
Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

Sustainable development of rural education tourism – the case of Dashu Town, Chun’an County

Yang Jingyan¹, Tan Siow Kian^{2*}

¹Tourism College of Zhejiang, China; ²School of Economics and Management, Xiamen University

*correspondence: siowkian.tan@xmu.edu.my

Abstract

This study explores sustainable development and the design of rural educational tourism products. The integration of rural educational tourism may achieve win-win outcomes. Nevertheless, the method of integrating these two to achieve sustainable development is yet to be fully understood. Dashu Town, a rural area known for elements of patriotism and natural resources, is a highlight of Chun’an government in developing its tourism industry. Twelve tourism products were observed in this study, and twenty respondents were interviewed. A total of 45 concepts of rural educational tourism emerged and were categorised under four main themes: patriotism, agricultural, life skills training, and rural culture and art. The values of these four themes were defined and illustrated in this paper. To achieve sustainable development, suggestions to enhance the supporting elements, integrate the services, and bridge the administrative gaps were illustrated.

Keywords:

Education;
Sustainability;
Agricultural;
Life skills;
Patriotism;
Rural tourism.

Received Xxx, XXXX

Accepted Xxx, XXXX

Published Xxx, XXXX

1. Introduction

With a continuous acceleration of urbanisation and industrialisation, China’s rural tourism has become a trend to escape from the city since the 1980s and has continued to show a high growth rate (Zhang, 2019). Since 2013, the Government and its agencies have promoted study tour programmes for primary and secondary schools (MoE, 2016). China’s central government has issued a series of documents on study tours via the National Tourism and Leisure Programme (2013 – 2020), instigating integrated development of study tours (Gov, 2013). Study tours then become an important characteristic of quality education for young people in China. In 2018, the number of study tours in China exceeded 4 million for the first time, generating revenues of about 12.5 billion yuan, and the number of related travel agencies exceeded 1,200 (MoCT, 2019; MoE, 2019b). In 2019, the Ministry of Education added ‘study tour management and service’ as a new focus (MoE, 2019a). Study tours have since then developed into rural educational tourism and become most influential in the development of rural tourism. The vigorously developing rural educational tourism thus contributes to rural development and quality education (MoE, 2016; 2019a; Song & Liu, 2018). Rural educational tourism has gained much attention from both experts and scholars as it is an important agent for development (He, 2003) and is an adopted path for many regions as a way to achieve economic growth, environmental protection, and sustainable development. Nevertheless, the rural and educational tourism integration method is yet to be fully understood.

There are limited studies on rural educational tourism for sustainable development despite its popularity. Rural educational tourism as a product, its life cycle, product innovation, environmental protection, marginal effect, and other aspects are yet to be fully understood. Existing studies are mainly focussed on identifying the strategies to develop rural educational tourism rather than examining the contents and student experiences. The government found it urgent that guidelines on rural educational tourism is proposed to the communities in various regions (Li, 2017; MoE, 2016, 2019a; Song & Liu, 2018; S. Wang & Liu, 2007).

Hence, this study was conducted to examine rural educational tourism in Dashu Town. Located at the centre southwest of Chun'an, Dashu is vastly covered by forest areas (83.9%), and the locals are mostly farmers. The town is not only rich in natural resources but it is also known for its stories of patriotism (Pang, 2021), making it a prioritised focus for educational tourism development by the Chun'an government (Gov, 2022). This study aimed to bridge the literature on rural and educational tourism for sustainable development.

The research purpose is reflected in two aspects: (i) improving the rural tourism products to enhance educational tourism and improve education quality; (ii) promoting rural revitalisation for sustainable development. The research questions were developed as follows:

RQ1: What are the core elements of Dashu Town in developing rural educational tourism?

RQ2: What are the values of rural educational tourism products to the communities?

RQ3: How can sustainable development be achieved via rural educational tourism?

2. Literature review

The British study tour activity is called the 'Grand Tour,' originally called the long tour of the British aristocracy. Nowadays, study tours are known as long tours in the United Kingdom and study tours in Europe for cultural and educational development (Bird, 2024). In Japan, educational tours have existed since 1886, where students travelled and learned about different histories and cultures, although the academic term study tour was later developed (Nagai & Kashiwagi, 2018). These government-led tours aim to cultivate students' attitudes and social awareness, aiming towards addressing society-wide concerns and providing support to education. Domestic study tours first appeared in the 1990s academic literature, which has developed into an educational activity adopted by schools and become well known to the public (Sun & Xu, 2021). In general, study tours refer to special trips for inquiry and learning; in a narrower sense, they refer to trips conducted outside the school, in which students participate and aim to understand society, acquire knowledge, and cultivate personality (Sun & Xu, 2021; Wise, 2022).

From the perspective of active learning, Kimonen et al. (2017) believed that educational tours are channels for students to communicate with the outside world. Meanwhile, Aliyeva (2015) and Samah and Ahmadian (2013) also generally considered educational tours to be a travel experience from school to out-of-class learning. Researchers have studied educational tourism from the perspectives of behavioural science, geography, economics, sociology, environment, education, and other disciplines and believed that educational tourism has the characteristics of integration, experiential, relevance, comprehensiveness, and innovation (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Qian et al., 2019). Integration exists as educational tours amalgamate education with tourism to meet the students' learning and tourism needs. The experiential characteristic is created as students learn by practice and grow through experience. Relevance is ensured as educational tourism is designed with themes and activities that fulfil students' varying needs and interests. Innovation is promoted by focusing on innovative practices and products within educational tours.

Liu et al. (2023) proposed that the current development of China's educational tourism does not focus on educational factors. Yan (2023) pointed out that China's educational tourism is still in the stage of low consumption, lagging, and is less prominent, with the domestic market for educational tourism destinations mainly concentrated in the first-tier big cities or historical and cultural ancient cities, neglecting the rural areas. Abubakar et al. (2014) argued that a more complete system should be pursued to improve educational tourism.

Rural educational tourism is a development in educational tourism where rural tourism and educational tourism are integrated and developed. Rural tourism originated in France, and the term 'rural tourism' was used widely in the nineteenth century (He, 2003; S. Wang & Liu, 2007). Besides rural tourism, farm tourism, agritourism, agricultural tourism, village tourism, and other expressions have been used interchangeably (Rosalina et al., 2021). British scholars Lane and Bramwell (1994) proposed that rural tourism is not just tourism activities limited to the vast rural areas. On the contrary, rural tourism integrates agriculture and tourism, making rural tourism differs across regions and extends to the countryside in general. The rise of rural tourism can be attributed to people wanting to escape from urban life by seeking a different experience in rural areas. Hence, rural educational tourism is study tours conducted in rural areas, relying on rural tourism resources such as customs, history, culture, and production activities (Liu et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Lu, 2023; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Qian et al., 2019; Sun & Xu, 2021; Wang et al., 2019).

The original form of foreign rural educational tourism aimed to improve economic returns, integrate production and living resources, and develop tourism products of the early manors and farms (Petroman et al., 2016). Attractions include agricultural production activities such as brewing and collecting produce and agricultural science, which have appealed to the urban residents. They also proposed that utilising existing resources and injecting new elements into rural tourism products, such as courses on crops, cooking courses about farmhouse cuisine, and flower demonstration courses, can enhance rural educational tourism.

Rural educational tourism is an important way to provide quality education for primary and secondary school students, and it has a strong practical educational significance. The countryside has rich and unique natural resources, and rural educational tourism is used in countries around the world to promote the development of the rural economy. Rural educational tourism connects local resources and agricultural activities with educational activities (Chen et al., 2023; Rosalina et al., 2021).

The most important contradiction in China's development is mainly reflected in the unbalanced development of urban and rural areas and the inadequate development of the countryside. In the context of China's comprehensive modernisation and all-around promotion of rural revitalisation development strategy, developing rural educational tourism is of great significance (MoE, 2016; Zhang, 2019). It is significant to help students grow their knowledge, broaden their horizons, and cultivate their innovative and practical abilities.

Rural tourism plays an important role in breaking China's urban-rural segregation and integrating urban and rural areas, which has great practical significance (Ren et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2023) argued that rural tourism is challenging the countryside because a shift from agricultural development orientation to tertiary service orientation is necessary. The need to rely on human and natural resources to carry out tourism activities poses another challenge. In short, rural educational tourism might help bridge the urban-rural divide, but it may cause sustainability issues, especially those relevant to the social and cultural aspects. Thus far, the examination of rural educational tourism from a sustainable development perspective remains understudied.

3. Study context – Dashu Town

Dashu Town is located in the southwest of Chun'an, under the jurisdiction of 13 administrative villages and 1 community, with a household population of 13,877 and resident population of 7,321, covering a geographical area of 163 square kilometres, 40 kilometres away from Thousand Island Lake, the county town. The forest coverage of the town is more than 83.9%, with 43,000 acres of Moso bamboo and 13,000 acres of tea, and the per capita net income of farmers is 44,287 yuan (Gov, 2022).

Dashu Town has two types of distinctive resources: ancient villages and natural landscapes. Dashu Town has three ancient villages bestowed with humanistic resources, including Ruohong, Liyueping, and Dashu. Among them, Ruohong Village has the reputation of being the first village in Sui'an, and the folk custom of 'rushing eighteen' has been passed down for more than 600 years. Liyueping village has a filial piety plaque that is currently the only well-preserved plaque recognising filial piety and virtue of men in Chun'an County. The preserved village of Xia Jiang and the White Horse Red Army slogan wall that carries Chinese revolutionary history are patriotic and educational artifacts considered extremely high value by the government (Gov, 2022).

The natural landscapes of Dashu Town provide scenic resources, with attractions such as Gongshanjian Mountain, Qiandao Lake, Qianmu Mountain Spring, and Hujia fishing village. These attractions provide a unique landscape and potential development, an auxiliary aid for the development of rural educational tourism. Due to the rich natural and social resources, Dashu Town has the potential to become a rural educational tourism town. In addition, Chun'an government has also emphasise its development more sustainably (Gov, 2022).

4. Methods

This study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the current situation of rural educational tourism. Qualitative methods were employed, involving in-depth interviews, field trips, and observations conducted in Dashu Town. Interviews and observations were conducted with local government officials, farmers, and industry owners to understand local resources, the demands and difficulties of various parties, and to draw on the problems and suggestions raised by various parties.

Twelve tourism products were selected and visited in Dashu Town, including those of agriculture (rice paddies, wormwood, and tea) and patriotic artifacts. These products are vital for rural educational tourism.

A total of 20 respondents were interviewed, as shown in Table 1. A theoretical sampling was employed in this work. This purposive sampling technique allows the researcher to select information-rich and relevant sources that provide informed empirical materials (Patton, 2002). This technique does not aim to generate a representative sample set but includes the selection of informed participants who have had active participation in a specific topic discussed (Kensbock & Jennings, 2011).

Seven interview questions were developed, each addressing one of the study's research questions (as shown in Table 2). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed. First, the interviewer's conversation contents were transcribed to text and imported into ATLAS.ti software for analysis. The qualitative data were then open-coded, and concepts were generated. Next, the concepts with similar ideas were categorised under their sub-dimensions using axial coding. This was followed by selective coding, where the sub-dimensions were grouped under relevant themes. The authors have organised and structured the data within each theme into

coherent and consistent narratives while considering how the themes relate to the research questions and each other. Finally, the authors identify an appropriate name for each theme.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Respondent	Sex	Age	Role/Occupation
R1	M	32	Village cadre
R2	M	30	Village cadre
R3	M	60	School Leader
R4	M	40	Township Leader
R5	F	27	Township cadre
R6	M	50	Township Leader
R7	F	26	Township cadre
R8	M	31	Cadre of the County Tourism Bureau
R9	M	35	Township tourism cadre
R10	M	36	School Teacher
R11	F	43	Head of Research Enterprise
R12	F	35	Employee of research company
R13	F	39	Specialised School Teacher
R14	M	49	Academic expert
R15	M	51	Rural Travel Specialist
R16	F	48	Head of Research Enterprise
R17	M	39	Enterprise Research Staff
R18	M	30	Visitor
R19	F	41	Educational administrator
R20	M	44	Leader of Chun'an County Tourism Bureau

Some examples of extracts from the data are shown in column 4, table 3 – 6. These extracts were open-coded, and concepts were generated, as shown in column 3, table 3 – 6. Next, the concepts with similar ideas were categorised under different sub-dimensions using axial coding (column 2, table 3 – 6). Later, the sub-dimensions were grouped under different themes using selective coding (column 1, table 3 – 6). It is important to determine which aspect of the data is included in each theme and organise and structure the data within each theme into a coherent and consistent narrative. In addition, it is necessary to consider how the theme relates to the research questions of this study, as well as the connection between the themes. The final stage is the identification of an appropriate name for each theme.

Table 2: Interview questions

Research questions	Interview questions
RQ1: What are the core elements of Dashu Town in developing rural-educational tourism?	Q1 What do you think the educational tourism in the countryside looks like?
	Q2 What are the conditions and elements that should be met in order to develop educational tourism in the countryside?
	Q3 What kind of educational tourism products do you think are suitable for the development of the countryside?
RQ2: What are the values of rural educational tourism products to the communities?	Q4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of Dashu Town in developing educational tourism products?
	Q5 What kind of educational tourism products are suitable for Dashu Town?
RQ3: How can sustainable development be achieved via rural educational tourism?	Q6 What conditions and elements are needed for Dashu Town to develop some unique educational tourism products?
	Q7 What is the connotation of Dashu Town's development of educational tour products?

5. Findings

Dashu Town has rich tourism resources, comprising landscapes, villages, agriculture, customs, and history. Based on the qualitative data, four main themes were derived: patriotic study, agriculture study, life skills development, and rural culture and art study.

5.1 Theme 1 – Patriotic study

Patriotic study refers to research and study activities with patriotism as the main content, which includes national and ethnic education, excellent traditional culture education, excellent conditions education, and Chinese education (Long & Yang, 2022; Rogach, 2019).

Eighteen elements emerged under the first theme, grouped under six sub-dimensions: 'history, intangible, tangible, positioning, planning, and organising'. The former were grouped under 'resources', and the latter were categorised under 'sustainability'.

Table 3 Patriotic education study

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Concepts	Extracts from the data
Resources	History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various historical periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering the various <i>historical periods of revolution, construction, reform, and opening-up since the Opium War</i>, a large number of benevolent and aspiring people have left behind many beautiful and inspiring <i>poems of patriotism</i> and great spirit for the sake of national prosperity and national rejuvenation (R3).
	Intangible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intangible resources – historical events; stories, legends; poems of patriotism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further excavate intangible cultural resources, such as historical events, historical figures, stories and legends, and Red Army songs, which are related to them, and integrate and develop patriotism study and learning products with unique cultural brand value by injecting cultural creative elements (R10)
	Tangible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tangible – ruins and monuments; old houses, historical relics, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content level: divided into basic level, core level, and extension level. The basic level is the various kinds of <i>ruins and monuments</i> and other unadorned memorial sites, symbols, and achievements; the core level is the <i>spirit of patriotism</i>; the extended level is the <i>resources, environment, and other elements related to patriotism tourism</i> (R14). Preservation of <i>tangible objects</i> such as old houses, historical relics, books, and materials (R19)
Sustainability	Positioning strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine product positioning and branding Cultural values Clear themes Different communication methods Integrated platforms Design and develop new curricula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the resource base, refine the product positioning, brand image, and activity content with the characteristics of the times and local features, and do a good job of planning and designing (R6) Exhibits with clear themes, rich content, diverse forms, innovative display, and communication methods to stimulate the interest of young people to visit (R14) Availability of venues suitable for the provision of student activities and integrated service platforms for social practice (R12)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and design of research products and curricula (R13)
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public service Customisation – guides and activities for different groups of visitors Training for staff – receptionists and interpreters Nurturing volunteers Alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise various activities and adhere to the positioning of public service (R1) Preparation of different guides or lectures for different groups of visitors, such as people of different age groups, party cadres, and ordinary tourists (R10) Develop special products and activity menus for main source markets, such as students' summer and winter vacations (R9) Dedicated receptionists and interpreters are available, and training is conducted on a regular basis (R8). Establish a team of mission volunteers to cope with reception peaks (R5) Establish alliances with similar educational bases for organic linkage, mutual embedding, and resource sharing to extend product content and expand the scope of education and brand influence (R4)
Organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making system Development plan Risk management system Volunteering system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a decision-making and management system for the base or project and employment of professional and responsible management (R7). Formulate a five-year development plan and annual work plans (R11) Improve the management system, including open reception, job responsibilities, safety and security, rewards and punishments, assessment, and emergency plans (R4) Establish a pool of study tutors by categorising volunteers, such as retired teachers, old party members, professionals, and technicians in the vicinity (R19)

5.2 Theme 2 – Agricultural tourism experience study

Agricultural tourism experience study refers to using agricultural production, rural ecological environment, animals and plants, and other agricultural resources for research and study, in the form of leisure and relaxation of the mind, to complete the agricultural science and technology and knowledge of research and study (Liu et al., 2023). It can enhance students' practical ability, improve students' knowledge of the agricultural field, and enhance the sense of social responsibility and other aspects that have positive significance.

Eleven elements emerged under the second theme, grouped under five sub-dimensions: bridging theoretical knowledge with practical skills, course content, mentor matching, local resources, and safeguard assurance - in which the former three were categorised under 'pedagogical goal', and the latter two were grouped under 'sustainability'.

Table 4 Agricultural tourism experience tour

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Concepts	Extracts from the data
Pedagogical goal	Bridging theoretical knowledge with practical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject matter experts • Linking practical skills with literacy goals • Development of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To connect with subject matter knowledge and have knowledge objectives for student mastery (R1) • To acquire theoretical knowledge related to agriculture, experience rural farming life, develop students' practical and operational skills, and meet the literacy goals (R2) • Focusing on the development of students' virtues, establishing the concept of education based on virtues, and fostering affective goals (R7)
	Course content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customisation – age, learning ability of students • Overall flow of activities • Psychomotor skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The curriculum of the study should be developed and designed separately according to the different age groups, learning abilities, and knowledge of students (R14) • To have the overall flow of activities at the study site arranged, the duration of the study activities, the cost of the study program, etc. (R15) • To offer no less than three labour practice projects on planting, cultivation, picking, breeding, and processing that satisfy different labour practice contents for one day or more (R13) • Have labour tools and instruments that match the practical lessons (R9)
	Mentor Matching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers; students, tour guides; researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be experts, scholars, university students and tour guides who guide students in agricultural research (R13) • To have an outdoor leader who manages the students' daily life and leads agricultural activities during the study process (R11) • Local farmers can be included, and farmers with specific skills can be invited to act as lecturers or participate in active games (R5) • To carry out research activities according to the research environment and to have accompanying staff according to the ratio of research courses (R3)
Sustainability	Local resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local base for experiencing • Local agricultural products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a local base for agricultural practices, such as agricultural estates, agricultural parks, etc. (R16) • Promote the sale of local agricultural products based on enhancing students' knowledge and increasing income for farmers (R4)

Safeguard assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel: safety officer; medical personnel • Safety – insurance; briefing; assistance; meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research team should have a special accompanying safety officer and be staffed with medical personnel (R7) • Purchase insurance before travel (R12) • Before the start of the activity, the lead teacher should emphasise safety matters, and the accompanying staff should give appropriate assistance in the activity (R11) • Meals and accommodation are strictly inspected, and agreements are signed with food and lodging establishments that provide safety and security (R19)
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5.3 Theme 3 – Life skills training and research

Life skills training and research are to improve students' self-care and self-reliance by organising students to participate in daily life work, production labour, and service work, advocating students' love of life, love of work, enhancing self-confidence and mastering certain life skills (Nasheeda et al., 2019). With a certain degree of basic life skills, students will be able to use appropriate behavioural methods to deal with the problems and challenges of daily life comfortably, thus easily keeping away from psychological and behavioural problems. At the same time, life skills education can, to a certain extent, improve students' self-awareness and relieve tension and anxiety.

Seven elements emerged under the third theme, grouped under three sub-dimensions: design, essential life skills, and creativity. The former two were categorised under 'integration', and the latter were grouped under 'sustainability'.

Table 5 Life skills educational tour

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Concepts	Extracts from the data
Integration	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental space • Customisation • Subject matter experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have a large place and space to accommodate students for skill acquisition, such as a space of 150 square meters and a capacity of about 100 people (R6) • Research spaces should meet the educational purposes of student research but should not damage the local environment (R14) • To set up skill training courses for diversified needs (R3) • Professional institutions do professional things (R7)
	Essential life skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor survival skills • Daily life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in essential life skills, such as boating, catching fish, touching shrimp, climbing trees, etc., can be carried out in conjunction with local rural areas (R17) • Develop some skills training study courses suitable for local characteristics, such as catering and cooking, home beautification, mechanical production, etc. Some basic processes and principles of practical skills and other aspects of learning knowledge (R3)
Sustainability	Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative thinking • Innovation; technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills contain many aspects of training knowledge and content that need to be organised and linked together with innovative and creative thinking (R10) • Creative skills training courses can also be developed by combining them with skills training content such as agricultural production and labour, traditional craft

manufacturing, and new technology experience and application in local villages (R18)

5.4 Theme 4 – Rural culture and art study

Art study is an important part of studies. Through the medium of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting, art studies materialise abstract art concepts into cognitive and sensory inputs, which is also more like a way of unlocking children’s knowledge of the world through art (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Art study has a unique role in the growth of primary and secondary school students. Through learning, art is 'revived' in the scene, and the scene is brought to life by the soul injected by art. Understanding the cultural heritage of different places is a widely recognised value, and in the interactive experience with the world and nature, improving participants’ ability to switch between emotional and rational thinking, cultivating learners self-expression, communicating with others, and the logical ability to deconstruct complex events will be thinking patterns that benefits the learners’ growth.

Nine elements emerged under the fourth theme, grouped under three sub-dimensions: local characteristics, art workers, and safeguarding heritage. The first two were categorised under 'integration', and the latter were grouped under 'sustainability'.

Table 6 Rural culture and art study tour

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Concepts	Extracts from the data
Integration	Local Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural resources Cultural resources Atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural resources are the foundation, and resources may include landscapes, performances, food, crafts, activities, etc. (R18) Have a long historical and cultural background and a non-heritage culture that can be passed on (R3) With unique regional cultures and characteristics, it is the basis and source for the development of local cultures and also an important factor in promoting tourism and economic development (R6) Dashu Township has cultural resources and non-heritage projects, such as bamboo weaving, root carving, bamboo horse dance, rice wine, etc., all of which are extremely rich in local characteristics and can enable students to experience the cultural heritage and artistic atmosphere of the countryside (R2)
	Art workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-genetic inheritors; Cultural worker; Craftsmen; Cultural enthusiasts Their development and transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers include non-genetic inheritors, cultural workers, craftsmen, cultural enthusiasts (R18) Workers can become research instructors and can assume responsibility and liability of transmission and dissemination (R8) Workers can demonstrate cultural responsibility and explain relevant knowledge, complete cultural exhibitions, and tell cultural stories so that students can feel a love for rural culture and art (R19)

Sustainability	Safeguarding heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection • Inheritance • Integrating tours with rural culture • Government support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project development should be based on the sense of protection and inheritance and be market-oriented (R6) • Integrate study tours with rural culture, giving full play to the function of rural culture as a unique curricular resource through activities such as exhibitions, on-site demonstrations of handicrafts, and instant production by students so as to realise cultural inheritance in situ (R14) • Currently facing a succession crisis and focusing on training successors (R1) • The government should invest funds to support the inheritance and protection of rural cultural and artistic resources (R3)
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In short, 45 elements / concepts of rural educational tourism emerged, categorised under four main themes: patriotic, agricultural, life skills training, and rural culture and art. The values of these four themes were defined and illustrated. In order to achieve sustainable development, three measures need to be enhanced.

First, the enhancement of support elements is needed. For instance, upgrading and re-modelling the catering, lodging, shopping, entertainment, and other tourism support elements to form an interactive tourism service system and connecting these different rural educational tourism spots with the overall tourism market of Chun'an County and Qiandao Lake scenic spots. Not only that, the support system should be connected to the surrounding townships in order to develop rural educational tourism together and create a win-win solution.

Second, soft skills and personnel development needs special attention. For instance, personnel training in catering, accommodation, shopping, and security services needs to be integrated and enhanced to protect the operation of study tours. Third, orderly development of research and educational tourism can be achieved by revisiting the policy for optimising tourism administration, enhancing the financial support policy and security, reforming the land policy, and strengthening human resources.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Among the scant studies on rural educational tourism, scholars mainly focus on the utilisation of resources, development strategies, and promotion of local economic development of rural educational tourism, but not from the unique perspective of developing rural educational tourism products. In this study, a township with rich characteristics was selected as a case study, and the core elements in the development of rural educational tourism - the development of tourism products as a research point, and four products/designs emerged. The first theme is related to 'patriotism,' in which many historical heritage can be preserved and shared with the youngster; the second is 'agriculture-based', and the agricultural industry and the construction of the countryside are the prerequisites; the third is 'learning for use,' which should enrich the education and learning connotation of the product; the fourth is 'culture as the soul,' the product should not only reflect the economic and educational activities, but also be a cultural heritage, with humanistic contents such as folk culture, non-heritage skills, and historical sites of the revolution.

Petroman et al. (2016) acknowledged that using existing resources and injecting new elements can design different rural tourism products, such as the course study of farming roles and the

cooking course of farm food. Their study is only based on educational tourism products designed for agricultural life in the countryside, only considering the agricultural resources and agricultural characteristics of the countryside, without considering other product themes. Our findings extend the literature by highlighting the patriotism values, life skills, and cultural elements to the development of rural educational tourism products and propose that, for instance, rural culture and art study products can be developed based on rural folk culture, non-heritage skills, and other resources, which is an innovative rural educational tourism product, which has outstanding practical significance for primary and secondary school students to improve their traditional cultural literacy.

Previous studies mainly illustrate the principles, modes, and strategies of how to develop research and educational tourism products from the theoretical level and did not study the insights of the available products from a more specific level, which is more in line with the actual situation of rural areas. Our study innovatively puts forward the specific development types of rural educational tourism products, describes the elements and values of each educational tourism product, and provides reference and guidance for the sustainable development of educational tourism products in other rural areas.

There is a lack of rural and educational tourism base in current tourism studies; in other words, the tourism product is homogeneous and lacks unique characteristics for differentiation. This study thus comprehends how to integrate local rural resources for developing and designing educational tourism products in line with local vernacular characteristics as a research goal, and to articulate and complement the rural tourism products of the surrounding towns and cities so as to achieve the differentiated development, which is also a new contribution of this study.

In short, this study investigates a township - Dashu Town, taking it as an example, comprehensively analyses the resource conditions and elements for developing educational tourism products in Dashu Town, innovatively puts forward the four main educational tourism product themes, and designs specific educational courses and routes. It provides an effective reference basis for business operators, tourists, and local government to make decisions.

In summary, rural educational tourism integrates rural tourism and educational tourism, which is a good path for many communities in areas dominated by the agricultural industry to realise rural revitalisation. However, the development of rural educational tours should be based on resource endowment, agriculture as the basis, and culture as the soul to effectively improve the competitiveness of the market.

Finally, rural educational tourism is a relatively new research field, and its industry and programs are also in the primary stage of development. However, it has some promising outcomes which might contribute to sustainable development. Future research should further improve and breakthrough in the following aspects: First, research should be carried out in other potential townships to seek the development of guidelines for rural educational tourism. Secondly, horizontal comparisons should be made to analyse the development of research and educational tourism in Dashu Town with that of other communities in other areas so as to not only seek universal laws but also to highlight Dashu Town's characteristics. Thirdly, the development of rural educational tourism in Dashu Town should be studied over time, and constantly confirm or correct and enrich the content of the research to better benefit the stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

We want to thank the Dashu town's local authorities and all the respondents who shared their insights and opinions via in-depth interviews. Thanks to the editorial team and anonymous peer reviewers for valuable comments, which helped strengthen this article.

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