

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Academic Year 2020/2021

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**[Sustainable Development of Chinese Homestays in the Rural Tourism
---the example of Hainan Province, China]**

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

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[Date of presentation: September, 16, 2021]

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an emerging thing, rural homestays have shown rapid development in China in recent years, injecting new vitality into China's rural revitalisation strategy. On the one hand, over the past two decades, due to the failures and shortcomings of early development policies in developing countries, rural areas have been underdeveloped and the population has generally been engaged in very low-yielding agriculture, such as crop cultivation, cereal grains and forestry, which do not meet the tasks of poverty reduction and rural development (Gao & Wu, 2017). As researchers have studied the direction of development in rural areas, they have found that in developing countries, rural tourism can be considered a potentially good product for promoting the country and involving communities in tourism, and that it is one of the strategies for communities to achieve better living conditions (Amir et al., 2015). The rural homestay is a countryside tourism product based on the natural ecological environment, and it is important for the development of rural areas because it is built by farmers using their own unused houses, combined with local customs and natural environment, and it enables farmers to participate in the development of rural tourism, providing them with considerable economic benefits. If effectively guided by the government, it can largely advance the economic and social development of the countryside and reduce the gap between urban and rural areas, making rural homestays an important tourism product to change the backwardness of the countryside. On the other hand, due to the upgrading of tourism consumption in China, tourists' preferred mode of travel has changed from sightseeing to leisure and holiday travel, and they seek a deeper tourism experience, eager to participate in the life of local residents to experience the local cultural characteristics. In the report "Cities Live for You, Fresh Findings from Chinese Consumers", Hilton, Nielsen and others surveyed 1,000 visitors from all regions and age groups, and the results show that Chinese visitors' spending patterns have changed significantly compared to the past few years, showing four main characteristics. First, exploratory, with 83% of respondents enjoying exploring different terroirs and cultural features; secondly, self-satisfaction, with 82% of respondents going out of their way to spend more money and give generously; thirdly, openness, with 77% of respondents preferring to go deeper into the area and meet local people; and fourth, uniqueness, 77% of respondents reject sameness and seek more unique experiences (Report: Chinese

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tourists's spending patterns change significantly, showing four major characteristics, 2019). Hence, rural homestays are a tourism product that meets the needs of the market. For tourists, they are a tourist attraction and a way for them to explore the traditional culture, customs and lifestyle of the area.

This paper is a study of rural homestays in China's Hainan Province, as it is primarily a tourist development province, one of the best in China, with its rich natural resources, mainly coastal scenery and tropical landscapes. And at the same time, Hainan is making great efforts to build a beautiful countryside, rural tourism will be given a huge opportunity for development, the main population of Hainan is mainly rural, the population of Hainan in 2019 is 9,447,200, the rural population is 6,232,900 (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province & Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics in Hainan, 2020), accounting for 66% of the total population, indicating that the development of rural tourism is an important way to increase employment opportunities and income for local residents. The homestay is the core element of rural tourism development, the direction of transformation and upgrading of rural tourism, and a key development industry for Hainan. At present, Hainan rural homestays are in a period of rapid development, more and more people are investing in rural homestays, but they do not care about the sustainable development of rural homestays, and many homestay operators only focus on short-term gains. In terms of concepts, many homestay operators confuse the concepts of farmhouses, inns and homestays, leading to uneven product quality in the homestay market, and many homestays are not designed to combine local customs, culture and natural landscapes, but rather in the style of boutique hotels, as well as they imitate each other, leading to a lack of personalisation and serious homogenisation. Hainan is also known for its rich coastal tourism resources, with a large number of homestays based on sea view rooms, resulting in an uneven development of homestays, showing the result of a large concentration and rapid development of homestays in Sanya, Haikou and the eastern coastal areas, while the number of homestays in the central mountainous areas is small and slow. In addition, although the government has introduced a large number of policies and regulations to support and regulate the development of rural homestays, there is a problem of multiple government departments supervising and managing homestays at the same time, and no

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cooperative relationship has been formed, resulting in a lack of clarity in the responsibilities of the homestay regulatory body.

This paper uses in-depth interviews with government staff and homestay operators, as well as analysis of existing literature to explore the current development of rural homestays in Hainan, mainly by interpreting some of the policies and regulations on the development of homestays in China and Hainan, analyzing the distribution of rural homestays and the stakeholder relationships in homestay tourism, in order to understand the shortcomings in the development of rural homestays in Hainan. Then, based on an analysis of the current situation of rural homestays in Hainan, some strategic recommendations for the development of rural homestays are formulated from the government's perspective to ensure the sustainability of their development. Finally, the findings of this paper are closely linked to China's rural revitalisation strategy, providing suggestions for a plan to combat poverty in rural Hainan, as well as providing some theoretical basis for the future development of rural homestays in Hainan and their sustainable development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Foreign rural tourism arose in Europe in the 19th century, and the early 19th century to the 1930s was a stage in the development of traditional European rural tourism, where the core consumers were part of the aristocracy and the wealthy, and the main forms were holiday holidays, retreats and family visits. After the Second World War, the rise of modern rural tourism was marked as mass urban dwellers chose rural tourism to escape the hustle and bustle of the city, with its main pastimes including sightseeing, leisure and farm experiences. In nearly a century of development, a systematic, industrialised and diversified system of rural tourism development has been formed, centred on Europe and America (Song & Xie, 2019). Originating in the 1970s, European rural homestays encompass a variety of experiences such as sightseeing experiences, leisure farms, outdoor cycling and family activities, and have developed a mature business model for rural homestays in terms of management regulations, product development and project planning. Among them, European rural homestays are prominently represented by the UK and France, which have the longest history of rural

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homestays and are the origin of the development of rural homestays. The British Homestay is the originator of the world's homestays, which emerged on a large scale at the end of the Second World War when American troops went to various parts of the UK as support troops, and due to a lack of formal hospitality facilities, there was a proliferation of home hospitality businesses, which took shape as homestays (R. Yang, 2018).

In addition, European homestays are developed in combination with farmhouses and are run as side-businesses, so farm tourism plays an important role in rural tourism, for example, in European countries such as France, where farmhouse-style homestays are used to experience farm life while enjoying a comfortable countryside environment, such as wine tasting at wineries and special activities such as horseback riding through the mountains (Zhai, 2017). As well as in some rural areas of East Germany (Wittow, Island of Rügen), 80% of the accommodation is provided by working farms or farms that have been converted into accommodation facilities (Ionela et al., 2015). However, due to the diversity of European culture, history, nature and climate, the types of rural tourism vary greatly from country to country and there is no uniform European experience of rural tourism.

In the Asian region, Japan's homestays are the most classic, representing the finest in Asian homestay development, with their homestay development in the form of different thematic styles becoming one of the core attractions of tourism, and showing a trend towards high-end, boutique and service experience (Duangsa, 2018). In the 1980s, as Japan entered the post-industrial period, material conditions were basically met and people became more concerned about "spiritual enrichment", creating a boom of return to the countryside with a passion for gardening and green tourism, which led to the emergence of rural homestays in various cities and regions (Chen et al., 2016). Between 1959 and 1960, Japanese homestays began as farm side businesses, offering accommodation to tourists, known as Farm Inn. Agricultural experience is the main selling point and feature of Japanese homestays. In comparison, Chinese homestays tend to be more touristy and residential, but also experiential, whereas Japanese homestays are simpler and more focused on living and relaxing (Fan, 2016). Japanese homestays are mainly divided into Western-style homestays and farmhouse homestays, with the main features of farmhouse homestays being the local character and the

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experience they offer, while Western-style homestays combine Western culture and are more casual, even offering breakfast and dinner to their guests. Moreover, Japanese rural homestays are usually located in tourist areas such as mountains and fishing villages, most owners of Japanese homestays are farmers or fishermen, and villagers use their own premises to provide temporary accommodation for tourists after obtaining permission to operate, and such accommodation is usually family-run, with a staff of no more than five people and about 10 rooms, usually accommodating about 20 people (Fan, 2016). So as well as experiencing the traditional homes of Japanese lodges, you can also learn about Japanese culture and experience the life of a farmer through local agriculture, such as orange groves, pastures or gardens (DUANGSA, 2018). At the stage of development level, Japanese homestays not only focus on optimising the living experience and cultural experience, but also pay great attention to the communication and exchange between visitors. In terms of the positioning of homestay development, the Japanese homestay industry shows the characteristics of clear positioning, i.e. relying on Japan's unique natural and cultural resources to create homestay products with Japanese cultural characteristics (Fang, 2019).

The development of rural homestay tourism is significant for rural communities, especially in developing countries, not only in terms of meeting the needs of tourists, but more importantly in terms of increasing the benefits for rural residents and reducing the gap between urban and rural residents, most of the poor people in developing countries live in rural areas and although they are engaged in subsistence farming, most of them still live in poverty (Leh & Hamzah, 2012). For Asia, which, with the exception of Japan, are developing countries, the development of homestay tourism can help lift local residents out of poverty, as homestays are a tool for social and economic empowerment, and Rea (2000) points out that homestays require low capital expenditure and increase tourism opportunities for the poor (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013), and it enhances the local community's links to the outside world and increases the income of its residents. The development of rural homestay in Asia began in the 1990s, mainly in the form of green tourism, community development and increased participation of rural residents, and in many successful rural homestay destinations in Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and India, community-level codes of conduct, cooperation of stakeholders and regulations by government authorities have helped in the development of homestay

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tourism (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Among these, homestay tourism emphasises a community-based development model, and Tsonis (2009) points out in his study that conceptually, CBT is managed and owned by communities, and that it also gives communities the power to determine their own pace of development, protect the environment and promote intercultural awareness (Jamaludin et al., 2012). On the one hand, CBT can be found in Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Mongolia and Bali, Indonesia, which have formed a CBT network (Rermlawan & Tritham, 2016), in these homestays, community-based homestays are collectives based on the community actively hosting tourists, the homestay planning seems to be synonymous with community tourism planning, and community tourism in the form of homestays also means that villagers don't have to leave their villages to find wealth in the city (Jamaludin et al., 2012), and Harris, etc (2001) said that the involvement of women, ethnic minorities and local people in community-based tourism enterprises is important for achieving economic, environmental and social development (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013); On the other hand, George, etc (2009) indicated that rural communities in developing countries are often entrenched in a sense of powerlessness, injustice, inequality and exclusion, and the way to combat this malaise is to encourage these communities to interact with the outside world through tourism, which is facilitated by the attraction of modern tourists to the unique lifestyles and cultures of the rural landscape (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Tourism activities in a region should be able to provide benefits to the local community, particularly by reducing poverty rates through the creation of suitable employment opportunities, such as accommodation owners, property managers, tour guides, etc. The transformation of a region's status will be more meaningful when local communities are maximally involved in planned tourism development activities, particularly in the context of establishing equality in the distribution of resources and opportunities (Leh & Hamzah, 2012).

The essence of tourism in Nepal lies in the natural beauty of the rural mountains and the mysterious way of life and mysterious culture of its indigenous communities, attributes that can best be showcased through homestay tourism and are an attractive alternative tourism product for a country that cannot prioritise extensive infrastructure investment, but has a rich tourism industry in remote communities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Poverty is a particularly pronounced problem in rural and remote mountainous areas of

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Nepal, especially for female-headed households, because of the inaccessibility, vulnerability, marginalization and relative sparseness of the population in these areas, and according to Sherpa, Kruk & Tamrakar (2007), over 75% of women in mountainous areas are below the poverty line in South Asia alone (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013) This has led to the emergence of a community-based approach to rural tourism in Nepal, which aims to support local people by encouraging tourists to visit these places and providing opportunities for them to participate in community activities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013), and for the sustainable development of the area to promote gender equality, women are encouraged to participate in the running and management of the lodges. In one case, in the Barpak district of Nepal, in order to promote sustainable community development and gender equality, the local community has involved women in the mainstream development of the homestay, and women's ownership of the homestay has ensured avenues for women to generate income (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013), the 'bottom-up' community-based homestay development model in the area has increased opportunities for women's participation and may have improved the chances of success for homestay projects, as local people have a sense of ownership and control over the development of the project. Of course, government support in the form of training is essential and local guidance for the initiative provides stability, commitment and enthusiasm (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013).

In addition to this, in Malaysia, the homestay programme was first introduced in 1995 by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism in Temerloh, Pahang, with the aim of promoting the participation of rural communities in the tourism sector and enhancing their economies (Jamaludin et al., 2012). Malaysian homestays started in the early 1970's, initially offering breakfast, dinner and accommodation, they were mostly located in coastal areas and had a rural atmosphere, in 1988, homestays in Malaysia were officially developed to provide tourists with a rural Malaysian experience and an insight into the local way of life (Ismail et al., 2016). The Malaysian homestay programme is part of a tourism product that encourages rural communities to participate in tourism and gain interaction between the natural environment and culture (Ionela et al., 2015), since 1988, the Malaysian Government has been converting existing homes into home accommodation facilities to generate additional income for rural residents. For example, Banghuris Homestay is the only homestay in Sepang District with a Javanese Malay

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background, one of the interesting activities in Sepang is to visit palm plantations, rubber plantations, coffee plantations, orchards and small and medium enterprises. In addition to this, a variety of unique local cultural activities are offered which have become tourist attractions, these activities also include visiting the historical sites of Bukit Bangkong, experiencing a Malay wedding, witnessing and participating in cultural activities and handicraft making activities (Leh & Hamzah, 2012), which are designed to attract visitors with a certain demographic profile who desire an authentic experience (Muslim et al., 2017). Besides, the Malaysian government has used pro-poor tourism strategies in the development of homestay tourism projects in order to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, Ashley and Roe (2002) state that pro-poor tourism (PPT) is a tourism strategy that generates profits for the poor and in his research on PPT he found that PPT can benefit local communities that are directly involved in financial (economic) and lifestyle (social) aspects and that PPT aims to strengthen the link between the poor and the tourism sector and then through active participation in product development to reduce the poverty gap (Leh & Hamzah, 2012). As Chok and Macbeth (2007) suggest in their study, one of the main underlying ideas of PPT refers to the fact that local communities "have to contribute in tourism decisions if the meaning of their livelihoods is to be reflected in the way tourism is developed" (Prabhakaran et al., 2014), therefore, the key to a PPT strategy is the equitable participation of communities in homestay development and ultimately equal access to benefits. Through the development of homestays, finally Malaysia increases employment opportunities (66.7%) and improves the development of public facilities and infrastructure (52.8%) (Leh & Hamzah, 2012).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current data collection is divided into primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected through in-depth interviews, surveyors invited government officials and homestay operators to conduct interviews, using a question-and-answer format to answer questions directly. And is supplemented by a variety of the secondary data, including academic literature, online information, official documents and statistics.

The study interviewed a total of three government officials from Hainan Province,

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Sanya City and Yazhou District, who answered the interview questions on different levels, average interview time of 20 minutes per person. There are six main open-ended questions, and the following topics were addressed: 1. The role of government in the tourism market; 2. Whether the rural homestay meets the policy and regulatory standards; 3. Current problems with rural homestays; 4. What changes should be made to homestays for sustainable development; 5. In terms of the overall local economy, culture and employment, what is suitable for the long-term development of homestay: 1) The land is acquired by the government for development and is the main person responsible for the management of the homestay, 2) Local residents use their existing land and skills to run and manage the homestay, with the government providing guidance, 3) Introduce social capital to scale up and corporatise the operation of homestays on the basis of existing homestays; 6. Which is more sustainable, a rural tourism homestay or a large-scale hotel.

The study also interviewed homestay owners of three different types of homestays, namely boutique homestays, mid-range homestays, and small-scale homestays, three people in total, average interview time of 20 minutes per person. These homestay owners who were interviewed were first searched through Ctrip, filtered by local ranking, and then helped by local tourism bureau staff to contact if they were willing to be interviewed for this interview. And the interview questions consisted of two main parts, the first of which was basic information about the homestay owners, eight questions in total, including their place of origin, professional skills, experience, and frequency in the homestay, etc, the second part contains basic information about the homestay, ten questions in total, including the positioning, the main consumer groups, the tourism activities offered by the homestay, and whether the homestay was designed and developed with the overall integration of the surrounding environment in mind, etc.

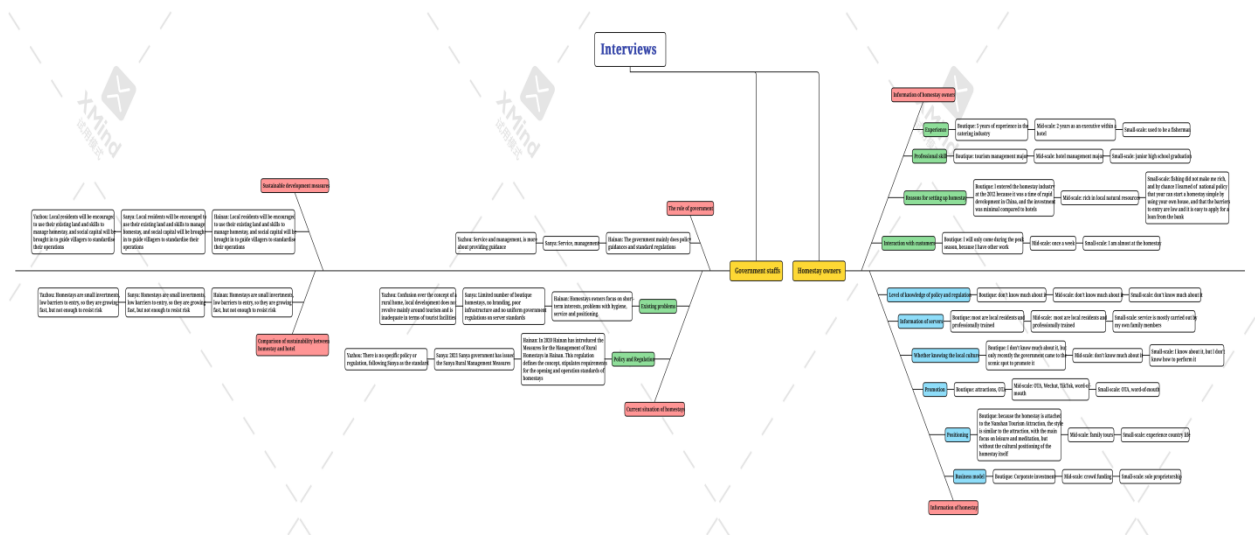
After the interviews were completed, the content was summarised using MAXQDA 2020 and first coded into two main sections: government staff and homestay owner, the first major category of government staff is then subdivided into Hainan, Sanya and Yazhou, and then into four categories based on content: the role of government, the current state of homestay, sustainable development measures, and a comparison of homestay and hotel sustainability. In the process of collation, the content is marked in different colours according to the different categories. The second major category of

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homestay owners were divided into three categories: boutique homestays, mid-scale homestays, and small-scale homestays, and then into two categories based on content: information about the homestay owner and information about the homestay, where the information about the homestay owner was mainly to understand the experience and skills of the owner, the reasons for starting the homestay, and the interaction with customers. In addition, the similarities between the interviews with homestay owners are marked with different colours. Finally use the mind map to summarise the selected content (Table 1)

Table 1: Interview Mind Map



4. INTRODUCTION OF CASE STUDY AREA AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Natural resources

Hainan Island is located at the southernmost of China and is the only tropical island province in China. The long axis of the island runs from northeast to southwest, about 290 km long and 180 km wide from northwest to southeast, with a total area of 33,900 square kilometres and a coastline of 1,528 km around the island, with 68 large and small harbours, making it the 2nd largest island in China after Taiwan Island (Peng, 2005). Hainan Island is located in the tropics and has a tropical monsoon climate, influenced by the northeast and southwest monsoons, with the coldest months being January to February and the hottest months being June to July.

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Hainan is rich in total tourism resources (Table 2), and according to statistics, there are about 470 resource monoliths. The variety is relatively complete, covering 8 main categories, 30 sub-categories and 135 basic types (87% of the 155 basic types in the country) (Zhongshang chanye yanjiuyuan[China Business Industry Research Institute, 2017). There are 244 natural tourism resource elements, accounting for 51.47%, and 230 social and human resource elements, accounting for 48.53%.

Table 2: Hainan Tourism Resources Classification

Main categories	Sub-categories	Basic types	Resources
A. Landscapes	5	35	129
B. Waterscapes	5	12	46
C. Biological landscape	4	11	51
D. Climatic Landscape	2	6	13
E. Site and Relic	2	10	22
F. Architecture	7	40	139
G. Tourism products	1	5	25
H. Cultural activities	4	15	44
Total	30	134	469

(Source: Outline of the Master Plan for Tourism Development in Hainan Province, 2005)

The tourism resources on Hainan Island are not only numerous, but also cover a very comprehensive range of types (Table 3), including all the main categories in the Chinese classification criteria, with the exception of a few basic types such as snow and ice, glaciers and passages of the Great Wall, all of which can be found on Hainan Island, and the unique crater.

Table 3: Comparison of tourism resource types and classification criteria in Hainan

	Hainan	National Standards	Percentage (%)
Main categories	8	8	100
Sub-categories	30	31	96.8

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Basic types	134	155	86.45
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(Source: Outline of the Master Plan for Tourism Development in Hainan Province, 2005)

Due to its unique tourism resources, Hainan has many of China's unique or best tourism resources and titles, including world-class beaches, Asia's largest nautical lighthouse, China's only tropical island province, the only national coral reef reserve, the only cross-sea railway, and the largest pristine tropical rainforest in China (Peng, 2005), the same is true of rural tourism resources. The countryside of Hainan has beautiful scenery and a pleasant climate, with blue skies and blue seas in the coastal countryside, fishing ports and small boats; tropical rainforests and fruit trees and fields in the mountainous countryside; landscapes and gardens in the plain countryside (Weng, 2009). According to statistics, there are 440 rural tourism resource sites in Hainan, including 54 rural natural ecological landscape resource sites, accounting for 12.27%; 75 rural idyllic landscape resource sites, accounting for 17.05%; 221 rural heritage and architectural landscape resource sites, accounting for 50.23%; 60 rural humanistic activities and folk culture resource sites, accounting for 13.64% (Hainansheng xiangcunlvyou zongtiguohua (2014-2020) [Master Plan for Rural Tourism in Hainan Province (2014-2020)], 2014).

At the same time, the island's previous isolation has been improved and the accessibility of tourist destinations has gradually improved. On the one hand, Hainan's external transport system has basically formed a three-in-one comprehensive three-dimensional transport system of air, sea and cross-sea railways. In terms of air transport, Hainan Island has built two large international airports - Haikou Meilan International Airport and Sanya Phoenix International Airport, which has greatly shortened the time for visitors from mainland areas to Hainan Island; in terms of sea transport, which has traditionally been the main mode of transport on Hainan Island, 24 ports have been opened on the island so far; in terms of railway, the first cross-sea railway was opened between Haikou and Guangzhou in December 2004, ending the history of no trains between Hainan Island and the mainland and significantly reducing external transport costs (Peng, 2005). On the other hand, transportation on Hainan Island is mainly by road, with main lines running directly to ports, cities and counties, and with branch lines extending to 318 townships and various tourist attractions throughout the island. And the island has developed tourist routes with Haikou and Sanya as the two endpoints,

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roughly divided into three lines, the first seaside tourist landscape, located on the east coast of Hainan; the second is the middle line of the Li and Miao minority landscape; the third is the primitive jungle landscape, located on the west coast of Hainan (Chen, 2013).

4.2. Cultural resources

Hainan Island is rich in ancient cultural heritage, and from the Han Dynasty onwards, a maritime "Silk Road" was opened up, with the South China Sea as the centre, to the surrounding international and even European and African regions for trade and commerce. Hainan Island and the islands in the South China Sea, especially the Xisha Islands, are located at the main route of this maritime "Silk Road" (Luo, 2012). Meanwhile, Hainan Island is home to the wonders of underwater villages. In China, an ancient village called "Rencun" was struck by a massive earthquake during the Ming Dynasty, causing more than 100 square kilometres of land to sink, creating what are now 72 "underwater villages", the only one in China that was caused by a An ancient cultural site where land sank into the sea as a result of an earthquake (Luo, 2012).

Besides, Hainan has been more distant from the mainland since ancient times and has been relatively little influenced by the culture of the Central Plains, thus creating unique cultural traditions and characteristics and differences in culture. Hainan is home to 36 ethnic minorities, including the Li, Miao, Zhuang and Hui, each with their own unique customs and traditional culture. This multi-ethnic cultural agglomeration has resulted in a diverse range of cuisines and a unique food culture, a wealth of folk crafts, and a variety of ethnic festivals (Cheng, 2013), among them is Hainan Province, the only Li-inhabited area in China (Chen, 2013). Hainan Island has 38.7% of the island's mountainous area and 70% of the central forest, and most of Hainan's ethnic minorities are concentrated in this area, which has a strong vernacular culture (A study on the development of homestay industry under the integration of "tourism + agriculture" industry,2021).

The island also includes a number of historical and cultural monuments, such as the ancient city of Yazhou, the Dongpo Academy and the ancestral home of Song Qingling. In terms of architectural culture, the Li people's dry-rail, boat-shaped thatched houses and bamboo-walled houses and the Miao people's hanging foot houses have tropical

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mountain cultural characteristics; in terms of food culture, the distinctive Li and Miao people's bamboo rice, the special dish of southern killing, the Miao people's three-coloured rice and five-coloured rice, etc.; in terms of folk crafts, there is a wide range of them, including weaving, embroidery and knitting, which are rich in connotation and diverse in form; in addition, there are also the colourful Li and Miao festivals represented by the "March 3" and the unique style of Li and Miao singing and dancing art (Zhong, 2011).

4.3. Economic benefits of tourisms

The resident urban population in Hainan Province increased year on year from 2012 to 2018, and the rate of urbanisation steadily increased, with Hainan's urbanisation rate increasing from 52% in 2012 to 59.06% in 2018. With the continuous development of urbanisation, the resident population of rural Hainan Province has decreased from 4,257,600 in 2012 to 3,825,100 in 2018, a decrease of 432,500 in six years. The new residential area in Hainan's countryside remains above 4 million square meters per year, with 4,026,300 square meters of new residential area in Hainan's countryside in 2018. With the continuous reduction of the countryside population, a large amount of countryside residential area is left unused, so making full use of unused houses to develop rural homestays can largely increase the supply of rural homestays and increase the income of farmers (Qiao, 2019).

Table 4: 2012-2018 Statistics relating to population and new residential area in the countryside in Hainan Province

Year	Urban resident population (million)	Rural resident population (million)	Urbanisation rate (%)	Increase residential area in the countryside (million square metres)
2012	461.24	425.76	52	446.25
2013	472.02	422.98	52.74	753.12
2014	485.45	417.55	53.76	547.28
2015	502.14	408.87	55.12	378.67
2016	520.67	396.33	56.78	368.63
2017	537.45	388.55	58.04	423.41
2018	551.81	382.51	59.06	402.63

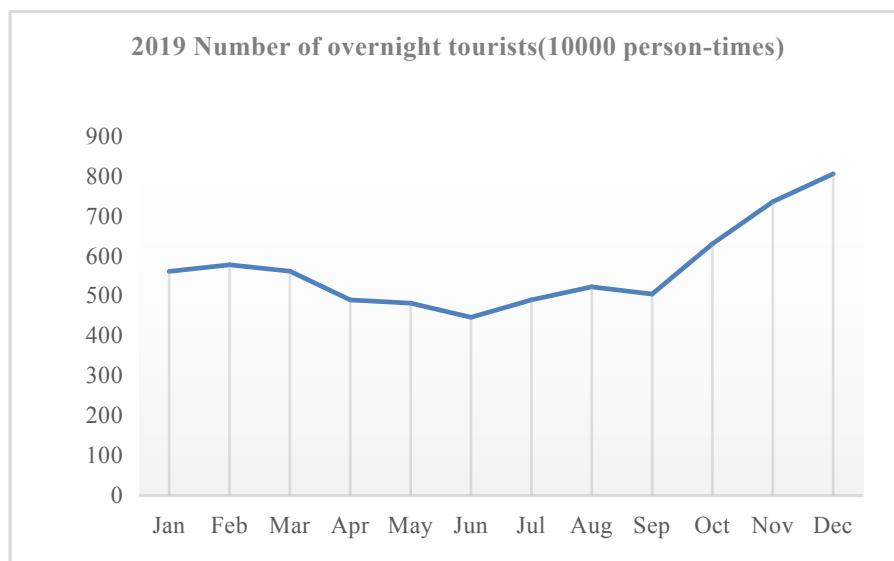
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(Source: Qiao, 2019)

Hainan Province is currently characterised by tropical holiday and leisure tourism, with tourists mainly concentrated in the coastal areas, with 76,273,900 tourist arrivals according to 2018 statistics. Of the overnight tourist receptions in Hainan Province, the coastal areas received 92.48% and the six central cities and counties accounted for 7.52%. The distribution of inbound tourists in 2018 was more uneven across regions, with the coastal region accounting for 97.70% and the centre for only 2.30% (Zhao & Guo, 2020). And tourists are sensitive to climatic and environmental conditions, with a "W" shaped distribution of tourist arrivals and revenues in Hainan over the seasons, with the main peak occurring from the end of the year to the beginning of the following year, a secondary peak in July-August, and a trough in June and September (Table 5).

Table 5: 2019 Number of overnight tourists



(Source: Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province & Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics in Hainan, 2019)

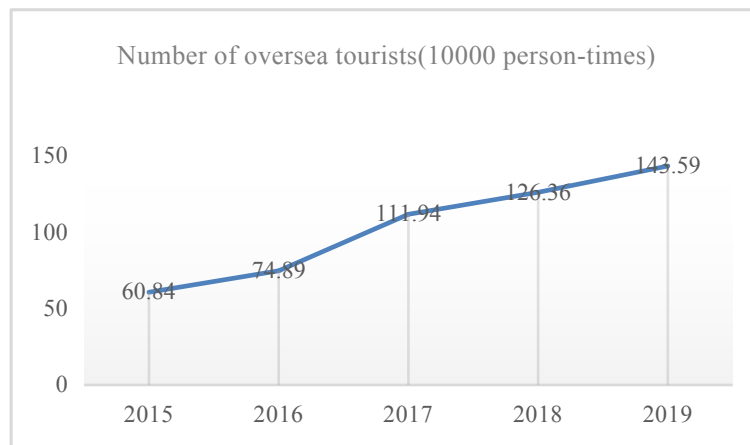
For a long time, the composition of Hainan's visitor market has been mainly domestic, supplemented by foreign visitors, so that the proportion of foreign visitors is very small, accounting for only 2% (Shi & Xin, 2018). Although the proportion of foreign tourists is relatively small, the number of arrivals is on a growing trend (Table 6), with Russia being the main foreign source country for Hainan, mainly due to its climate and geographical location, and according to the data on the statistics of foreigners received by tourist hotels in 2018, the number of visitors from Russia reached 255,759, ranking

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first in the number of arrivals. The more economically developed regions such as the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta are the main source of tourists to Hainan, accounting for 36.5%; Visitors from the Northeast are also a major source of tourists to Hainan due to the cooler temperatures in the region, and they have the longest per capita length of stay and highest per capita spend (Zhongshang chanye yanjiuyuan [China Business Industry Research Institute], 2017).

Table 6: Number of overseas tourists



(Source: Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province & Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics in Hainan, 2019)

The spatial distribution of coastal tourism on Hainan Island is seriously uneven, with coastal tourism destinations mainly concentrated in the eastern coastal belt (Zhao & Guo, 2020). Due to the over-reliance on coastal resources, the scope of tourism activities on Hainan Island is concentrated in the outer coastal part of the island, with tourist attractions and hospitality services mostly located on the offshore coast, resulting in an over-intensity of tourism hospitality facilities and tourist activities in these areas. At present, Hainan Province has 41 senior scenic spots (30 A-class scenic spots, three large scenic spots and eight national forest parks), 29 of which are located in the eastern region strung together by Haikou and Sanya, accounting for 70.73% of the total number of senior scenic spots, with Sanya and Haikou accounting for over 60% of the province's tourism market share (Shi & Xin, 2018) In contrast, the vast area of the island's interior, including the Wuzhishan area of Qiongzong and the Li and Miao settlements, has not been fully utilised and integrated, with tourism development lagging behind and tourists rarely arriving, presenting a clear imbalance in spatial development (Peng, 2005).

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Historically, due to Hainan's location at the southern tip of China and its inaccessibility to the outside world, it has long been regarded as a barbaric land with a very backward economy, in 1986, Hainan's GDP was only RMB 744 and 1/6 of the population was below the poverty line. Due to the weak foundation of industry in Hainan Province and the limited education level of the population as a whole, the traditional employment of local residents is mainly in primary industries such as fishing, gathering, breeding and farming, with low levels of employment and low income levels, and with obvious seasonal and discontinuous characteristics due to climatic conditions, weather changes and other natural factors. In order to solve the employment difficulties and increase the income of the population, China decided to make use of the rich natural resources of Hainan Island to develop the local tourism industry, which is a labour-intensive tertiary industry that not only offers a large number of jobs, but also has a variety of levels and a large number of jobs that do not require a high level of skill, thus allowing a large number of islanders with limited knowledge and skills to be absorbed from the local area.

In January 1986, Hainan was included in China's Seventh Five-Year Plan as a key tourism area, giving the island economic management authority equivalent to that of the provincial level. In the early years of the establishment of the Special Economic Zone, tourism was designated as one of the four pillar industries of industry, agriculture, trade and tourism, and since then Hainan's tourism industry has developed rapidly (Hainan Yearbook 1989, 1989). The economic situation in Hainan Province has improved considerably since tourism became an important industry in the province, with a GDP of just 5.728 billion yuan in 1987, which has increased to 519.55 billion yuan in 2018, 907 times the GDP of 1987, and according to statistics the tourism revenue of Hainan Province in 1987 was only 1.731 billion yuan, in 2018 tourism revenue has reached 95.016 billion yuan, 55 times more than in 1987 (Table 7). With the growth of tourism, local tourism businesses have grown year on year (Table 8), providing the majority of jobs for local residents and reducing local poverty rates (Table 9)

Table 7: 2010-2018 Changes in GDP, Tourism income, and Overnight tourists

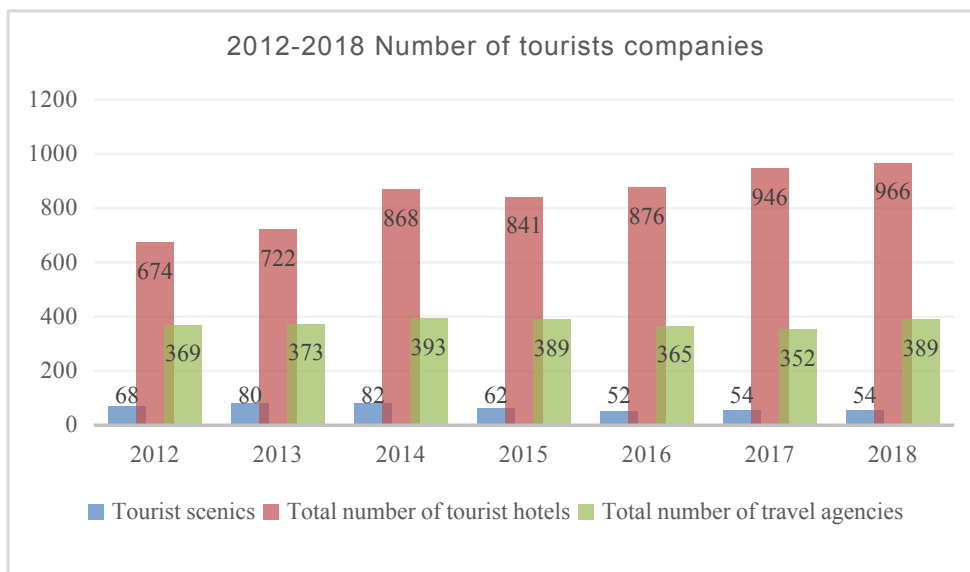
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Year	GDP(100 million yuan)	Tourism income(100 million yuan)	Proportion of GDP(%)	Overnight tourists(10000 person- times)	Growth rate (%)
2010	23831	257.63	10.81	2587	14.98
2011	28898	324.04	11.21	3001	16.00
2012	32377	379.12	11.70	3320	10.63
2013	35666	428.56	12.01	3673	10.62
2014	38924	506.50	13.01	4060	10.56
2015	40818	572.49	14.02	4492	10.64
2016	44347	672.10	15.15	4977	10.80
2017	48430	811.99	16.77	5591	12.30
2018	51955	950.16	18.29	6330	11.70

(Source: Statistical Yearbook of Hainan Province by Year)

Table 8: 2012-2018 Number of tourists companies

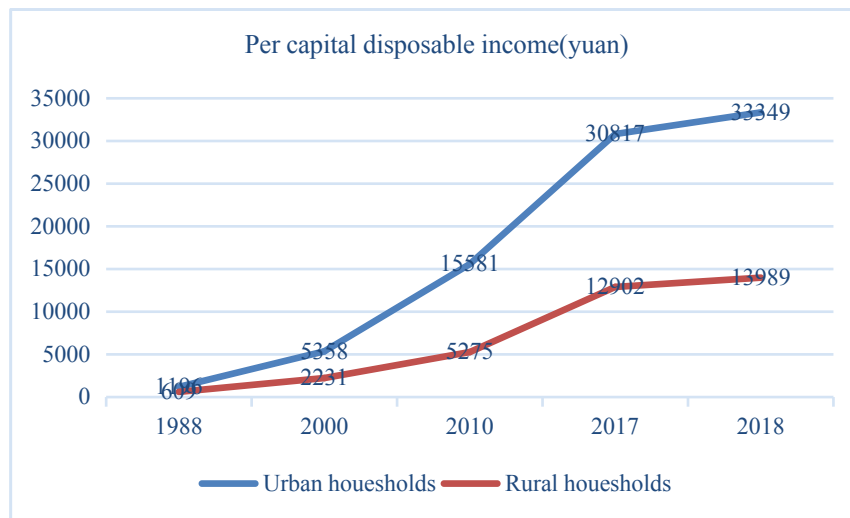


(Source: Compilation of historical data from the Statistics Bureau of Hainan Province)

Table 9: Per capital disposable income

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(Source: Compilation of historical data from the Statistics Bureau of Hainan Province)

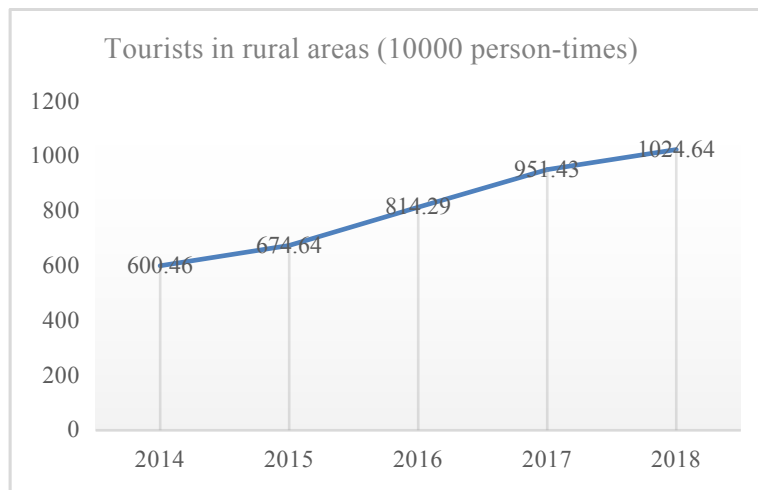
The main population of Hainan Province is predominantly rural, with a population of 9,447,200 in 2019, with a rural population of 6,232,900 (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province & Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics in Hainan, 2019), with 66% of the total population, the data shows that the development of rural tourism is an important way to increase employment opportunities for local residents and improve their income. According to the statistics of 2015, more than 50,000 people have been engaged in rural tourism business services in Hainan Province, directly and indirectly driving more than 70,000 people out of poverty (Mo, 2017).

With the construction and development of the international tourism island, rural tourism in Hainan Province has also developed rapidly (Table 11 & Table 12), but due to the uneven development of tourism among the various regions of Hainan, tourism enterprises and tourist attractions are mainly concentrated in the eastern coast and Haikou and Sanya, while the development of tourism in the central region is relatively lagging behind (Chen, 2012), and there are differences in the level of development of their rural tourism (Chen, 2016). In terms of rural tourism income, Sanya and Haikou have relatively high rural tourism income, and in terms of rural tourism population, Sanya and Haikou also have the highest number of visitors, thus the eastern regions such as Sanya and Haikou have the best rural tourism development.

Table 11: 2014-2018 Tourists in rural areas

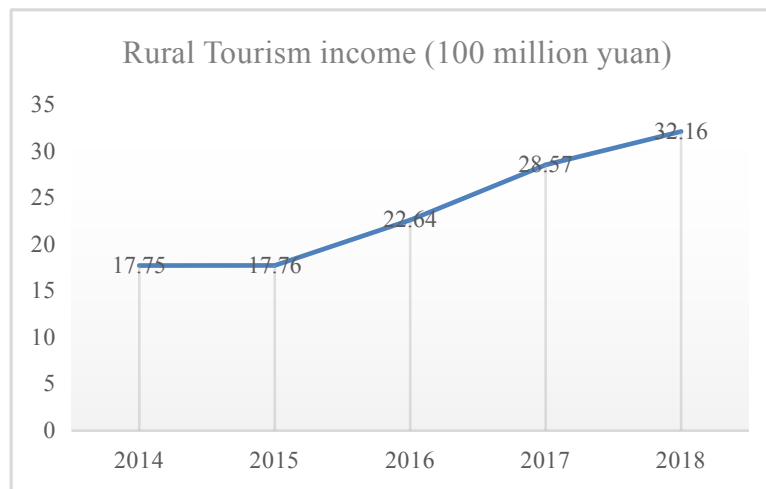
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(Source: Chen, 2016)

Table 12: 2014-2018 Rural Tourism income



(Source: Chen, 2016)

5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL HOMESTAYS IN HAINAN

5.1. Publication of Policies and Regulations

UNWTO defines rural tourism as the creation of a 'rural environment' for visitors by providing natural, cultural and human experiences that are typical of the countryside. These 'experiences' provide visitors with the authentic and traditional experiences that are the essence of rural life. It returns the visitor to a return to origins and originality (Othman et al., 2013). The acceleration of urbanisation and the increase in the income

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of the population have largely stimulated the demand for tourism among urban dwellers. However, traditional consumer tourism models are no longer able to meet the growing material and cultural needs of the population, so new forms of tourism in the rural environment are gradually attracting more and more travellers. In recent years, rural tourism has become a popular choice for city dwellers to get away from the "hustle and bustle of the city and relax". At the same time, due to the impact of the COVID-19, tourists are increasingly inclined to travel at a slower pace, in shorter cycles and in closer proximity, and place greater importance on safety, health and comfort. According to statistics, in 2020, the proportion of Chinese tourism users who visited the countryside in the suburbs or provinces in the last year or six months reached 70%, more than 50% of tourism users visited the countryside multiple times a year, and 18.12% of tourism users visited the countryside multiple times in January. Unlike the provision of a single, homogenous ornamental service, rural tourism is a complex experience of various consumer services (Aimedia Consulting, 2020).

Because the economic activities of the rural population are concentrated in agricultural-based activities, these activities are low yielding and unprofitable (Leh & Hamzah, 2012), resulting in a homogeneous economy. However, the diversity of the rural economy is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the lives of rural inhabitants (Suzana et al., 2021). Because of the variety of natural, cultural and special interest activities available in rural tourism, the development of rural tourism is an important step towards diversifying the rural economy, and has great potential for diversifying the rural economy and for balanced regional development. Rural tourism can have a positive impact on the income growth of the rural population, tourism is a labour-intensive tertiary sector industry that not only offers a large number of jobs, but also a variety of levels, with a large number of jobs do not require a high level of skill, thus drawing in a large number of villagers with limited knowledge and skills from the local area and supporting the conservation and sustainable use of existing natural resources (Suzana et al., 2021). Rural tourism has contributed to the diversification of Asia's rural economies (Amir et al., 2015).

China's rural tourism is driven by domestic and international market demand, influenced by developed countries, and guided by China's special tourism policy to alleviate poverty (Wang, 1999). China's rural tourism emerged in the late 1990s and

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has played an important role in optimising the industrial structure of rural areas, narrowing the income gap between urban and rural areas, promoting rural employment, driving the development of related industries and facilitating cultural exchanges between urban and rural areas, etc. China's tourism industry has actively promoted the development of rural tourism and agricultural tourism while emphasising urban tourism and scenic tourism (Guo & Han, 2010). **In 1998, the National Tourism Administration (NTA) launched the "China Rural Tour",** with the slogan "Eat farmhouse meals, stay in farmhouses, do farmhouse work, see farmhouse scenery and enjoy farming", which has given a strong impetus to the development of rural tourism in China (Dangqian woguo xiangcunlvyou zhengjinru neirong chuangxin fazhan jieduan [China's rural tourism is currently entering a phase of innovative content development], 2019). **In 2009, the National Tourism Administration (NTA) launched the "Year of Ecotourism",** and various parts of the country seized the new opportunity to make full use of and protect the rural ecological environment and develop rural agricultural ecotourism, further promoting the development of rural tourism in China. China's new positioning of tourism provides a good backdrop (China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) has designated 2009 as the "Year of Ecotourism in China", 2008), the **State Council's "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Tourism Industry"** has positioned the tourism industry as a strategic industry and proposed to gradually develop tourism as a strategic pillar industry of the national economy, as well as promoting the diversification of tourism products and implementing rural tourism projects to enrich the people (State Council of China, 2009). This policy provides a new strategic positioning for the tourism industry and the requirements for the development of rural tourism, and provides a good policy background for the development of rural tourism in Hainan, indicating the direction for rural tourism. "In the 12th Five-Year Plan", China is entering a critical period of building a moderately prosperous society, adhering to the scientific concept of development and vigorously promoting the integrated development of urban and rural areas, which provides a historic opportunity for the development of rural tourism (Chen & Wang, 2010). In its proposal for the preparation of **the 12th Five-Year Plan**, the Hainan Provincial Committee proposed to vigorously develop leisure agriculture with rural tourism as the main focus; to strengthen rural infrastructure construction and public services, and

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to plan the layout of villages and rural communities in an integrated manner in accordance with the requirements of integrated urban and rural development (Hainan Daily News, 2011). This plan creates a good policy guidance, material basis and measure guarantee for the innovative development of rural tourism, which is of great significance to promote rural tourism in Hainan.

As a key engine for the transformation and upgrading of the rural economy, rural tourism plays a key role in solving the problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers, and in winning the battle against poverty (Lei & Liu, 2021), in order to solve the "three rural issues", **China put forward the “rural revitalisation strategy” in 2017**, which provides good industrial support for the development of rural tourism (Xie, 2018). The “rural revitalisation strategy” proposes to implement leisure agriculture and rural tourism boutique projects, promote the integration of agriculture with science and technology, culture and other elements, and cultivate new business models for rural economic development (The rural revitalization strategy, 2017). As the beautiful natural environmental resources of the countryside are the fundamental attraction of rural tourism to tourists, the “rural revitalization strategy” proposes to improve the rural living environment and strengthen rural infrastructure construction while achieving harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, and the “rural revitalization strategy” will achieve a balance between the development of rural tourism resources and economic and social benefits (Xie, 2018). On the fifth China Tourism Day, Vice Premier Wang Yang focused on tourism poverty alleviation during his research, stressing that rural tourism is a creation of the grassroots and the masses, an effective way to alleviate poverty in poor areas, and an important channel for poor people to escape poverty (Cheng et al., 2018). **In October 2018, the National Development and Reform Commission and other thirteen departments issued an “action plan to promote the quality and upgrade of rural tourism development (2018-2020)”** to implement the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and the 2nd and 3rd Plenary Sessions of the 19th Central Committee, accelerate the quality and expansion of rural tourism, and further play an important role in driving rural tourism to promote consumption, improve people's livelihood and promote high-quality development (Development and Reform Commission, 2018). **In January 2019, the “Central Government's No. 1 document”** called for

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giving full play to the countryside's resources, ecology and cultural advantages, and developing industries such as leisure tourism, catering and lodging, cultural experiences, health and wellness, and elderly services that meet the needs of urban and rural residents. As well as strengthening the construction of rural tourism infrastructure and improving public service facilities such as health, transportation, information and postal services. In addition (Several Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council on the priority development of agriculture and rural areas for the work of the "three rural areas", 2019), in the” **Guidance Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the Revitalization of Rural Industries**”, which is pointed out that rural leisure tourism should be optimized, leisure agriculture and rural tourism boutique projects should be implemented, a number of leisure tourism parks with complete facilities and various functions, rural homestays, forest homes and recreation bases should be built, a number of beautiful leisure villages and rural tourism key villages should be cultivated, and a number of leisure agriculture demonstration counties should be constructed (State Council of China, 2019).

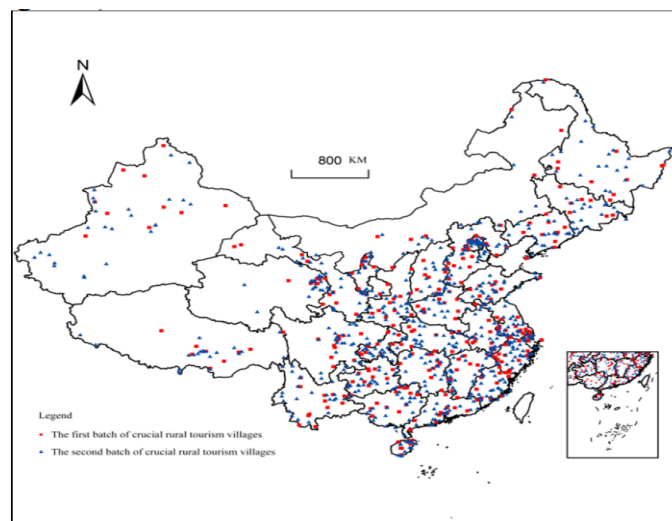
The development of the rural concept has become a government strategy to improve the standard of living and the socio-economy of rural areas, especially for poor people (Leh & Hamzah, 2012). Rural tourism provides a large number of employment opportunities for surplus rural labour, as tourism has a strong ability to absorb labour, and the development of rural tourism requires not only manpower such as tour guides, managers and service staff, but also infrastructure such as accommodation, travel agencies and restaurants, which creates good conditions for developing rural labour resources. As a result, new policies have been legislated to ensure that rural communities escape poverty and regression through active participation in the development of the rural tourism sector. From 2008 to 2010, income from leisure agriculture and rural tourism in China increased at an average annual rate of 46.39%. In 2009, the rural tourism industry had generated an operating income of 80 billion yuan, driving the employment of nearly 2 million people in both urban and rural areas, including 1.59 million in rural areas, and achieving an increase in income of 25.7 billion yuan for rural residents. in 2012, China's leisure agriculture and rural tourism income had exceeded 240 billion yuan (Qianzhan, 2014).

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The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has announced a total of 320 key rural tourism villages for the first batch and 680 key rural tourism villages for the second batch in 2019 and 2020 respectively, making a total of 1,000 villages (Table 13). The key to being selected is that the rural tourism villages are rich in cultural tourism resources, better protection of natural ecology and traditional culture, better development of rural B & B, mature tourism product system, perfect infrastructure and public services, obvious employment and enrichment benefits, typical demonstration and leading role, representing the quality service level of rural tourism in the new era (Lei & Liu, 2021).

Table 13: The spatial distribution of crucial rural tourism villages in China



(Source: Lei & Liu, 2021)

In the 1990s, Hainan Province began to launch a rural tourism development plan (Chen, 2016), at present, with more than 440 rural tourist attractions in Hainan Province, including more than 220 rural heritage and architectural landscape resource points, 31 rural tourism commodity resource points, 54 rural natural ecological attractions, 72 village field landscape resource points, and more than 60 rural human activities and folk culture type resource points (Chen, 2016). Hainan has developed different styles of development based on the advantages of its resources, for example, Nanqiang Village in Bo'ao Town relies on the human environment and the unique natural scenery of the Bo'ao Forum site to build a water-based rural tourism project; Ledong County has developed tourism products such as water rafting and hot spring

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sanctuaries by virtue of its good natural ecological resources such as the Jianfengling tropical rainforest. In addition, Hainan's ethnic customs and culture have been greatly integrated into the idyllic scenery, with the development of rural tourism, central Hainan ethnic areas such as the Li, Miao and other concentrations of economic backwardness due to the closed, but its unique culture has a strong appeal to tourists, such as Southeast Asian style village, Nan Kun ethnic style tourism area (*Chen, 2016*). The governor of Hainan Province proposed in 2006 to build Hainan into a preferred destination for rural leisure tourism in China, as the countryside is rich in natural resources, such as forest parks, exotic peaks and mountains, idyllic landscapes, as well as multi-ethnic customs and historical and cultural monuments, so vigorous development of rural tourism can attract more visitors and give tourists more choices when they visit Hainan, and the tourism industry in Hainan will gradually grow and become one of the main economic resources of Hainan. In addition, the development of rural tourism can also divert pressure from the reception of hot spots. Hainan is one of China's leading tourism provinces and is a hotspot destination for both domestic and international tourism. As a result, many traditional tourist attractions are often overcrowded during the peak season, causing varying degrees of pressure on reception, especially in some scenic areas where overloading causes a certain degree of damage to resources and also reduces the tourist experience. In this context, the development of rural tourism can alleviate the pressure on these traditional scenic spots and also improve the tourist experience for visitors.

The vast area of Hainan is rural and most of the successful scenic spots are located in rural areas, such as Nanshan, Da Xiaodongtian, Penang Valley and Wuzhizhou Island. Moreover, Hainan has high ecological requirements, so industry can only be concentrated in a few parks, most rural areas, in addition to tropical agriculture, the development of tourism-based services has become a necessary choice, rural tourism has an important role to play in achieving the goal of a rich and strong province (*Chen & Wang, 2010*). Hainan Province has a small population, a large proportion of the rural population, and a low level of economic development, the "tourism + poverty alleviation" model has also become the backbone of Hainan's many teams to alleviate poverty, around the sustainable poverty alleviation efforts, through the scenic spot with the village, the homestays village, capable people with households and other models, tourism industry investment, tourism-oriented employment, set tourism poverty alleviation sales point, create tourism poverty alleviation goods, carry out tourism consumption poverty alleviation, hold rural tourism training,

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tourism poverty alleviation line propaganda and promotion and other ways, drive the poor masses not only at home to achieve re-employment, but also at home to develop local specialties and handicraft products sales, rural homestays, farm caravans and other tourism industry. According to statistics, in 2018, Hainan's countryside received 10,246,400 visitors, an increase of 7.69% year-on-year, and achieved a rural tourism income of 3.216 billion yuan, an increase of 12.55% year-on-year. Up to now, a total of 106 coconut-level rural tourism sites have been assessed (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province & Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics in Hainan, 2018).

Rural homestays are a part of tourism, i.e. hospitality and services, with a focus on ecotourism and rural community tourism (Othman et al., 2013), where homestay facilities are usually found in areas close to tourist destinations, as well as relying greatly on the surrounding attractions (Othman et al., 2013). Through the rural homestay tourism, visitors are introduced to the daily life of the village residents and have the opportunity to experience the different lives and customs of the local community and receive a package of accommodation for the entire duration of their stay in their chosen village (Leh & Hamzah, 2012), which is therefore different from the interaction and environment of a traditional tour. In addition rural homestays differ from traditional accommodation because of their overall small scale and often remote rural communities (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013). **In August 2017, the National Tourism Administration's Basic Requirements and Evaluation of Tourism Homestay** stipulated in terms of market access that the number of rooms in a single building for a homestay should not exceed 14 sets. The customer base for rural homestays is very small and specific (The National Tourism, 2017), and according to statistics, young people are the main source of customers for the homestay market, with 18-30 year olds accounting for 70% of homestay bookings (Cai, 2021).

China has introduced many supportive policies to promote the development of homestays. **On 19 November 2015, the General Office of the State Council published on its website the "Guidance Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Living Service Industry to Promote the Upgrading of Consumption Structure"**, naming for the first time "actively developing such sub-sectors as inns and lodging houses, short-stay flats and

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long-stay flats", which qualifies them as living service industry and will provide policy support in multiple dimensions (State Council, 2015a). **On 27 January 2016, the "Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on the implementation of the new concept of development to accelerate the modernisation of agriculture to achieve the goal of overall well-off"** clearly pointed out the need to vigorously develop leisure agriculture and rural tourism, and to develop rural leisure and holiday products such as leisure farms, rural homestays, self-drive camping and outdoor sports in a planned manner (State Council, 2015b). To support the development of the sharing economy, in the same year, ten departments, including the Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Propaganda and the Ministry of Science and Technology, jointly issued the **"Guidance on Promoting Green Consumption"** stating, **"Support the development of the sharing economy, encourage the effective use of personal idle resources, and orderly develop network reservation carpooling, own vehicle rental, homestays, and the exchange and use of old items"**. **On 10-12 December 2019, the Central Economic Work Conference** emphasized promoting the high-quality development of tourism, especially pointing out that rural homestay as an important industrial mode of rural tourism, the high-quality development of rural homestay, high-quality enhancement for the promotion of the overall high-quality development of tourism has an important role.

The Tourism Development Committee of Hainan Province released the "Master Plan for Homestay Tourism in Hainan Province (2014-2020)" proposing the development of homestay tourism as a key development in recent years. **In February 2018, Hainan Province issued the "Guidelines of the People's Government of Hainan Province on Promoting the Development of Rural Homestays"**, which was pointed out that the objective of developing rural homestays in Hainan Province is "to create a 'bird's nest' for leisure and holiday, rehabilitation and recuperation, and wintering, to allow farmers to participate more in rural tourism services, to help the whole area of tourism, and to achieve the healthy and sustainable development of the beautiful countryside" (Hainan People's Government, 2018). This policy marks a guiding policy for the rural homestay industry in Hainan, and is conducive to the standardisation and quality development of the homestay industry in Hainan Province.

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In order to accelerate the development of rural homestays in Hainan Province, **in 2018 the Hainan Provincial Government formulated “the Implementation Plan for Promoting the Development of Rural homestays in Hainan Province”**, taking into account the advantages of local natural, ecological and humanistic resources, which points out the need to make full use of the legal residences of rural and agroforestry residents, as well as idle resources such as village collective houses and agroforestry houses, to form a number of boutique homestays with rural characteristics through planning and co-ordination, policy support, publicity and guidance, the participation of market elements such as capital in the development and construction of rural homestays in Hainan, to eventually form distinctive rural homestay brands (Hainan Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2019). The programme also sets out specific plans to build no less than 200 special rural homestays and create five special rural homestay clusters in Hainan Province by 2021 (Hainan Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2019).

In April 2019, the Hainan Provincial Department of Housing and Construction released “the Hainan Rural homestay Development Plan (2018-2030)” to bring capital into the countryside and promote rural tourism in the context of real estate regulation. The plan proposes that, relying on the province's traditional villages, beautiful countryside, shared farms and other rural tourism resources, combined with the spatial layout of the whole area of tourism and urban and rural transportation network system, the formation of "two circles, one belt and three groups" of rural homestay, including the Hai Cheng Wen rural homestay circle, the Great Sanya rural homestay circle, the eastern recreation group, the western mountain and sea group, and the central rainforest group. There are 10 types of homestay tourism products: Volcano homestay, Riding House homestay, Hopewell homestay, Fisherman's homestay, Salt homestay, Li homestay, Miao homestay, Juntun homestay, Yazhou homestay and Junken homestay.

Although homestays involve tourism, health, security and environmental protection, Hainan homestays are in a state of disorder until 2020. Prior to 2020, Hainan homestays lacked proper guidance from corresponding policies and regulations, and were not properly regulated, inevitably leading to a large number of potential problems: for example, homestay fees were not regulated, food and accommodation

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safety was not guaranteed, and some homestays were unable to effectively treat the waste and sewage generated, leading to serious environmental pollution (Dai, 2016), as well as previous regulations were too general and also confused the concept of rural homestays, focusing only on accommodation-based homestays in towns and cities, and lacking a legal basis for the regulation of rural homestays. In addition, there are no regulations for homestay access standards, using star hotel standards, but because of the small number of rooms, hardware support is not standardized and other reasons, can not meet the standards, and ultimately can not obtain a business license, so that most of Hainan's rural homestay no legal business entity identity. In 2020 Hainan introduced a programme on the management of rural homestays, which defines rural homestays and sets out certain requirements for homestay standards, the official website of the Market Supervision Authority has set up a registration office for the opening of rural homestays, which has been specialised to manage them. And in order to make the operation of rural homestays more standardised, a "Code of Service Quality for Rural homestays" has also been introduced, requiring rooms and commodity prices to be clearly marked, with full-time or part-time security guards according to the scale of operation, etc (Fu, 2019).

With the gradual improvement of policies and regulations, the homestay industry has become more regulated, but government staff in Sanya said that the number of boutique homestays in Sanya is currently limited, and most of them are still operating as farmhouses, which are lacking in terms of boutique, service quality and personalisation, although some boutique homestays have their own unique style in terms of layout and service, but they have not formed branding. The development of rural homestays is inseparable from the intervention of social capital. Through interviews, it was found that there are few villagers who are self-employed in medium and high-end homestays, and most of the operators are external investors, mainly including local returnees and non - locals who are doing business outside, and these people are highly educated and previously engaged in tourism-related industries, so most village - run homestays are not competitive with these mid - to high - end homestays. Government staff have also taken note of this, citing the fact that homestays in Hainan are currently at a rudimentary stage of development, and that the government should both guide villagers to use their existing land and skills to

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operate and manage it, and to help bring in a small amount of social capital to the countryside, as villagers do not understand how operate and serve to meet the quality requirements of their customers, and if a small amount of social capital is brought in to allow these companies to make a demonstration of standardisation of rural homestays, to guide the participation of villagers and train local residents to use their existing resources to develop homestays. Nonetheless, the government should raise the threshold for foreign capital to invest in B & Bs and control their number, because if all the investment is made by capital, then the villagers will be mere spectators with no decision-making power to maximise their interests, and it goes against the need for farmers to use their own land to maximise their interests as required by the rural revitalisation strategy.

5.2. Changes in Type of Homestays

The development of homestays in China began in Taiwan at the end of the 20th century, as the rural population in Taiwan fell to 10% and agriculture faced a great crisis of survival, the local government therefore introduced a series of policies such as "developing leisure agriculture" and "one leisure agricultural park for one township", as a new form of industry, homestay tourism began to sprout (Sun, 2020). However, homestays in mainland China started late and are still in the development stage, the early days of homestays in mainland China were in the form of farmhouses, family hotels and guest houses (Zhang & Meng, 2017), in the late 1980s, 'farmhouses' began to emerge, a type of accommodation that was mainly set up by local farmers on their own initiative to meet the accommodation needs of tourists. The "farmer + farmer" model belongs to the primary stage of rural tourism in China, with "model households" driving rural development. When the "model households" take the lead in rural tourism and achieve success, farmers begin to join the ranks of tourism reception, and learn from the "model households" experience and technology, and after a short period of integration, the "farmer + farmer" rural tourism development model is formed, which is the most authentic in terms of cultural preservation, costs little to visitors and allows them to experience the most original local customs and culture, but the farmhouses are small in scale and only provide visitors with the basic tourist activities, such as fruit and vegetable picking, fishing and eating farmhouse meals, and the quality of accommodation is inadequate, mostly for one - day visitors.

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In 2003, as more and more visitors to Taiwan experienced Taiwan's unique homestays and the attraction of the greater economic benefits that the homestay industry could achieve, the mainland began to learn from Taiwan's homestay industry experience (Sun, 2020), the concept of "homestay" was introduced to China, bringing economic benefits to some villagers as well as relieving accommodation constraints during the peak tourist season, in 2010, as a result of the Shanghai World Expo, homestays began to gain more attention as a form of accommodation. However, Chinese homestays started to develop rapidly from 2015 to promote the development of the folklore industry. In 2016, the Chinese mainland developed homestays under the beautiful countryside policy, and the mainland homestay industry gradually moved from the barbaric growth of family hotels to the middle stage of boutique development, while at the same time, the homestay experience gradually became the core attraction element of tourism consumption activities, and then developed into special tourism activities (Sun, 2020). With the rapid development of homestays, staying in a homestay is no longer simply about staying and eating, it is becoming a trend to provide customised and specialised excursions and entertainment products with butler services, with an emphasis on creating interactive spaces in homestays to create a home in travel (Sun, 2020). The current types of homestays are characterised by diversity, with the main types being family hotels, guest houses, farmhouses, youth hostels, country houses and serviced flats, however many homestays in mainland China are modern in architectural style and focus more on the external state, lack grounding activities and extensive contact with the lives of rural residents (DUANGSA, 2018).

6. CURRENT SITUATION OF RURAL HOMESTAYS IN HAINAN

6.1. The Spatial of Distribution of Homestays

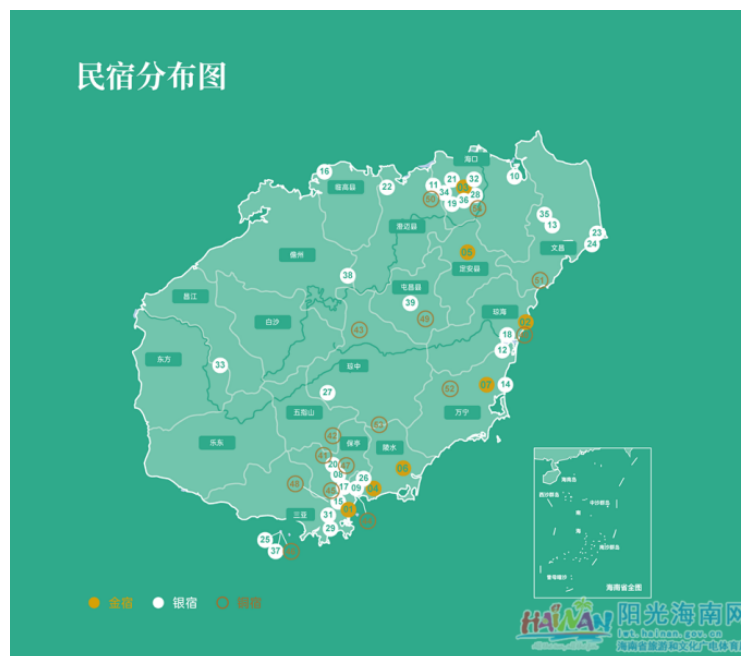
Homestays in Hainan Province are mainly located in villages, islands, ancient towns, and around scenic spots, and are developing in clusters (2018 - 2030 Hainansheng xiangcun minsu fazhan gui Hua (THE PLANNING OF RURAL HOMESTAY DEVELOPMENT IN HAINAN PROVINCE, 2018), however, the development of homestays is particularly uneven, with better development and more homestays in

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Haikou, Sanya and on the eastern tourist routes (Qiao, 2019), which can be classified according to their area of distribution into three categories: coastal areas, plain terraces and mountainous hills (Yang, 2018). According to 2018 statistics, the number of homestays in Sanya was 282, accounting for 50.72% of the total 556 homestays in Hainan, while the number of homestays in Haikou and Lingshui were 68 and 44 respectively, accounting for 12.23% and 7.91% of the total number of homestays respectively (Qiao, 2019).

Table 14: Distribution of homestays in Hainan Province



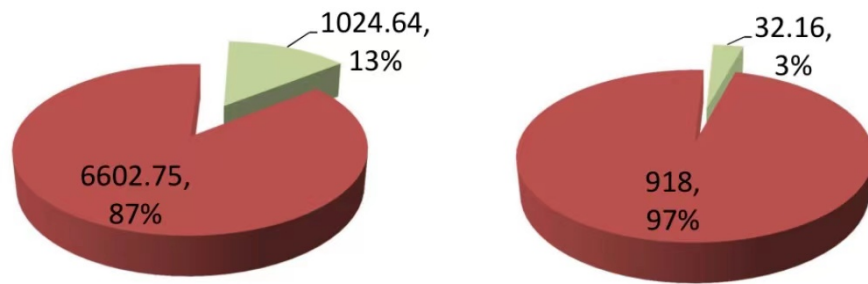
(Source: Department of Tourism and Culture, Radio, Television and Sports of Hainan Province, 2020)

Because Hainan Province has focused on the development of coastal tourism areas over the years, the development of rural tourism has lagged behind and the proportion of tourism is low (Table 15). In terms of 2018 statistics, there are 556 homestays in Hainan Province, of which 145 are rural homestays, accounting for 26% of the total, with a large gap between urban and rural areas (Table 16)

Table 15: Share of rural tourism receipts and revenue in Hainan Province

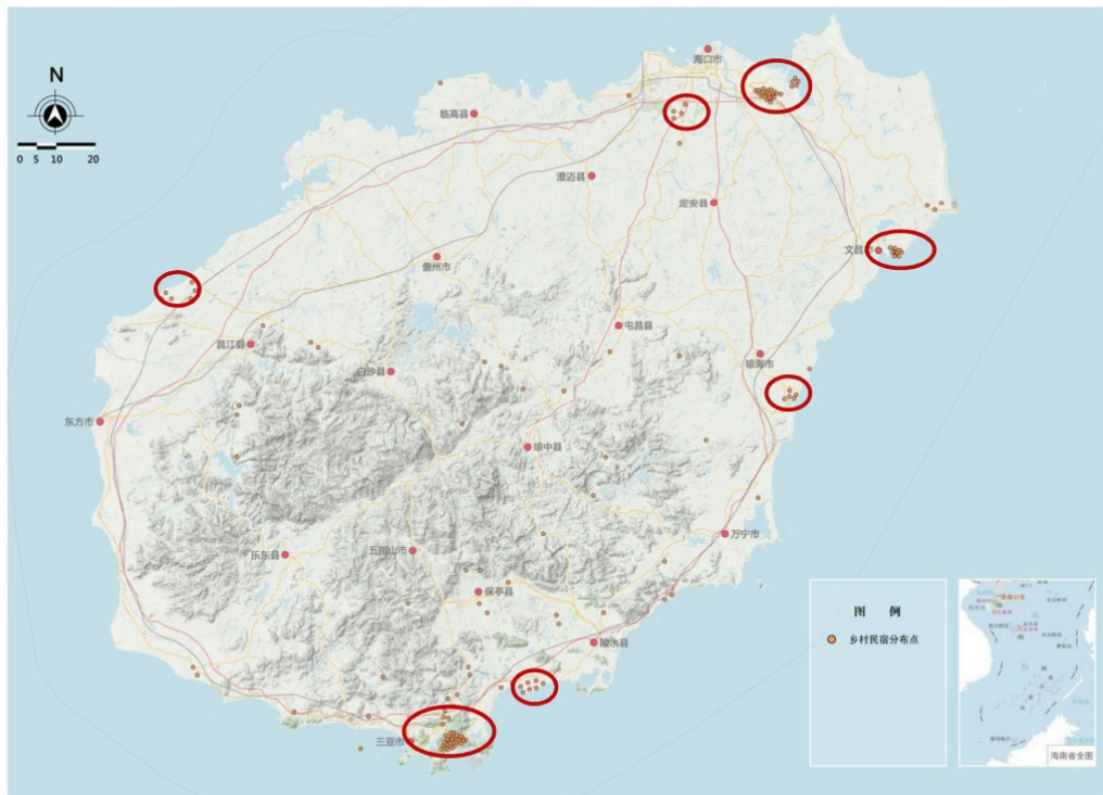
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(Source: Hainan Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2019)

Table 16: Spatial distribution of rural homestays in Hainan



(Source: Hainan Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2019)

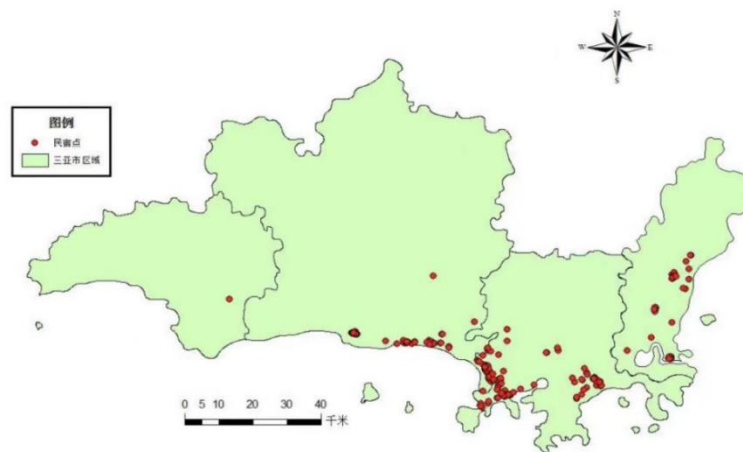
Sanya is the fastest growing tourist destination in the whole of Hainan Province and by far the best built tourist infrastructure, with homestays accounting for half of the entire province, and according to the "2017 Homestay Short Rental Development Report" released by Tujia.com in 2017, Sanya has become the 6th most occupied

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Homestay destination city in China (Chen, 2019). The spatial distribution of homestays in Sanya has a distinctly agglomerative character, expanding from the southwest to the northeast, with the spatial distribution of homestays mainly characterised by "small dispersion and multiple agglomeration", with few in the north and more in the south, and an uneven spatial distribution of homestays, clustered in different administrative areas along the coastline. The homestays in the Haitang Bay area are also developing in small clusters, but the Yazhou district, known as a famous historical and cultural city, has few homestays (Table 17) (Chen, 2019). This result is due to the fact that the development of homestays in Sanya has relied too much on the natural climate, the sea and other holiday environments, and has neglected the cultural orientation of homestay development, interviews with hostel owners also confirm that the development of homestays is dependent on the local natural landscape, while staff and tourists have little understanding of the local ethnic culture and non-heritage culture, and tourists only participate in basic tourism activities such as catching the sea, beach volleyball and yachting, etc.

Table 17: Spatial distribution of homestays in Sanya



(Source: Chen, 2019)

6.2. Structural of the Homestays Tourism System---Network Stakeholders

In practice, the key issue in achieving sustainable tourism development is how to balance the needs and perspectives of different stakeholders and to manage them fairly and effectively. Effective collective action can strengthen community solidarity,

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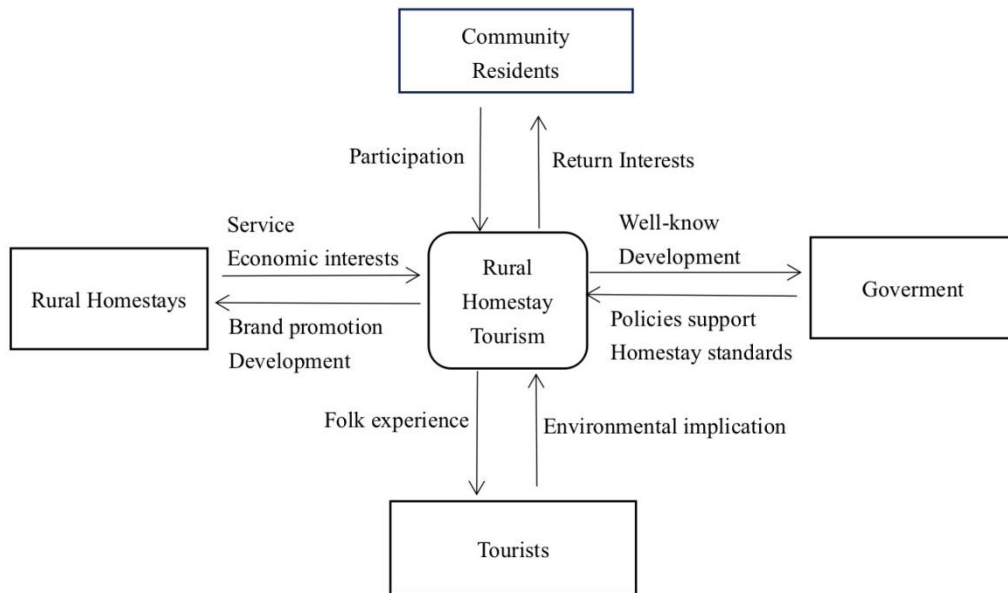
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identity and empowerment, and strengthen the position of local people in negotiations with the outside world, this approach that is popular in developed countries (Gao & Wu, 2017). Ruhanen (2009) has stated that the success of a tourism destination is determined by the effectiveness of cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders (Shariffuddin et al., 2021), similarly, Stankova (2014) has stated that cooperation between government agencies and private organizations in tourism planning and development has the potential to positively impact economic growth and quality of life in destinations (Shariffuddin et al., 2021). Therefore stakeholders must be able to take action to enable members to mobilise, synchronise and integrate their resources and efforts in order to achieve a long-term tourism destination (Retnosary & Salleh, 2020), and a focus on stakeholder theory helps to maximise the overall benefits based on an adequate balance between the interests of all parties (R. Yang, 2018). According to stakeholder theory, a stakeholder in the homestay industry can be defined as any individual or group of individuals who influence the development and operation of a homestay, its management and maintenance, or who are affected by the development and decision-making of a homestay (R. Yang, 2018), so rural homestay is an activity that involves rural communities, with appropriate support from local and regional government agencies and an equally important role played by other stakeholders (Ratna & Santanu, 2021), Rokeach (1973) said that these stakeholders have values that are the beliefs on which they act; the influence of these values can cause people to consider their surroundings and things positively or negatively (Ghasemi & Hamzah, 2014). McIntosh and Goeldne (1986) suggest that the classic concept of community participation in tourism in a Western context can be examined in at least two ways: in terms of decision-making and benefit-sharing processes. However, in the collective context of China, sustainability may mean that stakeholders are involved in benefit sharing rather than in decision-making in the current national social arena (Gao & Wu, 2017). At present, the development mode of Hainan homestay mainly includes: farmers' independent operation type (17.28%), enterprise + farmers' joint venture type (34.91%), contract operation type (38.84%), and government participation in operation type (8.97%) (Yao, 2019), so Hainan's rural homestay development mainly relies on social capital, while Hainan local villagers own funds are less and can hardly afford the cost of renovating and transforming homestays.

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Table 18: Core stakeholders related to rural homestay tourism map



For a number of years in China, the national government's industry directors and the elite, represented by planners, have been the main units and groups influencing tourism decisions, but this has led to a disconnection between tourism development and rural communities, with villagers not receiving the compensation or rights they deserve, which has led to many problems (Yao, 2009), for example, villagers are excluded from the influence of tourism development, decision-making and management, and have no control over the direction and objectives of the destination, which results in them being deprived of the opportunity to benefit from tourism development by external forces and receiving low real income from tourism, while becoming the ultimate victims of the negative effects of tourism (Yao, 2009). However, the participation of local people is key to the equitable distribution of benefits in the tourism development process (Begum et al., 2014), who should be both participants and beneficiaries in tourism development. At present, for the sustainable development of local tourism, more and more rural communities are breaking through various barriers of interest from other sources to become real subjects of interest in the development of many rural tourism destinations in China (Yao, 2009), all three government officials interviewed were also supportive of villagers using their existing land to run and manage homestays, supplemented by the introduction of capital, as a way to increase villagers' participation and decision-making power, with

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the government providing guidance to them, For example, in the villages of Bo Hou and Zhong Liao in Sanya, the planning of the homestays is guided by the government, with capital investing in tourism facilities around the homestays and bringing in a large number of tourists to spend money in the villages, while the operation and management of the homestays are led by the local villagers. Nevertheless, local residents have to suffer the cumulative consequences of tourism development, often at the expense of their living environment, despite the huge economic benefits they have achieved (R. Yang, 2018), as part of the overall tourism attraction, villagers have to live their daily lives as well as being part of the community showcase, they are generally passive contributors to various economic and social costs, including the occupation of land resources, changes in lifestyle, destruction of cultural traditions, increased cost of living and environmental pollution, but most of these costs are intangible and easily overlooked and concealed (Yao, 2009). Therefore whichever type of tourism development is used to revitalise the village, the rights of the local villagers must be taken into account, as they live there and influence the social environment (Gao & Wu, 2017).

As a form of tiny accommodation with low barriers to participation and entry, rural homestays have formed a certain scale in some scenic areas, but from the perspective of the tourism industry as a whole, they are still in the early stages of development, with hotels in Hainan Province now mature, especially in Sanya, Sanya's government staff say that the hotel industry in Sanya is now in a developed position, with mid - to high - end hotels reaching a certain scale and already in a saturated state, but rural homestays are just starting out, and the role of the government is particularly important for such a new industry. The government is the core stakeholder and the regulator in rural homestay tourism. Government departments play an overall coordinating and controlling role in the development of rural tourism, and the government's concerns as a manager are closely related to the image, economic development and cultural development of the jurisdiction. The Chinese government has now changed from a traditional managerial government to a service - oriented government (Lv, 2018), interviews with three government staff members revealed that they agreed that the government's leading role in the tourism market is one of service and management, with the government staff member from Yazhou District

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mentioning that the Chinese government is currently a form of decentralisation and that Hainan Province is a model of small government and big market, with the government providing more guidance, then management and finally service. And Martínez and Galván (2014) mention that for a destination to be successful, governments are key in adopting appropriate social and economic practices in the tourism sector and in creating or adding innovative value to tourism products and services (Shariffuddin et al., 2021), the government has supported the development of homestays in rural tourism through the formulation and implementation of policies and has set standards for the establishment of homestays for the sake of the orderly development of the tourism market. According to the staff of the Hainan government, the management of homestays in Hainan Province clearly stipulates that the number of rooms in a homestay should generally be less than 14, the number of beds in a single building should be less than 30, and the area of a single building in a homestay should not exceed 800 square metres. In addition government departments are constantly monitoring the private sector through the implementation of laws (Begum et al., 2014). But he also mentioned that there is no unified policy or regulation to govern the development of homestays in Hainan Province before 2020, and that the development of homestays is in a state of disorderly development. Although homestays belong to tourist accommodation, there are no unified standards for hotels regarding fire safety, hygiene and security, and although homestays are required to provide business licenses, they cannot be managed according to the standards of hotels.

homestay operators are an indispensable link and bridge in the development of homestay tourism activities, with both professional skills and service to tourists, and are an important collaborator in the development of homestay tourism (Zhang, 2009), they are also key stakeholders who have the power to control key resources and have a direct role in the development of the homestay and are the executors who run the whole homestay (R. Yang, 2018). Among the core stakeholders in rural tourism development, the interests of homestay owners are the most clearly directed, pursuing both economic benefits and the need to achieve their strategic objectives, who hopes to provide tourists with highly satisfying tourism products with as little investment as possible through its own capital operations, product operations and sound

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management, and to reap the greatest possible benefits while satisfying tourists' needs (Zhang, 2009). In China, well-preserved tourism resources are often located in economically underdeveloped areas, and even more so in the countryside. As a result, the majority of investments in boutique rural homestays are made by foreign capital, which usually controls and monopolises the local tourism industry, and the large amounts of capital, as well as specialist skills and knowledge needed to promote tourism development, need to be brought in from outside the country. The owners of the two medium to high-end homestays interviewed, Nanshan Leisure Homestay and Suozai Homestay are external capital who came to Yazhou to make investments because of the local natural resources, history and culture, while the staff are mostly local villagers, providing them with some jobs, and the Suozai Homestay even brings economic benefits to the fishermen around the homestay, as the raw materials for all the seafood food in the homestay are come from the surrounding fishermen. The operator becomes the biggest beneficiary of the environment when operators and tourists enter, and the local population, while benefiting from it, is also the most direct bearer of the negative effects of tourism. In addition, outsiders also occupy the majority of management jobs, and as the local population's own literacy and skill levels limit their participation, only semi-skilled or unskilled jobs are left for local people, and although they provide employment opportunities for local residents, they are highly disproportionate in terms of their resource possession status and economic position, which has led to a large degree of local economic leakage and dependence on enterprises (Zhang, 2009). Although some of the local homestay operators are residents who are familiar with the local environment, Yazhou district government officials said that most of these people have not undergone formal training, coupled with their own varying levels of education, and some of the less educated residents have a relatively poor sense of service and attitude when engaging in business activities, and a lack of brand awareness and brand marketing, so when faced with some competition, they often resort to price wars way, which seriously disrupts the market order.

Visitors are the demand side of rural tourism, the consumers and practitioners of the rural tourism market, and the purpose of tourism, or the benefits sought by tourists, is to gain maximum physical and mental enjoyment and satisfaction by purchasing

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tourism products and experiencing local folklore features (Zhang, 2009). Visitors, as experiencers, think more about their own experience and the environment and hygiene directly affect their feelings. In rural tourism, the contact between tourists and local residents is one of the important tourism experiences. Tourists want to experience the original ecological rural tourism, feel the local customs and folkways, and realise the desire to "eat farmhouse food, live in farmhouses, do farm work and enjoy farming", the homestay owners interviewed all said that tourists choose homestays not only for the accommodation but also for the special local folk experiences, such as catching the sea, picking vegetables and fruits, Li folk songs and the Langdian Chai dance, which are all popular with tourists. However, due to the economic backwardness of the local population, most of them want to develop tourism to gain economic benefits and increase their income levels in order to leave the primitive and realize modernize, so the resulting "performance culture" has lost the authenticity (Zhang, 2009), the number of visitors will gradually decrease. In recent years, with the rapid development of Internet technology and mobile terminal intelligence, new media is becoming more and more civilian, the civilianization of the Internet has made the Internet a convenient way for consumers to search for information, consumers can spread, obtain and exchange all kinds of information on the Internet platform to facilitate the purchase decision, so word-of-mouth about homestays on the internet is becoming increasingly important in influencing whether visitors choose to stay there. The latest survey data from the Tujia advance booking cycle shows that 97.4% of homestay users travel to book accommodation online in advance, and 98% of those who choose to book accommodation online will refer to online word of mouth to make their choice (Yuan, 2019), so there has been a major shift in the relationship between tourists and homestay operators, the position of the operator as a supplier has decreased, while the position of the customer on the demand side has increased due to the social influence created by the dissemination of information on the online platform, and the role of the customer is not only that of a consumer, but the feedback provided by the customer is gradually adopted by the operator and a better balance is sought between the interests of both parties (R. Yang, 2018). And at the same time, with the rapid development of local tourism, the relationship between tourists and local villagers has undergone a major transformation, in the early stages of tourism development, tourists entering the

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countryside brought spending, and the development of homestays also led to the development of the surrounding infrastructure and improved the quality of life of villagers. However, the influx of tourists can cause some damage to the local natural environment, and there are too many cultural performances to cater for tourists' favourites, which lose their original authenticity, and raise local prices to increase the cost of living for villagers.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusion

In this study, it can be seen that the development of rural tourism in China has been closely linked to tourism strategy to alleviate poverty, from its beginnings and development to the formation of a mature tourism system. Vice Premier Wang Yang focused on tourism for poverty alleviation during his research, stressing that rural tourism is a creation of the grassroots and the masses, an effective way to alleviate poverty in poor areas, and an important channel for poor people to escape poverty (Cheng et al., 2018), it can be said that rural tourism is an important means of poverty alleviation in China, while China's poverty alleviation policies promote the development of rural tourism, and the two complement each other. Among them, the concept of rural homestay, which is unified by the homestay management approach, refers to an emerging tourism model in which villagers make use of their unused houses to provide a range of rural services to tourists in combination with local agricultural activities, ecological environment and cultural customs. Compared to previous rural tourism, rural homestay tourism can meet the desire of tourists to integrate into rural life and have a unique tourism experience, as well as increase the additional income of villagers, and tourism can play an important role in rural economic growth and development of rural standards (Ionela et al., 2015), so this is why the development of rural homestays is crucial to China's rural revitalisation strategy.

In contrasting manner, the study found that homestays in Hainan are extremely dependent on coastal resources and surrounding tourist attractions, while the development of tourism resources in Hainan is uneven, with tourism enterprises and

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tourist attractions mainly concentrated in the eastern coast, Haikou and Sanya, where the number of homestays is high, while the development of tourism in the central region is relatively backward and the development of homestays is on a slow trend. In addition, coastal tourism in Hainan has seasonal variations, with accommodation usually in short supply throughout the winter and summer holidays when the number of tourists is highest, and often without customers during the low season, so homestays are also characterised by seasonal variations. The particular reason for the circumstance is the development of homestays in Hainan has been relatively short, most homestay operators have no relevant experience, they only know to apply the operation and service methods of chain boutique hotels, and do not know the importance of personalised services and creative operation for the development of homestays, and the development does not combine the geographical environment and folk culture, but imitate each other, and only pursue the style of sea view rooms. In the event that such a single form of development continues for a long time, it will eventually lead to a serious homogenisation of homestays, which will eventually affect the formation of the entire homestay brand and inspire a price war in the homestay market.

It was also found that the majority of homestays in Hainan are still being developed on an individual, and that there are deficiencies in the hospitality services and risk response of these types of homestays, such as the COVID-19 in 2020, which led to the closure of many individual homestays. Yazhou district government staff pointed out that there are 114 registered homestays in Yazhou, but only about 80 are still operating after the COVID-19, and some of those that are operating are defective. These individual homestays are susceptible to market information mismatch, weak competitiveness and lack of regional joint development due to factors such as the cumbersome nature of market information, limited human resources and the periodicity of development services.

7.2. Suggestions for the sustainable development of rural homestays

On the one hand, it is recommended that the local area should develop homestays under the integration of natural landscape and cultural customs. As an important carrier of Hainan's local customs and history and culture, rural homestays should form a vernacular brand culture, whose development helps the spread of Hainan's culture,

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enables visitors to experience Hainan's culture, increases the feasibility of re-tourism, reduces the impact of seasonal changes, and should focus more on vernacular in the central areas of Hainan where coastal resources are less developed, and areas are home to the Li, Miao and Hui ethnic groups, who have their own distinctive cultures, such as the intangible heritage of Li folk songs, firewood dances and Li brocade. Vernacular culture is an important feature that distinguishes Chinese culture from other cultures (Li, 2018), the cultural construction of the homestay brand should be rooted in the countryside, incorporating local vernacular folklore and protecting local cultural heritage. For example, the different regions of Yunnan have different ethnic characteristics and folklore. The most distinctive and attractive features of Lijiang are the old ladies in ethnic costumes, the leisurely slow life of the region, and the evening music of Dongjing and the fine music of Baisha, all of which are far more unique than Lijiang itself, and the branding of Yunnan homestays makes use of these local characteristics and culture (Li, 2018). They realise that every visitor who chooses a homestay is not only a spectator, but also an experience and a participant, and that involving visitors not only gives them a distinctive cultural experience, but also allows the homestay to act as a vehicle to spread the word about local culture. A homestay that establishes a unique vernacular brand culture will have a strong appeal, and the establishment of a homestay brand can also lead to a brand effect that generates local development.

On the other hand, it is recommended that Hainan establish homestay clusters in key development areas, particularly in the central region, so that homestays and supporting service providers with competitive and cooperative relationships can aggregate geographically and form clusters. This will not only improve the infrastructure around the homestay, but through rational layout and unified planning, the homestay cluster can achieve professional division of labour, business complementarity and sharing, synergistic operation and overall marketing. More importantly, homestay clusters emphasise the unity of the exterior of the homestay, enhancing its external recognition, but taking care to distinguish the differences between internal homestays, thus bringing about the agglomeration effect of economies of scale, and also enhancing its core competitiveness and attractiveness to its target clientele. The most developed homestay industry in China, Zhejiang Province, is using the homestay cluster model, thus the

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competitiveness of homestay continues to rise and also enhances the tourism value of the homestay cluster sites, well improving the local tourism competitiveness. The local characteristics of Zhejiang have been combined with the natural landscape and cultural customs to form distinctive homestay clusters of scenic spots, such as in Zhoushan, making full use of the overall environmental characteristics of the island, most of the local homestays have incorporated marine elements and fishermen's elements in their design and decorative style, while the city of Songyang is also known for its "Homestay+" development idea, through the construction of homestay clusters featuring "one village with one product , and one village with one rhyme" to create a demonstration area for the development of mountainous homestays.

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