	15,618.500	−2.859	0.004

Note: Subgroup variable: whether or not to participate.

##### 4.4.1. Spatial Distance Limits Effective Participation of Farm Households in Tourism

The geography of the Qinba Mountain region in southern Shaanxi is complex, with natural villages mostly distributed along mountains, rivers, and natural river valleys, and poor accessibility. Even with improved transport conditions, the spatial distance between

farm households in ecological functional areas and the tourist attractions they rely on is still long due to the scattered population living there and the wide geographical distribution of natural scenic spots. Whether or not farmers participate in tourism is related to the distance between them and the scenic spots, and there is a significant difference between the two ( $p = 0.013 < 0.05$ ) (Table 3). The results of the survey in the sample villages showed that 59.8% of the farming households were located more than 10 km away from the scenic spot (Table 2). The location conditions and transportation environment became one of the main obstacles limiting farm households' participation in tourism. In fact, spatial distance to some extent also reflects the magnitude of the time costs incurred by farm households in participating in tourism. During the interviews, it was found that some poor households brought their own home-grown local products to sell around the scenic spots, and the income from the sporadic sale of local products was not proportional to the time cost they spent, and these incomes only supplemented the household's daily expenses and were not the main source of income.

#### 4.4.2. Non-Farm Work Constitutes a Proxy for Farm Household Participation in Tourism

Whether and to what extent farm households choose to participate in tourism is not blind, but the result of rational behavioral decisions. Tourism participation is likely to be a livelihood option for farm households when the costs of their participation are lower than the benefits and rewards, they receive, or in the long term when community residents are able to achieve more stable long-term benefits. Statistical analysis and tests of variance between participating and non-participating farmers show that non-farm labor is significantly different ( $p = 0.016 < 0.05$ ) in the choice between participating and non-participating farmers (Table 3), i.e., non-farm labor constitutes a proxy for farm participation in tourism. The research statistics (Table 2) show that non-farm work is still the main source of income for farm households and is the main form of livelihood for farm households, accounting for approximately 66.8% of the total sample size, while tourism-related business is only 14.1%, indicating that participation in tourism makes a relatively small contribution to the annual per capita income of farm households. In fact, due to the strong dependence of rural tourism on rural natural resources, the seasonal nature and vulnerability of the tourism industry all contribute to the uncertainty of farm households' tourism livelihood income, and participation in tourism only serves as a useful supplement to farm households' livelihoods.

#### 4.4.3. Providing Stalls and Running Agritourism Hotels Were the Main Ways in Which Farmers Participated in Tourism

The results of the data analysis (Table 3) show that there is a significant difference between participating and non-participating farmers in the two participation methods of "providing stalls" ( $p = 0.029 < 0.05$ ) and "running agritourism hotels" ( $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). There were significant differences in the effect on the income of farming households, while there were no significant differences in the participation methods of "employment", "shareholding and dividend", and "land transfer". From the field research and interviews, it can be seen that the majority of farming households participate in tourism in a single way, mainly by opening farmhouses and selling tourism consumer goods, accounting for 23.2% and 18.7% respectively. At the same time, as most villages have less than one mu of arable land per capita, and most of it is scattered and fragmented, it is not the main way for farmers to participate in tourism, as the income from land transfer or dividends from shares is obviously small.

#### 4.4.4. Lack of Finance, Technology, and Rights Are the Main Barriers to Farmers' Participation in Tourism

Lack of capital ( $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ), skills ( $p = 0.048 < 0.05$ ), and rights ( $p = 0.004 < 0.05$ ) constitute the main barriers to whether farmers participate in tourism, i.e., farmers generally believe that their choice to participate in rural tourism is related to the capital they have, the skills they possess and the rights they have. Tourism participation has a large upfront capital investment, high requirements for products, services, and skills, various types of

tourism resources and customers, and requires a certain level of social connections and contacts. This is a challenge for farmers who are still on the verge of escaping poverty and is a major barrier to their participation in tourism.

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1. *Tourism Is Conditional in Alleviating Poverty*

Rural tourism, a tourism precision approach to poverty alleviation, does not necessarily lead to all poor households benefiting from it and achieving prosperity. Tourism alleviates poverty conditionally, and there are regional differences in the effectiveness of rural tourism in alleviating poverty [25].

The factors influencing this variation can be broadly divided into two levels: farm household factors and environmental factors in rural tourism development. In terms of individual household factors, the quality of human capital, the size of the farm household labor force, the choice of the farm household's main means of livelihood, and the way and obstacles to the farm household's participation in rural tourism all constitute influences on whether or not the farm household increases its income; in terms of the environment of rural tourism development, the stage of rural tourism development, the geographical location of the farm household's village and the spatial distance from the tourist attractions, and the policy of the farm household's participation in tourism are the main factors affecting farmers' income increase. This finding is in line with our expectations. In fact, it is also consistent with the findings of related scholars. In the early stages of tourism development in villages, villagers along the ring of scenic spots or tourist roads become the first to benefit from rural tourism. Villagers far from scenic spots and along tourist roads or those with less ability to participate receive limited economic benefits from rural tourism development [25]. With the uneven spatial distribution of rural tourism development and the uneven participation capacity of villagers, rural tourism development has the potential to widen the gap between the rich and the poor among the village population. Appropriate intervention by the 'visible hand' of the government to ensure the participation of various stakeholders, such as communities, enterprises, and the government, can alleviate the problem of inequitable income distribution caused by rural tourism and narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, which will lead to a Pareto rise in overall village welfare [26].

### 5.2. *Non-Agricultural Work Constitutes the Substitution of Farmers' Choice of Tourism Livelihood*

Whether and to what extent farmers choose to participate in tourism is not a blind choice, but a rational choice based on social exchange theory. When tourism has the potential to complement or even replace traditional community industries, farmers weigh up the rewards and costs of a shift in livelihoods against the level of benefits. Rural tourism is conducive to the local transfer of employment in familiar industries and familiar environments, but the high cost and risk of livelihood change for farmers due to the seasonality of rural tourism and low job security make highly qualified laborers less willing to choose local and nearby tourism employment. At the same time, due to the low level of participation and the single way of participation, especially the employment opportunities and employment environment provided by rural tourism are not attractive to rural laborers. A large number of laborers choose to go out to work. This "crowding out" effect leads to an unreasonable structure of the rural labor force left behind [27], which is not conducive to the consolidation and enhancement of the effectiveness of precise tourism poverty alleviation and poses a great challenge to the large-scale and industrialized development of rural tourism and the comprehensive revitalization of the countryside.

### 5.3. *Human Capital Constitutes a Major Barrier to Benefiting the Poor*

Among the inputs of production factors, human capital plays a far greater role in the process of economic growth than physical capital, and attention should be paid to human capital [28]. China's experience in poverty alleviation shows that human capital, such as education, is the main reason for widening the income gap among farm households, and it

becomes more urgent to enhance the ability of the poor to take advantage of opportunities. Amartya Sen's capability poverty theory suggests that poor people are "deprived" because they do not possess "basic viable capabilities" and are thus locked in a "poverty trap" for a long time [29]. The lack of skills, power disadvantage, gender discrimination, and physical limitations of the poor compared to the non-poor ultimately prevent the extremely poor from participating in tourism, and even if some of the poor do participate, they are limited to low-skilled jobs with low barriers to employment and limited levels of profitability and ability, which can even exacerbate the relative poverty of this group. Through skills education and training, the ability of the poor to integrate into society and reap the benefits is improved. It also helps poor families to participate in tourism poverty alleviation projects through the introduction of relevant policies by national government departments, so that they can be precisely positioned for training, improve their work skills and abilities, be precisely positioned for employment and enhance the benefits of tourism poverty alleviation [30].

#### *5.4. Geographical Location and Transport Conditions Significantly Influence the Effects of Tourism on Poverty Reduction*

Muganda M (2010) found that geographic location had a significant impact on local residents' participation and tourism benefits in the Arusha region of Tanzania, with residents living farther away from the main transport routes having fewer opportunities to participate in tourism development and lower tourism benefits than those living near the main transport routes [31]. Scenic spots and waterfall complexes in Nanzhao County, Nanyang City, found that distance from scenic spots significantly affects residents' perceptions of the effects of tourism [32], which in turn limits their opportunities to participate in tourism. As accessibility continues to improve, the tourism poverty reduction effect gradually increases [33].

#### *5.5. Enhance the Effective Participation of Poor Residents*

Sebastian and Marte's effective participation theory suggests that the main purpose of citizens' participation is to have their interests perceived and to have the opportunity to influence decisions, and thus have their needs and suggestions reflected in the final decision outcome. In numerous areas of tourism poverty alleviation practice, community participation has not been as rosy as imagined, with participatory development in many rural areas remaining symbolic and non-participatory [34] and effective participation of the poor being significantly low, with limited benefits gained from tourism poverty alleviation. Zuo Bing [35] argues that the lack of effective participation and the uneven distribution of tourism benefits lies in the absence of rights, which is rooted in the design of China's political, economic, and legal systems that favor growth over the effective defense of the legitimate interests of individuals and society. In the process of poverty alleviation through rural tourism, too much emphasis is placed on the driving role of exogenous forces, neglecting the role of endogenous sources. In the process of tourism precision, poverty alleviation does not give poor residents the full right to information, participation, decision-making, and benefit, resulting in the insufficient endogenous motivation of residents [36]. Therefore, in the process of poverty alleviation in rural tourism, there is a need to implement tourism empowerment and continuous institutional innovation in rural tourism poverty alleviation [37]. At the primary stage of rural tourism development, the government should strengthen the institutional design and empower farmers with the right to information so that they have a full understanding of the country's poverty alleviation policies. At the same time, the government should play a guiding and coordinating role to coordinate the benefit mechanism of rural tourism stakeholders. Then, gradually increase farmers' rights to participate, make decisions and benefit, improve their participation in policy formulation, expand the scope of community participation and promote the implementation of various types of participatory policies on the ground. Continuously enhance the subjectivity of poor residents in the precise process of rural tourism, rely on the endogenous motivation

and self-development ability of poor residents to achieve the sustainability of poverty alleviation in poor areas, and then realize the effective connection between precise tourism poverty alleviation and rural revitalization.

## 6. Policy Suggestions

### 6.1. Establish a Screening Mechanism for Tourism Poverty Alleviation Participation and Implement Diversified Poverty Governance

Tourism development has a high threshold for participation and large initial investment, not all poor households have the ability to participate in tourism, especially into the decisive stage of poverty alleviation, and most poor households are extremely poor or have special difficulties, poor self-development capacity. Therefore, we should establish a screening mechanism for tourism participation in poverty alleviation, through the “classification of governance” of the poor population, select the poor people with the will to participate in tourism, have the basic ability to participate and experience, and actively encourage them to participate; for the poor households with insufficient development conditions, do not have the ability to participate in tourism, explore new poverty alleviation paths, do a good job “One household, one policy”. Only by achieving refined poverty alleviation governance can we coordinate the relationship between poverty alleviation and economic development and realize the effective connection between the systems of poverty alleviation and development and rural revitalization.

### 6.2. Encourage the Integration and Synergistic Development of a Variety of Industries to Achieve “+ Tourism” and “Tourism +” Two-Way Interaction

Rural tourism provides farmers with diversified livelihoods and increases their income channels, but rural tourism activities are carried out with characteristics such as strong territoriality and obvious seasonality. Relying on tourism alone to alleviate poverty is not enough to drive the effect of poverty alleviation is limited. Agriculture, forestry, cultural industry, and tourism should be encouraged to integrate, give full play to the combination of different ways to alleviate poverty, synergy, adhere to the “multi-legged and use”. For example, Mianxian’s Chinese herbal medicine cultivation industry, tea cultivation industry, and processing industry have formed a relatively complete industrial chain, forming a number of industrial complexes integrating “cultivation-processing-marketing”, whose economic contribution is far greater than the contribution of tourism alone to the county’s economy. Therefore, on the basis of these advantageous resources and characteristic industries in villages and towns, tourism elements are integrated to develop “agriculture + tourism”, “tea + tourism”, “medicine + tourism”, “leisure + tourism” and “recreation + tourism” products to extend the industrial chain and increase the added value of the industry. Driven by the strategy of “one industry breakthrough” in Liuba County, new tourism models such as “tourism + holiday”, “tourism + study tour”, “tourism + national education”, “tourism + local culture” have emerged.” The “Tourism+” effect has initially emerged and has effectively driven the development of other industries and increased the income of poor households.

### 6.3. Strengthen Tourism Skills Training and Implement a Strategy to Cultivate and Enhance rural Tourism Talent

Effective participation in tourism has a high threshold, and the key to participatory rural tourism development lies in enhancing the ability of farmers to engage in rural tourism. The basic skills and levels of the poor are enhanced through tourism vocational skills training. On the one hand, the breadth of tourism skills training is expanded so that more farmers can participate in skills training. At the same time, the depth of skills training is increased in villages and towns that are key to tourism development. The training will shift from simple skills training at a low level to tourism management at a high level. On the other hand, “able people” and “big families” can be promoted from local tourism participants as key training objects to play their exemplary leading role. On the other hand, the “competent” and “big” farmers from the local tourism participants are selected

as key training targets, and their role as demonstrators and leaders is brought into play. Another measure can be taken, that is, local county governments should actively promote villages and towns to establish long-term and stable cooperative relations with tourism colleges and universities. Give full play to the intellectual advantages of universities and research institutions. For example, professional tourism experts can be hired to guide the development and management of local tourism, which not only realizes the development of key tourism poverty alleviation villages, but also cultivates the practical ability of talents in tourism colleges and universities, and truly achieves a win-win situation.

#### *6.4. Adhere to the Development Path of Participatory Poverty Alleviation and Stimulate the Endogenous Motivation of Farmers*

Participatory poverty alleviation is considered to be the most effective way to alleviate poverty. On the one hand, participatory development can effectively awaken the people's sense of participation, bring into play their spirit of ownership, and enhance their sense of collective belonging and accomplishment. On the other hand, participatory development is to enable the local people to fully apply their knowledge and skills to development activities in a familiar environment. Respect the subjectivity and initiative of the poor and give grassroots organizations and villagers more autonomy to choose their own development in accordance with the approach of "government guidance, departmental linkage, voluntary villagers and endogenous development". Efforts have been made to combine the "top-down" model of promoting poverty alleviation with the "bottom-up" model of dynamic poverty alleviation. Through empowerment through tourism, communities actively explore the "bottom-up" dynamic poverty alleviation model to stimulate the endogenous motivation of farmers.

#### *6.5. Play the Coordinating and Leading Role of the Government, and Cultivate and Strengthen Tourism Cooperative Organizations*

It has been argued that government-led industrial poverty alleviation relies on administrative paths, and the interest linkage among subjects is not strong, making poverty alleviation and development lack a social foundation, leading to goal drift and widening of the gap between rich and poor [38]. However, in poor mountainous areas with a weak industrial base and unsound participation system, it is still necessary to adhere to the leading role of the government. In the key villages and towns of tourism poverty alleviation, give full play to the active role of township party workstations in promoting poverty alleviation, regulating relationships, and stabilizing effectiveness. Encourage tourism scenic spots, travel agencies, tourist hotels, and other travel-related enterprises to rural tourism poverty alleviation key villages, poor households of twinning help. Coordinate scenic spots with villages, capable people with households, enterprises + farmers in the tourism poverty alleviation model, and actively guide the development and growth of private tourism collaborative organizations to stabilize the effectiveness of tourism poverty alleviation.

### **7. Conclusions, Deficiencies, and Prospects**

Tourism poverty alleviation as one of the measures for precise poverty alleviation is widely promoted by government departments and industries at all levels, but the analysis of Hanzhong City in the Qinba Mountains of southern Shaanxi shows that tourism poverty alleviation has a limited role in promoting the income increase of poor households, and tourism has no significant effect on the increase of household income of poor households participating in tourism versus non-participating poor households. The positive effect of tourism precision poverty alleviation on poor households is not as strong as it is thought to be. However, this does not negate the effectiveness of tourism poverty alleviation policies. On the one hand, China's tourism precision poverty alleviation strategy is oriented to specific tourism poverty alleviation villages and towns, and it is not specific in terms of targeting, i.e., it can point to all poor groups whose causes of poverty are not the same; on the other hand, the positive effect of tourism poverty alleviation in the Qinba Mountains has been initially shown, but for most of the tourism scenic spots in the primary stage of

tourism development, the aggregation effect of its tourism industry is not yet prominent and not enough to play its spillover effect. Tourism does not exist as a dominant way to alleviate poverty in the surrounding poor villages. Therefore, subsequent studies need to avoid generalization and one-sidedness and need to combine the root causes of poverty and push tourism poverty alleviation into systematization and depth in practice and research.

This stage should still be implemented in the village and town as the target of the community tourism poverty alleviation approach, in the strategic decision-making options, the establishment of tourism poverty alleviation participation in the screening mechanism, the implementation of diversified poverty governance; in the tourism development strategy, to encourage multi-industry integration and synergistic development, to achieve “+ tourism” and “tourism + “two-way interaction; in the way of poverty alleviation development, adhere to the participatory development path, to stimulate the endogenous power of farmers. Actively explore the “bottom-up” dynamic way of poverty alleviation; in the development of endogenous power, strengthen skills training, improve the comprehensive quality of the poor and their participation level and ability; in the coordination and protection, play the role of grassroots party-building coordination and leadership, and constantly cultivate and strengthen tourism cooperation organizations. In the process of promoting tourism poverty alleviation strategy with villages and towns as units, the sustainability of its effect on poor households and its quality should be further observed and analyzed; on the other hand, the long-term poverty alleviation strategy of motivating poor households to develop and enhancing their human capital should still be adhered to.

This paper is based on a small sample size of only ten villages in Hanzhong City, and the findings are only applicable to this region. The geographical environment and resource endowments of China’s villages vary greatly, as do their cultural traditions, customs, and people’s lifestyles and livelihood patterns. The heterogeneous nature of the countryside and the multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted nature of rural tourism dictate that China’s poverty eradication and rural revitalization must follow a differentiated development path. Therefore, we must analyze specific problems and adopt targeted countermeasures and measures to address the characteristics and limiting factors of rural tourism development in different study areas in order to achieve precise measures and promote sustainable development of rural tourism and the common prosperity of villagers.

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