

Article

The Value Expression and Driving Factors of Rural Spatial Ecological Products: A Case Study of B&Bs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces, China

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Abstract: In the context of rural revitalization strategies and humans' increasing leisure pursuits, rural tourism has begun to act as a new development path of rural economic growth and industrial transformation. This phenomenon generally occurs in rural areas around metropolitan areas, manifesting as the transformation or reconstruction of rural spaces. As a result, many new types of tertiary industry spaces utilizing rural land for leisure activities have emerged. We analyze the connotations of rural spatial and industrial transformation from the perspective of spatial production and innovatively propose that the transformed space is an ecological product, which includes three types in practice: industrial space, consumption space, and residential space. This study facilitates urban–rural integration and common prosperity. Given the lack of analysis of rural ecological products, especially rural spatial ecological products (e.g., rural B&Bs and other tertiary industry spaces), this study aims to explore the value expression and driving factors of rural spatial ecological products based on geo-visual (spatially visualizing) analytical tools looking at 10361 B&Bs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces of China as typical examples. Our results show that (1) the value of rural spatial ecological products is reflected in the price that urban consumers are willing to pay for rural natural landscapes, which constitutes an ecological premium; and (2) the prices of rural spatial ecological products are strikingly different at multiple spatial scales, and this difference is related to the local ecological resources. This study provides insights into the rational allocation of the limited resources required for rural construction, which helps optimize the spatial planning of rural ecotourism and enhance the gametogenous development momentum of rural areas. At the same time, this study theoretically expands the research results of cultural ecosystem services.

Keywords: rural spatial ecological products; ecological product value realization; cultural ecosystem services; the production of space; industrial transformation; rural revitalization



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1. Introduction

With rapid socio-economic development, people are engaging in more leisure activities to meet their increasing spiritual and cultural needs [1,2]. Under the guidance of China's rural revitalization policy, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province, as the pioneer regions, have begun rural tourism activities in full swing. These two provinces are exemplary areas for rural industrial development in China, which have not only spawned diversified local development models but also accumulated a great deal of experience in rural tourism development [3–5]. With the spillover of leisure consumption demand in metropolitan areas, access to leisure and relaxation opportunities from the central city has generally occurred in rural areas on the fringes of the metropolis [6,7]. Urban residents want to enter rural areas to enjoy the natural landscape and local leisure culture, and rural residents are willing to give up their rural space for economic benefits. The nationwide expansion of rural tourism activities affected by rapid urbanization has significantly changed Chinese rural industries [8–10].

The flow of urban capital to rural areas creates new industrial functions, spatial forms, and development models. In this context, new types of spaces utilizing rural land for leisure and tourism activities have emerged in rural areas [11,12]. These spaces are carried by idle rural land or houses and must be built on rural construction land. The production process of these spaces is “resources turning into assets and then into capital.” Many forms have emerged [13], such as coffee, tea bars, B&Bs, camping, outdoor activities, etc. B&Bs are the most typical new type of tertiary industry space among them. Rural B&Bs organically combine rural natural landscapes, a rural sense of belonging, modern urban life, and personalized creative culture, deriving in various models such as cultural and creative industry spaces, consumption spaces, and health resort spaces [14–16].

The development and changes in rural communities are closely related to the changes in the rural economy. Traditional agriculture is the main economic activity, but it is no longer the main or only economic driving force in most rural areas. It has shifted towards the development of the tertiary industry or the integration of three industries. Many studies have explored the transformation of rural industries and spaces from a global geographical space perspective or targeted individual cases, studying rural development from aspects such as leisure agriculture, nature conservation, rural tourism, and diverse subject interactions [17–20]. The production mechanism and benefits of rural new tertiary industry space are noteworthy, but more interesting is how these spaces attract consumers and why similar services in rural areas are priced higher than in cities.

Thus far, some researchers have analyzed the spatial layout and influencing factors of the tertiary industry, mainly B&Bs, against the background of rural tourism and generally recognize the important role of ecological resources [21–23]. Rural areas are the main space for cultivating nature and producing ecological products [24]. Ecological products are closely related to ecosystem services [25,26]. Ecological products are goods or services produced by the dual effects of ecosystems and humans, provided for human society to use and consume [27,28]. Based on the widely recognized conversion of ecological resources into “product economy” [29], much research has been conducted on the ecological product value realization. However, discussions on the value realization of rural ecological resources mostly focus on researching ecological products such as forests, water bodies, cultivated land, and agricultural products [30–33]. Although there has been discussion on the classification of various consumption attributes of rural ecological products [34–36], there has not yet been research on the non-material form of rural new tertiary industry as an ecological product.

This study believes that these new tertiary industry spaces in rural areas are actually intangible ecological products that integrate the formation of ecological value, and are essentially cultural ecosystem services (CESs) promoted by rural tourism. This study names them rural spatial ecological products, which belong to the category of CESs under the classification of ecological products. The value realization of rural spatial ecological products lies in the tangible transformation of intangible assets, such as rural ecology and culture, through tertiary industry spaces, such as rural B&Bs. The particularity of realizing the value of rural spatial ecological products is that rural B&Bs and other tertiary industry spaces make intangibles (e.g., rural ecology and culture) tangible. Currently, existing research usually focuses on tourist attractions to study CESs [37–40]. With the widespread rise of rural tourism around metropolitan areas, the value of CESs has been widely realized in rural areas. However, our discussion on the non-material forms of CESs, such as space under rural tourism, has not been conducted in previous research, especially in China.

This study took 10361 B&Bs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces as typical rural spatial ecological products and used the Kriging space interpolation method to spatialize the rural B&Bs’ prices in the two provinces. The goal of this study is to enrich the research on the value realization of the non-material forms of CESs (e.g., space), and to provide theoretical thinking for the rational planning of rural ecotourism construction in practice.

2. Conception and Classification

2.1. The Concept and Property of Rural Spatial Ecological Products

This type of new tertiary industry space, which appears in rural areas and is different from the traditional sense, is called “rural spatial ecological products”. It is defined as the space produced by the organic combination of ecological environment value and the value of tertiary industry products and services in rural areas. The production mechanism utilizes urban and rural capital to make natural factors that can maintain rural ecological stability, have ecological regulation functions, provide a comfortable environment to be invested in production activities, and form a new type of tertiary industry space, as well as the products and services attached to this space. Rural spatial ecological products are expressed in the form of space and result from ecological resources participating in the spatial production process as production factors. Rural spatial development capital generates ecological space premiums by combining natural capital and land production factors, producing unique rural spatial ecological products. The two main forms of these products are as follows.

The first rationale of rural spatial ecological products is cultural ecosystem services (CESs) which fall under the category of ecological products. This type of ecological product reflects the spiritual needs of rural ecosystems and leisure culture to meet human needs. CESs are mainly reflected in tourism and leisure activities [41], and the value of leisure tourism has been proven to bring greater ecological premiums to a certain extent [42]. Rural spatial ecological products have emerged with the rise of rural tourism. Urban consumers pursue rural natural landscapes that they cannot enjoy in the city and are willing to pay higher prices for the same products and services in the city (e.g., coffee, catering, accommodation, etc.). In fact, through consumption and experience, they return to the natural world and receive spiritual enjoyment, physical and mental pleasure, and other services to meet their spiritual and cultural needs. Therefore, intangible assets such as rural ecological resources rely on human interaction (e.g., funds, labor, buildings, etc.) to form a CES that meets human spiritual needs and aesthetics, manifesting as spatial form, defined as rural spatial ecological products in this study.

The second rationale of rural spatial ecological products results from the participation of rural ecological resources (e.g., mountains, water, fresh air, etc.) as core production factors, using rural land or vacant houses for spatial production. The theory of spatial production provides a new perspective for modern economic growth—“space” [43]. In Lefebvre’s view, early capitalism’s “spatial production” was the production of specific things in space. With the continuous proliferation and expansion of capital, more and more goods and services are exchanged in the market system. Just like social labor creates exchange value, many products directly created by non-human labor activities also have certain exchange and use value, and space has gradually become a product. He also proposed that natural space provides a means of production for spatial production, while social space can have a reverse effect on natural space [44]. Human social production practices have transformed natural space and graded it with social significance. Under the policy of integrating the three industries in China, rural areas have shifted from pure agricultural production relations to diversified functional organizations and towards a coupling interaction relationship of “people-land-industry” [45]. Rural tangible resources, social atmosphere, culture and impression, land, and space, with rural land as the material carrier and multi-dimensional full space as the container, have become products for commercial development [46]. Rural space has transformed from a single production to a production and consumption function. The inflow of urban capital and population is the foundation of rural spatial ecological product production. However, unlike the tertiary industry space in cities, the core production factors of rural spatial ecological products are not capital and labor but ecological resources. Rural spatial ecological products refer to economic activity venues where business entities use rural construction land, integrate rural areas’ unique cultural and ecological environment, and provide accommodation, catering, and other city services for tourists.

2.2. The Essence and Characteristics of Rural Spatial Ecological Products

As an organic combination of economy, ecology, and culture, rural spatial ecological products play an extremely important role in economic development and social progress and have the following characteristics.

One is ecological. Rural spatial ecological products integrate green agricultural products, a simple and peaceful life, and a beautiful natural environment, inviting urban consumers to travel, vacation, and live in rural areas. They feel the value and significance of nature for a better life in the green mountains and an ecological livable environment, and thus experience spiritual pleasure. Therefore, nature also reflects that rural spatial ecological products belong to the CESs through the classification of ecological products. At the same time, the quantity and quality of rural spatial ecological products are, to some extent, influenced by ecological resources. The demand for rural spatial ecological products gradually increases with the continuous improvement in human living standards. However, the limited availability of ecological resources leads to limited growth in the supply capacity of rural spatial ecological products, making them scarce.

The second characteristic is spatiality. Spatiality is the most essential characteristic of rural spatial ecological products. From a material perspective, rural spatial ecological products exist as a form of spatial carrier, manifested as physical spaces, which can be architectural spaces, such as rural B&Bs or health and wellness service accommodation spaces; consumption spaces, such as catering and entertainment; or open spaces, such as outdoor camping, sports expansion activities, and other consumption spaces. From a social perspective, rural spatial ecological products are social spaces that differ from natural ones. As a social product, they are processed and produced using natural spaces as resources and raw materials, according to the requirements of different societies and classes, with the goal of maximizing exchange value.

The third characteristic is monopoly. Given the major contributions of the manufacturing and real estate industries to the economy and population growth, local governments commonly opt to lease out rural land to development zones at lower prices. Using this approach to attract investment and bring rural areas into the tourism consumption market to achieve rural revitalization [47]. Consequently, construction land and nonagricultural industries have evidenced remarkable increases in rural China. Because rural ecological products are essentially spatial, they require the support of land as the foundation and can only be built on collective construction land. In rural areas, annual construction land (indicators) is a monopolistic resource, so rural ecological space products have natural monopolistic characteristics. And due to the geographical limitations of ecological resources and local culture, they have a unique geographical location in terms of natural geography.

Overall, the products and services provided by the new tertiary industry space can be exemplified by rural B&Bs. Their true appeal surpasses the similar products and services provided by cities. This is because they are located in green and picturesque rural ecological environments and are attractive for meeting consumers' spiritual pleasure needs. In this case, this type of tertiary industry space possesses ecological attributes such as rural landscapes. It undergoes spatial production and market transactions from ecological resources to ecological assets and capital [48]. Fundamentally speaking, this is the process of transforming "ecological advantages" into "product economy" in the realization of ecological product value [49], reflecting a development approach that combines ecological environment protection with economic development and rural construction. It is also the meaning of the saying that "Clear waters and green mountains are as good as mountains of gold and silver" [50].

2.3. Development Types of Rural Spatial Ecological Products

In the production process of rural spatial ecological products, the government guides business entities to carry out franchise activities while maintaining the stability of the rural ecosystem, improving resource allocation efficiency and utilization efficiency, promoting a virtuous cycle of protection and development in rural areas, and promoting rural con-

struction. The operating entity fully excavates natural and cultural resources, coordinates ecological environment protection and real estate development, invests in production factors such as funds and labor, and provides products and services for realization. The results presented by current rural construction practices can be divided into three types of spatial development: industrial space, consumption space, and residential space, which have different spatial production processes and production entities (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Development types of rural spatial ecological products: (a) Industrial space: Mingyue Village, Chengdu, Sichuan Province; (b) Consumption space: Bulao Village, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province; (c) Living space: Damao Village, Sanya, Hainan Province.

2.3.1. Industrial Space

As a modern service industry, cultural and creative industry spaces are spaces where self-employed individuals rent rural houses for creative purposes. The cultural and creative industry refers to the practical activities of cultural creativity and design services carried out by cultural and creative workers in specific rural areas. In the process of spatial production in rural areas, due to the inherent natural ecological environment and local culture of rural spaces, cultural and creative workers are attracted to settle in for “artistic creation”, thereby releasing and activating rural cultural power and promoting rural construction. The supply of rural ecological environment and local culture, led by capital input from artists, generates economic effects such as resource activation and the social benefits of improving aesthetic education for rural residents and forms unique rural aesthetic spaces, such as Qingtian in Shunde and Mingyue in Chengdu [51,52]. This represents the emergence of productive services in the modern service industry, which enhances the soft power and attractiveness of rural culture and has a specific impact on aesthetic education for indigenous villagers.

2.3.2. Consumption Space

The gentrified consumption space represents a traditional service industry, a rural gentrified consumption space mainly serving the urban population. They often occur in rural areas around metropolitan areas and are dominated by the young middle class, with a relatively fast process, for example, in rural areas such as Tangjiajia Village, Nanjing and Bulao Village, Nanjing [53,54]. This type of living space enters rural spaces in the form of capital. With the capital investment led by the urban middle class, rural housing integrates modern urban decoration styles for renovation or reconstruction. In addition, the gentrified group injects urban services into rural functions to cater to a high-grade consumer experience environment and restore the quality of life of the city. The housing functions in rural areas have expanded and are no longer limited to traditional formats such as accommodation, catering, and shops. Some new leisure and entertainment formats, such as camping and outdoor activities, have also gradually emerged.

2.3.3. Living Space

Comfortable immigrant health and wellness spaces have emerged in the rural hinterlands with distinctive cultural landscapes and healthy geographical environments induced by comfortable immigrant populations such as tourism, retirees, and wellness. The process is relatively slow in rural areas such as Changshou Village in Bama, Guangxi, and Damao Village in Sanya, Hainan [55,56]. At present, this type of space is backward-compatible and

has also appeared in the vicinity of resourceful big cities. For example, the occupancy rate of the Nanjing Employee Rehabilitation Base (rural B&Bs) in Longshang Village, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province has reached 45.95%. Comfortable immigration combines habitual living with tourism in seasonal tourism and long-term living practices, possessing the dual roles of “tourist” and “resident”. It has middle-class characteristics in terms of occupation, education, and wealth. Migration aims to lead a healthy and beautiful life, manifested as seasonal tourism and long-term living. Influenced by capital, this lifestyle service space adopts land use methods related to the urban gentry class. In the production process of such rural ecological space products, capital pursues profits in rustic space, develops high-profit production models by changing land use, increases land value, and realizes spatial appreciation.

3. Materials and Methods

Rural spatial ecological products are a type of spatial ecological product formed through spatial production in rural areas, accompanied by the flow of capital factors and rural construction. They have various spatial types and business functions, including cultural and creative industry spaces, gentrified consumption spaces, and comfortable and healthy living spaces. Compared to artistic and creative industry spaces and comfortable and healthy living spaces, the development of rural B&B spaces in gentrified consumption spaces is more common and complete. In the consumption process of urban tourists, rural B&Bs have become the most popular consumption space at present. Meanwhile, the comprehensive driving force of rural B&Bs is strong. Many new rural formats have emerged with the evolution and upgrading of the rural B&B industry. Therefore, this article takes rural B&Bs as a typical representative of rural spatial ecological products for quantitative analysis and research to explore the value performance and driving factors of rural spatial ecological products.

3.1. Study Area

This study selected Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces as its research areas. Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces are located in economically developed areas of eastern China, with superior geographical locations, pleasant climate environments, and abundant ecological resources. They are also demonstration areas for rural tourism and rural revitalization in China. At the national level, both Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province hold significant strategic positions and have always been critical regions for national development. They have an important radiating and driving effect on the entire Yangtze River Delta region. Choosing this region is conducive to promoting and applying the rural, regional collaborative development model. In terms of urbanization development, both Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province have a relatively high level of urbanization, mature development, and a good foundation for promoting integrated development with higher starting points and higher quality. Therefore, taking Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces as the research areas, the study conclusions can provide not only scientific references for rural tourism planning and decision-making in the two provinces but also certain references for rural tourism development in the whole country. The division of rural and urban areas in this study is based on the 2023 statistical zoning code and urban–rural unified classification code data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. We used categories 210 and 220 in the unified urban–rural classification code to represent rural areas and other categories as urban areas (Figure 2. The red area on the right side of Figure 2 represents the rural areas, while the blank area represents the urban areas).

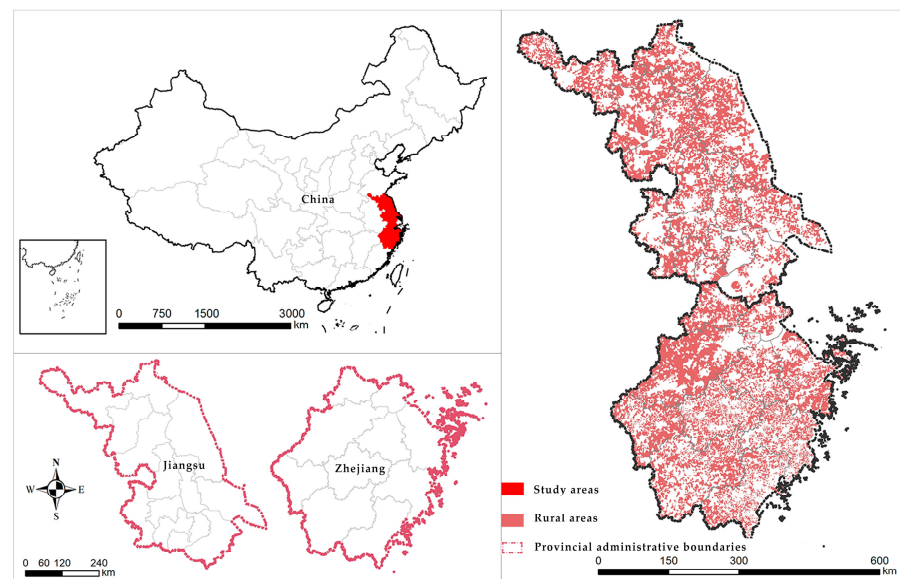


Figure 2. The division of urban and rural areas in the study area. (Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces, China).

3.2. Data Sources and Processing

We used Python to crawl the POIs and price data of B&Bs on the Ctrip platform (<https://ctrip.com/>, accessed on 28 January 2024). Ctrip is currently the largest platform in China and also the first to open an online travel service provider (OTA), ranking first in comprehensive visits. The crawled data were divided into urban and rural areas based on the determined study areas. The area feature data were cut using the unified classification code for urban and rural areas. ArcGIS cutting tools were used to classify the crawled B&B data into rural and urban areas. We identified 3112 urban B&Bs and 772 rural B&Bs in Jiangsu Province, and 3305 urban B&Bs and 3172 rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province (Figure 3) to facilitate subsequent analysis of price data comparison.

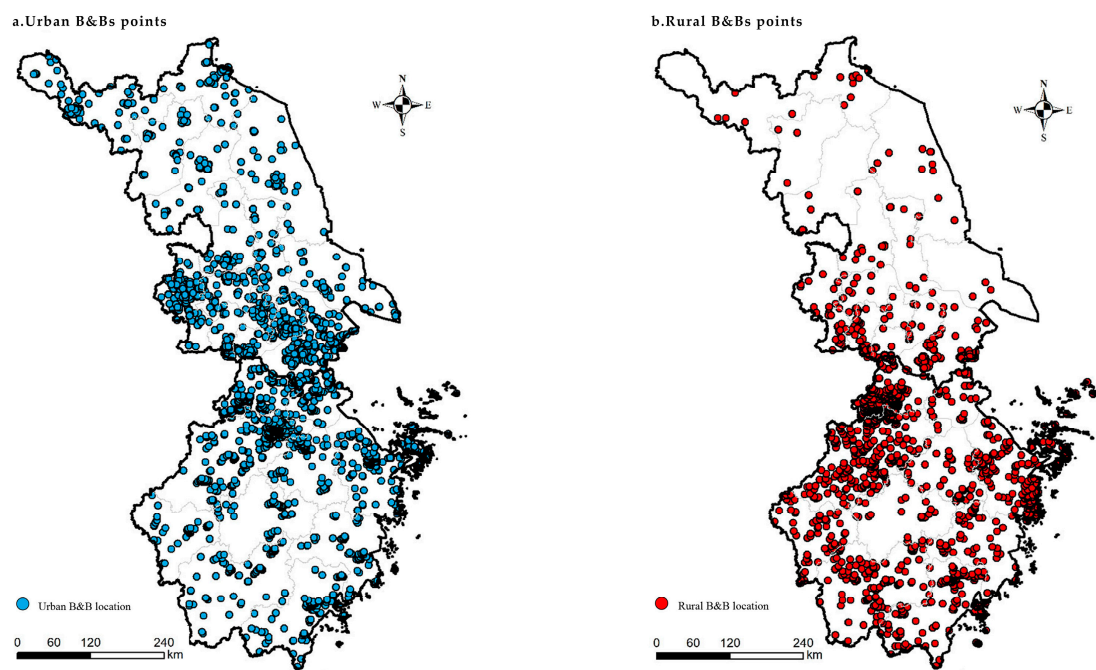


Figure 3. Data of B&Bs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces.

On this basis, the influence of differences in products and services can be excluded by comparing the prices of urban and rural B&Bs under the same brand. Therefore, we selected the leading “Huazhu” chain brand in rural tourism for further comparative analysis (<https://lvyuetravel.com/flowerBuilding.html?locale=zh-CN>, accessed on 28 January 2024). Huazhu is one of the three brands under the Lvyue Group. Lvyue Group was an internal entrepreneurship incubation project of the Qunar platform in 2016. Due to the merger of the Qunar platform and Ctrip, Lvyue Group is now Ctrip’s strategic investment company. The Huazhu brand was the earliest brand developed by the Lvyue group, and currently, there are over a thousand hotels signed and opened domestically and internationally. After screening, 121 urban B&Bs and 60 rural B&Bs in Jiangsu Province and 74 urban B&Bs and 126 rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province were identified (Figure 4), totaling 381 data points.

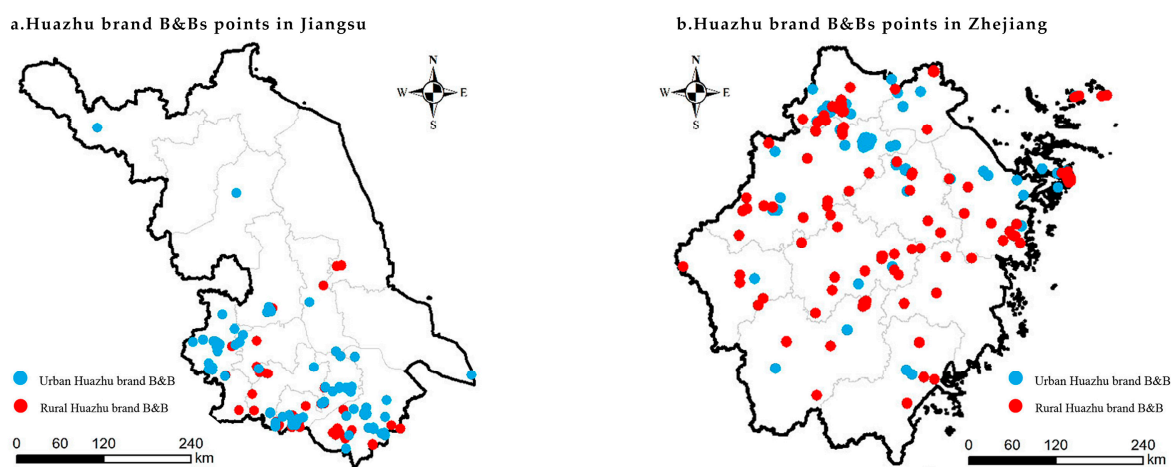


Figure 4. Data of Huazhu-brand B&Bs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces.

Considering the price differences of different types of rooms, B&B price data were selected based on standard room prices (using the consumption price of two people as the collected data and the price of single rooms exceeding two people divided proportionally). Meanwhile, considering the maximization of ecological value, the data collection for this study was conducted on 20 July 2023, during the peak summer tourism period. Statistics were conducted based on the prices of B&Bs provided on the website. To ensure the timeliness and accuracy of data updates, telephone verification and supplementation of information omission indicators on the website were conducted with B&B operators.

3.3. Methods

3.3.1. Comparative Analysis Method

This study adopts a comparative analysis method to compare and analyze the prices of B&Bs in urban and rural areas to understand the essence and development laws behind them and then recognize the value performance and driving factors of rural spatial ecological products. There are three steps: 1. From a macro perspective, compare the average prices of urban and rural homestays in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces; 2. from a meso perspective, compare the average prices of representative B&B brands from two provinces in urban and rural areas; and 3. from a micro perspective, choose one B&B under the same brand from urban and rural areas for comparison. Furthermore, in spatial analysis, when conducting the analysis, interrelated indicators were compared, such as comparing and analyzing advantageous ecological resources such as national scenic spots in the two regions, in order to find the driving factors of rural spatial ecological products.

3.3.2. Kriging Space Interpolation Method

The factors affecting housing prices are complex, and obtaining complete data on related influencing factors is difficult. Kriging spatial interpolation, also known as spatial local interpolation, is a method used for unbiased optimal estimation of regionalized variables in a finite region based on spatial autocorrelation [57]. The Kriging spatial interpolation method estimates the attribute values of unknown points within the same range based on the known point attribute values. This method has made outstanding contributions to studying the most important influencing factors of position. Therefore, the Kriging spatial interpolation method was chosen to conduct a spatial analysis of housing prices and study their spatial distribution characteristics [58]. The calculation formula is as follows:

$$Z(X_0) = \sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i Z(X_i) \quad (1)$$

Among them, $Z(X_0)$ is the estimated value of the room price for the X_0 th B&B, $Z(X_i)$ is the room price for the X_i th B&B, λ_i is the Kriging interpolation coefficient, and n is the number of B&B samples. Using the Kriging spatial interpolation method, the unified threshold (price grade) can intuitively reflect the spatial distribution differences of urban and rural B&B prices in Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province.

4. Results

4.1. Value Performance

According to the analysis above, there were various manifestations of rural spatial ecological products, among which rural B&Bs were the most representative tertiary industry space. As a kind of CES, the value of rural spatial ecological products is realized through production inputs such as ecological capital, building carriers, and labor, expressed in spatial prices. Therefore, the value performance of rural spatial ecological products was obtained by discussing the price situation of rural B&Bs (obviously shown in Figure 5). In particular, Figure 5 illustrates the following: (1) From a macro perspective, comparing the average prices of urban and rural areas in the two provinces, it is found that the per-night price of rural B&Bs is higher than that of urban B&Bs. The average price per night of rural B&Bs is CNY 264.8, an increase of 21.30% compared to the urban average price. Similarly, in Zhejiang Province, the average price of rural B&Bs is also higher than that of urban B&Bs. The average price per night for urban B&Bs is CNY 308.7, while the average price per night for rural B&Bs is CNY 438, with a 41.88% difference in average price. (2) To minimize other factors that may affect tourist consumption (e.g., capital investment, corporate planning, spatial design, etc.), a comparative analysis of prices was conducted on medium–high grade Huazhu chain brands that have matured in rural B&Bs from a meso perspective, further proves the phenomenon that rural B&B prices are higher than urban B&B prices. The price of each room of the Huazhu chain brand in Jiangsu Province reaches CNY 441.9 per night in urban areas, an increase of 22.40% compared to rural areas. Similarly, the price of chain brands in Zhejiang Province reaches CNY 538.4 per night in urban areas, an increase of 30.06% compared to rural areas.

This study takes the Huazhu brand in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, as an example and selects two sample points in urban and rural areas. These two sample points were two rural B&Bs with similar room areas, the same service function, the same beds, similar room decoration styles, and consistent ratings on the same date (Figure 6). The internal accommodation conditions of the houses in the two sample points are similar, including the placement of the hot spring pool, but the prices of rural B&Bs are more than twice that of urban B&Bs.

The comparison results raise a question: why do rural areas with weaker infrastructure and transportation tend to have higher prices for similar B&Bs than cities? Through existing research on rural tourism and an in-depth understanding of the rural environment and consumer psychology [59,60], it has been found that when rural B&Bs are offered to tourists at a price higher than the accommodation conditions of similar products and services in the city, tourists actually pay for the added value of rural natural landscapes to such tertiary

industry spaces. It can also be said to be an ecological premium. Therefore, the price paid by consumers is, to some extent, a value expression of rural spatial ecological products.

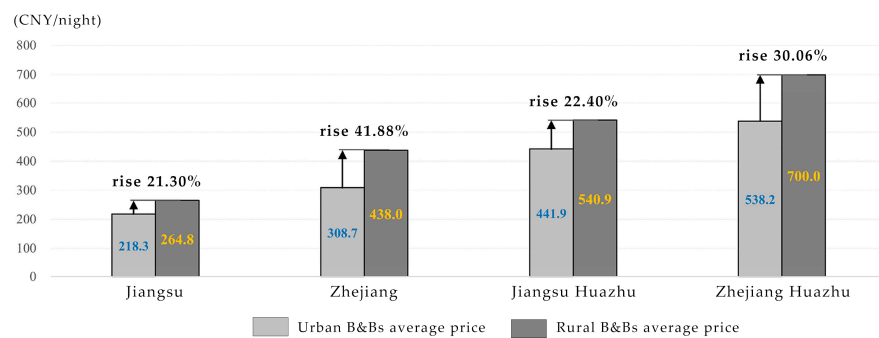


Figure 5. Comparison of average prices of urban and rural B&Bs between Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province. (Discussed in both macro and meso perspectives, macro: Jiangsu and Zhejiang; meso: Jiangsu Huazhu and Zhejiang Huazhu).

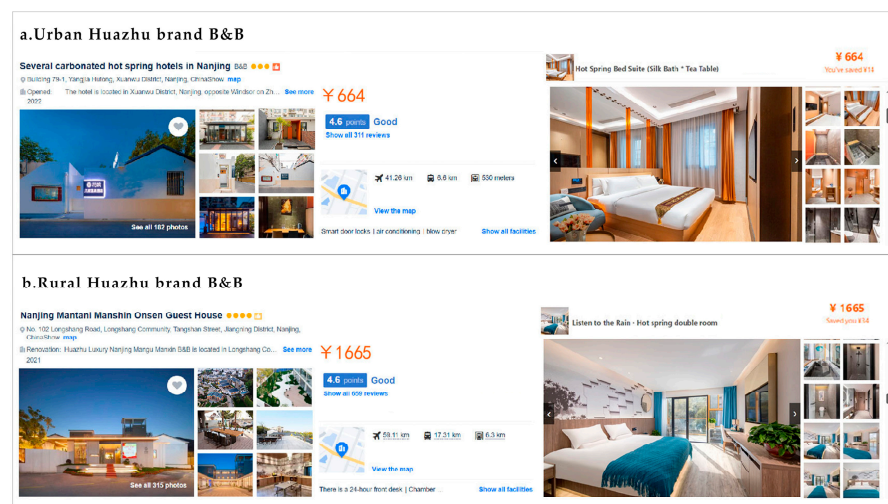


Figure 6. Comparison of B&B prices between two sample points in Nanjing, Jiangsu, China, which belong to urban and rural areas. (a) The price per night of a Huazhu B&B in the urban area of Nanjing is CNY 664 with a consumer rating of 4.6; (b) the price per night of a Huazhu B&B in the rural area of Nanjing is up to CNY 1665, while the consumer rating is also 4.6.

4.2. Driving Factors

The conclusions of rural ecological premium are drawn by comparing and analyzing the price data of B&Bs. We used the Kriging spatial interpolation method to analyze the spatial distribution characteristics of B&B prices in Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces. Due to the scope of research of the two provinces, the accuracy of our Kriging analysis may be limited for such a large interpolation area. However, our research has a relatively large amount of data, so it does not affect the spatial analysis required to support the research. As a representative space of rural spatial ecological products, we analyzed the spatial distribution of B&B prices, described the spatial distribution characteristics of rural spatial ecological products, and then determined the driving factors for the value realization of rural spatial ecological products. This study focuses on four aspects: the price distribution of urban and rural B&Bs in Jiangsu Province, the discussion of geographical differences between the two provinces, the price distribution of urban and rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province, and the distribution of national scenic spots in the two provinces, to prove the core role of ecological resources multidimensionally and progressively.

From a spatial perspective (Figure 7), the price of urban and rural B&Bs in Jiangsu Province shows a significant spatial gradient difference in southern, central, and northern Jiangsu, showing a decreasing trend from south to north. (1) The prices of urban B&Bs in northern Jiangsu are generally in the low range. Still, the prices of rural B&Bs in Suqian, Huai'an, and Yancheng cities have increased to a larger scale, which is believed to be influenced to some extent by the ecological resources of rural areas. For example, Huai'an's Hongze Lake scenic area has driven the development and construction of surrounding villages. (2) The situation in the central Jiangsu region is unique, with Yangzhou and Taizhou showing a phenomenon where urban prices are higher than rural prices. The advantageous tourism resources of these two cities are located in the city center, because these two cities have superior ecological resources located in the city center, such as the Slgradeer West Lake Scenic Area in Yangzhou and the Qinhu National Wetland Park in Taizhou. The ecological resources in rural areas have not been well developed and utilized. The prices of urban and rural B&Bs in Nantong are in a balanced state. Nantong is close to Shanghai and is, to some extent, influenced by its radiation. (3) The urbanization grade in the southern region of Jiangsu is relatively high, and the prices of urban B&Bs have increased from the low grade to the low–medium grade. Among them, the prices of urban B&Bs in the city center are relatively high. Still, the high prices are distributed in a clustered pattern, accounting for 5% of the space, with a small radiation range, because the city center has good product and service experience. In rural areas of southern Jiangsu, rural B&B prices generally belong to the medium grade, with a large radiation range, accounting for almost 60% of space. The price distribution around the Taihu Lake Scenic Area is special in southern Jiangsu. Because Taihu Lake is mainly surrounded by urban construction and development, the price of B&Bs in cities is higher than that in rural areas.

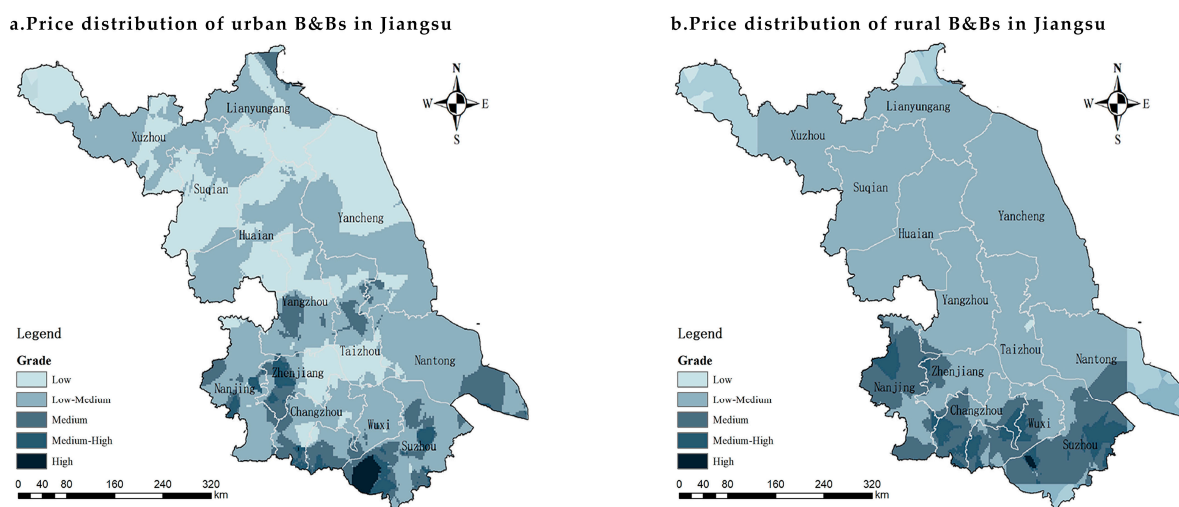


Figure 7. Price distribution of urban and rural B&Bs in Jiangsu Province: (a) urban B&Bs; (b) rural B&Bs. It is evident from a to b that prices in rural areas have increased significantly compared to those in urban areas (prices of urban and rural B&Bs divided into five levels, ranging from low to high, based on the price standards of common B&B ratings).

Significant differences exist in the natural geographical characteristics between Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province (Figure 8). Zhejiang Province is mainly characterized by mountainous and hilly terrain, with mountainous and hilly areas accounting for about 74.6% of the total area. The terrain fluctuates greatly, with the overall terrain being higher in the southwest and lower in the northeast. The highest peak in the province is Huangmaojian in the southwest, the highest peak in the Yangtze River Delta region.

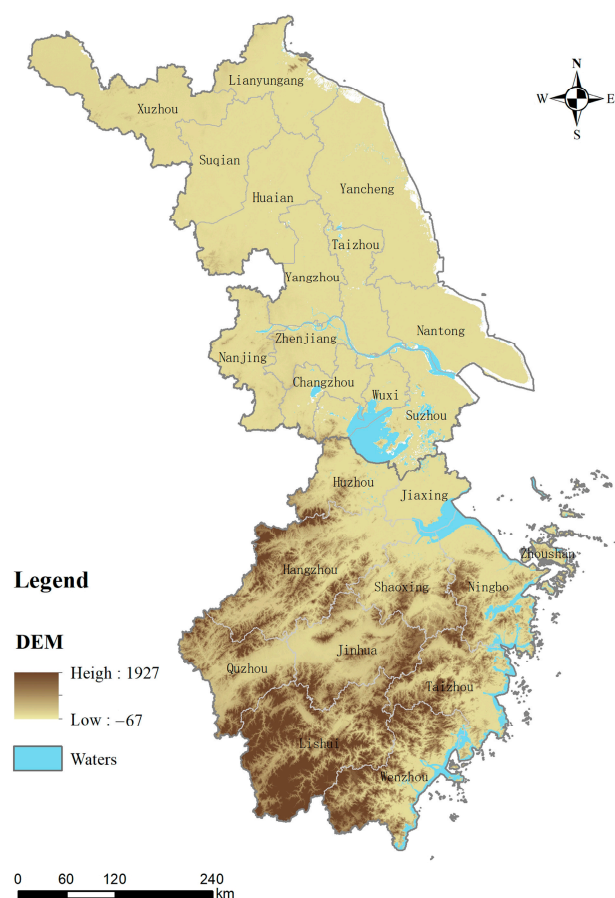


Figure 8. The topographic and geomorphological characteristics of Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces. (Spatial distribution of natural environment by comparing the topography in different parts of the two provinces).

Jiangsu Province is located in the northern part of the Yangtze River Delta, with a predominantly plain terrain, accounting for approximately 86.9% of the total area. Jiangsu Province has the highest proportion of plain area in China. The terrain of Jiangsu Province is very low and flat, with a relative height difference of less than 100 m in most areas of the province. The overall terrain is higher in the west and lower in the east, and the highest peak in the province is the Yuntai Mountain Yunu Peak, located in the northeast.

Landform is a morphological feature of the Earth's surface, which significantly impacts the distribution and utilization of resources [61]. Mountains often have greater ecological resource advantages. On the one hand, mountainous areas have a better ecological environment. The population density of mountainous areas is relatively low compared to plain areas, and the intensity of human activities and development is also lower. Most areas maintain a relatively natural and primitive natural environment, with higher forest vegetation coverage and significantly lower ecological damage and pollutant accumulation levels than plain areas. On the other hand, mountainous areas have richer ecological diversity. The vertical climate zone formed by altitude differences and the geographical isolation caused by mountain barriers bring rich climate diversity, environmental diversity, biodiversity, and landscape diversity to mountainous areas.

According to the special geography of Zhejiang Province, it is divided into North Zhejiang, South Zhejiang, Central Zhejiang, West Zhejiang, and East Zhejiang. The prices of rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province are characterized by high prices on the periphery and low prices in the middle (Figure 9). Specifically, from a spatial perspective, the northern Zhejiang region belongs to an alluvial plain with dense water networks and has

good tourism resources. Overall, the prices of urban and rural B&Bs are generally in the medium–high grade.

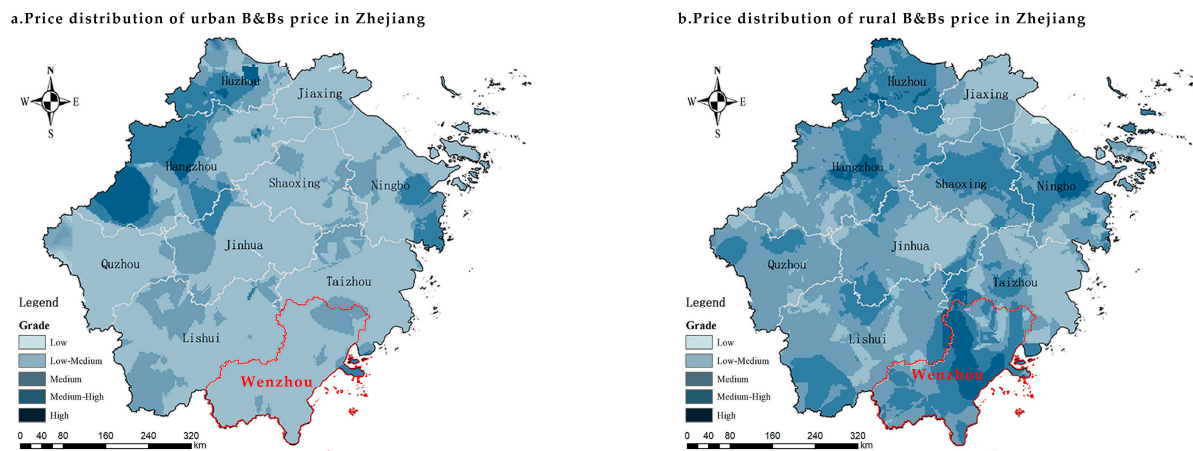


Figure 9. Price distribution of urban and rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province: (a) urban B&Bs; (b) rural B&Bs. From (a) to (b), it is evident that overall rural prices have increased compared to urban prices, especially in Wenzhou. Wenzhou is a prefecture level city in Zhejiang Province, and it is a high growth area. Red line is the boundary of Wenzhou City.

The city center of Hangzhou and Chun’an County both have extremely high prices for urban B&Bs, which are influenced by the West Lake Scenic Area and Qiandao Lake Scenic Area within the urban area, and have driven up the prices of rural B&Bs in the surrounding rural areas. In rural areas, the high-price cluster of rural B&Bs in northern Zhejiang is located in the Moganshan Scenic Area. Relying on this ecological resource advantage, the price of rural B&Bs is higher than that predicted by urban B&Bs in terms of space.

Except for northern Zhejiang, urban B&Bs in southern Zhejiang, central Zhejiang, western Zhejiang, and eastern Zhejiang are mainly distributed in low-grade and low–medium-grade categories, with low-grade prices accounting for about 35% and low–medium-grade prices accounting for about 60%. Due to the influence of terrain, the advantageous ecological resources in this area are concentrated in rural areas. Urban B&B prices are mainly distributed in the low–medium grade range. Unlike the proportion of B&B prices in cities, the price of rural B&Bs is also around 60% in the low–medium grade, but the remaining 40% is not in the low grade but distributed in the medium–high-grade and even high-grade prices. In Wenzhou of southern Zhejiang and Ningbo of eastern Zhejiang, there is a significant price gathering at high-grade prices, forming a significant price increase change.

Research has shown that the price of rural B&Bs is highly correlated with factors such as tourist attractions, location characteristics, venue space, outdoor landscape, and original ecological environments [62]. To further prove the driving factors for the price growth of rural spatial ecological products, the spatial distribution characteristics of prices are explained based on the list of national scenic spots published by the State Council (Figure 9). National scenic spots refer to areas with ornamental, cultural, or scientific value, concentrated natural and cultural landscapes, beautiful environments, and available for people to visit or engage in scientific and cultural activities. The rating standards for national scenic spots have already included considerations for fresh air, vegetation coverage, and biodiversity. Therefore, this study can fully reflect the quality and richness of ecological resources by linking national scenic spots and the spatial distribution of rural B&B prices.

From the above spatial price changes, it can be seen that overall, the prices of rural B&Bs are higher than those of urban B&Bs, and the upward grade in prices can be intuitively seen from the graph. Among them, rural high-price B&Bs have obvious scenic orientation, forming clusters in scenic spots such as Taihu Lake, Mogan Mountain, and Nanxi River.

Taking Wenzhou City in southern Zhejiang Province as an example, we can see from Figure 9a that the prices of urban B&Bs in Wenzhou City are mainly in the low and medium–low ranges. However, according to the Kriging spatial distribution valuation of rural B&B prices in Figure 9b, it is shown that the prices of rural B&Bs in the medium and even high grades are distributed, and there is a clear phenomenon that the prices of rural B&Bs in the region are higher than those in urban B&Bs. As shown in Figure 10, the high-priced spatial distribution is surrounded by multiple national-level scenic spots, including the Baizhangji Scenic Area, Fangshan Scenic Area, Yandangshan Scenic Area, and Nanxi River Scenic Area. From Figure 9a to Figure 9b, we can see a clearly higher grade of change. The stack in Figure 10 shows that high-growth areas have high-quality scenic resources around them. Therefore, it can be concluded that rural B&Bs are priced higher than urban B&Bs due to the ecological environment. From a macro perspective, when comparing the two provinces horizontally, according to the depth of the map, it can be concluded that the overall price of homestays in Zhejiang Province is higher than that in Jiangsu Province. The price growth of rural B&Bs in Zhejiang Province compared to urban B&Bs in the same region is more dramatic than that in Jiangsu Province.

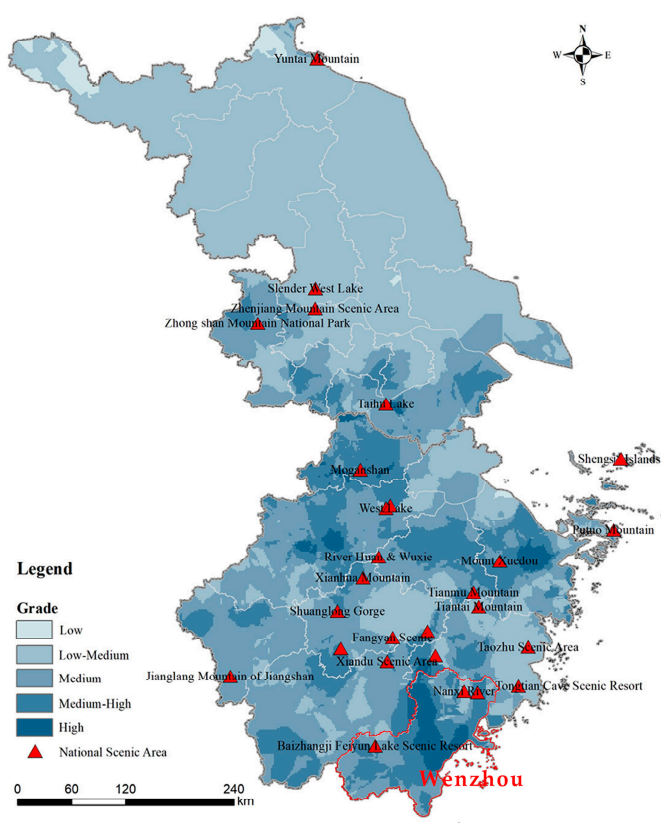


Figure 10. The spatial relationship between the distribution of rural B&B prices and national scenic spots. (Affected by rating indicators, national scenic spots can reflect ecosystem services such as vegetation coverage, biodiversity, and natural environmental quality. Therefore, in this study, the quality and richness of ecological resources can be reflected).

Based on the above analysis, this article believes that rural B&Bs generally have higher prices than urban B&Bs, and the higher prices are partly due to the ecological premium that tourists are willing to pay for the unique regional natural environment of rural areas. In addition, the spatial distribution characteristics of rural B&B prices have been summarized through an overall analysis of space. In fact, the price of rural B&Bs is influenced by their distance from ecological resources and changes. The ecological premium situation is more likely to occur in areas with ecological resource advantages, and the higher the level of ecological resources, the higher the ecological premium.

5. Discussion

5.1. Research Findings Compared with Other Studies

There have been several studies on cultural ecosystem services at home and abroad across spatial scales, such as global, regional, and urban green spaces, forests, and oceans [63–67]. There have also been studies on agricultural landscapes [68]. However, little attention has been paid to the CES of green spaces in tourist villages. This study focused on rural cultural ecosystem services. We found that a new type of tertiary space that emphasizes the interaction between ecology and human beings has emerged in rural areas. We defined this space as rural spatial eco-products. In practice, these include cultural and creative industry space, consumption space, and comfortable immigrant vacation space. Through the interpretation of the theoretical connotation and production process, it is considered a cultural ecosystem service, a cultural recreational function produced by human beings to satisfy their leisure and recreational needs (spiritual pleasure and aesthetics) through rural tourism. Culture and recreation are classified as cultural ecosystem services [26]. The acquisition of the recreational value of rural tourism CES requires the personal participation of human beings, which can be reflected in the rural landscape, tourism opportunities, spiritual pleasure, etc., which is precisely the focus of ecosystem services in rural tourism sites and is of great significance to the planning of rural tourism and the optimization of tourism landscape space. Most of the studies that have been conducted have used the direct monetized recreational travel cost method approach and the indirect monetized approach to assess the recreational value of tourist areas [69]. Therefore, we follow the monetized form of value expression to assess the value of the cultural ecosystem services of rural tourist sites through the price of the tertiary industry.

Due to better facilities, higher transportation accessibility, and more convenient business environments in cities, there is a general default that prices are higher in cities than in rural areas for the same quality and services. However, according to the data analyzed by this study, it is contrary to common sense that most rural B&Bs have higher prices than urban ones, so there must be an unknown value given to the countryside, i.e., the core contribution of ecological resources. Consumers are attracted to the rural natural landscape and willing to pay a higher price than their urban counterparts. That is to say, consumer preferences for landscapes can affect the development and pricing of rural tourism, which is consistent with most other studies on scenic spots. [70–72]. Nevertheless, there are some areas where urban B&B prices are higher than rural ones, such as Yangzhou and Taizhou, because the high-quality natural environments in these two cities are in the city centers. Hence, the value of the ecosystem services they provide falls in cities. This research finding is not in contradiction with our generalized conclusions. The current study suggests that rural landscapes generate ecological premium, and there are significant spatial differences between Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces. Zhejiang Province has a more obvious trade of a high premium than Jiangsu Province, which aligns with our expectations. Because from the perspective of topography and the resources of scenic spots, Zhejiang Province has more and higher quality ecological resources. Previous studies on seascapes have confirmed this finding that B&Bs or regions closer to the natural landscape will have higher prices [73,74].

The biggest difference between this study and existing research is that we innovatively propose a non-material form of ecological products already appearing in rural areas and define them as rural spatial ecological products. For the emergence of new tertiary industry spaces in rural areas, research is usually conducted from the perspective of spatial production. This article takes Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province, which are at the forefront of rural revitalization development in China, as an example, comparing the prices of rural B&B spaces proves the ecological premium phenomenon that occurs under rural tourism. It is believed that these new tertiary industry spaces reflect products and services that satisfy consumer spiritual pleasure; they should be regarded as cultural ecosystem services products under the category of ecological products. It is expanding the boundaries of cultural services, enriching research on the realization of ecological product value, and

explaining the phenomenon of rural industrial transformation and spatial reconstruction from a new perspective.

5.2. Research Limitations

This study has the following limitations: (1) Although an overarching concept is proposed, the quantitative analysis only considers one of the rural spatial eco-products, namely the rural B&B. We chose this consumer space because it is currently one of the most popular forms of consumption under rural tourism. Nevertheless, there are also a large number of rural spatial eco-products, such as cultural and creative industry spaces (e.g., cultural and creative goods, handicrafts, etc.), gentrification consumption spaces (e.g., camping, catering, etc.), and comfortable immigrant health and wellness spaces (e.g., house price, etc.), which have only been summarized in the current study in terms of overall categorization, and have not yet been analyzed in detail to understand rural spatial eco-products better. (2) This study analyzes the relationship between ecological resources and B&B prices. Based on objective facts, selects a large amount of data to prove the premium of ecological resources. However, due to the large study area, more precise and complex accessibility calculations are not used to measure the impact of scenic spots on rural tourism destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to select more representative regions for detailed research in the future.

5.3. Practical Implications

Analyzing the relationship between rural and urban areas on the outskirts of metropolitan areas can provide a reference for rural development and rural revitalization in the context of rapid urbanization [75]. This study contributes to a more efficient allocation of resources. It helps to address some of the negative impacts (e.g., lack of gametogenous motivation, inequitable distribution among multiple agents) in rural construction. Based on the study results, some suggestions are made to improve the efficiency of tourism activities in rural areas in the future: (1) Spatial differences are objectively existing differences, and we should respect this trade to make more reasonable resource allocation. The urban–rural and regional differences in the distribution of B&B prices suggest that guidance for the development of rural tourism needs to be tailored to the local conditions and be more diversified. In the practice of rural development around metropolitan areas, priority attention should be given to rural areas that are closer to or more exposed to high-level scenic spots. (2) The suitability assessment of rural spatial ecological product development can guide the rational allocation of production factors such as funds and labor required for rural construction, especially scarce resources such as land. (3) To enhance the gametogenous power of rural development, a better distribution system can be formulated in the process of rural income distribution. As the core production input factor, ecological resources should be distributed accordingly.

6. Conclusions

With the promotion of rural tourism, the transformation of rural industries has become an important way to let the rural economy flourish and achieve rural revitalization strategies. Some new types of tertiary industry spaces have emerged, mainly focused on leisure and tourism activities. The urban community characteristics of rural areas around big cities are increasingly prominent, and rural areas are gradually undergoing industrial transformation, spatial reconstruction, and other phenomena.

Although these phenomena have received increasing attention from spatial planners, researchers, and local governments, some negative problems (e.g., insufficient endogenous driving force and contradictions in the distribution of benefits) that have emerged in current practice have led to unsustainable rural development. By analyzing the phenomenon and interpreting the theory, this study considers that this new tertiary industry space appearing in rural areas is an ecological product that connotes ecological value added. The research of CESs should be used to satisfy consumers' spiritual needs, which are defined as a

rural spatial ecological product. Rural spatial ecological products have dual properties and three characteristics, among which spatiality is the essence of rural spatial ecological products. We summarize three development types of rural spatial ecological products by current practice. Then, using B&Bs as typical samples for analysis, this study has two main findings: Firstly, the value of rural spatial eco-products is reflected in the price that urban consumers are willing to pay for rural natural landscapes, and such a consumer price belongs to the ecological premium. Secondly, the prices of rural spatial ecological products differ significantly at the spatial scale, and such differences are related to local ecological resources. The closer the ecological resources or the richer the ecological resources in the neighborhood, the higher the value of the rural spatial ecological products. This study provides reflections on the rational allocation of the limited resources needed to build the countryside, which helps to optimize the spatial planning of rural ecotourism and enhance the dynamics of gametogenous rural development. At the same time, it theoretically expands the research results of ecosystem cultural services.

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