Atmospheric Rural Community and Tourists' Experience -- China's Rural Tourism and Seniors' Quality of Life

Jieyu Shi

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ATMOSPHERIC RURAL COMMUNITY AND TOURISTS’ EXPERIENCE
—CHINA’S RURAL TOURISM AND SENIORS’ QUALITY OF LIFE

by

Jieyu Shi

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

Dr. Liping A. Cai, Chair
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Dr. Susan Gordon
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Dr. Dongfan Wu
Department of Landscape Architecture, Tsinghua University

Approved by:
Dr. Barbara Almanza
Director of the Departmental Graduate Program
To My Parents

献给我的父母
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ABSTRACT

Author: Shi, Jieyu, MS
Institution: Purdue University
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Major Professor: Liping A. Cai

The increasing percentage of aged populations in many parts of the world is an issue of global attention and significance. China is no exception and faced with a pressing challenge to find solutions for improving seniors’ quality of life. Extending the extant knowledge on the relationship between tourism and health, the current study posits that rural tourism, as a growing and popular form of leisure in China, can enhance the quality of life for both senior tourists and senior locals and proposes the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism. This study develops the concept by investigating the elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism that these two groups of seniors value and by examining the quality of life features they expect from rural tourism.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 senior tourists in Lanzhou City, China, and 13 senior locals in Wushan County, China, regarding their perceptions of atmospheric community for rural tourism and quality of life. Snowball sampling method was applied in the collection of the textual data. A thematic analysis was adopted to identify, analyze, and report categories in the data. Direct observation was employed as the supplementary method to corroborate the findings and strengthen the reliability and validity of this study. The findings of this study reveal that the two senior groups shared similar ideas of what constitutes an atmospheric community for rural tourism. Five common elements were identified. They are tangible attractions, intangible attractions, interaction, rusticity, and infrastructure. The significance of these elements varied between the two groups, though. The study also found that both senior tourists and senior locals considered health, income, children’s lives, and personal hobbies as features of their quality of life. However, only senior locals emphasized the importance of personal interactions in quality of life. Based on the senior tourists’ and
senior locals’ wishes concerning rural tourism and quality of life, this study presents two recommendations that can help meet the groups’ expectations for China’s rural tourism development. The first recommendation is to strengthen governmental support in finance, promotion, and advertising, as well as supervision and regulation. The second is to develop integrated approach between rural tourism and distinctive local traditions, representative local industries, and desired features of tourist and local seniors’ quality of life, respectively.

The concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism presented in this study recognizes the quality of life issues for both senior tourists and senior locals and emphasizes the interactions between these two groups. Their expectations for a good quality of life can be satisfied through developing such atmospheric rural communities that are characterized by the five elements of tangible attractions, intangible attractions, interaction, rusticity, and infrastructure. This study included both senior tourists and senior locals in one research design to examine their quality of life in rural tourism; and it pioneered the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism in tourism literature. Conducted in the Chinese context, however, the findings from the study should be considered unique in interpreting their implications.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

China, with the largest population in the world, shows the most rapid growth rate of aged population. In 1950, China had 41 million people aged over 60, while in 2009, this number rose to 160 million. The proportion of seniors increased from seven percent in 2000 to around nine percent in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). The most challenging concern from ageing is health. Various diseases, from flu to cancer, negatively influence seniors’ health and quality of life. Some diseases, ranging from hypertension, stroke, and heart disease, to cancers and bone diseases, strongly deteriorate the quality of later life (Fried & Wallace, 1992). Worldwide, because of long periods at home, lack of social interaction, and isolation from society, the majority of seniors suffer from loneliness and depression (Institute of Public Policy Research, 2009; Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2008). In one study (Age UK, 2011), over one million seniors reported that they spent eighty percent of their time at home and always felt lonely. Another study (Institute of Policy Research, 2009) claimed that depression is the most common problem later in life that impaired more than two million seniors’ health and their quality of life. Every aging society requires measures to promote the senior population’s living conditions and quality of life (Ferrer, Sanz, Ferrandis, McCabe, & García, 2015). The pressing challenge for the aged population and for all societies is to find solutions on how to live healthier later in life and how to improve life quality, especially for countries like China.

Tourism is a service-based industry, whose influence on people should never be underestimated. A large body of studies has demonstrated the positive impacts of tourism on people’s lives (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012; Hagger & Murray, 2013; Hunter-Jones & Blackburn, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015; Riley, 1992). Some of the outstanding impacts are health benefits and life quality improvements (Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007). Travel was positively correlated with physical health outcomes. For example, risk of cardiovascular heart disease among middle-aged men was decreased by traveling (Gump & Matthews, 2000). People often felt happier, healthier, and more
relaxed after a pleasant trip, although these effects were limited in strength and duration after the holiday (de Bloom, Geurts, Sonnentag, Taris, de Weerth, & Kompier, 2011). Tourism also provided mental health benefits for aged people who suffered from social isolation (de Aguiar, Aibéo, Kastenhols, & Dourado, 2012). Researchers concluded that tourism presented a positive psychological influence on seniors’ subjective well-being, quality of life, self-assessed health, and life satisfaction, regardless of type or duration of trip (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012; Hagger & Murray, 2013; Hunter-Jones & Blackburn, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015). A study comparing health perceptions within a Spanish senior population showed that seniors who tend to travel are more active and healthier than those who do not (Ferrer, Sanz, Ferrandis, McCabe, & García, 2016). Similarly, Milman (1998) and Wei and Milman (2002) found out that participating in various activities during vacation was helpful for improving seniors’ well-being.

The senior population shows a strong intention to travel as the World Tourism Organization (2011) forecasted that by 2050, people who are over 60 will take about two billion trips. The increasing awareness of the health benefits from tourism led to the aged population becoming a vital tourism market segment (Patterson, 2006; Schröder, & Widmann 2007). The American Association of Retired Persons reported that different from younger people, seniors traveled more frequently and stayed away longer (Miller, 1996). Rosenfeld (1986) and Shoemaker (1989) pointed out that people aged 55 and over were more likely to go longer distances and stay away longer. In their study on the motivation of Chinese senior tourists, Hsu, Cai, and Wong (2007) identified both external conditions and internal desires for Chinese seniors to travel away from home for leisure.

Quality of life, along with other similar concepts, such as well-being and happiness, is connected to the concept of wellness (Smith & Puczko, 2009). In some countries, wellness or well-being tourism often happens in a rural environment, which can be considered as rural tourism (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). A study of rural well-being tourism conducted in Finland investigated whether or not rural tourism could be regarded as a form of well-being tourism, and the results distinguished a rural well-being tourism segment (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). Experiences in natural settings and rural environments were also seen as an important and necessary part of a well-being
experience in the context of Alpine Wellness in Austria and Lake-Wellness in Finland (Konu, Tuohino, & Komppula, 2010).

However, while seniors’ motivations and the role that tourism plays in their health and quality of life were identified, several aspects of tourism and quality of life for senior population remain untold. Firstly, no study included both groups in one research to investigate their quality of life in rural tourism. Furthermore, although the benefits of tourism were demonstrated in the past, few studies have examined if rural tourism is better for improving the quality of life for seniors. In addition, no extant literature was found to explore rural tourism and seniors’ quality of life in the Chinese context. The current study posits that rural tourism in China may provide a solution to address some of the pressing health issues facing the aging population and improving their quality of life.

1.2 Research Objectives

The increase in the percentage of many populations aged 65 years or over is not just an issue for China, but one of global attention and significance. By 2030, there will be more than one billion seniors in the world (National Institute on Ageing, 2011). “A hallmark of modern societies is the effort to improve people’s lives, including the debilities of advanced age” (Furchtgott & Furchtgott, 1999). Developed countries have already started to follow the thought of aging successfully, but developing counties have not paid enough attention to improve the quality of later life for their aged populations (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Eyetsemitan & Gire, 2003). As the ultimate goal of developing tourism is to improve people’s quality of life (Yi, 2005), which is identical to the need of modern societies and aging countries, corresponding studies are needed to meet the aging trend and the desire of high quality of life.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between atmospheric community for rural tourism (RT) and quality of life (QOL) for Chinese senior populations of both tourists and locals. Adopting the tenets of Pesonen and Komppula (2010), this study believes that in China, rural areas with a unique atmosphere have advantages to develop rural tourism, which might be beneficial for seniors’ quality of life improvements. Therefore, within the Chinese context, a new concept called atmospheric
community is proposed for rural tourism. The specific objectives of the study are presented as follows:

1) To identify elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism valued by senior tourists and senior locals.
2) To discover the features of quality of life expected by senior locals from rural tourism development.
3) To ascertain the features of quality of life expected by senior tourists from visiting rural destinations.
4) To make recommendations for China’s rural tourism that can improve the quality of life for the senior populations of both locals and tourists.

1.3 Research Organization

The study includes six chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research background and research purpose and objectives. Chapter 2 reviews previous literature on the topics of: motivations of rural tourists and senior tourists; rural tourism; China’s rural tourism; quality of life; and the relationship between tourism and quality of life. At the end of chapter 2, the framework that guides the research is presented. Chapter 3 illustrates the methodology of the study through introduction of selected methods, design of research, sample, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings for each objective. Chapter 5 summarizes the key findings and the unique ones in the Chinese context, proposes the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism, and explain its relationship with seniors’ quality of life. Chapter 6 concludes the contributions of this study as well as theoretical and practical implications for developing China’s rural tourism and improving seniors’ quality of life. Limitations and future research recommendations are also discussed in this chapter.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with the review of previous studies on the motivations of rural tourists and senior tourists, followed by that on rural tourism, the development of China’s rural tourism, quality of life, tourism-related quality of life domains, and the relationship between tourism and quality of life. A framework that connects the atmospheric community for rural tourism and seniors’ quality of life to guide the research is presented at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Motivations

2.1.1 Motivations of Rural Tourists

Rural tourists are those who are willing to pay for accommodation in a rural destination and who are interested in natural resources and activities, like sports, agriculture-related labors, and scenery viewing (Yagüe Perales, 2002). These rural tourists are motivated by many factors. A mass of previous studies identified the factors motivating rural tourists, which include: the desire to escape from everyday life and connect with nature, the opportunity to participate in rural activities, having a physical and/or mental rest, the sensation of experiencing space and freedom, experiencing peace and tranquility, the search for authenticity and tradition, the possibility of enjoying family time in a calm atmosphere, and so forth. (Molera & Albaladejo, 2007; Pesonen &Komppula, 2010). Interacting with local residents and experiencing rural life are also significant motivations (Bramwell, 1994; Gannon, 1994).

2.1.2 Motivations of Senior Tourists

Tourism is a desired long-term activity of seniors (Stats & Pierfelice, 2003), making up a significant part of life upon retirement (Gibson, 2002). Retirement provides an important opportunity for seniors to take holidays (Nimrod, 2008). Today’s retirees are wealthier, better educated, more independent and freer from obligations than in the past (Martin & Kinsella, 1994), which means that seniors are more likely to prioritize
tourism (Staats & Pierfelice, 2003). In their study on the motivation of Chinese senior tourists, Hsu, Cai, and Wong (2007) identified both external conditions and internal desires motivating Chinese seniors to travel away from home for leisure. Not only do seniors have affluent personal financial resources, time resources, and are in good health, which are external conditions, but also seniors show internal desires to improve their wellbeing, escape routine life, and socialize. Jang and Wu (2006) applied the model of push and pull motivation factors to investigate 353 seniors from Taiwan about their motivations. Five push and three pull factors were found in that study. The five push factors are: ego-enhancement, self-esteem, knowledge-seeking, relaxation, and socialization. The three pull factors included cleanliness and safety; facilities, event, and cost; and natural and historical sight.

2.1.3 The Overlap of Motivations between Rural Tourists and Senior Tourists

As stated in the previous two parts, it is obvious that rural tourists and senior tourists share some similarities. First, these two groups of tourists share many common motivations. For instance, they both have the desire to escape routine life, search for opportunities to relax and rest, enjoy the closeness to nature, socialize with others and so forth. In addition, there is an overlap between rural tourists and senior tourists. Previous literature demonstrated that seniors are more likely to choose rural tourism over urban tourism (Cavaco, 1995; Sharpley, 2002) because their physical needs are better met by somewhere quiet and peaceful. Studies pointed out that seniors tend to avoid peak hours in urban cities due to crowdedness and noise they can hardly bare (Hanson, 1977; Scott et al., 2009). It was found that rural tourists usually live in urban areas and choose not to travel far from the destinations (Fuentes García, 1995; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997), which is consistent with the preferences of senior tourists. Given these similarities, rural tourism seems to be more appealing to the senior population.
2.2 Rural Tourism

2.2.1 Definition of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is not a contemporary concept; rather, it has existed for centuries—since the Industrial Revolution (Cai & Li, 2009). Broadly speaking, rural tourism is defined as “a type of tourism that takes place in the countryside” (Lane, 1994). Oppermann (1996) stated that “rural tourism often referred to the tourism taking place in a nonurban territory where human’s land related economic activities, primarily agriculture, are going on”. This definition identified the importance of human presence, which according to Oppermann (1996) is a qualifying requirement. Since researchers’ perspectives of rural tourism are different, the understanding of its definition is changing all the time. Pesonen and Komppula (2010) defined rural tourism as a typical tourism outside densely populated areas and tourism centers. In some countries, rural tourism is understood to be more or less synonymous with farm tourism (agritourism, agrotourism) and nature tourism or at least traveling in nature. Rural tourism, in general, refers to small family enterprises and lifestyle entrepreneurship (Komppula, 2007).

2.2.2 Features of Rural Tourism

Although the definitions of rural tourism may be different from another, researchers often agree on its features. Rural tourism offers different experiences and activities from urban tourism (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Oppermann, 1996; Pesonen, Komppula, Kronenberg, & Peters, 2011). Rural tourism is highly attractive to tourists who seek the rural character of places, natural environments, and characteristics of local communities (Fiorello & Bo, 2012). Unlike cities, rural areas are closer to abundant nature resources, such as lakes, springs, farms, forests, and mountains, which are a representative feature of rural tourism (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Sharpley, 1996). Rural tourism establishments are located in the remote countryside, and rural activities typically happen outside densely populated areas and tourism centers (Pesonen, & Komppula, 2010). Many rural activities, like farming and picking, are of interest to tourists. According to Countryside Commission (1997), half of its surveyed visitors thought that farming keeps the countryside attractive. In addition to tangible features, the
intangible features of rural tourism are attractive and important. The atmosphere of rural areas is quiet, peaceful, and slow-paced (Pesonen, & Komppula, 2010). More importantly, rural tourism thrives on community involvement and interactions between tourists and locals (Allen, Long, Perdue, & Kieselbach, 1988).

2.2.3 Significance of Rural Tourism

Since the 1970s, tourism activities in rural areas have remarkably increased in developed countries worldwide, which has played a key role in the development of these areas that were facing economic and social challenges (Cavaco, 1995; Hoggart, Buller, & Black, 1995; Opperman, 1996; Perales, 2002; Williams & Shaw, 1998). With its advantageous features, rural tourism is considered an effective way to provide various opportunities to develop rural areas. In many rural places, rural tourism significantly improved local economic growth (Alexander & McKenna, 1998; Blaine, Mohammad, & Var, 1993). For instance, in the rural areas of many Western countries, tourism is seen as an important industry (Robinson, 1990), not only to supplement increasingly decreased traditional agrarian activities (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997), but also to diversify in the face of declining interest in mass tourism destinations (Sharpley, 2002). Developing rural tourism benefits both individuals and local communities by creating job opportunities, increasing income, and enhancing infrastructure (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003).

Previous studies have also identified the benefits of rural tourism for tourists. Developing rural tourism provides opportunities for people from urban cities to exchange ideas with locals and gain unique rural experiences through participation in various rural activities (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Oppermann, 1996). A study conducted by Pesonen and Komppula (2010) stated that among rural tourists, a segment of rural well-being was distinguished. In other words, rural tourism has a positive influence on tourists’ health and wellbeing.

In many rural places, intangible cultural heritage lacks attention and preservation, but rural tourism can make contributions to address this issue (Lane, 1994). On one hand, precious natural heritage could be scientifically conserved and developed into tourist attractions. On the other hand, tangible cultural heritage, like characteristics of local living properties, and intangible cultural heritage, like hand-crafts skills, would be
protected during the process of developing rural tourism. Not only will the valuable heritage be preserved, but tourists also can enjoy the beauty of heritage and culture.

### 2.2.4 Challenges of Rural Tourism

The development of rural tourism is not without some challenges. For example, it can be difficult for rural areas to keep loyal tourists and achieve sustainable development. Rural tourism is popular and continues to grow, but not all rural places were equally attractive to senior rural tourists, and the development status did not meet their requirements (Gannon, 1994). As Cai and Li (2009) mentioned, most attractions in rural areas were small, scattered, and disorganized, and these places suffered from lack of basic infrastructural facilities and services. Also, in consideration of undeveloped conditions in rural areas, a significant investment was highly needed during the development process. The shortage of investments may result in low quality of products and services, which can seriously hamper local rural tourism because of the failure to meet tourists’ needs (Roberts, 1996). Simply relying on investors and business owners was not a long-term plan. Government subsidies were essential to maintain the advantages of developing rural tourism (Fleischer & Felenstein, 2000).

Rural tourism cannot be developed without local communities’ and residents’ support and involvement. Their attitudes toward rural tourism influence tourists’ satisfaction, residents’ quality of life, and local communities’ harmony. However, in many developing countries (China especially), the local communities’ and residents’ attitudes toward and perspectives on rural tourism were not valued, and their involvement was rare—sometimes nonexistent. In such cases, friction between tourists and locals is common. Further, even with the involvement of local communities and residents, it is difficult for them to adapt to a service role and combine their agriculture industry with tourism (Hajalager, 1996; Fleischer & Pizam, 1997).

### 2.3 Rural Tourism in the Chinese Context

China is an agrarian society and rural economic development plays a significant role in the country’s economic modernization (Chen, 1997). Rural tourism combines agriculture with tourism, which provides a solution to promoting rural socioeconomic
development (Gu & Ryan, 2008) and meeting tourists’ travel needs. China’s rural tourism is a new popular trend that is continuously growing (Zhou & Huang, 2004). However, unlike Western countries, China, with its unique culture and development path, has its own distinct characteristics in rural tourism and its own problems that need to be solved.

2.3.1 Features of Chinese Rural Tourism

Farm diversification into tourism has been seen more widely as an effective means of addressing the socio-economic problems of rural areas in general and agriculture in particular. It also receives varying degrees of government and state support (Hjalager, 1996; Sharpley & Vass, 2006). The government plays an important role in tourism development all over the world and China is no exception. China’s government is at the center of all decisions, including those regarding tourism development (Dai, Jiang, Yang, & Ma, 2013; Deng, 2000). The Chinese government simultaneously plays several roles, including operator, regulator, investor, promoter, coordinator, and educator (Zhang, Chong, & AP, 1999). With this support from the government, investments and various resources are guaranteed.

With the appearance of “China Rural Tourism Year 1998,” “China Eco-Tourism Year 1999,” and “Chinese Life Tourism Year 2004,” a series of rural tourism-based activities were created and promoted through financial incentives and government policy support. Based on these activities facilitating farm diversification into tourism, rural communities developed tourism in many different forms. Then, “Nong Jia Le” became the dominant form of rural tourism in China (Hu, 2008), which is defined as a distinctive form of China’s rural tourism that is invested in and operated by the individual farmers and their families. It entails providing rustic meals, mostly home-made; accommodations, mostly farmhouses; and services and amusements for tourists and vacationers who leave their homes in cities to visit during the weekend and holidays, even if only for a few hours (Ying & Zhou, 2007). Nong Jia Le includes the distinguished features of: having fresh food, tasting green vegetables, experiencing traditional countryside living, doing hard farm work, seeing entertaining plays by farmers, and purchasing indigenous products from farm families (Zou, 2005). The majority of rural tourists choosing Nong
Jia Le are urban residents, which means that it has provided a new leisure style among Chinese urban residents. Meanwhile, Nong Jia Le has made it possible for many local farmers to start their family business (Zou, 2005). During the past 20 years, Nong Jia Le has shown remarkable growth in the supply of rural tourism (Zheng & Zhong, 2004). Rural tourist attractions have been built throughout 31 provinces and autonomous regions in China since the 1980s, a trend that is still continuing nation-wide (Shao, 2007).

Eighty-five percent of Finnish rural tourists spent a significant part of their youth in a rural environment (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). This feature might be identified as rural place identity, which refers to dimensions of the self that defined an individual’s personal identity in relation to a physical environment (Kulczycki & Lück, 2009).

Similarly, many Chinese seniors currently living in urban cities were born in rural areas or had rural life experiences and memories. However, few studies have investigated whether Chinese seniors tend to travel back to rural places for nostalgia, to go back to their roots, and/or to fulfill their sense of belonging in their later lives.

2.3.2 Challenges of Rural Tourism in China

In China, developing tourism is more likely to result in negative impacts on the environment, which will seriously influence the quality of life for tourists and locals as well as the sustainable development of rural tourism. For instance, Zhong, Deng, and Xiang (2008) conducted a study to examine the environment of the Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in China. The findings showed that the quality of air and water deteriorated over four discernable tourism developmental stages: exploration, involvement, development, and consolidation.

China’s rural tourism lacks locals’ participation and community involvement. Due to the dominant role of Chinese government, it is difficult for local communities and local residents to have rights to participate and be involved in planning, developing, and decision making when it comes to rural tourism development. Sometimes, joint decisions about tourism are made between the government and the developer in a situation where local communities are not given the right to know. In other words, residents knew their community would be developed into a tourist destination when the enterprises entered the community, but they knew nothing about the details of the development plans (Bao &
Sun, 2007). The significance of the need for participation of and involvement by the local community and residents was identified in prior studies. Shi (2009) pointed out that a lack of locals’ involvement in Chinese tourism planning resulted in conflicts between locals and tourists. Liu, Ouyang, and Miao (2010) found that improving community involvement in a protected area was an effective way to alleviate the conflicts in that area. Although the current regime has started to provide more rights to local communities and residents (Salidjanova & Koch-Weser, 2013), local communities’ and residents’ awareness of participation and involvement is still an issue.

China’s rural tourism was introduced by the Chinese government as a tool to help rural areas generate income to address the problems of poverty (Gu & Ryan, 2009). As many previous studies mentioned, tourism was a great way to generate employment opportunities, develop public infrastructures, and narrow the gaps between rural areas and urban zones, and between eastern and western China (Huang, 2013; Jeffries, 2001). However, only focusing on the purpose of solving economic issues by developing rural tourism should not be a long-term goal. Determining how to improve the quality of life for both tourists and local residents, especially for senior populations in China, and how to achieve the harmonious rural communities and protect their rural atmospheres are more important.

2.4 Quality of Life (QOL)

2.4.1 Definition of QOL

Quality of Life (QOL) is seen as a multi-dimensional concept, and because of different academic perspectives, objectives, and measurement approaches, its definition varies across disciplines. In health science, QOL is referred to as a way in which physical, emotional, and social well-being are affected by a disease or related treatment (Calvert & Freemantle, 2003). In economics and sociology, QOL is a social and economic barometer of regional and national development (Leigh & Blakely, 2013). In psychology, QOL identified subjective well-being as a core component, and subjective well-being is an evaluation factor of people’s life in both affective and cognitive ways (Diener, 1995). In social science, QOL, subjective well-being (e.g., life satisfaction), and
human happiness are interchangeable. However, the definition of QOL has never been complete or universal. The topic of QOL remains a developing research area. Various studies are needed to explore what is a high quality of life and how to measure it.

The two most common approaches for defining and measuring QOL are objective and subjective indicators. Objective QOL indicators do not involve any residents’ subjective perceptions of their lives (Diener & Suh, 1997). On the contrary, subjective indicators focus on residents’ own perceptions of their life quality. The residents’ judgement of their lives was found to be more effective than measuring their living conditions through official statistic (Glatzer, 2006). Some scholars suggested that a balanced life between individuals’ desires and realities can achieve true happiness (Diener & Suh, 1997). Because individual ideas are critical, the current study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with senior tourists and senior locals to investigate their desires and their perceptions of life. Therefore, the approach of subjective indicators was employed in this study.

2.4.2 Domains of Tourism-related QOL

As previously mentioned, QOL was defined and measured according to different domains in various research studies. In the tourism industry, there are certain tourism-related domains to measure QOL for both tourists and local residents by adopting subjective indicators as a measurement approach. Compared with other domains, tourism-related QOL domains focus on community QOL and tourism social impacts (Yi, 2005).

When exploring residents’ perceptions of tourism impacts on their quality of life and examining the relationship between residents’ perceptions on life domains and tourism impacts in communities, Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) identified eight tourism-related domains of QOL. They are: recreation amenities, community pride and awareness, economic strength, natural and cultural preservation, community well-being, way of life, crime and substance abuse, and urban issues.

Tourists’ QOL is equally important to residents’ QOL. Neal, Uysal, and Sirgy (2007) investigated the travel experiences on tourists’ overall QOL and highlighted that tourists’ QOL and life satisfaction were affected by the satisfaction of tourism-related
experiences, such as travel, destination, and tourism-based activities. The connection between travel experiences and life quality was emphasized in their study.

In the current study, the tourism-related QOL domains for tourists and local residents mentioned above were employed as a theoretical foundation and as indicators to explore what features of QOL are valued and expected by Chinese senior tourists and senior local residents involved in rural tourism.

2.4.3 Tourism and QOL

As a destination- and service-based industry, tourism impacts the society in various aspects. Not only does tourism change the economic, social, and cultural elements of society, but it also influences the perceptions of tourists and local residents about their quality of life (Andereck, Valentine, Vogt, & Knopf, 2007; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). The enhancement of residents’ quality of life by increasing the availability of resources for recreation and entertainment and improvements in local infrastructure were identified in previous studies (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Cohen, 1984; Lankford & Howard, 1994). Additionally, improving tourists’ and local residents’ quality of life was one of the most important goals of tourism development (Yi, 2015). Thus, the close relationship between tourism development and QOL cannot be underestimated.

In the 1970s, researchers found that successful tourism development depended on support from local residents (Sharpley, 2014). Satisfaction with life was clearly linked to satisfaction with leisure travel services and experiences (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999; Sirgy 2010). More general links between tourism, quality of life (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012) and subjective well-being have been examined (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). Specifically, people often felt happier, healthier, and more relaxed after a pleasant trip, although these effects might be limited in strength and duration after the holiday (de Bloom et al., 2011).

Some researchers also believe that individual residents’ perceptions about their lives in a community reflect community-level QOL (Allen, Long, Perdue, & Kieselbach, 1988; Han, Fang, & Huang, 2013; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013). The image of local communities (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2000; Mason & Cheyne, 2000), the exchange of culture and knowledge, the mutual understanding between tourists and
locals, the revitalization of intangible heritage—arts, crafts, and local traditions (Beekhuis, 1981; Mason, 2008)—and the awareness of environmental protection can all benefit from developing rural tourism (Mason, 2008). Among Finnish rural tourists, a segment of rural well-being was clearly distinguished (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010), which implies that there was a connection between rural tourism and tourists’ QOL.

Healthy and active seniors are more likely to engage in tourism, and being active and enjoying a diverse leisure and social life through tourism is likely to improve health and well-being perceptions (Wei and Milman, 2002). However, the role that tourism plays in seniors’ lives and its impact on their physical and emotional well-being remains largely untold (Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2011). There are limited studies focusing on health and well-being relationships for senior travelers. Notable studies include those by Milman (1998) and Wei and Milman (2002) who concluded that taking part in a variety of activities while on vacation might lead to well-being improvements. However, there are no studies investigating whether rural tourism can better improve the quality of life for both senior tourists and senior local residents, especially in Chinese contexts.

In China, the senior population is a major component of rural communities. The QOL of seniors living in rural communities should be taken into consideration during rural tourism development. Also, as previously discussed, senior tourists are more likely to be rural tourists and engage in rural tourism. Therefore, with the features of rural tourism that may be conducive to seniors’ quality of life, the current study posits that rural tourism, as a growing sector of tourism industry in China, may provide a solution to address some of the pressing health issues facing the aged population in China and to improve the quality of life for both senior tourists and senior locals.

2.5 Framework of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism and QOL

After the combination and assumption of rural tourism and QOL for both senior tourists and senior locals, a framework that guides the current study is proposed in Figure 1. This framework demonstrates the two main concepts: atmospheric community for rural tourism and quality of life for both senior tourists and senior locals, involved in the study. The present study believes that there is connection between rural tourism and quality of life. Therefore, it is vital and essential to investigate what elements constitute an
atmospheric community for rural tourism and examine what features of QOL are valued and expected by both groups. After synthesizing the elements of atmospheric community for rural tourism and the features identified by senior tourists and senior locals, the relationship between these two concepts can be identified. Based on wishes and expectations from senior tourists and senior locals, recommendations for developing China’s rural tourism in order to improve QOL for China’s senior population are presented.

Figure 1: The Framework of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism and Seniors’ Quality of Life
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 introduces specific methods that were employed in the current study. It then describes the design of research, sample, data collection process, and data analysis tools.

3.1 Introduction of Methods

Qualitative methods provide an effective way to investigate the relationship between China’s rural tourism and the quality of life for both senior tourists and senior local. In this exploratory study, two qualitative methods (semi-structured in-depth interviews as the major method and direct observation as the secondary method) were applied in attempt to understand opinions of senior tourists and senior locals about China’s rural tourism development and their quality of life.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews refer to a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from interviewees by asking questions (Longhurst, 2003). They are the most widely used interview format in qualitative studies (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Due to the exploratory nature of the current study, these interviews were more suitable than other data collection methods for both the researcher and the participants. Semi-structured interview questions delineate the interview scope and helped the researcher stay focused on research-related questions. The open-ended questions also allowed the researcher to acquire more personalized opinions, attitudes, and understandings toward the development of rural tourism in the China’s market and in seniors’ quality of life. Similarly, individual participants were not restricted by limited options, not influenced by others’ thoughts, and not embarrassed to express true opinions because of the presence of participants.

Direct observation is a representative method of participation observation (Cole, 2005). In the current study, this method was applied to observe the natural and rural environments, living and spiritual status of both senior tourists and senior locals, and interactions between these two groups. This method was used to corroborate the findings from semi-structured in-depth interviews and strengthen the reliability and validity of the study.
3.2 Design of Research

In order to develop the interview questions about China’s rural tourism and senior tourists’ and senior locals’ quality of life, the researcher reviewed previous literature studies on rural tourism—especially rural tourism in the Chinese context—tourism-related quality of life domains, and the relationship between rural tourism and quality of life. In addition, the researcher consulted professors and experts in the hospitality and tourism fields for suggestions.

3.2.1 Interviewees

The current study is interested in the quality of life for both tourist and senior locals in the context of China’s rural tourism development. Therefore, the interviewees involve two groups: Chinese senior tourists now living in urban cities and Chinese senior locals now living in rural areas. Since the official retirement age of mainland China is 55 for females and 60 for males (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007), these ages were adopted as the criteria to select interviewees.

3.2.2 Interview Questions

For two different groups of interviewees, two versions of interview questions were developed based on previous literature and suggestions proposed by professors and experts from the hospitality and tourism field. Both versions of questions shared the same five sections:

(a) Rural tourism-oriented questions, such as “Compared with urban cities, what elements represent rural areas? Both tangible and intangible elements and what elements do you think are important for an atmospheric community for rural tourism?”

(b) Quality of life-oriented questions, such as “What specific factors influence your quality of life? Both positive and negative factors and what features of quality of life do you value or expected?”

(c) The relationship between rural tourism and quality of life, such as “What specific factors of this travel experience influence your quality of life?”
Both positive and negative and what specific aspects of developing rural tourism influence your quality of life? Both positive and negative aspects.”

(d) General evaluation, such as “How would you describe this rural community? In a few words or phrases.”

(e) Personal information, such as “age and occupation.”

However, in each section, some of the interview questions were different for the two groups of interviewees. For instance, in section (c) of the relationship between rural tourism and quality of life, the senior tourists were asked, “What changed in your quality of life while you are traveling here?”, but the senior locals were asked, “Does the development of rural tourism in Wushan County influence your quality of life?” All interview questions served the research objectives, led the interviews, and encouraged interviewees to offer more information. The detailed interview questions for senior tourists and senior locals are presented in Appendices A and B.

### 3.3.3 Reliability and Validity

In consideration of interviewees who are Chinese and only speak Mandarin or a local dialect, back-to-back translation was needed and employed to ensure the consistency and correctness of interview responses. All questions were originally developed in English. After they were reviewed by professors, the researcher revised and translated interview questions into written Chinese. A bilingual Chinese-English professor did the translation back to English. The researcher compared the expressions in English and questions that did not convey clear meanings were revised according to the professor’s advice for both the English and Chinese versions of the interview questions.

The next step was to slightly revise all interview questions in conversational Chinese, which was used during the interviews. The researcher prepared prompts for each interview question in case they were needed during the interviews.

Prior to the official interviews, pilot tests were conducted on two Chinese seniors to determine if the interview questions were clear and easy to understand. Both interviewees granted permission for the interviews to be recorded. They were also informed that all documents, including recordings, transcripts, and other supportive
materials, would be confidential and only used for research. After the pilot tests, all interview questions were finalized.

According to Krippendorff (2004), in order to ensure the reliability and validity of themes, the interview data should be coded more than once. Therefore, after the transcripts were coded and identified by the researcher, another bilingual master student in the hospitality and tourism field was invited to verify the themes.

3.4 Sample

This study adopted a purposive and convenience sampling approach to select participants. Male seniors aged 60 or over and female seniors aged 55 or over were the target population. Snowball sampling was employed to ensure the sample size in the process of data collection. Recruitment occurred in two locations: Wushan County, Tianshui City, Gansu Province, China, to recruit senior locals and Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China, to recruit senior tourists. No compensation was provided to the interviewees. For those who chose to be interviewed in the private conference room of a hotel, snacks and drinks were offered during the interviews. The initial sample size was 20 for each group. However, due to the limited time and the sudden change of weather during data collection periods, the initial plan could not be completed. A total of 25 seniors, 12 senior tourists and 13 senior locals, were interviewed for the current study.

3.5 Data Collection

In order to eliminate interrupting factors, interviews covered weekdays and weekends, taking place in mornings, afternoons, and evenings. Official interviews were conducted from March 12th—16th, 2017, in either interviewees’ homes or a private conference room in a local hotel, depending on the interviewee’s location preference. All interviewees were labelled by identifiers, which demonstrated the identity of interviewees and the order of interviews. For instance, “ST 1” stands for the first senior tourist who was interviewed; “SL 2” represents the second senior local who participated in the interview. All interviews were conducted in either Mandarin or the local dialect by the researcher herself since she is a native speaker of both languages. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. At the beginning, the interviewer thanked the interviewees for
participating, explained the purpose and significance of the study, clarified the confidentiality of the collected data, and encouraged them to talk frankly and thoroughly. All interviews were then conducted based on the prepared semi-structured questions. In the end, interviewees were asked to provide some demographic information, such as age, occupation, major income source, proportion of income spending on travel, and so forth. With the interviewees’ consent, all interviews were recorded, by a digital voice recorder and the interviewer took notes during the interview process. The data were stored in the interviewer’s personal, password-protected computer.

Direct observation is both a research method and a data collection tool (Bernard, 1988). In addition to interview data, observational notes and pictures (with consent if a person appeared) were taken by the researcher as supportive materials. During the interview periods from March 12th—16th, 2017, the researcher visited Wushan County by herself and observed what actions had been taken for developing rural tourism, how senior local residents communicated with each other, and what kind of activities they participated in during their daily lives.

3.6 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed into textual format by the researcher and a group of people who speak both Mandarin and the local dialect. To analyze the perspectives of senior tourists and senior locals on the relationship between China’s rural tourism development and their quality of life, the thematic analysis method was employed. Thematic analysis is defined as a method to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was manually done by the researcher. The researcher read the textual interview documents and identified key words, phrases, and/or sentences repeatedly mentioned by interviewees. After organizing the initial list of codes, the researcher classified the codes into potential categories and themes. Then, the researcher reviewed and revised the themes to achieve consistency.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Chapter 4 begins with the profiles of interviewees, providing a picture of the interviewees’ demographics and personal backgrounds. The next section on senior tourists’ motivations, senior locals’ attitudes toward rural tourism, and the two groups’ perceptions of rural tourism in Wushan County is presented to underline the discussion on the significance and relevance of the main research objectives. The rest of the findings are grouped under the following four research objectives:

1) To identify elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism valued by senior tourists and senior locals;
2) To discover the features of quality of life expected by senior locals from rural tourism development;
3) To ascertain the aspects of quality of life expected by senior tourists from visiting rural destinations;
4) To make recommendations for China’s rural tourism that can improve the quality of life for the senior populations of both locals and tourists.

Under each research objective, several distinctive categories are identified from the analysis of coded responses, along with observational notes. In consideration of the differences between the two groups of interviewees, as well as the two versions of interview questions, the findings are separately reported according to different groups of participants. Inspired by the study of Lehto, Cai, Fu, and Chen (2014), after searching, reviewing, and refining, the research presented the findings regarding how frequently they were mentioned by interviewees and how in-depth and elaborately the participants discussed the issues.

4.1 Profiles of Interviewees

Of the 25 seniors in total, 12 senior tourists and 13 senior locals participated in the interviews. Within the group of 12 senior tourists, half of them were male and the rest were female. Among the 13 senior locals, eight were males and five were females.
One interview of a senior local was not included in the analysis because the information offered by the interviewee was not useful and valuable for the research objectives.

Table 1 shows the demographics and personal information of the senior tourists who participated in this study. Ten of the 12 senior tourists are retired from their career and the other two are still working. All senior tourists currently live in Lanzhou City, and five of them were born in cities. The birthplaces of the other seven were in rural areas, which corresponds with one motivation, “I have a special relationship with rural areas,” identified in the subsection 4.2.1. When asked about travel frequency, six interviewees reported very often, two said often, one stated sometimes, and two claimed occasionally. One (ST4) explained that he used to travel very often, but now, because of age, he does not take many trips to other places. All interviewees reported that they shared their experiences and recommended Wushan County to family and friends. Eleven out of 12 reported that they would like to visit Wushan County again in the future; the other interviewee (ST10) claimed that the decision on revisiting the destination depends on if there are other attractions attractive to her.

Table 2 presents the demographics and personal information of the senior locals in Wushan County who involved in this research. As mentioned by the interviewed senior locals, in the majority of China’s rural areas, including Wushan County, local residents always consider themselves seniors as long as they have grandchildren, regardless of their physical age. Based on this idea, one female local resident (SL1) aged 53 was regarded as a qualified interviewee for the current study because she already has grandchildren and thinks of herself as a senior. Within the group, six of the senior locals are retired and the others work in different fields, such as local government, the local hospitality and tourism industry, agriculture, and so on. While all of the senior locals currently live in Wushan County, 12 out of 13 were born there; SL9 was born in a rural area of Zhejiang Province. When it comes to relocating, only SL1 reported that she might move to another place if her children need her help; and the rest of the interviewees stated that they do not have any plans to relocate to other places. Nine of the interviewed senior locals live with their spouses and children; one (SL7) lives alone; and three (SL5, SL6, and SL15) refused to answer this question.
<table>
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<th>Label</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Travel Frequency</th>
<th>Recommend to Others</th>
<th>Revisit</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>City</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>58</td>
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<td>City</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Retired</td>
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<td>Used to very often</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Retired</td>
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<td>City</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>City</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>75</td>
<td>Retired</td>
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<td>City</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>72</td>
<td>Retired</td>
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<td>City</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Depends on attractions</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>City</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>retired</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>Relocate Plan</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Depends on children</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
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<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
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<td>SL3</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>55</td>
<td>Local Government Officer</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
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<td>SL5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td>75</td>
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<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Alone</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Local Restaurant Owner</td>
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<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Spouse and children</td>
<td></td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>Wushan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SL12</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>66</td>
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<td>Wushan</td>
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</table>
4.2 Motivations, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Rural Tourism

4.2.1 Senior Tourists’ Motivations in Rural Tourism

All 12 senior tourists were asked why they traveled to Wushan County. All of them said it was because this county has plentiful resources that attracted them. At the same time, several family members and friends recommended this destination to them. Two interviewees (ST4 and ST10) said they knew this place because organizations they worked for selected Wushan County as a leisure vacation destination for them.

The interviewed senior tourists also reported that rural places are sentimental to them. Five of them (ST1, ST2, ST3, ST11, and ST12) were born and have lived in cities for their entire lives. Because they have no experiences living in rural areas, they were curious about rural life and thought living in such areas would be interesting. As reported by ST12:

I remembered when I was in primary school, I was impressed by a sentence from an article, which said that Wushan is famous for its rice and Lanzhou is famous for its melons. From then on, I really wanted to go to Wushan and try its rice to verify what I read from that article.

There are five participating senior tourists (ST4, ST6, ST7, ST8, and ST9) previously worked in Wushan County and said they had visited the county to see and experience changes where they had a lot of meaningful moments and memories. Four out of 12 interviewees (ST5, ST6, ST7, and ST9) expressed that Wushan County was their hometown and some of their relatives still live there, so they needed to visit their hometown and family members.

More than half of interviewed senior tourists (ST1, ST2, ST4, ST9, ST10, ST11, and ST12) emphasized that because of their age, they started to like quiet and natural places. When they were young, they tended to like big cities and enjoy densely populated and busy downtowns. However, after experiencing so much in their lifetimes, they preferred rural places much more than urban cities. They could not bear the noise and fast-paced routine lives anymore. On the contrary, when they saw the endless farmlands and various crops growing, they felt happy and were glad to connect with nature.
The final motivation for senior tourists (ST1 and ST8) traveling to Wushan County is the decent distance, which usually refers to a three- to four-hour drive to their city of Lanzhou. For the aged population, when choosing a travel destination, the distance between two places is always a critical reason for them to consider due to their concerns about their energy and health conditions. Thus, rural communities near their cities become the priority.

4.2.2 Senior Locals’ Attitudes toward Rural Tourism

As stated previously, local residents play important roles in developing rural tourism, so it is necessary to know their attitudes toward it. According to the interviews with senior locals, both positive and negative attitudes exist toward the rural tourism in Wushan County.

The majority of the senior locals who participated in this research (SL2, SL3, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7, SL8, and SL9) supported their county’s development of rural tourism, but not all of them offered the same support. Some of the supportive senior locals thought the rural tourism in Wushan County has been moving forward and the population visiting the county has increased during recent years. Many local residents have already started the business of Nong Jia Le and have gained a good reputation among urban tourists. Other tourist attractions are also popular and worth visiting, such as Shuilian Dong, Muti Temple, Laojun Mountain, and Woniu Mountain. This group of senior locals gladly welcomes tourists to Wushan County. However, although other senior locals also support the development of rural tourism in the county, these supportive senior locals think that most of the local residents have not realized the significance of rural tourism and that both the local government and community members have not paid enough attention to this growing industry. Wushan County has many attractive places and valuable resources that need to be well planned, developed, and promoted.

A few senior local residents (SL1, SL10, and SL11) expressed a negative attitude regarding the development of rural tourism in Wushan County. They were concerned that as a result of developing rural tourism, the locals’ lives have been interrupted by people
from the outside. They also feel that the air quality has decreased and that the natural environment has been damaged by trash. As reported by one interviewee:

Our rural community is not as good as before. Nowadays, too many people and vehicles come into Wushan County, which seriously damages the environment during their visits. For instance, last year, my family went to Ciyun Temple, I saw a couple of visitors throw plastic bags and empty bottles on the ground when they left. It made me angry because the beautiful place was polluted. (SL1)

4.2.3 Perception of Rural Tourism

Senior Tourists

For the questions asking what they think of rural tourism or how they define it, senior tourists stated their opinions, which were consistent with the definitions in previous studies. All 12 senior tourists defined rural tourism as traveling to rural areas with typical rural features, such as natural landscapes, fresh air, historic folk houses, local food, and so forth. Some interviewees reported that rural tourism, compared with other tourism types, is popular and fashionable among urban citizens, especially the senior population who have lived in cities for decades and are tired of modern buildings. Instead, they would like to see natural views.

In addition to natural resources and the environment, five out of 12 interviewees (ST2, ST5, ST6, ST9, and ST11) emphasized the importance of involvement from local residents when defining the concept of rural tourism. They expressed their hopes and desires to be welcomed and receive good service from locals, which could provide them with unique experiences in an environment different from cities. They wanted to escape their routine lives in aspect, including the people with whom they interacted.

One of the interviewees (ST10) pointed out that the definition of rural tourism also includes the promotion of local rural attractions and products. The concept of rural tourism should not only focus on the features of rural areas, but it should also state the significance of the development and promotion of those rural areas.
**Senior Locals**

As locals, the senior residents shared some similar ideas with the senior tourists in defining rural tourism. Except two interviewees (SL1 and SL10), other local participants defined it as urban citizens spending their leisure time visiting rural areas, enjoying rural and natural sightseeing, picking fresh vegetables and fruits, and tasting local food. According to the interviews, Nong Jia Le was frequently mentioned by senior locals as a major form of rural tourism. They also claimed that water (rivers and/or springs) and mountains were two important components of rural tourism in China. However, coming from a different perspective, the senior locals have a distinct thought about rural tourism. Two out of 12 senior locals (SL2 and SL6) emphasized that rural tourism should not just remain in tourist attractions. Instead, rural tourism needs to underline the significance of tourists experiencing rural life as locals and of providing them with such opportunities to do so.

Asking senior locals to define rural tourism produced another interesting finding. According to the interviews and observations, there are still some Chinese seniors who currently living in rural areas were less educated and were unaware of the role they play in developing rural tourism. When asked about this notion, two senior participants (SL1 and SL10) expressed that they had never thought about it, and they said that rural tourism is an issue, which should be considered and managed by the government—not by local residents.

**4.3 Elements of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism**

This section reveals the findings of both similarities and differences between senior tourists and senior locals in identifying the elements of atmospheric community for rural tourism. In other words, what aspects these two groups think are important to constitute an atmospheric community for rural tourism. Five same distinguished elements, which are tangible attractions, intangible attractions, interactions with locals and/or tourists, rusticity, and infrastructure, generated from the analysis of interviews as well as observational notes for both groups of participants. However, the significance and
perceptions of similar and different items within each element were reported differently by senior tourists and senior locals.

4.3.1 Senior Tourists

**Element 1: Tangible Attractions**

All participating senior tourists mentioned that, as a rural community, the most significant component should include various local, tangible attractions. Based on the interviews, three categories of such attractions were identified.

The first is natural resources. Most of the senior tourists stated that they were attracted by the famous spring in Wushan County because its chemical element (Sulphur) highly benefits people’s health. Particularly, the female senior tourists who were interviewed seemed to enjoy the spring more than the male senior tourists because females are more concerned more about their skin and feel that the Sulphur in the spring can make it smooth. Also, natural landscapes such as mountains, trees, rivers, and so forth were reported by the senior tourists when were asked about the elements important for an atmospheric community for rural tourism.

The second category is featured local food, which includes snacks, organic and fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, and different kinds of food ingredients, such as peppers, green onions, gingers, and garlics. The five interviewed senior tourists who were born in cities and who now live in Lanzhou City (ST1, ST2, ST3, ST11, and ST12) reported that they were extremely interested in this category, having begun to pay attention to their diet to improve their health conditions and life quality in later life.

I am a foodie. Wushan County has plentiful fresh and organic food ingredients and more than 20 representative local vegetables that I have never seen and tried before. They are very attractive for me since the cities do not have them. (ST1)

We have already retired, so we keep an eye on our daily dietary. We prefer to eat green and organic food. Our needs can be met in Wushan County. (ST2)

The third category is the representative local jade-carving industry. In China, jade is regarded as a valuable treasure, and the products made from it are precious and represent good fortune. The participating senior tourists pointed out that a rural
community with its own unique industries is more attractive for them to visit and purchase souvenirs from during their visits.

Wushan County is famous for its jade products. When I was little, I heard about the jade glasses made from the special local jade called Yuanyang jade in Wushan County. In a Chinese poem, it says the elite grape wine needs the specific jade glasses, which refer to Yuanyang jade. (ST4)

**Element 2: Intangible Attractions**

In addition to identifying the important position of tangible attractions in a rural destination, according to the 11 interviewed senior tourists (ST1, ST3, ST4, ST5, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST10, ST11, and ST12), intangible attractions are of secondary importance and can be divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the natural intangible elements. The most frequent items mentioned by interviewees were comfortable climate, fresh air, and pleasant scents of flowers, grass, crops, and soils. The senior tourists stated that due to air and water pollution, the smell of fuel, and noise pollution, rural communities provide a more livable environment than urban areas.

Wushan is located in southeast Gansu Province, whose climate is perfect for me. The weather is humid with clear four seasons. It is not too cold in winter and not too hot in summer. It is the climate that provides a wonderful growing environment for vegetables and fruits. (ST6)

Another intangible element includes local history, culture, and traditions. Participating senior tourists mentioned that in their later lives, they are more interested in the history, culture, festivals, and traditions when visiting a place. Many scenic spots, such as Shuilian Dong (water curtain cave), Muti Temple, and other historic buildings in Wushan County have a long history. They also emphasized that this rural community has many intangible cultural traditions. Wushan County has been widely named as the county of calligraphy and the county of Wushu (martial art).

Like ancient times, especially when people celebrate traditional festivals, there are many activities. People do the Yangko (a popular rural folk dance in China), sing folk songs, and play Xuangu (a Chinese folk drum). They are unique in Wushan County. In other words, people have no chance to see and participate in these
activities in other places. Not only are they activities, but also they are symbols of spiritual culture and traditions. (ST5)

The last intangible element is the atmosphere of the rural community. The majority of the senior tourists think Wushan County is quiet and harmonious most of the time. However, they said that when the farmer’s market begins, people are everywhere and the county becomes bustling and lively. As they mentioned, in this rural community, energy and peace exist at the same time. These tourists reported that rural communities like Wushan County meet their requirements of being active sometimes while keeping a slow-paced later life overall.

In Wushan County, you can obviously feel the changes of its atmosphere. In the morning, the county is full of energy. Farmers either work in the fields or do business in the market. In the evening, the county is very quiet and peaceful. (ST3)

**Element 3: Interaction with Locals**

Ten out of 12 interviewed senior tourists (ST1, ST4, ST5, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST10, ST11, and ST12) stated that interactions with locals is an essential factor for them to consider when talking about an atmospheric community for rural tourism; they enjoyed having these conversations. Through this communication, they found that locals in Wushan County have many good personalities—nice, friendly, honest, and warm-hearted. They are very willing to help tourists as much as they can. The interviewed senior tourists pointed out that, as they were not familiar with the rural community, the interactions with local residents was the most effective and convenient way to get to know the place and gather useful and accurate information. In addition, both the senior tourists and senior locals liked to share their lives and personal experiences with each other. Some of the senior tourists who participated in the interviews specifically mentioned the improvement of local farmers’ quality in reception, services, and interactions in contrast with past experiences.

Unlike people in cities, people in rural places are friendly, open-hearted, and hospitable. Through the interactions with them, I can learn the changes and improvements of their lives. The entire communication is happy and harmonious, making me feel relaxed. This is why I like traveling to rural communities. (ST5)
During the time in Wushan County, we found that local residents were very easy to get along with. People who provided service to us and whom we met with during the visit were all locals. When we asked them for help and information, they answered all the questions with honesty. We enjoyed the conversations with them. (ST11)

**Element 4: Rusticity**

Another common theme identified by seven senior tourists (ST1, ST2, ST4, ST8, ST10, ST11, and ST12) is the rusticity of a rural community. More than half of the participants mentioned their desires to and interests in experiencing a rural community’s rusticity. From their perspectives, the theme of rusticity includes the following three categories.

The first category focuses on being close to nature. The senior tourists stated that, in urban areas, they can barely see natural landscapes, only artificial ones. However, in a rural community, it is easy for them to be surrounded by natural landscapes, such as mountains, streams, trees, grass, flowers, farmland, and so on, which makes them feel relaxed and relieved.

When you are in the rural environment, you cannot describe how those intangible attractions influence your feelings. The only thing you can do is be in that moment and enjoy. (ST12)

The next category is the experience of living in a rural community. The participating senior tourists who were born in and spent their entire lives in cities expressed their curiosity and willingness to experience the rural lifestyle. Meanwhile, those who were born in rural areas and later moved to cities are eager to return to rural places, either because of their love of rural communities or because of their family members.

I was looking forward to staying a few more days in order to experience the authentic rural life, but due to the time limitation, I could not make it happen this time. I plan to stay longer in Wushan County to live as a local when I go there next time. (ST1)

I would like to experience what real rural life is. When I visited a farmer’s family, I went to the farm and participated in picking fresh vegetables. I enjoyed so much
during the process. I stay too long in cities and always feel bored in my daily life, but the time I spent in Wushan County was incredible and made me feel refreshed. (ST2)

My spouse and I are planning to move back to Wushan County, where I was born. I love the land of my hometown. It achieves my inner peace. My three brothers are also in cities now and I think that all of us cannot leave my parents in the county and let them live by themselves. (ST8)

The third category mentioned is the importance that a rural community keep its “real” elements. A few interviewees expressed their worry that during the process of developing rural tourism, many authentic rural features of communities will be damaged by external invasion or will be changed to cater to tourists’ demands. They believe that an ideal rural community needs to keep its unique characteristics and present them to tourists in a genuine manner.

I know many young people from rural places now work in cities. When they are back in their hometowns, they tend to change the original rural features with urban and modern ones that they saw and experienced in cities. They might think it is an improvement, but in my view, they are losing valuable local traditions. (ST10)

**Element 5: Infrastructure**

Finally, seven out of 12 interviewed senior tourists (ST1, ST2, ST4, ST8, ST10, ST11, and ST12) stated that infrastructure is an important element of an atmospheric community for rural tourism. During the interviews, senior tourists reported that because they knew the overall development of Chinese rural communities was lagging, including the infrastructure, they were not picky about it. On the contrary, they thought that experiencing the underdeveloped infrastructure was a part of rural tourism as well. Accommodation and dining places were mentioned most frequently during the interviews. They emphasized that they were very interested in staying and dining in featured local folk houses, as long as these places were safe and clean.

For tourists, the infrastructure is pretty important. For instance, the accommodation does not have to be fancy, but it must be clean and safe; and the transportation to attractions should be convenient. (ST2 & ST8)
4.3.2 Senior Locals

**Element 1: Intangible Attractions**

From the interviews with senior locals, the most frequently mentioned items belong to the element of intangible attractions. Except one local interviewee (SL3), 12 out of 13 expressed that they are very proud of the intangible attractions in their community. Despite their different personal backgrounds, almost all senior locals are familiar with items pertaining to intangible attractions, which can also be categorized into three parts.

The senior locals ranked their local history, culture, and traditions first among all intangible attractions mentioned. They reported that in Wushan County, everyone takes pride in the skill of playing Xuangu (a Chinese folk drum). Xuangu, made by sheepskin, has been declared one of the national intangible cultural heritages since 2008 (China State Council, 2008). The whole plays Xuangu during the Dragon Boat Festival. Another intangible attraction emphasized is Yangko (a Chinese popular rural folk dance). They said that, similar to Xuangu, Yangko is a traditional way to celebrate Chinese Lunar New Year. The patterns and skills of Xuangu and Yangko play significant roles in creating atmospheric community for rural tourism. They also stated that whether rich or poor, man or woman, and more or less educated, Wushan locals are interested in Chinese calligraphy and painting as well as Wushu (Chinese martial art). They said that it is very common to see every family hanging Chinese calligraphy and painting works in their living rooms, and almost every senior farmer knows these skills. These senior locals identified the same patterns for Wushu; locals enjoy practicing Wushu, which benefits both health and spirit.

Xuangu has been included in the list of national intangible cultural heritages. It has a long history in the county. It is worth for tourists to participate because Xuangu cannot be seen and experienced in other places. Also, it is said that Yangko has a close relation with Chinese Traditional Operas. It used to be a community activity, but now it becomes an attraction for visitors. Additionally, Wushan County is named as the county of calligraphy. Maybe many places in China are famous for calligraphy, but in those places, it is artists who work on it.
What is unique in Wushan is that ordinary people can do it, even farmers. Here, calligraphy has nothing to do with wealth but with passion and love. (SL2)

When stopping by a small temple located in one of the villages in Wushan County, the researcher found it was undergoing repairs, and one senior local was in charge of repainting. During an informal conversation, this senior local stated that he was a farmer and painting was just one of his hobbies and skills. He also mentioned that all locals offered to help rebuild the temple during their spare time. Figure 2 shows this senior local repainting the temple.

Figure 2: Repainting Process in the Temple

Following history, culture, and traditions, the second category contains sound, scents, and taste. The interviewed senior locals claimed that in rural places, people are surrounded by fresh air; melodious sounds of birds and livestock; refreshing smells of flowers, grass, trees, and farmlands; and the delicious smell and taste of rural meals.
As mentioned by the interviewees, all these intangible feelings improve their mood and quality of life.

There is a local drink called Guanguan Tea, which is one of the favorite drinks among Wushan locals. We put seven or eight ingredients, such as tealeaves, red dates, medlar, and so on, into one teapot and then boil the tea on a stove. You can easily smell the scent of all ingredients mixed together. That is the happiest time I have every day. What is more, Wushan produces potatoes. We like to bake potatoes in the original way that we bury potatoes deep in the soil and set fire to the top. When the potatoes are ready, they have the smell of soil, which makes them more delicious. I heard some urban cities now have similar cooking styles, but the feeling is not the same when you do it by yourself and eat in the farmlands. (SL1 & SL2)

The interviewed senior locals also expressed the importance of the atmosphere of a rural community, not only for attracting urban tourists, but also for benefiting local residents. They stated that their rural lives are slow-paced, so either visiting or living in the rural areas makes people feel relaxed and stress-free. Wushan’s atmosphere is defined by these senior locals to be quiet, harmonious, and happy. As reported by one interviewee, it is easy for tourists to enjoy the atmosphere of Wushan County so much that they could forget to leave.

Element 2: Tangible Attractions

Twelve senior local participants (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7, SL8, SL9, SL10, SL11, SL12, and SL13) mentioned two parts of tangible attractions. One part includes various natural resources. Some locals explained that although it is in northwest China, Wushan County has rich green areas of grass, trees, and even forests. This group of interviewees emphasized that not only does Wushan have mountains; it also has the Wei River, which is a branch of the Yellow River, running through the county. In addition to the river, they stated that Wushan is known for its spring, which is the most popular tourist attraction in summer among urban senior tourists. The senior locals stated that there are other attractions, like Laojun Mountain, Shuilian Dong (water curtain cave), Lashao Temple, and Muti Temple, which are also worthy of visiting.
The second part contains the local food and snacks. The senior locals believed that local food and snacks are more like a symbol of a place, and trying different kinds of representative local vegetables is a way to get to know the destination. Several senior locals mentioned that the famous cold-water fish in Wushan County represents the good quality of water in the area.

**Element 3: Interaction with Locals and Tourists**

Among 13 senior locals who were interviewed, nine of them (SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL8, SL9, SL10, SL11, and SL12) pointed out the significance of interaction in creating an atmospheric community for rural tourism. They mentioned that it is important to have good communications with both local neighbors and tourists. As several of them reported, because Wushan is a small rural community, all neighbors know and get along well with each other. In addition, they emphasized that the permanent resident population is stable, so the overall relationships among locals are close and neighbors are like family members. The same interactions with tourists were mentioned by these participating senior locals. They said tourists were treated the same as locals, and they enjoyed the communication experiences with tourists. Using direct observation, the close relationship among local neighbors was noticed. People know each other well, and they always say hello and chat for a while when they meet in the street. This image is seldom seen in cities, but it is something urban senior tourists look forward to when traveling to rural communities.

Wushan locals are simple and honest. When you visit here, you will be regarded as locals’ relatives no matter if you know anyone. All local residents welcome you. If you need a hand, everyone is willing to help you and you do not have to worry about being tricked. Therefore, in Wushan, not only do you enjoy the natural view, but you can also know the locals. It is a place that is worth visiting. Sometimes when I meet with tourists, I am more than happy to introduce attractions and traditions to them. The communication with them is a process of influencing their perceptions of Wushan County and promoting my hometown.

(SL2)
**Element 4: Infrastructure**

Eight senior locals (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7, SL10, and SL11) emphasized the influence of infrastructure in creating an atmospheric community for rural tourism. They believed that Wushan’s infrastructure represents the majority of China’s rural areas, which is underdeveloped. The senior locals mentioned that the current infrastructure may not negatively influence tourists’ experiences, but it cannot be counted as a shining point when it comes to rural tourism. However, they expressed their hopes and willingness to provide the best infrastructure for tourists. They believe that local accommodation as a representative of the infrastructure impacts tourists’ impressions of the rural community and their entire travel experiences. Acting as a host, one interviewed senior local (SL4) pointed out that because locals constitute the main group of people who provide service to tourists, they represent not only themselves, but, more importantly, the community. This interviewee believed that the service quality is important because the service offering process highly influences tourists’ perceptions of the destinations and of their travel experiences. This senior local interviewee also emphasized that the service is always accompanied by interactions, so the quality plays a significant role in creating an atmospheric community for rural tourism.

**Element 5: Rusticity**

Within this group, four interviewed senior locals (SL1, SL2, SL6, and SL10) expressed that it is not enough for an atmospheric community for rural tourism to attract tourists by depending only on their resources. Rather, it should also provide opportunities for tourists to experience authentic rural life. They encouraged tourists to live in local folk housing with local residents and join in the farm work in the fields, pick ingredients and cook by themselves, and experience the joy from harvest. These senior locals also emphasized that an atmospheric community for rural tourism cannot destroy its own characteristics in order to cater to tourists’ demands. Instead, a rural community should keep its originality, which is the most valuable and attractive feature.
4.4 Features of Quality of Life

In this section, the findings of what features of quality of life expected by senior tourists and senior locals were presented. The first subsection shows each aspect of quality of life valued by senior tourists and the second subsection displays the same contents of senior locals. Four identical features of quality of life: health, children’s lives, income, and personal hobbies were identified by both groups although they ranked these features in different order regarding the importance. The senior tourists and senior locals classified several less important features into the category of others. One distinctive feature, which is interaction, was only reported by senior locals but senior tourists.

4.4.1 Senior Tourists

**Feature 1: Health**

Among all twelve interviewed senior tourists, 10 of them (ST1, ST2, ST4, ST5, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST10, and ST11) indicated that having good health is what they expect most for a high quality of life. They mentioned that the priority of their later lives is to exercise and stay healthy and active. Participating in various activities, such as swimming, playing sports, hiking, and traveling, is identified by these senior tourists to be beneficial for their health. These 10 senior tourists agreed that once seniors have serious diseases, their quality of life is negatively affected. In addition to physical health, the senior tourists also pay more attention to their spiritual and inner world. They emphasized that their perceptions of the world and their attitudes toward people highly influence their quality of life. As one interviewee (ST10) reported, now that seniors have already gone through a lot and have accumulated plentiful life experiences, they understand and have a high tolerance for many things and people in their later lives. This keeps seniors from becoming depressed.

I believe that a high quality of life means we seniors can take care of ourselves in daily life and stay healthy. As a senior, exercising often is very important.” (ST5)

My understanding of a high quality of life for seniors not only includes a healthy body and affluent life. I focus on my inner world as well. I try to be optimistic toward everything. Happiness is what I value in my later life.” (ST10)
**Feature 2: Income**

Eight of 12 interviewed senior tourists (ST2, ST3, ST4, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST9, and ST10) mentioned that income also influences their quality of life. Since these senior tourists are satisfied with their income and are generally not worried about money in their daily lives, income is not regarded as one of the more important factors. These interviewed senior tourists have a pension, health insurance, and monthly allowance. With sufficient income, they have no worries about their daily expenditures, like food and clothing, housing, and medical treatment. They reported that spare money allows them to travel to other places and explore unknown worlds.

**Feature 3: Children’s Lives**

Six of the senior tourists (ST2, ST3, ST4, ST6, ST8, and ST11) emphasize their attention to children’s lives, which have a decisive effect on their quality of life. They claimed that as long as their children live a happy and harmonious life, their quality of life can be improved. They are willing to devote themselves to doing as much as they can to help their children. Most interviewed senior tourists said that they are happiest when their children have a great job and their grandchildren visit them often.

I can help my daughter do some house chores and raise my grandchildren. I think Chinese parents have the obligations to help their children. (ST6)

**Feature 4: Personal Hobbies**

Five senior tourists (ST2, ST4, ST5, ST11, and ST12) believe that it is essential for seniors to have some hobbies. This is for two reasons. One is that seniors have plenty of spare time after retirement to achieve the dreams of their youth and complete what they wanted to do but had no time for in the past. The other is that developing personal hobbies can make seniors’ lives more interesting and keep them from becoming depressed and feeling lonely. In turn, their quality of life can be improved. In addition, interviewees claimed that urban cities offer more opportunities and access for them to participate in various activities and try new things. As reported by these five senior tourists, senior universities, where they can develop personal interests and make friends,
are very popular. Further, with the trend of more and more seniors considering travel a lifestyle, many senior travel associations have been established in recent years, which conveniently meet seniors’ desires of traveling and exploring rural areas with peers.

I am very into local music and traditional Chinese opera, especially Shanxi opera, which is famous and popular in northwestern provinces of China. I have an MP3 player with me wherever I go so that I can listen to the music and opera anytime. They make my life more interesting and improve my quality of life. (ST4)

Travel is a lifestyle, representing our attitude toward the later life. We are tired of modern life, so we tend to travel to rural counties, where we can experience a totally different life. It is full of fun and happiness. (ST11)

For me, the high quality of life means that I have enough time to do what I like. When I was young, I always admired people who played instruments, but I did not have spare time and money to learn back then. Now, my dream came true. I feel happy. (ST12)

**Feature 5: Other Features**

Other features mentioned by a few senior tourists (ST10, ST11, and ST12) include the living environment and the acquisition of information. As reported by one senior tourist (ST12), even with the access and opportunities to travel to rural places, their habitual residence is still in urban cities. Thus, the living environment plays an important role in their life quality. This interviewee stated that the majority of seniors in cities are eager to look at the blue sky, breathe fresh air, and drink unpolluted water. What is more, another senior tourist (ST10) emphasized that seniors are always worried that they cannot keep up with the rapid development of society. Keeping in touch with society and younger generations is critical for them to improve their quality of life. The most effective way identified by this interviewee is to acquire updated information, which allows them to be aware the newest things and trends all over the world.
4.4.2 Senior Locals

**Feature 1: Health**

When the senior locals were asked what features of quality of life they value and what they think a high quality of life should be, various answers were given, but the top feature was health. All of the senior locals reported that being in good health is the first and most important factor later in their lives. They stated that good health is the basis of everything; without it, there is no possibility of satisfying other desires. They emphasized three critical issues of health that exist particularly in rural areas. First, offspring living far away from the senior population causes many farmers aged around 70 to continue to work on their farms, and some of them even need to raise their grandchildren. Second, once senior locals get sick, there is nobody to take care of them; the pension infrastructure is underdeveloped in rural communities. Third, medical conditions in rural places are poor compared with big cities. Senior locals mentioned that all these issues negatively influence their health, so they engage in some exercise in order to maintain good health. However, they also hope that the government and other organizations can help improve their health status.

**Feature 2: Interaction**

Ten out of 13 senior locals (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7, SL8, SL9, SL11, and SL12) also pointed out that good relationships with others, especially with neighbors, are a vital feature of quality of life. They acknowledged the significance and necessity of good neighborly relations, as in rural counties, neighbors are the group of people with which seniors most frequently meet and communicate in their daily lives. Also, when they are in trouble, neighbors are always the first ones to offer help. These senior locals stated that if neighbors get along well with each other, they would like to spend more time together, which avoids feelings of loneliness and helplessness. In addition, it is noteworthy that they also mentioned the impact of communications with tourists had on their life quality. These senior locals expressed their willingness to interact with tourists, and they believed that their communications and interactions with tourists represent the image of their own county and help improve tourists’ travel experiences and satisfaction.
When these senior locals introduce their county to tourists, they realize their value and experience the meaning of life, both of which meet their expectations of a high quality of life.

Communication with tourists is necessary. It is a great opportunity for me to introduce my hometown, of which I am proud. When the information I offer to tourists is useful, I feel happy. And this encourages me to have more interactions with tourists. (SL6)

Based on the observation conducted by the researcher, the significance of the relationships with others was also evident. The researcher noticed that the vendors on the streets and the buyers know each other. Their communications were not just about buying and selling—they also talked about daily topics. During the interactions, all of them looked happy and relaxed.

**Feature 3: Children’s Lives**

Another common feature noted by seven senior locals (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL8, and SL11) is their children’s lives. They said that every aspect of their children’s lives influences the senior locals’ life quality. These seven interviewees indicated that, as a traditional Chinese family, children and parents depend on each other for their entire lives. Parents care more about their children than themselves. They believe that parents have the responsibilities and rights to participate in their children’s and even grandchildren’s all important life stages, such as education, career, and marriage. These rural senior locals also expressed their willingness to sacrifice their money and time for their children without hesitation. Some of them emphasized that the employment pressure in rural counties is increasing, meaning that it is hard for their college-educated children to find satisfactory jobs in their home county. This issue negatively impacts the life quality of senior parents.

What I expect most is that my daughters’ and sons’ families are happy and harmonious and they all have a successful career. If they can meet my expectations, my life quality will be improved a lot. For now, my younger daughter’s marriage is the most important thing in my life. (SL2)
My son and his family have a huge effect on my life. If he and his family are not happy, then I am not happy; if they are happy, I am happy and other things cannot impact my life. (SL6)

**Feature 4: Income**

There were six local interviewees (SL1, SL2, SL7, SL8, SL12, and SL13) reporting that, generally speaking, they are not satisfied with their income. Some of them who used to work for government agencies or companies said that they have relatively decent income allowing them to spend spare money traveling once or twice a year. However, this group thinks that those who used to be farmers or did not have stable jobs are still in poverty. They have difficulty in meeting daily expenses and furthering children’s education with such low income, not to mention being unable to improve their own life quality. According to their statements, income highly influences the quality of life for senior locals in rural areas.

The income is too low in our county. Though with health insurance, many seniors in rural places still cannot afford the cost of medical treatment since, due to the limited condition of local hospitals, some serious diseases can only be treated in cities, but we only get forty percent reimbursement if we choose to have the treatment in cities. Besides the huge cost of medical treatments, it is very expensive for farmers to pay tuition for their children’s education. Most farmers need to apply for loans. (SL1)

**Feature 5: Personal Hobbies**

Five of 13 senior local interviewees (SL1, SL6, SL7, SL9, and SL10) indicated that personal hobbies play an important role in their later lives and influence their overall quality of life. Although they are interested in different things, they stated that various hobbies benefit their health and mood and make their lives interesting and meaningful. These five senior locals imagined that without any hobbies, their later life would be boring and they would be easily depressed. When talking about their interests, they openly and willingly shared their personal hobbies. As previously mentioned, Wushan is a county of calligraphy. Many of them enjoy traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting.
Some senior locals are fond of senior singing and dancing groups, and others regard exercise as a hobby. They claimed that seniors must remain involved in their interests so that they can stay active and optimistic.

Seniors should be open-minded and try not to think too much. Otherwise, we need to participate in various activities, like singing and dancing, and learn how to have fun and enjoy our later lives. (SL1)

I think calligraphy and painting help me improve my quality of life. Not only do these hobbies make me feel happy and relaxed, but they are also helpful for me to learn new things. Sometimes acquaintances ask for my works. I take that as a compliment. I think I am good at time management. I can perfectly arrange practicing Tai Ji, writing and painting, singing and dancing, and playing Erhu. Though I am a senior, I am very busy every day. (SL6)

As evidenced in observation notes and pictures taken during the official interviews by the researcher, the importance of personal hobbies was also obvious. Figure 2 shows a number of calligraphy works completed by one interviewee (SL6), which hang in her bedroom and living room. Consistent with what she said during the interview, these works were asked for by others.
Feature 6: Other Features

Besides those discussed above, there are several features of quality of life expected by senior locals still worth mentioning. The education system is a concern for one interviewed senior local (SL5). She stated that the education system in rural areas is not as good as that in big cities, but most senior locals want their grandchildren to receive a good education, which impacts their live quality as well. The same can be said of the transportation system. A few senior locals reported that the local public transportation system should be improved to benefit their quality of life. They thought the current transportation system is not convenient enough for the senior population to get to wherever they would like to go. A small group of these senior locals expressed their dissatisfaction with the information acquisition channels. They expect to have more access to information so that they can keep themselves updated with changes in society.
Finally, a few senior locals emphasized their hopes of keeping their living environments from being damaged by developing rural tourism.

**4.5 Expectations for Rural Tourism**

Based on the valued elements of atmospheric community for rural tourism and the expected features of quality of life by the senior tourists and senior locals, both groups expressed their hopes and expectations for developing Wushan County’s, even China’s rural tourism. Their ideas can be good resources to refer in order to improve the development of rural tourism and benefit their quality of life. Both groups share some common ideas, but at the same time, because they come from different positions, they also have different expectations and different ranks of similar ones.

**4.5.1 Senior Tourists**

*Expectation 1: Simultaneously Improving Infrastructure and Service Quality*

Although they are not picky about the infrastructure, all 12 senior tourists do think that there are a lot of room for rural areas to improve and rural communities should offer quality infrastructure to tourists to develop rural tourism in the long term. In particular, they mainly mentioned three aspects of infrastructure. First, the roads to tourist attractions should be better planned and constructed. Currently, parts of roads to more rural attractions in Wushan County are still unsurfaced, which is inconvenient and unsafe particularly in terrible weather. It is also necessary and critical for rural communities to develop and improve their local public transportation. More than half of the senior tourists stated that they usually drive their own vehicles to rural areas, but they noticed that the local public transportation system is underdeveloped. For instance, the schedule of public buses is disordered so that people unexpectedly waste a lot of time waiting for buses. Second, local accommodations need to be improved in terms of quality and conditions; cleanliness is the most pressing concern in the accommodations. Finally, the dining environment and food safety in rural areas should be given more attention. Besides infrastructure, the service quality is valued by senior tourists and influences their travel experiences. They suggested that local people who work for the tourism industry should
receive some professional training. In order to satisfy tourists’ desires to know more about the destinations, the interpretation service of each attraction must be added and promoted. The prevalence of Mandarin is also important; for better interactions between locals and tourists, locals should be encouraged to speak Mandarin.

There is no doubt that local food and snacks are authentic here, but the food safety needs more attention and efforts to improve. The dining environment and quality of food should also be considered during the development of rural tourism. Only when tourists’ demands can be met, will they become the loyal visitors. (ST11)

**Expectation 2: Integrated Approach**

From the senior tourists’ perspectives, five (ST1, ST3, ST4, ST11, and ST12) hoped that rural communities could combine rural tourism development with local features. More specifically, they mentioned three types of integrated approaches in which rural areas can engage: combining rural tourism with local representative industries, such as the jade-carving industry in Wushan County; combining local history, culture, and traditions with rural tourism; and combining seniors’ health and quality of life with rural tourism. As an interviewee (ST3) noticed, many attractions in Wushan County are self-existent. There is no tourism cluster including all core elements to meet tourists’ demands. Like Wushan, rural counties with a long history, unique cultural heritages, and local traditions can integrate these into rural tourism and support the development of the local tourism industry accordingly. Since the senior tourists tend to travel to rural places, they care more about whether or not their health and quality of life can be improved through these travel experiences. Based on this idea, the senior tourists highly suggested that rural communities develop rural tourism aimed at benefiting the senior population’s health and quality of life.

With so many resources, Wushan County needs to combine the concepts of tourism and health. I have some suggestions in mind. In the attractions with natural resources, the bike trails and hiking trails can be designed and built to provide opportunities for seniors to get some exercise. (ST1)

When we visited Shuilian Dong, we found out that there are no restaurants near this attraction. We were dissatisfied with this because it brought us many troubles.
For example, we had to prepare food in advance or go to the restaurants far from this scenic spot. (ST3)

More senior apartments should be built near the springs so that we can stay there longer next time we visit Wushan. (ST11)

**Expectation 3: Promotion and Advertisement**

According to their own experiences and understandings, five out of 12 senior tourists (ST2, ST6, ST9, ST10, and ST12) emphasized that promotion and advertisement are needed for rural areas developing tourism. They reported that through interactions with local residents, senior tourists get to know many unknown but interesting attractions that they have never heard of before. As a matter of fact, they realized that many rural communities, like Wushan, have the problem of lack of promotion and advertisement. Due to this overall limited recognition, in order to develop China’s rural tourism, it is necessary and vital for rural communities to promote their images and advertise local featured attractions.

I feel that Wushan County, with plenty of unique natural resources, has huge potential to develop rural tourism, but many people do not know those resources, like forests and prairies. Advertisements are really needed. (ST2)

The most important and urgent task for rural areas is to enhance their awareness and popularity among tourists who are interested in rural tourism. I remember when I went to northeast China, people there had no idea about Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province, not to mention Wushan County. Rural destinations must take actions to promote themselves. The purpose of promotion and advertisement does not require tourists to know much about the rural communities, but to make them curious and generate the desire to visit these places. (ST12)

**Expectation 4: Government Supports**

Although only two interviewed senior tourists (ST5 and ST7) mentioned supports from the government, they emphasized how the Chinese government always plays the dominant role in each field, including the tourism industry. From the view of these two
interviewees, the involvement of the government is actually an advantage for rural areas to develop rural tourism, as the majority of China’s rural communities still suffer from poverty and do not have the ability to develop and promote rural tourism without external supports. In order to overcome the barrier of poverty, governments at all levels can provide sufficient financial support and investments. In addition, these two senior tourists noticed that the development of some local family business was out of order and there were no official organizations supervising it. They suggested that relevant governmental departments should set up specific regulations for tourism practitioners to follow. At the same time, supervising organizations must take the responsibility to ensure that the local rural tourism development is regulated.

Wushan is a great place to develop rural tourism because it has plentiful unique and precious resources. Currently, relying only on the rural community itself to develop rural tourism is impossible. The Chinese government should strongly offer supports. (ST5)

The rural tourism in Wushan is unorganized, which negatively impacts its rural tourism development and tourists’ experiences. (ST7)

4.5.2 Senior Locals

**Expectation 1: Government Supports**

Nine out of 13 interviewed senior locals in the current study (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL8, SL9, SL11, and SL12) pointed out that developing tourism in rural communities needs government supports. This suggestion was mentioned most frequently during the interviews and was considered the most effective way to improve rural areas’ tourism development. These senior locals, thinking of themselves as the group of people who know the rural community best, comprehensively stated each aspect that needs governmental support. To start, because of the slow and poor economic development in rural areas, they do not have sufficient capitals to invest into the tourism industry. Thus, governmental financial support appears to be more vital for these places to develop rural tourism. The next stage is promotion. These senior locals agreed that rural counties and local residents have the responsibility to promote the destination. Nevertheless, their
influence is limited so that promotion support, such as multiple promotion channels and better influence, is needed from the government. The senior locals are also concerned about their children’s careers in rural communities. They hope that, with government support, more opportunities can be created for young people to choose. For one thing, those in the younger generation would be able to start their own businesses and make contributions for tourism development. For another, young people can live around their senior parents and take care of them.

Although Wushan is developing rural tourism right now, the conditions are too poor to attract more tourists. Of course we want to make some improvements, but the thing is, people who work for the tourism industry do not have enough money. The government should offer some help. (SL1)

A major issue of Wushan rural tourism is that the majority of people do not know the attractiveness of this county. Many places are worth visiting, but almost nobody knows it. I think it is because the local government did not do a good job of advertising and introducing these attractions. One primary task for now is to make the county and attractions more notable. (SL2)

**Expectation 2: Simultaneously Improving Infrastructure and Service Quality**

All of the senior locals interviewed live in the rural community all the time, and seven of them (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7, and SL12) clearly noticed the changes of infrastructure and service quality in the tourism industry. They acknowledged that the infrastructure and service quality have improved a lot since Wushan County started to develop rural tourism. However, it must be said that there are still many aspects that should be promoted. These senior locals also highlighted the important role of transportation in rural tourism. Without convenient transportation, it is difficult for both tourists and locals to access many attractions. Safety can be seen as one of the most serious problems when it comes to tourism development in rural areas. Thus, they mentioned that for each rural attraction, safety must be ensured, and some special protections should be provided particularly for the senior population if needed. Another aspect suggested by this group of senior locals is service quality improvement. These interviewees believed many tourism employees are not qualified or professional.
For instance, some employees are not familiar with the history or culture of attractions, which means that accurate interpretation service cannot be offered to tourists. Additionally, they felt that tourism employees should participate in professional training to increase their awareness of high-quality service. Meanwhile, the administrative and supervisory mechanisms should be strengthened.

Rural tourism in Wushan County is growing, which benefits local economic development. But in the long run, people working for the tourism industry must realize the necessity and importance of improving infrastructure and service. Also, the quality of food should be made more delicate. (SL4)

In some attractions, the demand of employees exceeds supply, and many of them lack the professional service and management knowledge. And in some attractions, there are only few or no staff on duty. (SL6)

**Expectation 3: Highlighting Prominent Features**

Among all 13 interviewees, almost one third of the senior locals (SL6, SL8, SL10, and SL13) recommended developing rural tourism with local prominent features. They emphasized that rural communities like Wushan County have many unique local representative features that allow developers to plan and promote. Currently, many rural tourism businesses learn from and follow one another, resulting in a lack of their own uniqueness. Therefore, the senior locals highly suggested that tourism practitioners highlight prominent local features and their own characteristics when developing the business.

**Expectation 4: Community Spirit**

Three out of 13 interviewed senior locals (SL1, SL2, and SL9) mentioned that developing China’s rural tourism is not just the country’s or the community’s responsibility. Rather, it requires every local resident’s involvement. As previously reported by the senior locals, the relationship among rural local residents is very close, and people are glad to help each other and move their county forward together. In this case, a community spirit can be easily generated. The community spirit can bond all locals as a whole to stimulate the development and improvement of rural tourism.
A few senior locals emphasized that this kind of community spirit not only benefits China’s rural tourism, but that it can also become an intangible attraction of an atmospheric community for rural tourism.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the key findings reported in the previous chapter. Then it highlights the Chinese uniquenesses exacted from the findings. Based on the discussion of the relationship between rural tourism and the quality of life for both senior tourists and senior locals, the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism was proposed and the conceptual model, which demonstrated the relationship between atmospheric community for rural tourism and seniors’ quality of life, are discussed.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Elements of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism

For the first research objective (identifying the elements of atmospheric community for rural tourism), the findings show both similarities and differences stated by senior tourists and senior locals. Five common elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism emerged from the interviews with both groups of senior participants. They are tangible attractions, intangible attractions, interaction with locals and/or tourists, rusticity, and infrastructure. However, the significance of these elements varied between two groups and senior locals’ perceptions of infrastructure went beyond the construction of tangible service facilities—they also categorized the quality of intangible services to the element of infrastructure.

Senior tourists believed that the most important element is tangible attractions, including various natural resources, featured local food, and representative local industries, which are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the important role of natural attractions for rural tourism (Fiorello & Bo, 2012; Pesonen, Komppula, Kronenberg, & Peters, 2011). Besides the tangible attractions, the significance of intangible attractions in a rural destination was identified by the senior tourists in the current study, which has filled the gap left as a result of no attention paid to intangible attractions in the previous studies. Based on the findings, intangible attractions in this study contain natural intangible attractions, referring to comfortable climate; fresh air;
pleasant scents of flowers, grass, crops and soil; local history, culture, and traditions; and quiet and harmonious atmosphere. Interaction with locals and demands of infrastructure follow as the third element. Although the frequency of interaction was not reported as much as the first two elements, those senior tourists who mentioned this item pointed out its importance. The senior tourists seldom have interactions with others in cities, while during their visits in rural places, they are more likely to communicate with locals, which bring new and different experiences for their lives. Further, an atmospheric community for rural tourism should keep its rusticity and, at the same time, offer tourists with the opportunity to experience the closeness to nature and the rural lifestyle. Among all five elements, it seems that senior tourists do not have high expectations of infrastructure. With their life experiences and knowledge, they understood the infrastructure in rural areas cannot be compared with that in cities. Therefore, as long as the infrastructure meets their basic requirements, senior tourists will not complain about it.

The interviewed senior locals ranked the intangible attractions as the most important element to constitute an atmospheric community for rural tourism. They regarded these intangible attractions as valuable treasures. The items within this element can be categorized into three parts that are slightly different from those identified by senior tourists. They are: (1) history, culture, and traditions; (2) sound, scents, and taste; (3) the quiet, harmonious, and happy atmosphere. Unlike senior tourists, who have limited channels through which to learn about the community—especially those intangible things that require more time to experience and feel—the senior locals have spent their entire lives in the rural community. The local history, culture, and traditions have already become an important component of their lives. In addition, senior tourists only mentioned the significance of pleasant scents but sound and taste that are also valued by senior locals. The second important element identified by the senior locals is the tangible attractions, which include natural resources as well as featured local food. In particular, within the natural resources, mountains and water are two major components mentioned, which is consistent with the common perception that in China, people always think of a place as a good place if it has mountains and water.

Like the senior tourists who state the significance of interactions with locals, the third element of interaction and its important role in creating an atmospheric community
for rural tourism was also claimed by the senior locals. However, different from senior tourists, mainly focusing on the communications with locals in rural areas, the senior locals value the relationships with both local neighbors and tourists. On one hand, since senior locals are an indispensable component of a rural community, the relationships among neighbors influence everyone’s mood and life—the smaller a rural community, the closer the relationships. On the other hand, senior locals represent their community so that the interactions with tourists influence tourists’ perceptions of destinations.

Consistent with participating senior tourists’ opinions about infrastructure, the interviewed senior locals identified this element as well. The infrastructure must meet the requirements of tourists. More importantly, the senior locals emphasized the significance of service quality with in this element, which is critical for locals working in the service industry to improve their awareness of offering high-quality service and treating tourists as friends.

Table 3: Summary of Elements of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Senior Tourists</th>
<th>Senior Locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Tangible attractions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intangible attractions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>Local history, culture, and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Featured local food</td>
<td>Sound, scents, and taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representative local industries</td>
<td>Quiet and harmonious atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Intangible attractions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tangible attractions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfortable climate, fresh air, and</td>
<td>Natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pleasant scents</td>
<td>Featured local food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local history, culture, and traditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet and harmonious atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Interaction with locals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interaction with locals and tourists</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Rusticity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Infrastructure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being close to nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing the rural lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Infrastructure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rusticity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing the rural lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2 Features of Quality of Life

The second research objective was to discover the features of quality of life expected by senior tourists. Four features (health, personal hobbies, children’s lives, and income) were mentioned by both the senior tourists and the senior locals, although in different order. However, there is one feature—interaction—that was emphasized by the senior locals and not by senior tourists. This may be because, in China’s rural areas, people know each other in the same community and tend to have close relationships with neighbors; however, in urban cities, fewer and fewer people know their neighbors and do not actively build close relationships with others. In terms of the other four features, there is no doubt that health is considered the most significant by both groups. Following this, senior tourists pay more attention to developing personal hobbies in their later lives, which maybe because senior tourists are less worried about their material lives. Therefore, they are more likely to focus on spiritual lives—developing personal hobbies. Contrary to seniors in rural areas who are not satisfied with their income, senior tourists in urban cities are generally pleased with their income. In other words, the income somehow improves their quality of life as a positive factor. The last element named others includes several less important and less frequently mentioned items. A few urban senior tourists talk about the significance of their living environment and information acquisition, which also have influence on the quality of life for the entire senior population.

Similar to the previous research objective, the third is to ascertain the aspects of quality of life expected by senior locals. The findings highlight six features, which are health, interaction, children’s lives, income, personal hobbies, and other features such as education and transportation systems and information acquisition channels, that influence quality of life for seniors. Consistent with the findings of previous research objective and extant studies (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Patterson, 2006; Schröder, & Widmann 2007), health is always the most vital feature expected by the senior population when talking about quality of life. Next, unlike senior tourists living in big cities, senior locals in small rural communities tend to have the possibility to know all the neighbors and establish close relationships with them. Similarly, it is easy for senior locals to notice tourists since the communities are small and out of curiosity about the outside as well as the tradition of
being friends with people appearing in the community, senior locals are also likely to communicate with tourists. Therefore, senior locals value the interactions with both local neighbors and tourists. Another distinctive finding, which is consistent with senior tourists’ ideas, is that of Chinese characteristics; China’s seniors care about their children’s lives and are willing to devote themselves to helping their children live a better life. Chinese parents would rather save their spare money for their children than buy their favorite goods; they would rather help their children raise grandchildren than enjoy their later lives; and they would rather take care of their children’s housing than improve their own living environments. The feature of income plays a significant role in senior locals’ lives, because many Chinese rural areas still suffer from poverty and financial difficulties harm local seniors’ quality of life. However, senior locals in rural areas have started to value their quality of life through developing personal hobbies. Thus, they identified this feature influencing the life quality as well.

Some items only mentioned by a few senior locals were categorized into the feature of others, which include education system, transportation system, information acquisition channels, and living environment. Like senior tourists, local seniors expect the living environment not only benefiting their quality of life but also not damaged by rural tourism development. In addition, senior locals also desire to have more access to information in order to make themselves connected with the society. The other two items, education system and transportation system were just valued by senior locals not by senior tourists in terms of quality of life probably in that senior tourists only spend a few days in rural areas and their children are less likely to receive education in a tourist destination. Therefore, education system was not considered an expected feature by senior tourists. Similarly, the majority of senior tourists visit rural destinations by their own vehicles, so they do not think of transportation system as an important feature influencing their quality of life. However, these two items exist in and affect senior locals’ daily lives. Therefore, they value and expect to have a high quality education and transportation systems.
Table 4: Summary of Features of Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Senior Tourists</th>
<th>Senior Locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>With neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>With tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children’s lives</td>
<td>Children’s lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Personal hobbies</td>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Personal hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquisition of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information acquisition channels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Living environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.3 Recommendations for China’s Rural Tourism

The last research objective aims to provide recommendations for China’s future rural tourism development through understanding senior tourists’ and senior locals’ hopes and expectations based on their travel and life experiences. Several expectations were presented separately by these two groups of interviewees. Although their opinions regarding China’s rural tourism seems to be different, all of their expectations can be achieved by following two recommendations.

One recommendation for China’s future rural tourism is to strengthen government supports in various aspects. As a government-led country, China can take advantage of the power of the in developing rural tourism, especially in places that still suffer from poverty but have great potential in the tourism industry. In China’s rural areas, the most effective help from the government is financial support. With sufficient investments, senior tourists’ and senior locals’ expectations on the infrastructure, professional training for service staff, and destination promotion will be achieved. One aspect that needs
government support is supervision and/or regulation. According to the interviews with both senior tourists and senior locals, along with direct observations, rural tourism in underdeveloped areas is disorganized and hard to solve by relying only on self-restraint; however, with the supervision and regulation mechanism set up by the government, this situation can be improved.

The second recommendation is connected to the integrated approach in three ways. First, the distinctive local traditions can be combined with rural tourism. Considering the long history of China, many rural communities generally have some unique local traditions that can stand out during the process of developing rural tourism. Naming the rural communities after their traditions can be a way to achieve the integration of rural tourism and local traditions. For instance, Wushan County is named as “The County of Wushu.” In addition, cooperation between rural tourism and local representative industries is another integrated approach. By producing tourism products with local features, the industries have the possibility to gain more profits; in turn, these local featured tourism products may attract more tourists to visit. This suggestion also works for Wushan County with the unique jade-carving industry that can design and produce jade souvenirs for tourists. Finally, the integrated approach of rural tourism and quality of life, particularly seniors’ quality of life, will meet the tendency of seniors to choose rural tourism, and this is consistent with seniors’ desire to improve their quality of life.

**Table 5: Summary of Recommendations for China’s Rural Tourism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen the</td>
<td>Financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government supports</td>
<td>Promotion and advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervision and/or regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated approach</td>
<td>Integration of distinctive local traditions and rural tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of representative local industries and rural tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of seniors’ quality of life and rural tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Chinese Uniqueness

Conducted in the Chinese context, five unique findings stood out among all the findings. These Chinese uniquenesses, on one hand, represent the history and culture of China, and, on the other hand, reveal the tendency towards influencing other countries.

The dominant role of the Chinese government in developing RT. As in the government-led country, when talking about the China’s future development in RT, both senior tourists and senior locals mentioned the necessity and importance of government supports in finance, promotion and advertisement, and the establishment of supervision and regulations. However, the significance of the government was identified differently by these two groups. The senior locals seem to depend more on the government than do senior tourists. It is because senior tourists, who travel to the rural communities, only care about their travel experiences; but senior locals, who live in these areas, not only care about the RT but also the development of other aspects in the rural community since it is home for them not a destination.

Infrastructure and services are always come together. In western countries, infrastructure and services are two totally separate concepts. However, an interesting finding is that Chinese senior interviewees group these two concepts together in expressing their expectations for China’s RT. The reason is that in China’s service industry, the definition of infrastructure goes beyond the tangible facilities, such as accommodations and roads; it also includes intangible services. This Chinese understanding is reasonable since in the service industry, customers experience both the service facilities and the services offered by service staff.

Children’s lives strongly influence seniors’ QOL. As traditional Chinese seniors believed, they have obligations and responsibilities to participate in all stages of their children’s and even grandchildren’s lives. Helping their children as much as they can, like taking care of their grandchildren, is one of the ways they are involved. This Chinese perception has already influenced other cultures. There are more seniors in the United States starting to help their children look after their grandchildren and enjoy spending more time with them. However, although they mirror Chinese tradition, they never consider help to equal obligation and responsibility.
The importance of income stands out in Chinese seniors’ perception of QOL. Both senior tourists and senior locals regard income as a significant factor influencing their later lives. However, these two groups’ opinions on income are opposite. The senior tourists in general are satisfied with their income and identify its positive effect on their QOL. On the contrary, the senior locals complain about their income, which negatively impacts their QOL. Their different attitudes and perceptions, for one thing, imply a Chinese issue—the gap between the rich and the poor still exists and severely influences people’s lives; for another, explain the reason why the Chinese government introduced RT as a tool to help rural areas and residents get rid of poverty and narrow the gap.

Furthermore, in Chinese culture, people care about their “mianzi,” or face value. A decent income makes people, including seniors, more confident in front of others.

Interaction is the key to an atmospheric community for rural tourism and a high quality of life. The first mention of interaction occurred at identifying the elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism. Both senior groups emphasized its importance as well as their desires for interactions from RT. The second time that interaction was identified was in discovering the features of QOL expected by seniors. However, this time only senior locals highlighted interaction as a decisive factor influencing their QOL. This fact represents a Chinese uniqueness, which is the relationships among people is much closer in rural communities than in urban cities. It is because in China, compared with urban cities, rural communities are smaller so that people are more likely to know each other. In addition, Chinese rural communities tend to have more group oriented activities that encourage all residents to participate. For instance, farmers can easily see their neighbors around them when they are planting and harvesting in that the majority of farm works happen in the outside.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 The Relationship between Rural Tourism and Seniors’ Quality of Life

During the interviews, the senior tourists and senior locals were asked if rural tourism influences their quality of life, and if so, how. These two groups of people reported that rural tourism had a positive effect on their quality of life. Senior tourists’
satisfaction of their travel experiences to rural communities were beyond their expectations. This is because, at the beginning, due to the bias of rural areas falling behind, they did not set very high expectations. However, after their travel to rural communities, they found that the development of rural tourism was great. In other words, their travel experiences exceeded their expectations and demands of rural tourism in the following aspects. First, the overall rural environment benefited their physical and spiritual health, and the local scenery and delicious food brought visual and sensual enjoyments to them, making them experience a high quality of life. Through traveling, the senior tourists satisfied their desires for sharing life experiences and gaining new knowledge.

Senior tourists are not the only beneficiary of rural tourism; senior locals also benefit from it. The locals’ and community’s incomes are significantly increased, which meets senior locals’ expectation of income regarding a high quality of life. With more attractions planned and developed, senior locals have more options to spend their leisure time and develop their personal hobbies. This is consistent with another important feature of personal hobbies valued by senior locals. Thus, apart from material life, senior locals’ spiritual life is improved. They become more open-minded and more willing to exchange resources and knowledge with other places, and people enrich their lives. The interactions with tourists gave them the chance to both introduce their hometown to tourists and satisfy their own curiosity of the outside world.

In turn, the achievement of satisfying the aspects of quality of life expected and valued by both senior tourists and senior locals benefit rural tourism development. As for senior tourists, according to the interviews, those who had satisfactory travel experiences agreed that rural tourism improved their quality of life, reporting their willingness to recommend the rural destinations to others. This is an effective way to promote the image and recognition of rural destinations. In terms of senior locals, the improvement of their quality of life changed the attitudes of senior locals who presented negative attitudes toward developing rural tourism and increased their awareness of participating in the rural tourism industry as hosts.
5.3.2 The Concept of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism

As stated in the previous section and as shown in Figure 4, on one hand, what senior tourists and senior locals expected to improve their quality of life can be satisfied through traveling to and/or living in atmospheric communities. In other words, atmospheric communities for rural tourism benefit the quality of life for both senior groups. On the other hand, knowing the features of quality of life valued by them provides rural areas with the opportunity to gain useful ideas to better develop rural tourism.

Based on the findings of this study, a rural place that has the five elements discussed previously (tangible attractions, intangible attractions, interaction, rusticity, and infrastructure) can be tentatively defined as an atmospheric community for rural tourism. In particular, the key element for this concept is interaction, which contains three aspects: interaction between tourists and locals, interaction between tourists and tourists, and interaction between locals and locals. These three types of human interaction represent the process of generating a unique and pleasant atmosphere. This is why the current study involves both senior tourists and senior locals.
Figure 4: The Conceptual Model of Atmospheric Community for Rural Tourism and Seniors’ Quality of Life
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of the current study was to investigate the relationship between atmospheric community for rural tourism and seniors’ quality of life. To achieve this goal, a framework guiding the study was shown in Chapter 2, and the major exploratory research method of semi-structured in-depth interviews and the supplementary method of direct observation were introduced and applied in Chapter 3. Based on 25 interviews and direct observational notes, the findings of each research objective were reported in Chapter 4. In previous chapter, a summary of key findings, Chinese uniqueness, and the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism were discussed. In this chapter, both academic and practical contributions and implications, as well as limitations and recommendations for future studies were presented.

6.1 Contributions and Implications

6.1.1 Contributions

The present study contributes to both academia and industry in tourism field. Academically, this study is the first to involve both senior tourists and senior locals in one research design to investigate the relationship between rural tourism and quality of life for senior population especially in the Chinese context. The findings of this study identified the close relationship between senior tourists and senior locals and pointed out the insight that in China, rural tourism will have a better and brighter future if both groups are considered together. The findings also indicated that rural tourism is a solution to improve seniors’ quality of life and in turn, knowing the aspects of quality of life expected by both senior groups benefits rural tourism development. More importantly, the current study proposed a new concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism that supplements tourism concepts. An atmospheric community for rural tourism emphasizes the interaction between tourists and locals. This concept suggests a new win-win-win way to simultaneously develop China’s rural tourism and improve seniors’ quality of life.
Practically, this study benefits senior tourists, senior locals, and industry practitioners in different ways. Integrating the concept of atmospheric rural community into rural tourism can enhance senior tourists’ travel experiences, enrich senior locals’ daily life, and improve both groups’ quality of life. Also, the involvement of both senior tourists and senior locals in the study raises the awareness of tourism developers, rural communities, as well as the government to not only consider tourists’ demands, but also value locals’ opinions and participation in the process of developing rural tourism. Furthermore, the identified key elements of an atmospheric rural community provide the criterion for industry practitioners to create and evaluate a rural community’s atmosphere. For example, by highlighting interaction as the most significant element of an atmospheric rural community, policy makers can generate the official documents to encourage locals engaging in the tourism industry by offering them benefits.

6.1.2 Implications

The implications of this study are drawn from its findings and contributions, which are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, by proposing the new concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism, which emphasizes the interaction, the studies involving both senior tourists and senior locals in similar topics are encouraged. Additionally, this study connected the concept of atmospheric community for rural tourism with quality of life. In the future, this concept of atmospheric community has the possibility to be extended to other types of tourism. Practically, establishing atmospheric communities can be a long-term goal for tourism developers, policy makers, and community leaders to develop rural tourism in China. On the basis of knowing the importance of interaction between tourists and locals, policy makers can generate the official documents to encourage locals engaging in the tourism industry by offering them benefits. It would achieve both senior tourists’ and senior locals’ common expectation on interaction in rural tourism. Moreover, the indicated positive effect of rural tourism on quality of life, the discovered elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism, and the valued features of quality of life all can be helpful references for industry practitioners to integrate rural tourism with quality of life while developing tourism products.
6.2 Limitations and Future Research

The current study has some limitations. Only qualitative methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and direct observation were employed in the collection of the textual data. Based on the identified five elements of an atmospheric community for rural tourism and the features valued by the seniors in this study, surveys can be generated to evaluate whether or not a rural destination is considered an atmospheric community for rural tourism. In addition, the integration of qualitative methods and quantitative methods is recommended to apply for future studies. Another limitation concerns interview location. Only two interview places, either interviewees’ homes or a private hotel conference room, were involved in this study. Future studies are recommended to include more tourist attraction sites, particularly at different developing stages, for data collection. Finally, the data for the present study was gathered from only one rural county, Wushan County. This county is a good example of northwest Chinese rural areas that are underdeveloped but have great potential. However, in consideration of the diversity of the world, interesting and meaningful findings may be found in other rural areas with different resources and cultures. In the future, studies are recommended to involve other parts of Chinese rural areas as well as other countries’ rural communities. Then, comparison studies between different regions of rural places in one country or intercultural comparison studies can be conducted.
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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR TOURISTS

Section 1: Rural Tourism
1. Why did you choose Wushan County as your travel destination?
2. According to your experience, what are attractive in Wushan County for you?
3. How do you define rural tourism?
4. Do you consider Wushan County a rural area?
5. Compared with urban cities, what elements represent rural areas? Both tangible and intangible elements.
6. How do you describe the atmosphere in Wushan County?
7. What elements do you think are important for an atmospheric community for rural tourism?
8. Use 1-10 scale to evaluate Wushan County’s performance in creating an atmospheric community for rural tourism.
9. According to question No.8, for what reasons you gave such score.

Section 2: Quality of Life
1. Before traveling here, how would you evaluate your quality of life in general?
2. What specific factors influence your quality of life? Both positive and negative factors.
3. What features of quality of life do you value or expected?

Section 3: Rural Tourism and Quality of Life
1. How do you evaluate your current health condition?
2. What have been changed in your quality of life, while you are traveling here?
3. What specific factors of this travel experience influence your quality of life? Both positive and negative.
4. What features of quality of life do you expect to get from visiting rural destinations?
5. How does Wushan County meet your expectations regarding quality of life?
6. What do you think of your interaction with local residents during this experience?
7. Describe one interaction that is most impressive to you during this experience, either good or bad.

Section 4: General Evaluation
1. How would you describe this rural community? In a few words or phrases.
2. Use 1-10 scale to evaluate your general satisfaction of this travel experience.
3. According to No. 2, for what reason, you gave such score.
4. What would you tell your family or friends about this travel experience?
5. If having chance, are you willing to travel back?
6. In terms of improving the travel experience and the quality of life for tourists visiting Wushan County, especially for seniors, do you have any expectation or suggestions?

Section 5: Demographic Information
1. Age
2. Where are you from? Big cities or rural regions?
3. Whom do you travel with this time?
4. How long are you going to stay here?
5. What do you do now?
6. What is your current major income?
7. How do you evaluate your current income?
8. Do you always spend your income in traveling?
9. How much of your income approximately would be spent on travel?
10. How much of your time approximately would be spent on travel?
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR LOCALS

Section 1: Rural Tourism
1. How do you define rural tourism?
2. Do you consider Wushan County a rural area?
3. Is Wushan County developing the rural tourism?
4. Do many tourists visit Wushan County all year around?
5. What attractions does Wushan County have? Both tangible and intangible attractions.
7. How do you describe the atmosphere in Wushan County?
8. What elements do you think are important for an atmospheric community for rural tourism?
9. Use 1-10 scale to evaluate Wushan County’s performance in creating an atmospheric community for rural tourism.
10. According to question No.9, for what reasons you gave such score.

Section 2: Quality of Life
1. How do you evaluate your current health condition?
2. How would you evaluate your current quality of life in general?
4. What features of quality of life do you value or expect?

Section 3: Rural Tourism and Quality of Life
1. Before the development of rural tourism in Wushan County, how would you evaluate your quality of life?
2. Does the development of rural tourism in Wushan County influence your quality of life?
3. What specific aspects of developing rural tourism influence your quality of life? Both positive and negative aspects.
4. Do you usually interact with tourists?
5. How do you like the interactions with tourists?
6. How do the interactions with tourists influence your quality of life?
7. Describe one interaction that is most impressive to you during this experience, either good or bad.

Section 4: General Evaluation
1. Are you satisfied with the current life in Wushan County?
2. Are you satisfied with the current development of rural tourism in Wushan County?
3. How would you describe this rural community? In a few words or phrases.
4. In terms of developing the rural tourism in Wushan County and improving the quality of life for locals, especially for seniors, do you have any expectation or suggestions?

Section 5: Demographic Information
1. Age
2. Are you a local resident in Wushan County?
3. Where are you originally from? From Wushan County or anywhere else?
4. (If you are from somewhere else) Why did you move to Wushan County?
5. Do you have any plans to move to anywhere else?
6. What do you do now?
7. What is your current major income?
8. How do you evaluate your current income?
9. Whom are you living with?