

## Article

# Transformation of Rural Space under the Impact of Tourism: The Case of Xiamen, China

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**Abstract:** Tourism plays a key role in sustaining economic development. Previous research has established the connections between tourism and urban growth, as well as the influence of tourism on population and social structure, and the impact of tourism on the landscape. Fewer studies have been conducted on the impact of tourism on the process of rural development change, especially how rural spatial transformation and local community development are driven through tourism. This paper investigates the link between tourism and rural spatial development in China, using in-depth interviews. The research demonstrates that the ambiguity of collective land ownership in China is a key factor in the process of village development. The transformation of villages from “production space” to “consumption space” is driven by tourism based on the land institution arrangement. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding that tourism should be valued in the future as part of the village development process, especially when tourism plays a long-term role in promoting village development.

**Keywords:** the impact of tourism; rural space; rural revitalization; transformation



**Citation:** Yang, J.; Ma, H.; Weng, L. Transformation of Rural Space under the Impact of Tourism: The Case of Xiamen, China. *Land* **2022**, *11*, 928. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11060928>

Academic Editors: Baojie He, Deo Prasad, Ali Cheshmehzangi, Wu Deng, Samad Sepasgozar and Xiao Liu

Received: 16 May 2022

Accepted: 12 June 2022

Published: 17 June 2022

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism plays a critical role in the maintenance of economic development, and it has become a popular choice for many developing countries to encourage urbanization around the world; its performance has received government and public attention. Tourism is defined as a population and industrial agglomeration fueled by tourism, resulting in the extension and reconfiguration of metropolitan regions [1–3]. Tourism is a significant driver of urbanization in tourist destinations, as well as a contributor to changes in urban land use. Previous studies have examined the relationship between tourism and urban economic growth [4–6], as well as the impact of tourism on demographic and social structure [7–12], and the impact of tourism on the landscape [13–17]. The definition, dynamics, land usage and expansion, and the impact of tourism on the demographic and social structure have all been explored in previous research on tourism urbanization [18,19].

The issue of sustainable urban development is becoming more important as urbanization continues in the 21st century [20–23]. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the relationship between tourism and urban development, which is a process of rapid expansion and socio-spatial transformation [24–26] followed by rapid economic restructuring [27–29]. Tourism refers to urbanization that is fueled by tourism development and is based on entertainment and consumption. It is characterized by a tourism-driven resource redistribution process that is accompanied by a process of spatial, demographic, labor, and social identity change [30–32]. In metropolitan areas, tourism urbanization has affected the industrial structure and land use [33–36]. The tourism-driven impact on urban

spatial expansion and transformation has now been extensively investigated [37–39]. However, fewer studies have been conducted on the impact of tourism on the process of rural development change, especially how rural spatial transformation and local community development are driven through tourism. Research on the impact of tourism on rural areas in transition needs to be further explored. This study hypothesizes that tourism drives the transformation of rural spatial development. This paper attempts to discover the impact of tourism on the process of rural development change, especially how rural spatial transformation and local community development are driven through tourism.

Over time, as China's urbanization process continues, the urban population grows and the rural population declines. Owing to the rapid population growth and urbanization, it is especially important to deal with the relationship between urban and rural development [40–42]. Examining the rural development in China has become a new challenge for China's growth in the modern era. The growth of agricultural and rural areas must be prioritized in China's new development period. It is critical to implement the rural revitalization strategy in its entirety, forging a new urban–rural partnership of mutual prosperity and speeding up agriculture and rural area modernization. They are both “gas pedals” for enhancing consumption and “catalysts” for investment expansion as essential symbols of national modernization. The development of both in a synergistic manner will continue to unlock the potential of urban and rural production and consumption, job security, infrastructure, and public services. There is a link between urbanization in tourism and rural revitalization. The findings should make an important contribution to the field of tourism and help to revitalize rural areas by stimulating the flow and allocation of urban and rural resources, as well as guiding skills, resources, and technologies into rural areas.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews current studies on tourism-driven and sustainable rural development. Section 3 introduces the research methodology. Section 4 analyzes the relationship between rural spatial development transformation under the impact of tourism. Section 5 concludes this paper and discusses policy implications.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development

Sustainable rural development is one of the key elements of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is a critical issue that requires urgent attention from the international society. Due to its instant gains, low employment threshold, and vast industrial links, tourism has grown into one of the world's strongest and largest industries in recent years and is now regarded as a key factor for economic growth [43,44] and poverty reduction [45–47]. The impact of tourism on rural development has gained the attention of scholars [48,49]. Tourism, the world's largest industry, has been booming in recent years and is regarded as an important tool for economic growth due to its low investment, quick returns, low employment threshold, and broad industry linkages [50–52]. Many developing countries and regions are actively promoting rural economic growth through tourism development, with the help of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and multilateral aid agencies around the world.

As developed countries in Europe and the United States entered the period of mass tourism in the 1950s and 1960s, the impact of tourist development on the economic and social development of destinations began to emerge. Tourism growth brought income, more employment, and improved infrastructure in some emerging economic development areas [53–56]. However, tourism was mostly an episodic and add-on habit at this time, and the benefits of tourism development to villages received little attention, and tourism development rarely benefited the impoverished at the bottom. The role of tourism in promoting employment and boosting the economy was further recognized in the 1970s and 1980s, and some of the effects of tourism in rural development, such as a diverse range of employment and multiple levels of employment, were highlighted. At the same time, studies have revealed that tourism development is characterized by environmental damage, economic

leakage, social inequality, a heavy reliance on foreign capital and enterprises, and even “tourist enclaves”. These phenomena have attracted the attention of international society.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and it not only focused on the economic impact of tourism on the entire region, but also took into account the vital interests of the society’s inhabitants, and tourism development objectives began to include ecological and social sustainability. The British International Development Agency proposed the concept of PPT (PRO-POOR TOURISM) in 1999, which marked a significant shift in the international perspective of tourism poverty reduction to a more micro level, i.e., how the poor can achieve their development through tourism development [57–60]. The World Tourism Organization proposed the ST-EP program in 2002, which emphasizes sustainable tourism development and proposes sustainable tourism as a means of poverty alleviation, not only through economic support, project demonstration, and investment, but also through capacity training, improvement of tourism impact on local society and culture, and other means to promote local economic development [61–63].

### *2.2. Rural Tourism and Rural Revitalization*

Rural tourism is frequently regarded as an important way of accomplishing rural development. In recent years, international society has paid close attention to rural development, and governments from different countries have made efforts to actively promote rural development by adjusting rural economic and employment structures, improving taxation policies, improving government public expenditure policies and social security systems, and increasing investment in poverty alleviation in a variety of different ways [64–67]. Rural revitalization is a critical component of China’s poverty-eradication strategy, as well as the country’s overall achievement of a moderately prosperous society [68,69]. Tourism development as an important rural development tool has attracted much interest from both international and domestic scholars. However, there is less evidence from existing studies on the process of change of tourism on rural development, particularly how tourism drives the transformation of rural space and the transformation of local community development. This research will focus on the impact of tourism on the transformation of rural spatial development from the perspective of institutional arrangement, as well as the impact of this process on the survival status of rural residents and the relationship between tourism and rural revitalization from the aspect of policy-based institutional arrangements, to provide a reference for sustainable rural development.

Tourism is widely acknowledged as a tool for promoting sustainable rural development. The spatial impact of tourism on rural development in new urbanization is proposed, which will focus on the image of tourism on the transformation of rural spatial development from the perspective of China’s special land property rights institutional arrangement, based on the evolution of urbanization theory and the special characteristics of China’s property rights institution [70–72]. The impact of this process on rural economies will be investigated, as will the relationship between tourism and rural spatial development in terms of policy-based institutional arrangements, and the mechanism of rural spatial development will be investigated to provide theoretical support for tourism development to contribute to rural revitalization.

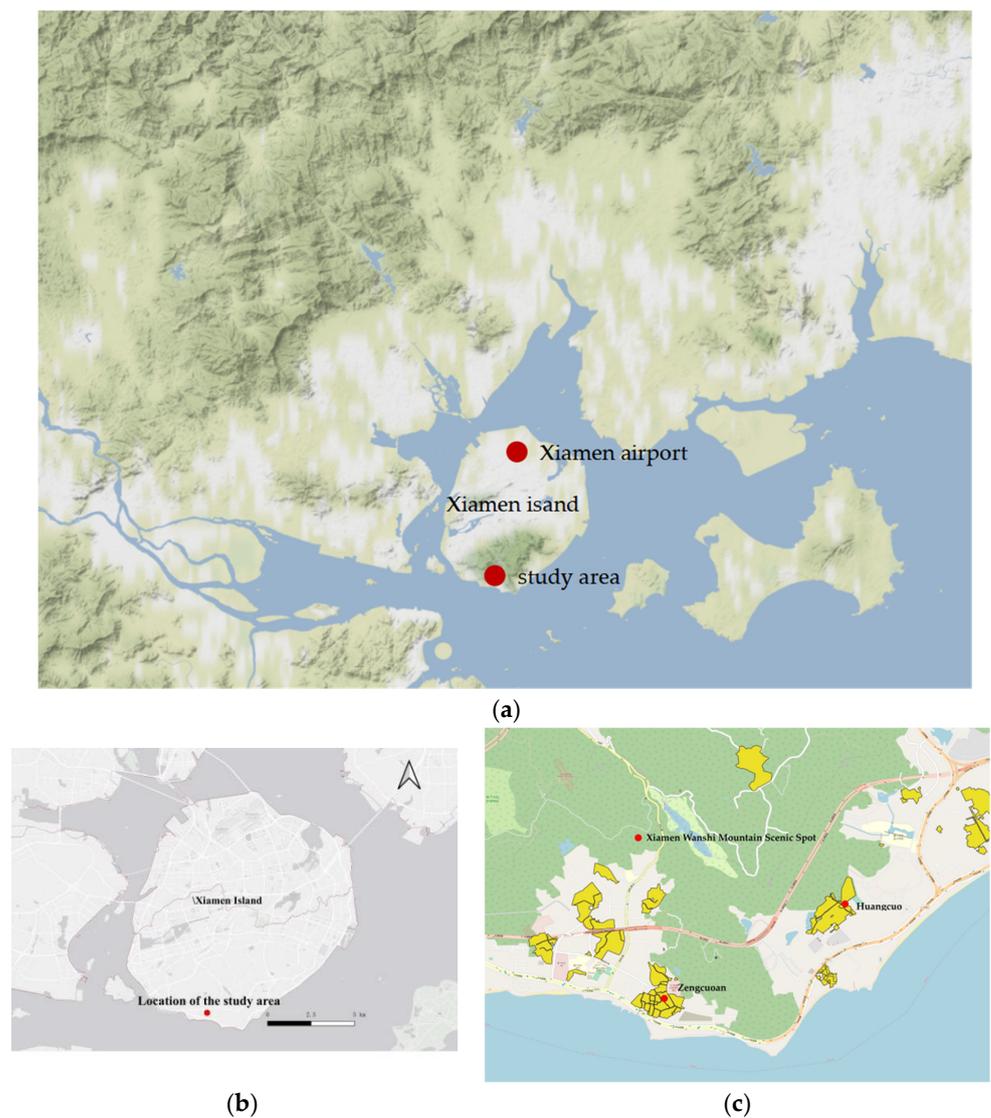
## **3. Research Methods**

### *3.1. Study Area*

In this paper, our study area is Zengcuoan and Huangcuo, two villages that were typical fishing villages more than 10 years ago. The rapid development of tourism in Xiamen has brought about a transformation of the villages and a large number of hotel and guesthouse operators have invested capital in the villages. The B&Bs in the villages have a diverse style of appearance and cheap prices, which attracts a large number of tourists to stay in the villages. They are typical of the transformation from fishing villages to tourist villages. The land in Zengcuoan and Huangcuo is under collective land ownership. Before

being influenced by tourism development, both villages were typical coastal fishing villages with strong southern Fujian architecture and agricultural populations. The development of the Xiamen Gulangyu-Wanshi Mountain tourist attraction successfully transformed these villages, which is consistent with the research topic of the transformation of village development patterns under the influence of tourism development. As a result, we chose these two villages as the focus of our research.

Wanshi Mountain, a beautiful mountain in the Xiamen urban area, is part of the Gulangyu-Wanshi Mountain National Scenic Spot. The mountains are linked, and the water is dependent on each other; the peaks overlap, and the boulders lean on each other; the winding paths lead to different scenery. It is the largest sightseeing area in China's large and medium-sized cities, and it is rarely found close to the downtown area. The Wanshi Mountain Scenic Spot is close to Zengcuoan and Huangcuo (Figure 1). Every year, a large number of tourists visit Xiamen to see the scenic tourist area of Wanshi Mountain. Due to the superior geographical surroundings and the beautiful scenery near the sea, many hostels have quickly developed in the villages.



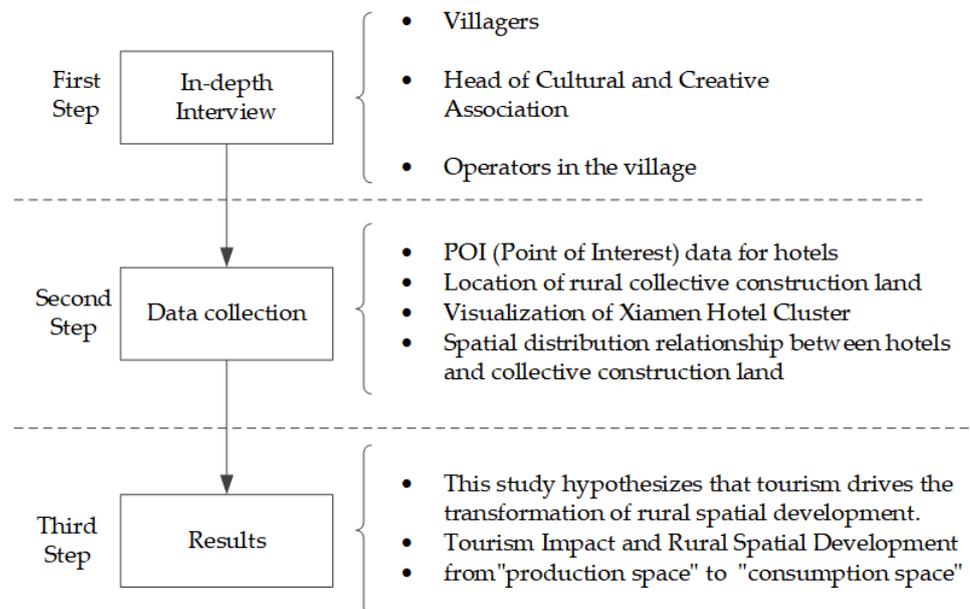
**Figure 1.** (a) shows the distance between the study case site and Xiamen Airport; (b) shows the location of the study case site on Xiamen Island; (c) shows the location of the study case site in relation to Xiamen Wanshi Mountain Scenic Area. Source: (a) is adapted from Stamen Terrain. (b) is adapted from Esri. (c) is adapted from OpenStreetMap.

The case study area is Zengcuoan and Huangcuo, near The Wanshi Mountain Scenic Spot. The villages, which were originally fishing villages, kept their collective land ownership system. The villages have one thing in common: they face the sea and have beautiful beaches and island scenery, as well as easy access to transportation. The villages, which are close to Xiamen's main tourist core area, have many hotel clusters, forming a tourist hotel scale group.

### 3.2. Research Methodology

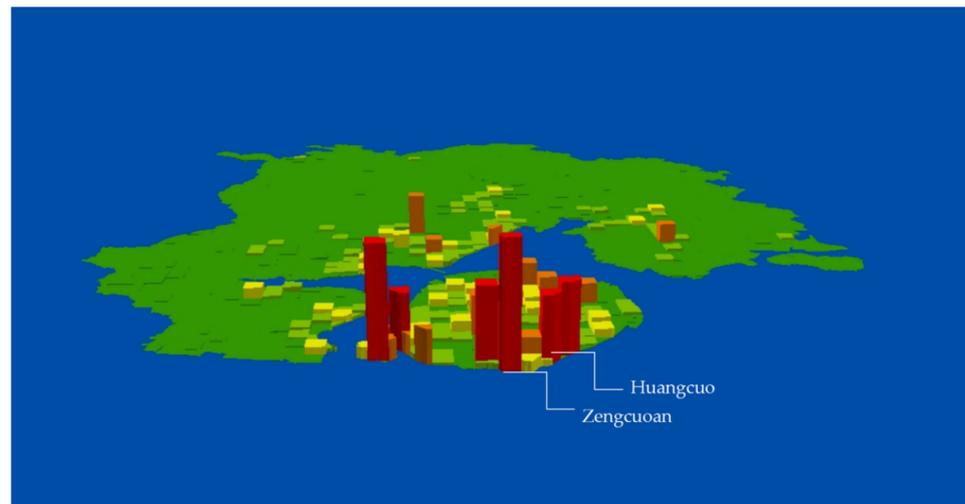
The authors of this study conducted in-depth interviews, field trips, and field research with community officials, government departments, B&B operators, and cultural and creative associations in the region several times between 2018 and 2021, to better understand the changes brought to the village during the tourism development process. Photoshoots and interviews were conducted during the study to better understand the positive influence of tourism on the village's development and the changes brought about by the business process.

Field research and documentary research methods were used to collect data by means of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Field research was conducted in the area in April 2018, May 2019, July 2020, and August 2021. The research mainly used non-participant observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to understand the historical evolution process and its current development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 subjects, including eight artists and 12 villagers, including in-depth interviews (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Research Methodology and Process. (Source: drawn by the authors).

Two types of data were applied in this study: one is the content of village research interviews, which is used to analyze the impact of tourism on the spatial development of villages; the other is the POI data (points of interests) of Xiamen hotels, which is used to identify the relationship between hotels and the spatial distribution of collective construction land. We input these POI data into ArcGIS for spatial visualization to reveal the general spatial layout of hotels in Xiamen. We added the Xiamen village construction land, and the results found that two villages, Zengcuoan and Huangcuo, form a hotel cluster in the tourist area (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Spatial distribution of hotel density in Xiamen. (Source: drawn by the authors).

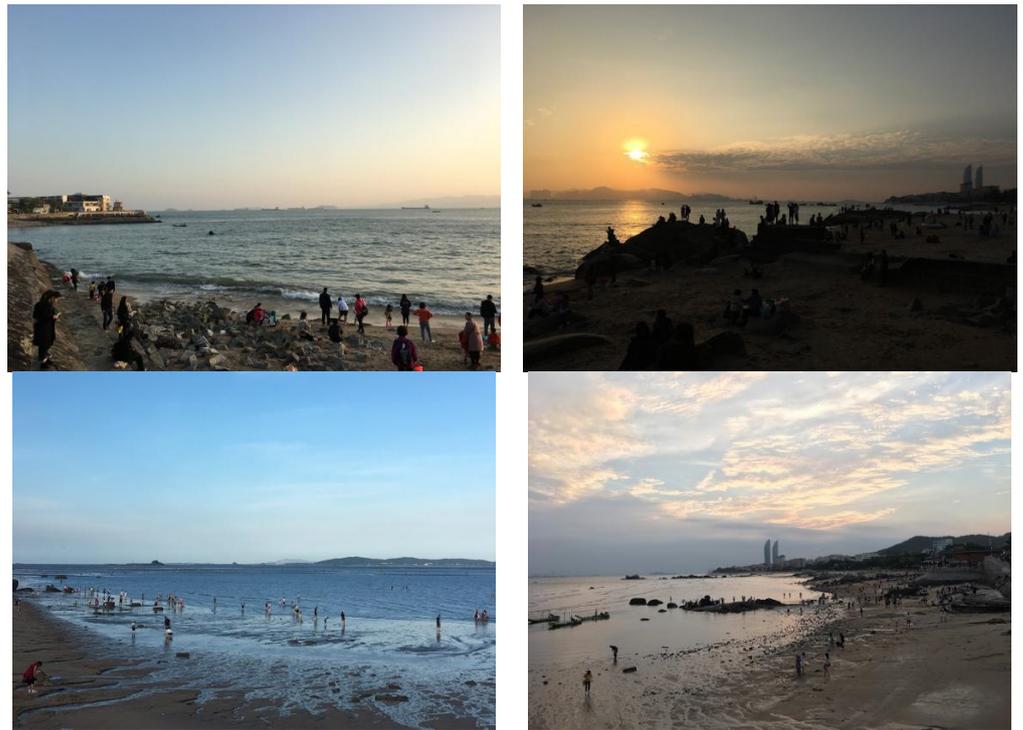
#### **4. Rural Spatial Development Transformation under the Impact of Tourism**

##### *4.1. Tourism-Driven Changes in Rural Development*

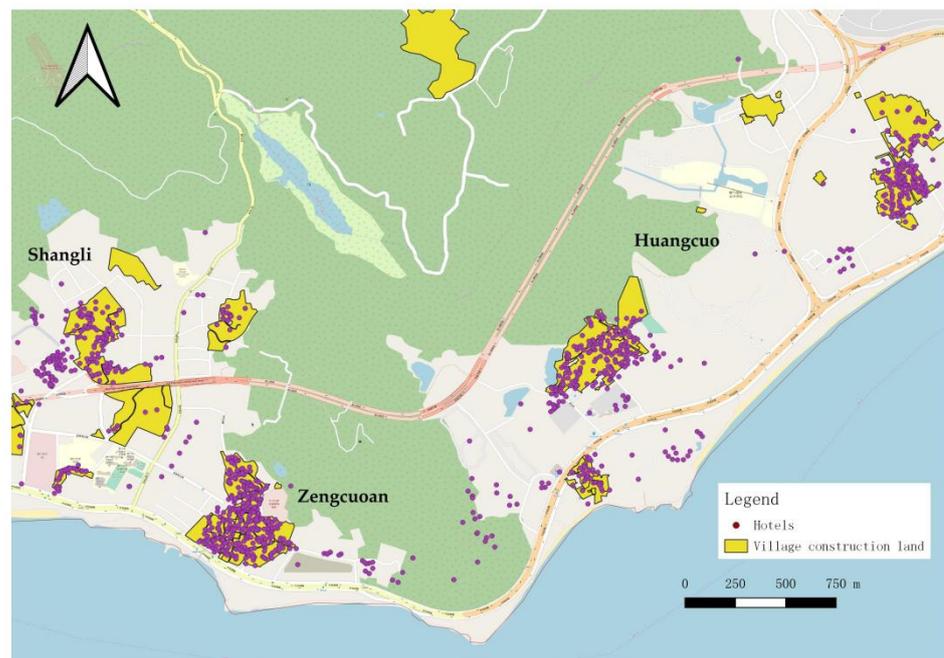
They were originally small and unknown fishing villages 10 years ago, which were mainly engaged in planting and fishing. Due to the superior geographical surroundings and the beautiful scenery near the sea, the villages have quickly developed a large number of hostels. However, Zengcuoan and Huangcuo are strategically located and have a unique southern Fujian original flavor. The villagers are gradually renting out their houses to artists and tourists, and family hotels are gradually emerging. Since 2013, with the gradual gathering of various small boutique shops and hotels with cultural and creative characteristics, this village has attracted many tourists to visit. It has now become a famous tourist attraction in Xiamen.

Since July 2013, the Xiamen Municipal Government has mobilized stakeholders such as landlords, business operators, and artistic youths to participate in community governance and achieve a new situation in the economic transformation of the village. The former “urban village” has been transformed into a tourist community with an active mechanism, excellent industry, wealthy citizens, and beautiful ecology”, creating a nationwide example of community tourism governance innovation in the transformation. The beautiful coastal scenery attracts tourists from all over the country to stay in the village for a short time (Figure 4).

Originally, it was a small and unknown fishing community that relied primarily on agriculture and fishing for income. The peasants lost their farming land as a result of the construction of the Xiamen Island Ring Road, negatively impacting their livelihood. The geographical location of Zengcuoan, on the other hand, has a distinct original flavor of southern Fujian, and teachers and students from Xiamen University’s Art Institute, as well as other artists, frequently come to this natural “creative foundation” to stay and create their work, providing a unique opportunity for the villagers to find work. The villagers gradually began to rent out their homes to artists and tourists, and a family hotel arose. Some literary and artistic innovators use the family hotel as a platform for artistic and cultural interchange, even presenting the community with diverse cultural and creative concepts. This has resulted in the formation of a unique cultural hamlet combining culture, creativity, tourism, and leisure, which has evolved into the current tourist village. The function of the village has gradually changed from a livelihood space to a consumption space. Most of the hotels in Xiamen’s tourist attractions around the island are located in the construction sites of two villages, Huangcuo and Zengcuoan. This forms a tourism industry cluster, which provides the foundation for the transformation and development of the villages (Figure 5).



**Figure 4.** Seaside scenery in the vicinity of Xiamen Island Ring Road. Source: Photo by the authors.



**Figure 5.** Spatial layout of villages by the sea on Xiamen Island. Source: drawn by the authors. The base map is obtained from the Openstreet map.

#### 4.2. Tourism-Driven and Rural Spatial Development Transformation

Institutions, as important manifestations of practices, have been an important dimension of institutional evolution research, which provides good research ideas and pathways for exploring the impact of historical and cultural practices on local development. A typical framework for the study of institutions can be found in Oliver Williamson's levels of institutional analysis, and the variation of institutions at each level [73]. Oliver Williamson's

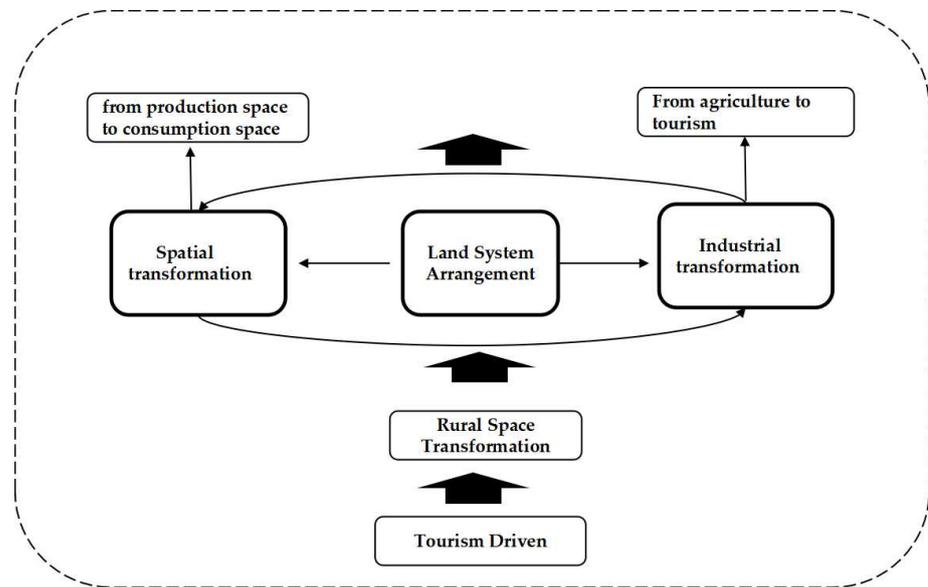
framework for institutional analysis distinguishes four interrelated levels of social or institutional analysis. The first level refers to the embedded institutions or the foundations of society and culture. The second level refers to the underlying institutional environment, which includes the constitution, political institutions, and the laws and related institutions that enable the enforcement of basic human and property rights and is referred to as the 'formal rules of the game'. The third level refers to the mechanisms of governance, which Williamson calls the way the game is played. The fourth level refers to the short-term resource allocation system [73].

Institutions are the product of human creation; they evolve and are changed by humans. The theoretical analysis must begin with the individual, while at the same time, institutions impose ubiquitous constraints on individual choice. Combining individual choices with institutional constraints is an important step in the study of the social sciences as a whole. The interaction of institutions and organizations determines the direction of institutional change [74]. The central question of human history is how to understand the great variation in historical change. Institutions play a key role in the distinction between different types of societies and in the differences in the performance of different societies. Despite the convergence of development in many countries in the context of globalization, it is a fact that institutions determine economic performance and that relative price changes are the source of institutional change [74]. The key to the solution to the long-standing and widespread phenomenon of property rights not leading to economic growth, described in *Structure and Change in Economic History*, is to explain the differences between institutions and organizations and the interactions between them. Organizations are created to take advantage of these opportunities, and their development will change institutions [75].

In this paper, we develop a research framework to analyze tourism-driven and rural space transformation in the institutional arrangement context (Figure 6). Due to the collective land property rights institution, the government has limited influence on the development of the village. The transformation of the original residential land into hotels is a breakthrough from the current government management system to maximize the benefits through the change of use. Tourism-driven transformation of village space development is achieved due to the ambiguity of collective land property rights, and maximizing rental income allows villages to gradually transition from fishing villages to tourism villages. This transformation is an opportunity to profit from the ambiguity of the collective land property rights system. We examine the dual property rights land system as the foundation for rural urbanization through collective and ambiguous land property rights using this analytical framework. Because of the lax institutional arrangement of rural land management in the urban and rural planning management law, villagers choose according to the second level of institutional arrangement, and the basic institution of urban and rural planning management in villages has certain institutional stability due to the ambiguity of land property rights, which is the "formal rule of the game." This institutional rule serves as the foundation for the village's decision to convert the previous residential land for commercial business use.

Due to the ambiguity of the collective land ownership system, many houses of farming have changed their residential properties and transformed their functions to form industrial clusters of B&Bs, and a large number of B&Bs are formed under the government's default (Figure 7), which is a result of the institutional arrangements of rural collective land property rights. The rural area is undergoing a significant transformation from a living space dominated by rural villagers to a consumption space dominated by tourists. Villagers have the right to use the land and attract businessmen to invest in the hotel by renting out the village houses in tourism, which objectively promotes the village's tourism urbanization. Villagers receive long-term land rent income, resulting in the transformation of village development. The villagers' living conditions have improved, while their original lifestyle and values have changed. The study shows that tourism is important in shaping local cultural and industrial features, transitioning from "production space" to

“consumption space,” and that tourism-driven industrial transformation is critical in rural development patterns.



**Figure 6.** Analysis Framework of Tourism driven and Rural space transformation. (Source: drawn by the authors).



**Figure 7.** Diversified hotel styles in Zengcuan. Source: Photo by the authors.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper examines the relationship between tourism-driven and rural space transformation. Through in-depth interviews and participatory observation, we investigate typical cases of tourism village transformation in Xiamen, China. The research demonstrates that the ambiguity of collective land ownership in China is a key factor in the process of village development. The transformation of villages from “production space” to “consumption space” is driven by tourism based on the land institution arrangement. Due

to the ambiguity of the collective land ownership system, many houses of farming have changed their residential properties and transformed their functions to form industrial clusters of B&Bs, and many B&Bs are formed under the government's default. The study shows that tourism is important in shaping local cultural and industrial features, transitioning from "production space" to "consumption space," and that tourism-driven industrial transformation is critical in rural development patterns. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a better understanding of how tourism should be valued in the future as part of the village development process, particularly when tourism plays a long-term role in promoting village development.

The future of tourism-driven research should emphasize integrated development of urban and rural areas, and village sustainable development should focus on the coordinated development of urban and rural areas to achieve the goal of optimizing urban and rural systems and spatial forms and promoting village sustainable development. Tourism-driven development is a valuable tool for promoting village transformation and development, as well as increasing farmer employment and income. Thus, scientific guidance of rural territorial urbanization through tourism-driven development is both a major practical need and an important scientific proposition for China's new urbanization and rural economic and social development, and this study provides some references and insights for future policymakers.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, J.Y., H.M. and L.W.; methodology, J.Y.; writing—original draft preparation, J.Y.; writing—review and editing, J.Y. and L.W.; Funding acquisition, H.M. and J.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This study is supported by the Second Tibetan Plateau Scientific Expedition, Research Program (STEP) [grant numbers: 2019QZKK1005], the National Natural Science Foundation of China [grant numbers: 42121001 and 41971209], Fujian Social Science Fund (grant number FJ2021C036), The Fujian Provincial Department of Education Fund (grant number JAS19312), The National Social Science Fund of China [21CH197], 2020 Central University Basic Scientific Research Business Fee Humanities and Social Sciences Fund [SKYC2020017, SKYZ2020022].

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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