

## THE REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL CULTURE OF RURAL HOMESTAY TOURISM IN CHINA

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**Abstract:** Rural homestay tourism is indispensable part of rural tourism in China, which provide not only bed and breakfast, but also transportation, activities. During the integration of cultural heritage and tourism, the practitioners of rural homestays follow suit, which made the problems of similar activities and urbanization appear. With the qualitative research of literature review, some successful case studies of rural homestay tourism in different countries and areas were analyzed. Traditional agricultural culture was explored in the sustainable development in rural homestay tourism. As an agricultural country, traditional agricultural culture is part of China's civilization. Traditional agricultural culture refers to the seasonal nature that the farmers follow to complete agricultural activities, which show the attitude and value of Chinese to nature and life. Owing to its own uniqueness, 24 solar terms, the representative of agricultural custom culture, were officially included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2016. Developing the authenticity of traditional agricultural culture with the help of information and communication technology (ICT), rural homestay tourism can also boost the revitalization of traditional agricultural culture and rural economy.

**Keywords:** Rural homestay tourism; traditional agricultural culture; authenticity; revitalization

### INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of researchers from developing countries are working on community-based rural homestays, especially in the Asia Pacific region (Janjua et al., 2021). Under the Rural Revitalization Strategy, an increasing number of Chinese villages have begun to build rural homestays to promote rural industrial transformation and drive local economic recovery (Bi et al., 2023).

Homestays can offer a variety of interesting activities related to the culture and social life of the local community (Demolingo, 2021), and its capability in creating a short relaxing break in a homelike atmosphere allowing them to experience host culture and pristine nature in more authentic way (Yasami et al., 2017). Virtual cultural heritage tourism has a similar social education effect as realistic cultural heritage tourism and extends involvement theory in the virtual context, promoting the practice of virtual cultural heritage tourism (Ji et al., 2023).

In April, 2024, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China has launched 82 national high-quality rural tourism routes with the theme "Being Free in the Countryside in Seasonal Festivals", which means "Beautiful Scenery of the Countryside in Four Seasons", taking tourists into their rural houses in different seasons, feeling long-history cultural charm, and appreciating the life aesthetics of the changing seasons. Since rural homestay tourism is a new trend in village tourism, many researches were under conduction. It is worth exploring the rural homestay with cultural tourism, especially traditional agricultural culture.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Rural homestay tourism

In many successful rural homestay destinations of Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and India, community level codes of conduct together with cooperation of stakeholders and regulations of government authorities have helped in this regard (Acharya et al., 2013). Homestays are an attractive alternative tourism product to portray the cultural richness in India. It appeals more often searching for local lifestyle experience, novelty, personalized service and authentic social interactions (Chakraborty, 2020).

#### Traditional agricultural culture

The countryside is rich in China's rich traditional culture, but also there are many cultural heritages. In the city, people are busy working day and night, every day in the high-pressure environment of life, the city is to enhance the economic level of our country's main areas, in the city life of the people, the modern atmosphere is more intense, but also lost a lot of traditional cultural customs, in the festival time without the past strong holiday atmosphere, it is difficult to enjoy the beautiful natural scenery, so people living in

the city during the holidays, hope to even go into the countryside to feel the real feeling, purify their hearts, feel the charm of nature (Sun, 2020). The design and planning of parent-child tourism project in Baisheng Village of Zigong City combine elements of farming culture, art and countryside, and create a modern parent-child tourism project suitable for the cultural characteristics of Zigong City, based on the traditional agricultural development in Zigong City, to create a green, artistic, local modern creative pastoral (Deng, 2020).

### **Authenticity**

Homestay operators should fully exploit local cultural values while designing their homestays; homestay should reflect the identity and perception of an authentic rural community-based product (Janjua et al., 2021b). Aesthetic experience can be used by destination managers in tourists' perceptions of existential authenticity (Genc et al., 2023). It is important for digital tourism platforms to develop more effective optimization strategies, which can help managers to create more attractive, authentic and immersive tourism models to enhance tourist satisfaction and cultivate cultural protection intention (Li et al., 2024).

### **Revitalization**

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, suggestions are proposed to enhance the cultural connotation of rural tourism products, create well-known homestay brands, and enhance brand awareness and reputation, so as to drive rural tourism and promote the economic development (Liu, 2023). Through the participation and cooperation of multiple subjects, the employment, income increase and the development of rural tourism of local villagers can be promoted, and the protection and publicity of rural culture will be realized. The comprehensive development of local agriculture, culture and tourism through the operation of homestay has laid a solid foundation for the deep integration of agriculture, culture and tourism industry, and provides theoretical basis and practical reference for rural revitalization (Simeng et al., 2023).

## **METHODS**

### **Research subject**

The research was aimed to revive traditional agricultural culture of rural homestay tourism in China based on some successful case studies in Asian countries. The methods of revitalizing traditional agricultural culture were under discussion, hoping to learn the successful experience of rural homestay tourism.

### **Data collection**

With Google scholar, the keywords, like "rural homestay" "agricultural culture" "Asia" "comparison" "India" "Japan" "Nepal" "Thailand" "Malaysia" "Indonesia" "China", were under research. Based on the successful examples in Asian countries, the experience and benefits within 10 years are concluded for sustainable development of rural homestay tourism in China.

### **Data analysis**

Distinctive cultural rural homestay programs were conducted in different Asian countries, hoping to preserve and inherit its own uniqueness.

#### **1. In India**

A tourist looking forward to staying in rural homestay primary focus would be to enjoy the 'rurality' of homestay and the native inhabitants. Tourists are thoughtfully interested in cultural exchange, indulging in the flavors of the Himalayas in many forms- food, drinks, cuisines, habits, lifestyle and various other activities. Homestay accommodation also acts as a reliable and integrated promotional tool to augment cultural as well as rural tourism (Singh et al., 2021). Home stay tourism not only gives economic benefits to rural communities but also promotes local art, traditions, culture, architecture and food habits. Rural homestays provide tourists an opportunities for a number of activities such as taking a tour of the village to know local history and insights, trekking, getting practical learning about weaving silk or cotton cloth, indulgence in farming, learning local skills such as cooking local cuisine, experiencing house boat sailing, camel rides, elephant rides, interaction with tribes and face-off with wild life (Prithvi Raj Sanyal et al., 2023).

#### **2. In Nepal**

Tourists get clued up about local customs, knowledge, and culture through the homestay program, where locals teach visitors about local customs, knowledge, and culture through the homestay program. Religion, vivid customs, weaving, games, musical instruments, attire, architecture, collecting fruit in the orchard, and engaging in farming are all part of the culture. The same goes for knowledge of traditional herbal remedies and other indigenous resource management practices, as well as local history and folklore. The homestay program aims to help participants better understand another traditions, cultures, and ways of thinking by getting involved in and experiencing locals' daily lives. It provides a chance to educate visitors about the target locations' socioeconomic and cultural problems (Regmi et al., 2023). In socio-cultural development of Tharu people's cultural performances facing urbanization, homestay programmes in the Tharu village of Kailali district have accelerated their financial advancement chiefly by their exceptionally distinct social-cultural legacies of rituals and performances (Dangaura, 2021).

### 3. In Thailand

Farmers must undertake agritourism innovation based on the community context and location of farm by innovation. By conducting a survey in Thailand, we found the following innovative tourism innovations: animal farming tourism, marine fishing farms, flower garden tourism, garden innovation and architecture, agricultural technology, and tourism in rice fields, picturesque salt fields, coconut plantations and strawberry farms, highland tourism, innovations in agritourism and accommodation, tourism that combines spirituality, and city simulators. Each tourist attraction has its own unique characteristics and different ways to attract tourists through agritourism innovation (Damnet et al., 2024).

### 4. In Malaysia

The Malaysian homestay program can be regarded as a rural-cultural-community based tourism product, and it was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia in 1988 as an effort to diversify the tourism products through the provision of an alternative accommodation for tourists (Kasuma et al., 2016). A variety of packages and activities are offered to tourists during their visits. These tourists live with a local family in a rural home and learn about close-knit family relationships, enjoy home-cooked food, and discover the simple lifestyle of the countryside (Muslim et al., 2017). The government stakeholders need to encourage the homestay providers to increase the viability of their traditional Malay food (TMF) to enhance and promote the uniqueness of their TMF to the tourists so that TMF can be the leading local products in their homestay programmed. Besides, the stakeholders need to review the marketing materials for the homestay programmed by publicizing more information about their TMF to heighten the local food awareness among tourists and thus safeguard not only the TMF but also the heritage, skills and ways of life of the local people in the homestay (Ismail, 2020).

### 5. In Japan

Small-scale farmers and rice farming communities have traditionally been important features of Japanese farming villages, as in other Asian countries (Inoue et al., 2024). Implementing Japanese hospitality practices, such as cultural immersion, attention to detail, and customization, can significantly elevate the quality of homestays to attract traveler's seeking authentic and enriching experiences (Abdullah et al., 2024).

### 6. In Indonesia

There are three indicators in the absorption of local culture, namely: the first, the system of values / norms inside and outside the homestay environment, such as welcoming guests in a friendly manner, inviting guests by showing the thumb symbol facing forward politely and so on. The dual systems of activities for the homestay owner community, such as maintaining the cleanliness, safety, and comfort of the homestay environment by working together, and the third system of artifacts that are the work of the homestay owner community, such as the results of farming, namely maize, batik making clothes, painting umbrellas, processing coffee, processing sugar palm into sugar, making light snacks such as getuk and sawut (Djati et al., 2022). Many people in tourist villages agreed on the concept that communal homestay could be a forum for the preservation of the culture, customs, and norms of the local community. In the aspect of cultural heritage conservation, homestay businesses are considered capable of providing the function of protecting and preserving customs, arts, culture, religious traditions, and languages. The management of this communal homestay is considered to create social interaction, cooperation and reduce forms of unhealthy competition (Takaendengan et al., 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are some problems of rural homestays in China. China has initially established an attractive and competitive agricultural, cultural and tourism industry system. However, the lack of characteristic development, insufficient industrial integration and brand marketing system have become the main shortcomings restricting the sustainable development of agriculture, culture and tourism industry (Fan et al.,

2022). Although the homestay industry is developing rapidly under the current economic model in Heyuan, there are still a series of problems, such as the scattered distribution of homestays, imperfect product support, serious homogeneity of homestay products, uneven service quality, and insufficient interaction between guest-host and tourists (Feng, 2022). It is a popular concept that developing rural homestays with local culture. Developing rural homestays with local wisdom and resources is a task for all the stakeholders. In China, “24 solar terms” is becoming the new theme of rural homestays in 2024. The sustainable and innovative development of rural homestay tourism is under research in the following four ways. They are stakeholder involvement, authenticity research, unique rural homestay programs, and digital marketing promotion.

### **1. Stakeholder involvement**

The stakeholders should share the responsibility of preservation and inheritance of traditional agriculture tourism. The local government should follow the national promotion to support the new theme as the policymaker, especially setting the national standards and criteria for the rural homestays in case of tourism risks. It is necessary to negotiate with different stakeholders for local government, because there are 24 solar terms in traditional agricultural culture, which is in a huge amount of number. Only with community-based tourism, rural homestay with traditional agricultural culture can be arranged reasonably, which can increase the length of stay and revisit. For the institute and researchers, it is necessary to form the sustainable model of rural homestays. Training lectures and seminars must be taken to have the blueprint and share the experience. For the owners and practitioners, the concept of self-reliance should be rooted, which means they have to design rural homestays in a creative and innovative way and put the theory into practice.

### **2. Authenticity research**

It is a possible way to develop rural homestay with traditional agricultural culture, which can make local wisdom alive and inherit it into daily life. Theory analysis is necessary, so literature reviews, such as, journals, documents, records and legends, will be included. To ensure the authenticity of traditional agricultural culture, interviews must be conducted with the inheritors, villagers, homestay owners and practitioner, and tourists. When the rurality meets the tourists' satisfaction, rural homestays with traditional agricultural culture will be developing sustainably. The key point of authenticity is the content. The tangible, such as, activities, objects, and the intangible, like, legends, customs, and value of life should be collected.

### **3. Unique rural homestay programs**

According to the representative of traditional agricultural culture, 24 solar terms, which are the guidelines for farming and daily life based on the sun's motion. there are 6 terms in spring, summer, autumn, and winter respectively. It is necessary to design the tourist factors, such as, accommodation, attractions, amenities, and activities with traditional agricultural culture, which can be a unique experience for tourists, because different parts of China have its unique nature and wisdom. From the structure of the homestays to the ornaments of the room, it is better to renovate the style of traditional architecture to show the local wisdom to keep the crops and food at home. When designing the activities and food offerings, it is necessary to explore the knowledge about nature and psychology. Tourists can experience agricultural activities during the change of the sun in the whole year, hoping to seek the meaning of life, like, planting in spring, growing in summer, harvesting in autumn and storing in winter. Additionally, promotion and marketing of local traditional fairs, festivals, exhibitions or even local shops near the homestay accommodation can add value to the experience of the tourists. In a word, with the local wisdom, unique rural homestay programs can combine with folk legend, ethnic customs, literature works and sports in a colorful way for tourists to enjoy the nature and regain the power.

Table 1. Unique Rural Homestay Programs with 24 Solar Terms

Date (Gregorian Calendar)	Name	Activity and Custom	Food	Unique Rural Homestay Programs
Feb.3 <sup>rd</sup> or4 <sup>th</sup> , in spring	Start of Spring (Li Chun)	kite-flying; balancing eggs upright; ceremony to greet spring; appreciating plum blossoms.	“biting the spring”; eating spring pancakes, spring rolls, or a few mouthfuls of carrots.	ceremony to greet spring; making fabric swallows; drawing traditional Chinese landscape painting.
Feb.18 <sup>th</sup> or19 <sup>th</sup> , in spring	Rain Water (Yu Shui)	finding godfather.	nutritious porridge with Chinese herb.	irrigation knowledge.
Mar.5 <sup>th</sup> or6 <sup>th</sup> , in spring	Insects Awaken (Jing Zhe)	sacrificing white tiger; “beat the villain”.	pear; duck blood; spinach; aloes; celery; Chinese yam; lotus seed.	insect knowledge and agriculture
Mar.20 <sup>th</sup> or21 <sup>st</sup> , in spring	Spring Equinox (Chun fen)	kite-flying and outings; balancing eggs upright; adjusting their planting schedules and field management.	seasonal vegetables.	kite-making; field- observation; planting.
Apr.4 <sup>th</sup> or5 <sup>th</sup> , in spring	Pure Brightness (Qing Ming)	sweeping ancestors’ tombs; sowing and cultivation activities; spring outings, flying kites.	Green rice ball; Cudweed herb rolls.	reflection on values of filial piety and family bonds.
Apr.19 <sup>th</sup> or20 <sup>nd</sup> , in spring	Grain Rain (Gu Yu)	sowing rice seedlings and other grain crops, picking Grain Rain tea leaves, pruning fruit trees, thinning flower buds, and pollinating tree and crops.	Tea; Chinese toon sprout.	sowing seedlings; legend of Cang jie, the “Sage of Character Creation”; tea ceremony.
May.5 <sup>th</sup> or6 <sup>th</sup> , in summer	Start of Summer (Li Xia)	pest control, fertilization, and intensified irrigation; adorned with multicolored silk threads; egg dueling game; weighting.	five colorful varieties of beans and grains; cherries, green plums, soybeans, garlic sprouts.	welcoming summer rituals; insect encyclopedia.
May.20 <sup>th</sup> or21 <sup>st</sup> , in summer	Grain Buds (Xiao Man)	weeding and fertilizing;	Bitter vegetables; cucumbers, watermelons, tomatoes,	reflection on maintaining a modest and unsatisfied mindset in life and work.
Jun.5 <sup>th</sup> or6 <sup>th</sup> , in summer	Grain in Ear (Mang Zhong)	harvesting, threshing, and drying wheat in the north; “double rush” (rushing to harvest early rice, rushing to plant late rice) in the south; “seeing off the flower god”.	having bayberries and plum syrup in the south; in the north, eating cold noodles and drinking mung bean soup.	growing and harvesting the crops; custom ritual “seeing off the flower god”.
Jun.21 <sup>st</sup> or22 <sup>nd</sup> , in summer	Summer Solstice (Xia Zhi)	ancestral worship, hanging mugwort leaves and wearing sachets to prevent mosquito bites.	noodles, wontons, herbal tea and mung bean soup to relieve summer heat.	making sachets with mugwort leaves; collecting herbs.

Jul.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in summer	Minor Heat (Xiao Shu)	receive the Sanfutie; outing.	the rice newly harvested; dumplings or noodles;	firefly-admiring; lotus flower admiring; making the Sanfutie.
Jul.22 <sup>nd</sup> or23 <sup>rd</sup> , in summer	Major Heat (Da Shu)	sending the Major Heat ship.	grass jelly	cricket fighting.
Aug.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in autumn	Start of Autumn (Li Qiu)	gathering crops.	towel gourd; white gourd; bitter gourd; meat; dumpling; peach.	harvest.
Aug.22 <sup>nd</sup> or23 <sup>rd</sup> , in autumn	End of Heat (Chu Shu)	millet, paddy rice all get mature; welcoming Autumn; Fishing Festival; time for night-blooming	duck; pear.	harvest; floating River Lantern; honoring ancestor.
Sep.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in autumn	White Dew (Bai Lu)	sacrificing to Da Yu; playing with swallow carts.	homemade wine; sweet potato; grape; Ten "white" herbal medicines; tea.	knowledge about taming floods by regulating rivers and watercourses.
Sep.22 <sup>nd</sup> or23 <sup>rd</sup> , in autumn	Autumn Equinox (Qiu Fen)	harvest, ploughing and planting; sacrificing to the moon; enjoy osmanthus.	having Qiucan (an autumn vegetable); crab	the Farmers' Harvest Festival; standing eggs on end; poem appreciating.
Oct.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in autumn	Cold Dew (Han Lu)	to-be-ripe autumn crops.	pomegranate; hawthorn; chrysanthemum wine;	fishing; hiking; making kipper of Miao ethnic minority.
Oct.23 <sup>rd</sup> or24 <sup>th</sup> , in autumn	Frost's Descent (Shuang Jiang)	legend of Frost's Descent, Qing Nv.	persimmon; date; apple; pear; duck; chestnut.	Frost's Descent Festival.
Nov.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in winter	Start of Winter (Li Dong)	sacrificing to ancestors.	dumpling: chicken, duck, beef, mutton, and fish, which are usually stewed with the four traditional Chinese medicines.	ceremony of "welcoming the winter"; Yifan Festival of Mulam ethnic minority.
Nov.22 <sup>nd</sup> or23 <sup>rd</sup> , in winter	Minor Snow (Xiao Xue)	make preparations	cabbage with bean curd soup, spinach with bean curd soup and mutton with radish soup; glutinous rice cakes;	making preserved pork; pickled vegetables
Dec.7 <sup>th</sup> or8 <sup>th</sup> , in winter	Major Snow (Da Xue)	increased nitrogen in soil can be absorbed with snow melting by crops quicker; pest killing by the freezing snow water	lamb; porridge	plum blossoms admiring; making sausages
Dec.22 <sup>nd</sup> or23 <sup>rd</sup> , in winter	Winter Solstice (Dong Zhi)	offering nine-layer cakes to ancestors.	dumpling; wonton; nut; red-bean and glutinous rice.	The Winter Solstice Festival.
Jan.5 <sup>th</sup> or6 <sup>th</sup> , in winter	Minor Cold (Xiao Han)	stocking up for the New Year.	Huangyacai; sticky rice; Laba porridge	making Spring Festival couplets, New Year pictures, papercuts for window decoration; Ice play

Jan.20 <sup>th</sup> or21 <sup>st</sup> , in winter	Major Cold (Da Han)	preparing for the New Year.	dispelling cold cake; fried spring rolls;	hanging sesame straw; doing winter sports
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#### 4. Digital marketing promotion

With the penetration of information and communication technology (ICT) into daily life, digital marketing promotion can draw attention of all-age-level tourists, especially Gen Z and aged generation. For Gen Z, travelling videos, journals from social media, like Tik Tok, Xiaohongshu, Instagram, Facebook, and marketing promotion applications and platforms by tourists, owners, and government about unique rural homestays can increase their curiosity, but for aged generation, it is a memorable experience of cherishing the past. It is advisable to educate the tourists with knowledge about agriculture development, planting procedures, skills, products, tools, customs and important figures. Creating seasonal scenes as tourism IP to share the good memory on the spot. Above all, rural homestay tourism develops with digital marketing promotion can accelerate the popularity of traditional agricultural culture, which can make a prompt tourist-host communication pre-tour, during tour and post-tour.



Figure 1. The Revitalization of Traditional Agricultural Culture in Rural Homestay Tourism in China

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Theoretical implications

The research explored the sustainable way to develop rural homestay tourism in China. Based on the new trend of “24 solar terms” as a theme tour route, the ways to revitalize traditional agricultural culture mainly are focused on four aspects. Following collaborative management with stakeholder involvement and digital marketing promotion, the unique rural homestay programs are designed to preserve and inherit authenticity of traditional agricultural culture.

### 2. Practical implications

With the revitalization of traditional agricultural culture, rural homestay tourism in China can explore the innovative methods to meet tourist experience and satisfaction. With the development of rural homestay tourism, the entrepreneurs can be increased, infrastructure of the rural areas improving, social problems solving, like left-behind child, empty-nest aged. In conclusion, the tourists and practitioners can benefit from the sustainable development of rural homestays.

### 3. Limitations

The research is not free from limitations. The research is focused on qualitative research. The comparative research of rural homestays is limited among some typical Asian countries. More case studies and quantitative research will be conducted in the further research, especially the detailed information in China, especially the agriculture knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

Rural homestay tourism has great potential to help the living environment, job opportunities, hence rural economy. With authentic agricultural culture involvement, sustainable development of rural homestay will be standardized managing in an educational and digital way in further research. The unique rural homestay programs can be created with local wisdom, natural resources, ethnic customs, which can make tourist experience the rural homestay tourism in a physical and psychological way, hoping to pursue the well-being of life.

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