

Research on the Relationship between the Lotus Cave Art Village and Population Mobility

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Abstract

Rural revitalization has emerged as a key strategic initiative in the new era, with population mobility playing a crucial role in shaping rural development. This study focuses on the art-driven revitalization of Lotus Cave Village, where the interplay between art and the countryside has created a synergistic relationship: art enriches the countryside, and the countryside, in turn, revitalizes art. The research aims to explore the dynamics of population mobility within this context, examining the characteristics and motivations that drive such movement. Through an analysis of the village's artistic transformation, the study uncovers how population mobility influences and supports rural art initiatives. The findings highlight the role of population mobility in facilitating rural art, and the paper concludes by proposing strategies for the protection and sustainable development of Lotus Cave Art Village, with a focus on leveraging population mobility to enhance cultural preservation and rural vitality.

Keywords: population mobility, rural revitalization, rural art, Lotus Cave Village

1. Introduction

The Lotus Cave Village, located in General Village, Qitang Town, Bishan District, Chongqing, China, is an area rich in cultural and historical significance (Jiao et al., 2022). In recent years, as Bishan District has been designated as a national pilot area for urban-rural integration, it has effectively responded to the call for a culturally strong nation by revitalizing rural areas through the integration of art and culture. This approach has not only infused the rural landscape with cultural and artistic vitality but has also provided new momentum for rural revitalization.

Population mobility plays a crucial role in the transformation of rural areas, particularly in the context of rural art development. Since the reform and opening, urban expansion has led to significant urban-rural disparities, contributing to a hollowing out of rural population structures and an increase in aging populations. This demographic shift has resulted in the migration of skilled professionals and the redistribution of resources. Scholars such as Wu (2022), Xie and Li (2020), and Wang and Chen (2024) have discussed the complex relationship between urbanization, rural labor migration, and rural revitalization, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities that arise from these trends. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that implementing the rural revitalization strategy requires “cultivating a team of professionals who understand agriculture, love the countryside, and care for farmers” (2021-02-22). Chen (2019) subsequently suggested that fully leveraging human capital is essential, including building a high-quality team of rural workers, attracting young talent to return home and start businesses, and activating the wealth-generating potential of local talents to boost rural revitalization. In summary, many scholars have focused on the relationship between rural revitalization and population mobility.

This study focuses on how artistic villages like the Lotus Cave Village can strategically harness population mobility to develop policies that effectively distribute resources, enhance the rural economy, and promote cultural growth. By examining the intersection of rural revitalization and population mobility, this research aims to provide valuable insights and practical strategies that can contribute to the successful implementation of rural revitalization initiatives and the construction of modernized rural communities.

2. Population Mobility in the Lotus Cave Art Village

2.1 Characteristics of Population Mobility

2.1.1 Characteristics of Inflowing Population

Since the Lotus Cave began its transformation into an artistic village, the inflowing population has primarily consisted of two groups: long-term settlers, including artists and cultural creatives, and short-term visitors, such as art enthusiasts, tourists, and temporary residents participating in cultural activities. These artists and designers have established their studios and galleries within the village, gradually creating a community rich in cultural creativity. The influx of these outsiders has not only introduced new cultural elements but also spurred local economic development. Many artists display and sell their works to visiting tourists, forming a burgeoning art market. Additionally, with the active involvement of cultural institutions, regular art exhibitions and festivals are held, attracting the return of outflowing youth and further enhancing the village's visibility and appeal.

2.1.2 Characteristics of Outflowing Population

During the transformation of Lotus Cave into an artistic village, many local young and middle-aged residents chose to leave for work. This trend was particularly pronounced in the initial stages of the village's transformation when the local economy was underdeveloped, and agricultural income was low. Many young people had to leave their hometowns in search of better employment opportunities and living conditions in cities. However, as the village evolved and developed, this trend began to slow. Nevertheless, due to the influx of outsiders and the commercialization of the village, the cost of living for residents started to rise, especially with significant increases in land and housing prices. Some residents chose to sell or rent out their land and homes to outside investors, moving to lower-cost areas or cities themselves. This "passive outflow" has led to a gradual decrease in the local population, particularly among the younger demographic.

In contrast to the outflow of young and middle-aged residents, the elderly population of Lotus Cave has experienced different migration patterns. Some elderly residents have moved to cities with their children, while others have chosen to remain in the village. For families that sold or rented out land and houses, elderly residents typically move to cities with their children to enjoy better living conditions and healthcare. However, those who cannot or do not wish to leave the village remain, contributing to the "left-behind elderly" phenomenon. This retention of elderly residents has altered the social structure of Lotus Cave, leading to a gradually increasing proportion of elderly residents. Meanwhile, the outflow of young and middle-aged residents has created pressing social issues concerning the daily care and emotional well-being of the remaining elderly population.

2.2 Drivers of Population Mobility

2.2.1 Policy Support and Infrastructure Improvement

In recent years, various levels of government have introduced a series of policies supporting the development of the cultural and creative industries, covering financial support, tax incentives, and talent introduction. These policies have not only provided creative support for artists but also created a favorable development environment for cultural industry practitioners. The infrastructure of Lotus Cave has seen significant improvements with government backing. Enhanced transportation access has made it easier for outsiders to reach and leave the village. Additionally, upgrades to communication networks and the construction of cultural facilities have provided better experiences for both artists and tourists. These infrastructural improvements have not only increased the village's appeal but also laid a solid foundation for its continued development.

2.2.2 Economic Pressure and Life Choices

As the influx of outsiders increased and the village's economy transformed, residents began to face mounting economic pressures. On the one hand, rising land and property prices made it difficult for some locals to afford the increasing cost of living. On the other hand, the traditional agricultural economy began to decline amidst the rise of the cultural industry, leaving some locals dependent on agriculture in a precarious position. For economic reasons, some residents chose to migrate to cities or other areas in search of new livelihoods.

When faced with the influx of external culture, residents often adopt one of two attitudes: adaptation or resistance. Some felt alienated and uncomfortable with the new cultural influences, prompting them to leave the village in search of a more familiar and comfortable environment. Conversely, others successfully integrated into the village's new social structure by participating in the cultural industry or adjusting their lifestyle.

2.2.3 The Rise of Cultural Tourism

President Jinping Xi has emphasized that "the cultural industry and tourism industry are closely interconnected; we should adhere to the principle of using culture to shape tourism and tourism to highlight culture, promoting

the integrated development of culture and tourism, so that people can appreciate cultural beauty while experiencing natural beauty and cultivate their minds” (Hu, 2021). In recent years, as the tourism industry has grown, cultural tourism has emerged as a popular form of travel, attracting an increasing number of tourists. The unique artistic atmosphere and cultural landscapes of Lotus Cave have gradually developed it into a cultural tourism destination. In 2022, General Village in Qitang Town was selected as one of the fourth batch of national key rural tourism villages. Cultural tourism has not only brought visitors to Lotus Cave but also generated economic benefits. The influx of tourists has directly stimulated the development of related services, such as catering, accommodation, and shopping, driving local economic growth. Since its renovation, the Lotus Cave Art Village has hosted over 100,000 visitors, generating more than ¥1.5 million in revenue, and boosting tourism income across the entire town to over ¥4 million. These economic benefits have attracted more cultural practitioners and entrepreneurs to Lotus Cave, further promoting population mobility. Additionally, some visitors, captivated by the village’s unique cultural atmosphere, have chosen to settle there permanently, becoming new residents of the village.

3. The Impact of Population Mobility on the Lotus Cave Art Village

3.1 The Impact on Cultural Ecology

3.1.1 The Integration and Conflict between Traditional Culture and Modern Art

Population mobility has brought about an exchange of diverse cultures. While this exchange enriches the cultural ecology of the village, it also inevitably leads to conflicts between traditional culture and modern art. On the one hand, external artists introduce modern art into the village, leading to an integration with the local traditional culture. On the other hand, this integration may result in the dilution or alteration of traditional culture. For example, the artwork “Bumper Harvest” was created by artists residing in Lotus Cave Village, using materials sourced locally—such as the rice and straw left after the harvest—to present an artistic representation of a grain storage house, symbolizing hopes for a bountiful harvest in the coming year. In November 2022, during the seventh episode of the cultural tourism exploration program *Homes in the Mountains and Rivers* jointly launched by China Media Group and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China, the writer Yong Zhu mentioned, “All of their works are closely tied to their agricultural labor and life. Therefore, only when these artworks are intricately connected with the land and the people on it, can the art truly be full of life.”

3.1.2 The Enhancement of Cultural Diversity

The influx of external populations has significantly enriched the cultural content of Lotus Cave. Artists from diverse backgrounds and fields come here to create and exchange ideas, forming a diverse and innovative cultural ecosystem. This diversity is not only reflected in artistic creation but also lifestyles and social interactions. In November 2023, the Leather Workshop at Lotus Cave opened and unexpectedly welcomed its first international visitors from countries including Bulgaria, Germany, France, Spain, Malta, Portugal, Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The Leather Workshop, located within the Lotus Cave Art Village’s coffee shop, upholds the tradition of local craftsmanship and provides employment opportunities for the community. The workshop’s mission is to preserve the local leather crafting techniques, offering tourists a fun and engaging hands-on experience and creating unique leather products for customers. The visit from these international friends not only enhanced the cultural diversity of the workshop but also injected more hope and opportunities for its future. The Leather Workshop at Lotus Cave will continue to provide interesting and educational craft experiences for tourists, fostering international friendship and cultural exchange.

3.2 The Impact on Economic Development

3.2.1 The Rise of Cultural Industries and the Transformation of the Village Economy

With the increase in the external population, the cultural industry in Lotus Cave has rapidly developed, gradually becoming a vital pillar of the local economy. The traditional agricultural economy has begun to transition into a diversified economic structure dominated by cultural industries. The sale of artworks, cultural tourism, and the development of related services have brought considerable economic benefits to the village. The Lotus Cave Village has established the “Lotus Cave Art Cooperative,” led by the village collective, with support from the government, art institutions, and social forces to ensure the operation of the art village. Through land transfers, capital shareholding dividends, and other methods, it actively fosters new “agriculture-culture-tourism” business models and the integration of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. By acting as an agent for the sale of agricultural by-products and other initiatives, the village has ensured that the interest linkage rate for villagers has consistently remained at 100%. Lotus Cave’s location in Qitang Town has successfully attracted over 120 large-scale farming households, and by transferring 12,000 mu (approximately 1,977 acres) of land, it has

brought more than ¥10 million in land transfer fees to the villagers. The “three changes” reform has revitalized the idle homesteads of more than 200 households, helping the village collective increase its income by ¥800,000 (Ren & Le, 2023).

3.2.2 Labor Return Increases Employment

Bringing art into the countryside not only allows the rural soil to nurture art but also gathers popularity and drives local industry revitalization. Meanwhile, villagers who had gone out to work seized the business opportunities brought by the renovation of the village and returned to the village for employment and entrepreneurship. They have opened guesthouses and farmhouses, meeting the personalized needs of tourists from all over the country while increasing their income. So far, more than 10 villagers have returned to start businesses, over 80 villagers have found employment at their doorstep, and the per capita annual income of the entire village has exceeded ¥20,000.

3.3 The Impact on Social Structure

With the continuous influx of external populations, the community structure of Lotus Cave has undergone significant changes. The original village community is gradually being replaced by a more open and diverse community structure. One of the goals and directions of Lotus Cave’s village art renovation is to support it as a tourist distribution center for the “Qitang Art Belt” by constructing corresponding supporting facilities to sustain activities such as art performances, study tours, team building, and the exploration of local cultural history (Jiao et al., 2022).

4. Protection and Development Strategies for the Lotus Cave Art Village from the Perspective of Population Mobility

4.1 Policy Support and Legal Protection

The protection and development of the Lotus Cave Art Village cannot be separated from strong policy support and effective legal guarantees. Firstly, the government should formulate a clear policy for the protection of non-heritage cultural resources, such as Lotus Flower, Xiangbao Loong, Cao Loong, etc., to ensure that they are legally recognized and protected, such as the formulation of a special non-heritage cultural resources protection plan, which clearly defines the protection objectives, measures, timetable, and responsible units of each non-heritage cultural resource. Secondly, the policy should cover financial support and tax incentives to provide special financial support for the protection and restoration of the Lotus Cave Art Village, such as the establishment of a special fund for heritage protection, the provision of low-interest loans, and the encouragement of social capital to invest in the restoration and utilization of the village. At the same time, tax incentives should be given to relevant enterprises or individuals to motivate more forces to participate in the conservation and cultural dissemination of the village. The government can also set up a public monitoring mechanism to improve the transparency and implementation of policies through public participation and encourage community residents and civil organizations to participate in conservation work, to form a situation in which the government and society work together for conservation. In addition to policy support, it should also focus on the participation of community residents and the enhancement of legal awareness. By popularizing legal knowledge, villagers can be made to understand the necessity of protecting traditional culture and historical heritage, and through guidance and incentive mechanisms, they can be pushed to consciously participate in the conservation of their village.

4.2 Community Revitalization and Population Return

Community revitalization and population return are crucial to the conservation of the Lotus Cave Art Village. Firstly, to improve infrastructure and public services, the government should invest in improving infrastructure such as roads, water supply, drainage, and power supply, and prioritize the development of a rural broadband network, to improve the convenience of villagers’ lives, enhance the quality of life of the villagers, and reduce the demand for outbound labor. Secondly, through the integrated development of “agriculture, culture and tourism”, rural tourism, specialty agriculture, and other economic models, create employment opportunities and entrepreneurial platforms for villagers, help villagers develop eco-agriculture and lodging economy through the provision of financial and technical support, and guide the establishment of co-operatives to form economies of scale (Deng et al., 2023). At the same time, it has formulated preferential policies to attract migrant workers to return to their hometowns to start their businesses and provided special training programs to enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities. Attract young people to return home. In addition, promotes cultural renaissance, enhances villagers’ sense of identity with traditional culture, and attracts outworkers to return to their hometowns to pass on and innovate rural culture. To support the return of population, the Government can provide incentives

such as business start-up subsidies, tax concessions, and skills training to help returnees better integrate into the rural economy. Through the creation of a harmonious community environment and the strengthening of villagers' self-governance, the sense of participation and belonging of villagers will be enhanced. Ultimately, through these measures, Lotus Cave Village can realize the return of its population, promote community revival, and provide a solid social foundation for the conservation and development of the art village.

4.3 Cultural Education and the Cultivation of Heirs

To continue and pass on the unique culture of Lotus Cave, cultural education and inheritor training must be strengthened. Firstly, traditional culture should be incorporated into school curricula and students' interest in and identification with traditional skills should be enhanced through activities such as cultural summer camps and workshops. At the same time, support should be given to folk artists to set up training courses and pass on their skills through the "master-apprentice system", to ensure the continuation of the culture. The government and society should also improve the living conditions of inheritors by providing policy concessions and livelihood protection to motivate them to focus on cultural inheritance. In addition, the inheritors should be encouraged to express their traditional skills in the context of modern art and digital technological innovations and to disseminate the cultural heritage of the Lotus Cave to a wider audience through cultural publicity and tourism promotion. Through these measures, Lotus Cave Village can establish a sustainable cultural education system to ensure that traditional culture is passed on and innovated in modern society.

4.4 Digital Protection and Innovation

In the context of increasing technological development, digital means offer new possibilities for cultural heritage protection. According to the cultural qualities of the Lotus Cave, the government can guide cultural enterprises to create digital cultural tourism IP with unique local characteristics, create interactive and experiential digital products, and create an immersive experiential environment in the region (Yao, 2024), such as virtual guides and online exhibitions, to attract more tourists. Technologies such as 3D scanning, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) can also be used to create a digital archive of the Lotus Cave Village by recording and displaying it in detail. This will not only help preserve the original appearance of the buildings but also attract more people to pay attention to and understand the Lotus Cave culture through virtual displays and interactive experiences.

4.5 International Cooperation and Cultural Exchange

The conservation and development of the Lotus Cave Village should not only be limited to the domestic context but should also actively seek international cooperation and cultural exchanges. Through establishing cooperative relationships with international cultural heritage protection institutions, museums, and art organizations, drawing on advanced international conservation experience and management models, exchanging and guiding with international experts, sharing conservation experience and resources, and improving the conservation and management level of the village. At the same time, international cultural festivals or art exhibitions will be held, and foreign artists will be invited to participate in the creation and display, to show the cultural charms of the Lotus Cave to the international community, and through the publicity and reporting of international media and cultural institutions, to enhance its international influence and attract more cultural tourism resources.

5. Conclusion

This study delves into the dual impact of population mobility on the protection and development of the Lotus Cave Art Village, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities it presents. Population mobility introduces significant challenges, such as cultural transmission gaps and the erosion of community vitality due to out-migration. However, it also brings opportunities, particularly by introducing external resources and talent that can drive artistic innovation and cultural dissemination.

Through this research, it is evident that effective management of population mobility can ensure that the cultural heritage of the Lotus Cave Art Village is not only preserved but also revitalized within the context of modern society. Policymakers are encouraged to refine and enhance the existing frameworks for cultural heritage protection, ensuring clear delineation of responsibilities and long-term sustainability. The community and its residents must strengthen their cultural identity and participation, fostering a proactive and self-sustaining approach to heritage preservation. Additionally, academics and researchers should deepen their exploration of the intricate relationship between population mobility and cultural heritage protection, identifying more effective strategies for sustainable development.

This study's findings underline the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including governments, communities, scholars, and the private sector. Such collaboration can lead to innovative funding and partnership

models supporting digital preservation and global promotion of cultural heritage. The Lotus Cave Art Village, with continued collective efforts, can maintain its unique artistic and historical significance, serving as a vital carrier of Chinese traditional culture on the global stage.

Future research should focus on developing more inclusive and sustainable protection strategies that address the challenges faced in cultural heritage conservation. By continuously analyzing the driving mechanisms behind population mobility and its effects on cultural heritage, dynamic, adaptive measures that enhance the resilience and sustainability of the Lotus Cave Art Village will be possible.

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