Experience of Community Resilience in Rural Areas around Heritage Sites in Quanzhou under Transition to a Knowledge Economy

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Abstract: With the transition to a knowledge economy becoming an important aim, this qualitative study examines rural communities (Yongning and Xunpu) near heritage sites in Quanzhou, China. “Pu Jing” and exhibition space are connected with the inheritance and creation of intangible cultural heritage in order to form a knowledge economy with unique local characteristics around these sites. Beliefs and customs that reconstruct social values are integrated with heritage conservation. Economic competition and social capital restructuring strengthen social identification and benefit building community resilience. Combining with the “Local Tourism Alliance” activities organized by local organizations is important when developing innovative education and tourism activities. The innovation-oriented rural revitalization strategy has promoted community resilience in rural areas around the heritage sites, enhanced local area values, and encouraged social and economic efficiency.

Keywords: community resilience; cultural heritage; knowledge economy; Quanzhou; rural revitalization

1. Introduction

With the shift from a rural economy to an urban industrial economy and even to a knowledge economy [1], the rural economic recession seems to be a global trend [2]. The concept of community resilience has become increasingly important, particularly when faced with challenges such as climate change, youth migration, and socio-economic disruption which lessens the resilience of communities worldwide [3–7]. Vulnerability, resilience, and adaptation were selected as the three key concepts in the plan for global environmental changes and international humanity factors [8]. These concepts are mutually connected and applied according to an analysis of the scale and subject interest [9]. The rural economic recession explains the increased study of resilience [10] and demonstrates that researchers are using this concept more frequently to analyze the sustainable dynamic of rural communities [11]. Climate change, resilience, vulnerability, adaptation, and management were regarded as the key concepts within the literature on rural resilience [12,13]. The term “community resilience” reflected that the concept of resilience was constantly evolving and that the public understood the adoption of the sustainable management of natural resources, the development, and dissemination of ecological knowledge, and that designs could respond to social and ecological changes [14]. Several studies taking resilience as a proactive strategy for learning in rural communities illustrated the importance of learning in the pursuit of social and ecological resilience and the gap caused by community resilience [7,15–17]. Therefore, the concept of resilience as an academic theme always challenges researchers seeking to establish measurable alternatives and indicators [18].

The field of rural resilience has an interdisciplinary classification. In the late 20th century, the emergence of resilience helped deepen the understanding of the complicated
relations between ecological and social systems involving different scales [18–20], concepts, and fields [11], for example, the analysis of human ecology, ecological economics, rural sociology and the study of the environment [21] and the discussion of the internal and external factors affecting the sustainable dynamic in rural areas [22,23]. First, in terms of social systems, the study of rural resilience focused on community participation and can assess the level of rural community adaptability [24]. Moreover, this indicates that studying resilience has provided a vital alternative framework for rural development [25]. Second, although they have provided most of the world’s food and natural resources, rural social and ecological systems are impacted by an economic gap, political instability, depopulation, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity [15,26,27]. Few studies have fully reviewed the similar development of inter-disciplinary rural resilience [28]. As a result, studies challenging this concept are still predominantly academic and theoretical, which results in insufficient practical experience and evidence of field testing.

It is important to explore the reasons for the vulnerability of rural resilience and the important factors for its creation. First, rural resilience is vulnerable to natural and man-made factors: (1) Outward migration may lead to community aging and disrupt inter-generational communication leading to the loss of experience and the interruption of knowledge and skills which are then unavailable to the younger generation thereby weakening resilience [29]. (2) Natural factors such as water quality and availability, soil types and quality, the steepness and accessibility of topographic features, etc. [3] affect resilience. However, rediscovering strongly resilient community features can strengthen community networks and resilience e.g., in Sichuan. (3) Over-reliance on external income makes communities vulnerable to certain elements/processes that prevent the development of resilience [3,6,30]. Similarly, over-reliance on external income such as remittances or subsidies [31] may weaken community cohesion and damage trust and income equality [3,4]. Thus, only by investigating the community’s circumstances can researchers assess resilience [6]. Second, among the crucial factors for establishing resilience in rural areas, Elms (2015) [32] claimed that a community response plan can help build resilience, whilst Mitchell et al. [33] saw the planning process as equally important. Darnhofer et al. [34] proposed that learning and adaptability—instead of production and productivity—are the most important factors for farmland resilience [35–37]. Furthermore, it is essential to strike a balance between respecting local knowledge and considering the practice of resilience studies carried out by “experts” [33,38]. However, the resilience of personnel within an organization has been recognized as a significant feature of rural resilience [39–41].

Concerning the relationship and development conditions for rural sustainable development and rural resilience in the knowledge economy, the UK Department of Trade and Industry claims that a knowledge-driven economy is one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth [42]. In the economy, major cities are dominant, with villages outside their influential space being marginalized. The transition to a knowledge economy is accompanied by the shift from an agricultural economy to an urban industrial economy. Sustainable rural communities are characterized by rural resilience where responding to rural recession is connected to the improvement of villagers’ livelihoods by changing their behaviors and allowing them to adapt to a new rural environment. There are three conditions for rural sustainable development within a knowledge economy: (1) creating new economic activities to meet the potential needs in cities; (2) pursuing local entrepreneurship in order to launch and expand these innovative exercises; (3) building social capital which is capable of supporting entrepreneurs in rolling out activities that attract credit, a labor force, human resources, and external markets whilst acquiring knowledge from the outside world which can be leveraged for learning and innovation. The knowledge economy (including knowledge-intensive industries) is based on innovation which depends on new combinations of human knowledge [1].

Increasing evidence from over 40 developed countries in the EU together with emerging and developing countries underlines the potential of a knowledge economy that boosts
sustainable urban-rural development. Voinescu and Moisoiu [43] stated that sustainability is the driver of the EU’s competitiveness and economic growth. Further, the key to becoming the top participant in the knowledge economy is to invest in innovation and technologies [44] thereby demonstrating the vigorous and sustained causal relations between educational investment and economic growth. Data from over 40 developed economies along with emerging, and developing economies [45] illustrate that national wealth, national competitiveness, and national intellectual capital are able to stimulate economic growth. Both in big cities and rural areas, the imbalanced development of the knowledge economy is a global trend. For cities, the importance of resources (land, forests, and minerals) in the rural hinterland relatively decreases while the knowledge of resources of other cities increases.

The knowledge economy is an economy of acquisition, as the knowledge it creates can be effectively disseminated and utilized to advance economic growth [46]. Powell and Snellman [47] claimed that knowledge-intensive activities contribute to economic advances. Also, they added that the key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities (including creativity) rather than on physical inputs or natural resources. Drotner [48] believed that a knowledge economy publicizing creativity can be applied widely since knowledge is the key element that increases and creates wealth and provides job opportunities, while human capital is the creativity that drives the creation of new ideas. As Cavusoglu [49] argued, the reliance on information and telecommunications is an enabling factor. Tantau [50] mentioned two different types of innovative methods, namely macro- and micro-economy, and social and organizational methods. Păunescu [51] emphasized that from the perspective of the economy, innovation offers more forms of value such as social, environmental, ethical, and political values, and local brands. Other expressions of local brands [52] include brand identity, brand origins, values, visions, visual recognition, and behavioral and scene narration [52, 53]. Polunin (2002) explained that brands, starting with self-analysis, understand and define their products and personalities, and then provide them to the targeted markets. Competitiveness and knowledge are the two key factors that promote economic growth, innovation, and sustainability [54]. In addition, the knowledge economy concerning the creation, distribution, and exploitation of knowledge and information has displaced energy and capital to become the major source of wealth creation. The knowledge economy is also conducive to lifelong learning, and investment in IT, research, and education is the key to a growing economy [54].

The project of rural communities around the heritage sites in Quanzhou has been considered China’s leading case where a knowledge economy is driven by the innovation of rural communities; however, there are few studies deeply exploring the social and ecological efficiency of rebuilding these communities. This study attempts to address the following issues. When they promote the integration between the rural knowledge economy and rural resilience, in what ways does the knowledge economy enhance rural resilience? Specifically, (1) What can a rural knowledge economy be? (2) What are the targets for the development of a rural knowledge economy? (3) What may be the social and ecological impacts on a rural knowledge economy? Consequently, the qualitative study focuses on concrete cases and probes the meaningful experience of redeveloping the traditional “Pu Jing” space into heritage and tourism resources. The significance of this study is to provide a case study for the revitalization of the knowledge economy in Asian rural areas combined with their heritage.

2. The General Development Status of China’s Rural Areas and the Heritage Sites in Quanzhou

Amid rapid urban-rural transformation, China’s rural communities are faced with unprecedented changes [55, 56]. As in many other transforming economies, studies relating to the subject of resilience have recently become more important [4, 57, 58]. Since 1949, Chinese society has gradually developed a dual urban-rural structure that has resulted in the conservation of rural cultural heritage [59]. Additionally, the disappearance of
natural ancient villages, and the failure to hand down cultural heritage, have not only aggravated the rural population’s “empty nest” problem but also destroyed the grassroots social structure and belief systems [60]. Chinese researchers have found that the process of bidding for World Heritage status may promote communication between villages and communities along with the heritage sites, enhance protection level and management capabilities, and arouse social concerns. After 1990, Chinese local governments at all levels paid attention to the bidding and listing of world heritage sites, in particular when the two historical cities of Lijiang and Pingyao were added to the World Heritage List in 1997. Generally, an included heritage site may gain international popularity and usher in enormous social and economic growth [61].

Located on the southeast coast of Fujian Province, Quanzhou was a maritime trading port during the Tang and five subsequent dynasties and also the Song and Yuan Dynasties. During the Song and Yuan periods, it became a world-renowned trading hub, labeled “the Largest Port in the East”. Nonetheless, this economic trajectory emphasized material matters leading to an urban-rural imbalance in the region. Meanwhile, as its development was marginalized, the rural culture was confronted with an unprecedented need to select its way forward and the hardship of changing its identity [62]. “Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China” was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2021, becoming China’s 56th world heritage site. As a result, “Quanzhou: World Heritage Sites” has become a trending word on social media with growing tourism concerns. Quanzhou was the largest port in the east during the Song and Yuan periods, known as “Zayton” [63]. In 2001, the city began to prepare its bid for World Heritage status as “Maritime Silk Road—Quanzhou” [64]. The ancient city underwent three stages, namely the protection and planning of the core areas (1983–2000), the protection and bidding (2000–2017), and the protection and bidding for its hinterland buffer zone of rural communities (2017–2021). In the first two stages, with a focus on the historic blocks, Quanzhou worked hard to conserve the ancient buildings, protect their texture, maintain the systemic pattern, and improve their living environment [65].

During the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee in 2019, the to-be-discussed project of “Ancient Quanzhou (Zayton) Historic Site” was dismissed, and the heritage area and buffer zone border were redrawn. The changes were as follows: (1) the area of the adjusted buffer zone increased substantially to include 22 heritage sites. The serial heritage showed the interrelation between Quanzhou and its hinterland [66], with the expanded area covering over 100 km$^2$. The protection task of the bidding involved 22 heritage sites including the ancient cities of Jinjiang, Quanzhou, Shishi, Nan’an, Dehua, and Anxi, with the expanded heritage sites mainly located in rural communities. (2) Since 2017, the local government, combined with the bidding, has issued the Guidelines on the Promotion of Rural Revitalization in a Whole Town. In light of the guidelines, the government has advanced urban-rural integrated development and carried out a series of themed activities. Besides, the activities of the heritage sites include heritage protection, emergency assistance, management and planning, technological support, and educational training [67]. (3) The government needed to develop cultural tourism based on heritage resources and to verify the core area and the mainly rural buffer zone of the conservation area. As a consequence, three boutique tourism routes and three routes through the heritage sites have been launched, extending from the harbor through the Jiangkou Plain to the hinterland and mountain areas around the sites. The routes include visits to the cultural relics and historical sites in rural areas and the former residences of famous people, as well as the interpretation of anecdotes and folklore of the sites [68]. (4) Both in the urban and rural areas, action groups on the basis of heritage conservation and creativity education were formed by local youths. Also, a series of performing activities are rolled out to pay close attention to community operations, art scenes, knowledge production, and documentary videos.

As the living fossil of the communities in the ancient cities of Quanzhou, the major space subject of this study—“Pu Jing” is not only a typical traditional Chinese community-level social organization but also boasts the basic elements of modern urban communi-
ties [69]. Pu Jing, having been formed since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, is still used as a place name by local people. How could Quanzhou’s overseas trade sustain long-term prosperity for five centuries? It is due to the strength of the beliefs active in the people [70]. The heritage sites in the ancient city of Quanzhou such as the Qingjing Mosque, Islamic Tombs, Kaiyuan Temple, Statue of Mani in the Cao’an Temple, the Tianhou and Confucius Temples, and the School and Statue of Lao Tze all demonstrate the inclusiveness and diversified features of local culture. “The place known as the kingdom of Buddhism is full of saints,” observed Zhu Xi over 800 years ago [71]. Today, the traditional Pu Jing space in Quanzhou has been transformed into public, multi-functional, and cultural heritage site resources. It is universally acknowledged that this practice is the first successful economic innovation based on Pu Jing.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Areas

The villages and towns in this study were selected from the rural communities of Yongning and Xunpu around the heritage sites in Quanzhou. Located on the southeast coast of China, the Yongning community is a town named in the Southern Song Dynasty with the intention of preventing foreign aggression. The old town was an agricultural community located in the south of Quanzhou until the 1990s. In addition, the research areas consisted of Cliff Inscriptions in the Huxiu Temple, Yongning Wei Inscriptions (the stone of sea), the Site of Ancient Wei Town, the Chaotian Temple, the Jade Emperor Loft, Islamic Tombs, and the Sun-watching Platform. The notable ancient maritime lighthouse in Quanzhou—Gusao Pagoda (also known as Wanshou Pagoda or Guansuo Pagoda) is one of the 22 heritage sites in the bidding project. In addition, the Xunpu community is located in the southeast of Quanzhou’s downtown, approximately ten miles distant, with Xunpu village boasting a long history. In the Ming Dynasty, there was a Zhegu Inspection Office in the community. The surrounding areas centering on Xunpu have gradually formed unique folk customs distinct from those of the East China Sea. Also situated on the northern coast of the Jinjiang River, the community relies on the fishery. The continental sea is the prominent part of downstream Jinjiang bordering the East China Sea and at the junction of salt and fresh water. Besides, there is a fast-flowing river to the front and the emerging Bin City to the back.

The selected communities are representative and subject to the definition of the knowledge economy in rural areas studied in this paper. They reflect the general features of rural resilience around the heritage sites in Quanzhou.

First, the Yongning ancient town in which the Quanzhou heritage sites are located is a representative rural community. With the development of urbanization and a social economy, this practical case represents the ideal status of “Pu Jing” rebuilt and exhibited by local communities. The heritage sites integrated with the exhibitions and performances of Pu Jing have created a new economic form in rural areas.

Second, the Xunpu community is a celebrated fishing village with historical and cultural values. It is well known for its established heritage tourism industry (such as the Matsu ceremony), and biodiversity (e.g., fishing and aquaculture), and illustrates a healthy community model. Thus, it has become an educational base on the basis of its heritage sites, attracting visits from professionals, scholars, and tourists.

Third, the “Local Tourism Alliance” is a grassroots organization active in the communities (including Yongning and Xunpu) around the heritage sites, with a major role in promoting the development of communities through proactive local engagement and sharing. The alliance, including local residents, is generally divided into: (1) local young people; (2) community workers; (3) college teachers; and (4) successors of intangible cultural heritage participants.

The study of the Yongning community illustrates that the features of the integration of heritage and innovation in the education of the self-organized “Local Tourism Alliance” are cooperation and mutual learning which play a vital role in the development of tourism
such as the “knowledge accumulation of heritage sites” in the community. This process of knowledge production includes the ordinary life of residents, folk vitality, spatial planning, and cultural activities, through which a conservative model of the ancient town can be established. According to Chang (2005), a rural heritage that closely integrates with rural life and space as the representation of rural memories is the platform for launching social events and establishing social ties. Thus, a common experience was established, becoming the foundation of local cohesion [72]. Moreover, resilience is also applied by tourism departments [41,73–75]. The development of tourism is able to promote the achievement of the 17 goals listed in “The United Nations 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development”, especially goals 8, 12, and 14 directly linked to tourism. These three goals can be realized through tourism marketing and tourism supervision which can improve the life and culture in the targeted community [76].

3.2. Data Collection

This study was conducted from August 2018 to July 2021, and the data was from in-depth interviews, field investigations, participant observation, and the analysis of relevant policies, paper materials, reports, notifications, and other documents. The researcher, observing as a participant, recorded the public seminars, lectures, and forums hosted by the alliance. Moreover, the interviews involved purposive sampling to ensure interviewees with diversified personal backgrounds including: (1) at least three years of engagement in community affairs and (2) playing influential roles in the shaping of cultural heritage and a rural “innovative economy”. Those interviewees serving as the conveners of the community development had helped shift traditional Pu Jing space into community cultural capital through the launching, development, and start-up stages. This study carried out eight in-depth interviews with a response rate of 100%. The interviewees were as follows: (1) IV1, the former village secretary who was in charge of the “Pu Jing” event, engaging in heritage organization, formulation, conservation and development; (2) IV2, a young adult returning to their hometown who was a local entrepreneur and the first person developing and organizing tourism activities; (3) IV3, the director of the management committee who worked as the coordinator of local cultural affairs, coordinating the bidding for the World Heritage List; (4) IV4, a retired civic servant who was in charge of the local temples, organizing the sacrifice activities of Pu Jing; (5) IV5, a community tour guide who had worked outside the community but returned to start up his own business, jointly providing guiding services to tourists; (6) IV6, a tourist who now works in Quanzhou; (7) IV7, a planner of cultural guidance who was in charge of the tourism department, promoting the tourism experience of local cultural heritage; (8) IV8, a retired teacher who was in charge of heritage education, assisting the local government to bid for the World Heritage List.

Field investigations included active observation, natural dialogues, field notes, figures, and photographs. A combination of qualitative community participation and observation activities was the main study method for probing the existing status of the environment. During this study, researchers took part in the routine activities of the village, for instance, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, the “inspection tour, and street parading”, the educational courses on cultural heritage, the exhibitions and designing of the “Pu Jing” space and the creation and maintenance activities. This helped the understanding of local customs and habits, values, beliefs, and lifestyles. The study results are as follows: (1) the exhibitions and performances of the “Pu Jing” space; (2) the beliefs and culture reconstructing the society; (3) the self-organized “tourism alliance” integrated with innovative heritage education.

4. Results

4.1. The Exhibitions and Performances in “Pu Jing” Space

“Pu Jing” space is a favorable factor for the development of heritage sites in the Yongning community. “Pu Jing” was formed in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and is still used as a place name by local residents. In ancient times, the community consisted of
“Yu -> Tu -> Pu -> Jing” instead of “Li Fang”. Every “Jing” had a certain territorial scope, including several streets and alleys and over 20 households. Residents in this region often worked together to build temples, commonly known as “Jing temples” which worshiped one or several specific gods as the patron saint in that jurisdiction. Urbanization led to local villagers moving into cities which resulted in economic recession and population decline. Since 2017, the exhibitions and performances in “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng (i.e., square) in response to the heritage bidding have promoted sustainable development through proactive and local-based participation and sharing.

Exhibitions and performances based on the “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng provide various areas for natural and artificial activities, exhibitions, and performances. Traditional cultural spaces created mutually connected spatial resources in order to support the practices of the knowledge economy whilst laying equal stress on the intimacy of practical space and culture. Today, such exhibitions, performances, ceremonies, and rallies are still the most important public activities which have shaped strong, local, and cultural characteristics in the Yongning community. All of these activities also demonstrate that the exhibitions and performances within a landscape are collective memories of a community based on the “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng. Maintaining the exhibitions and performances in Cuo Cheng (i.e., square) is an essential function in offering unique artificial scenery created by the local community and in establishing a multi-functional knowledge economy. The exhibitions and performances include, for example, the cooperation of heritage bidding and the activities relating to “the creation and revitalization of local characteristics” and “the creation of characteristics of community space and places” (Figure 1). Interviewee IV1, the person in charge of the “Pu Jing” event, said:

“It is supposed to be the most interesting thing to visit exhibitions in Cuo Cheng, which can bring everyone together . . . The exhibition was the center of the activity designing . . . And we hope to create new public life through ‘Pu Jing’.”

Figure 1. The exhibition and performance of “Nanyin”—the intangible cultural heritage of “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng space. (Note: Nanyin is a type of ancient Chinese music with typical culture of Minnan area, as a song of Quanzhou dialect.)
“Pu Jing” is a platform, a network, and even a movement regenerated from the rural areas. Every space of “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng was named after the doorplate. The space can serve as a workstation, a neighborhood, an intersection point of information, a space for communication within communities, a collective exhibition place, a space for experiments and actions, and a lounge for city roaming. The aim of operations based on “Pu Jing” is to “produce ideas and plans” and to “launch live streaming and sell products”. The Cuo Cheng integrated with the application of the new “the strength of community and network” technologies has generated an innovative method of producing cultural experiences and interactive scenarios. Interviewee IV2, the young adult returning to their hometown, said:

“The team of the project has reconstructed and reproduced regional culture by collecting and recording the Cuo Cheng scenery, humanity, stories, communities, and other local resources of multiple typical communities of intangible cultural heritage... This is a kind of education. Since 2016, we have invited more than 20 exhibitors from both local (Quanzhou) and international communities, which attracted approximately 100,000 local residents and domestic and overseas tourists to visit... By doing so, we can instruct the local residents, new residents, and tourists in Quanzhou to better understand the exhibitions from different viewpoints.”

Evidently, through transformation and development and with the help of the “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng project, Yongning has revitalized the traditional crafts of the heritage site and used them to create exhibitions and cultural performances. Exhibitions are the integration of resources with the expectation of engaging different groups from different perspectives (Figure 2). Interviewee IV3, the coordinator for local cultural affairs, said:

“Under the agenda of inheritance, we invite inheritors through exhibitions to carry forward the traditions... For example, an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage has succeeded in passing on Jincang embroidery to a female college student born after 2000. She then integrated Jincang embroidery into the recreation of costume designs. A joint exhibitor of a fashion brand has collaborated with the Jincang embroidery and bead embroidery exhibitors to work on the patterns designed by the student and to develop a wide range of products... We have combined with the design industry and the “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng. In the beginning, people in the neighborhood did not know what we were doing. But gradually, they got used to it and started to interact with us.”
The significance of “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng space of collective memories in Cuo Cheng is always connected with the life and experience of individuals. Assembly in Cuo Cheng is beneficial to establishing the local identity of individual capabilities and self-values. The Cuo Cheng space provides a stage for individuals to practice, and the improvements of Cuo Cheng and Zayton trees have become the collective memories of the community. As a heterogeneous local construction, the conservation of the ancient town allows local people to have the opportunity to know themselves, which in turn gives the residents a deeper sense of belonging. Interviewee IV1, the person in charge of the “Pu Jing” event, said:

“For many of the residents born from 1950 to 1970, Cuo Cheng is more of a threshing and drying ground. It is the place for watching movies in the open, dating, and making friends. Due to Cuo Cheng, part of the people who ever lived at the site has realized their own values.”

In conclusion, Cuo Cheng serves as a multi-functional place in Yongning’s Pu Jing community. Residents living inside and outside the area, of different ages, generations, and socio-economic backgrounds, have common life experiences in the community. This is important because: (1) The community highlights heritage and creativity education to enhance residents’ ability for innovative thinking and to roll out a key action plan for the area. (2) During festivals, the community is the site for worshiping the gods and for acting, which works as a medium for socially interactive behaviors such as the exhibitions of intangible cultural heritage sites, Nanyin performances, and palm drama operas. Consequently, the role and task of “Pu Jing” Cuo Cheng are to protect heritage and promote creativity education which may influence local residents and the rebuilding of the community.

4.2. The Beliefs and Culture Reconstructing the Society

The successful implementation of the beliefs and customs in the Xunpu community relies on the recognition that it is important for residents to participate in fishing activities, establish beliefs, carry forward culture and unique customs, and engage in interpersonal communication. These activities play an important role in shaping the community. The surrounding areas centering on Xunpu have gradually formed unique folk customs distinct from those of the East China Sea, especially regarding women in the community. Specifically, there are “Zhegu aunts and Xunpu aunts”, “diverse hairstyles, hair ornaments”, “clothing and dressing”, “distinct wedding times”, and “Oyster Shell Cuo”, a type of traditional building. As a result, the unique culture has attracted tourists. This study paid special attention to the event when the Matsu of Shunji Temple launched the inspection tour and street parade activities on 29th January. By doing so, the Xunpu community and leaders in charge of the temple support launching local Matsu beliefs and customs on their own to enable residents to engage in heritage conservation in a more extensive way. Interviewee IV4, the person in charge of a Matsu temple, said:

“On that day, Xunpu’s women wear “Dazhi shirts” with beautiful flowers on their heads, holding incense sticks and flags. The team walking in the front is the “leading flag” team, which leads the routes of the “incense inspection”, followed by the first, second, and third flag teams [along with the] drum, women’s lamp, Qian drum, first incense, and incense pavilion teams . . . There is also a lamp team, Sanma team, and waist drum team. The whole ancient village [has] a festive atmosphere with roads crowded with people [on both sides]. Every town has a team, with the leading person holding a plate printed [with] the name of their town. Then, every team has to form a smaller one to complete the street parading. The parading crowds dressed in costumes dress up in miscellaneous ways to perform while praying. Subsequently, they gather in an arranged Taoist site at the entrance to the town, which means the inspection tour is over . . . And then, performers go together to enjoy the prepared feast next to the site. However, the activities are not over, as there is on the night a Gaojia opera originating from Quanzhou.”
It is worth noting that beliefs, customs, and creativity play a vital role in building social cohesion. The case study shows that the traditional festivals and celebrations and tourism industry in the Xunpu community, as the mechanisms for motivation, reconnected the relationship between residents and space. The analysis demonstrated that the “Matsu inspection tour” ceremony exhibited its event planning and venue designing while the local person in charge promoted the efficiency of the revitalization of fishing villages oriented by intangible culture and creativity through the marketing of “network, ideas, and products”. Efforts included: offering tourism guidance and services, publicizing delicious street food and demonstrations such as organizing a 4000-strong procession, designing the “inspection and street parading routes” and boundary landmarks combined with residential interactive relations between roadway dimensions and Matsu inspection tour routes. This was the scripted design associated with Pu Jing space. The boundary landmarks reflected the confirmation of the spatial boundaries and regions of urban society and residents’ strong sense of identity with the community. Also, it was a series of territorial behaviors that promoted cultural innovation and competition. Interviewee IV5, the community guide, said:

“Our ultimate goal is to bring some new standpoints and perspectives to the old community in order to change the local residents... Here, we stress innovation, singularity, and originality.”

Xunpu community is also an example of innovative heritage education. Through investigation and research, the community identified that sacrifice and praying can continuously promote the formulation of a large-scale seasonal cultural system for local development which motivates residents to participate in activities. The inheritance of Pu Jing beliefs and temple activities relies on residents’ spontaneous recognition and maintenance of their heritage as well as innovation. Interviewee IV6, a tourist, said:

“The enthusiastic residents engaging in the Pu Jing activities often help the newcomers to integrate into the life of Quanzhou. For example, in the east of the city, when a stranger just moves into a street, warm-hearted local residents will help him prepare for worship and instruct him to follow them to learn how to do it. In this way, the stranger may gradually integrate into the life of streets and alleys.”

The Xunpu community’s role in the exhibitions and performance of rural communities not only presents the mutual relationship between residents and religious beliefs in the Matsu inspection tour ceremony but also establishes a network of social relations and forms local industries. In addition to staff from the host city, residents, pilgrims, and followers, the social relations involved in the belief ceremony also include related industries such as the shape painting and manufacturing of the Chinese god toy, clothing embroidery, ancient costume makeup, the inheritance of Wenwu and Zhentou performance (excellent traditional Chinese culture), orchestral performances and instrument manufacturing, and the firecracker and incense industries. All of these related traditional industries are the significant, fundamental, and local cultural industries supporting the Matsu inspection ceremony.

4.3. The Self-Organized “Tourism Alliance” Integrated with Innovative Heritage Education

In the Pu Jing tradition, the local-resident-organized “Local Tourism Alliance” of Yongning community provides another example of heritage conservation. The successful implementation of an innovative economy in the community is reliant on the residents’ recognition of the importance of participation in heritage education activities, interpersonal communication, and community services, as well as the role of activities, in shaping communities. As heritage sites, the Yongning community has established a heritage identity system and formed a Chinese and English voluntary interpretation team of over 20 people that regularly provides free interpreting services to the public [77]. Moreover, the community has implemented rural resilience based on heritage education and established a cohesive social network. The community has, in fact, shifted from traditional agriculture to economic recession and finally to an innovative economy. At present, the “Local Tourism
Alliance” is a public good organization that promotes the regional relations between cultural assets and landscape information such as historical buildings and streets, sightseeing activities, and route planning so as to help shape the overall image. The alliance working as a platform has coordinated with people from all walks of life, including executors, reformers, and those who participate in creative activities, to launch cooperation and establish the mechanism for the cultivation of an atmosphere of communication and dialogue (Figure 3). The alliance was also designed as the communication platform for the cultivation of art, culture, and creativity of people in the community who aim to develop a social network that integrates an innovative economy into community revitalization. Interviewee IV8, the teacher for World Heritage Education, said:

“The community has promoted heritage conservation, supervised the compliance of village regulations and folk rules, formed a voluntary interpreting team of residents who are dedicated to protecting the heritage sites. The key task is to mobilize more people to engage in the process.”

Figure 3. The discussion of the tourism routes focused on protecting heritage sites.

The process of tourism interpretation, value delivery, and establishing self-identity delivers the significance and values of cultural heritage to the public, which enables them to have an understanding of the history and to feel the culture. The “Revisiting 1926” activities started with the interpretation of the text, combined with old pictures collected by local youths and presented in an exhibition of documents (Figure 4). Interviewee IV7, the planner of the promotion of the tourism experience of local cultural heritage, said:

“With the combination of old pictures collected by local youths, the exhibition outlined the historical imagination of the community. Just nine months after the opening of the exhibition, three tea shops [displaying] cultural themes and a local restaurant were opened in the peripheral area. In the past, the region featured noodles, soybean milk, rice balls, and traditional industries while now enjoying leisure time for tasting coffee and toast due to the introduction of new elements.”

The analysis illustrates that the characteristics of heritage site tourism are beneficial for the implementation of the knowledge economy in the Yongning community. Based on the accumulated actions for heritage site promotion, the community has expanded the social significance of “cultural heritage”. The various maps reveal the routes of locations, districts, actions, exhibitions, performances, and activities that involve daily life, historical sites,
and rural space. Relevant agendas concerning heritage education and conservation can be highlighted in the framework, which means moving from the actions of “protecting heritage sites” launched by local people to a strategic alliance combining tourism interpretation.

![Image of local youths organizing the “Revisiting 1926” activity.](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.** The “Revisiting 1926” activity self-organized by local youths. (Note: “Revisiting 1926” is a documentary exhibition, displaying old photos collected by local youths, whereby the meaning and value of cultural heritage is conveyed to the public so that they can have an understanding of history and a sense of culture.)

5. **Discussion**

Much international literature has studied the roles, functions, and benefits of the knowledge economy but ignored the potential of China in response to social, economic, and ecological challenges in growing rural areas. This study constructs a framework for the development of the relationship between the knowledge economy, innovation education, and rural resilience (Figure 5). In other words, through the two communities of “Yongning” and “XuanPu”, the traditional “PuJing” space is used as an exhibition space to create a creative linkage, which constitutes an innovative platform for rural economic development. “Folk customs” shape social relations, intervene in the local value of heritage preservation, and the accumulation of local knowledge enhances knowledge innovation and education, and develops the tourism economy. The above-mentioned economic competition, social capital restructuring, and social recognition contribute to the establishment of local ties and community bonds, and largely enhance resilience. These innovations often include investments in information technology, research, and education.

In many Chinese rural communities, low agricultural incomes are the main driver for villagers seeking non-agricultural jobs or migration [78]. On the one hand, this study combines heritage education, sociology, geography, and similar concepts to discuss the new roles and functions of cultural heritage and creativity education in rural development from an interdisciplinary perspective. On the other hand, it complements recent studies on heritage preservation and creativity education in rural China. This paper aimed to probe the interactions of the knowledge economy with the resilience of rural communities around the Quanzhou heritage sites.
Although the case study of the Yongning community involved only individual places, the community has evolved into an innovative and competitive social space where residents can interact with each other. Schwab [46] saw the knowledge economy as an economy of acquisition as the knowledge it creates can be effectively disseminated and utilized to advance economic growth. The implementation of heritage preservation and an innovative knowledge economy in the community has provided an example of exhibitions and performances in rural “Pu Jing” communities, which creates the forms and characteristics of cultural space whilst promoting different cultural productions relating to people’s quality of life. Matless [79] indicated that the construction of collective memories and the reconstruction of a sense of history have helped recover a settlement’s behavioral space. Also, he stressed that landscapes are the outcome of cultural development consisting of behaviors, beliefs, and practices that demonstrate health, authenticity, and a sense of identity. When studying the regional governance of “Pu Jing”, Chinese scholars have introduced an interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on both mankind and space, known as “architectural ethnography” [80]. The results of this study revealed that the knowledge economy based on “Pu Jing” involves creative coordination comprising the design, development, establishment, or restoration of miscellaneous scenes. The results can be utilized for heritage education, cultural planning and exhibition, regional IP product incubation, and social interactive services, with a predicted effect of establishing sustainable benefits. Besides, Polunin [81] pointed out that regional and local brands must have a common cause and common sense with which to engage stakeholders. In particular, there may be personal characteristics in the promotion of brands [82].

When developing a tourism economy, the combination of beliefs and customs plays a vital part in developing resilience in rural communities. A study on the Xunpu community showed that the implementation of “inspection tour and street parading” activities helped establish a sense of belonging, identity, and community. Historically, local beliefs and customs were not only integrated into life and culture but also into local governance. Local societies centering on temples managed their neighborhoods in an informal way [83]. The academic community has discussed local beliefs and local governance based on Durkheim’s theories. Durkheim summarized the motive of religious phenomena as a social force—when religions penetrate the secular social system, their unique theology, deities, beliefs, and ceremonies have a systemic impact on people’s lives. This endows
the social system with divine features and allows the society to gain support from the systems and structures of traditional societies [84]. In a knowledge economy, development in rural areas is sustainable, as they can launch new economic activities to satisfy the potential needs of cities. “Matsu inspection tour and street parading” can also provide an ideal place for leisure tourism in cities. Besides, the knowledge economy, including knowledge-intensive industries, is based on innovation which relies on new combinations of human knowledge [1].

Local and community ties can greatly enhance resilience [85–87]. Skerratt (2013) observes that rural community resilience is the source of results, not simply a result. Similarly, in 2009, Janet Blake stated when explaining the UN’s “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, that communities are the core of the convention but not heritage itself. Furthermore, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage must consider a more extensive view of human society and culture during the formulation period of the convention [88]. The heritage culture and creativity education discussed in this study review self-organization, literature, and art organization from Dickson’s perspective of artistic education. However, he also tried to identify the artistic process and mechanism used to enhance the learning and understanding of tourists, residents, and merchants on rural rebuilding, promote appreciative thinking, and cultivate life tastes [89]. As a complicated text, urban-rural space is seldom produced and consumed for its own benefit. Thus, the establishment of new social ties provides the crucial impetus that prompts the constant production, demolition, and reshaping of urban space. Agreeing with Elms [32], this study demonstrates that a more extensive understanding of resilience should take into account the movement among different communities to form multi-functional urban agriculture. In addition, traditional industries support the Matsu inspection ceremony. Hadzimustafa [90] highlighted that some important drivers of competitiveness are related to the knowledge economy, for instance, innovation and education.

The communities (Yongning, Xunpu) selected in this study are parts of the rural communities in the Quanzhou heritage sites. Specifically, Yongning mainly takes the reconstruction of traditional tangible heritage space as the development platform of an innovative economy while Xunpu reconstructs social relations based on intangible heritage in order to boost the tourism industry. The two communities are complementary, identifying their respective advantages to develop the rural economy. The community-level “Local Tourism Alliance” organized for heritage conservation in both communities is essential to advance the development of the rural knowledge economy. The cases of these communities are representative and in line with the definition of the knowledge economy in rural areas used in this paper to reflect the general features of rural resilience around the heritage sites in Quanzhou. Therefore, the two communities are representative.

This study established a development framework in relation to the knowledge economy, educational innovation, and rural resilience (Figure 5). The traditional “Pu Jing” space as an exhibition space has formed a creative connection and built an innovative platform for rural economic development. The beliefs and customs have shaped the social ties and added local values to heritage protection, while the knowledge accumulation of heritage sites strengthened knowledge, innovation, and education whilst advancing the tourism economy. The above competition of economic forms, reconstruction of social capital, and social identity facilitate the building of local and community ties which, to a large extent, have strengthened resilience. This study recognizes the relationships between a knowledge economy, educational innovation, and rural resilience, which means that the living environment has the potential to form a healthy lifestyle for human beings and increase benefits. This is related to a series of studies of the benefits of introducing innovation and its mutual role with innovations targeting rural recovery. These innovations usually include IT and investments in research and education. According to Hadzimustafa [90], some of the most significant drivers of competitiveness come from the knowledge economy. Elms [32] suggested that the movement in different communities should be considered for a more extensive understanding of resilience. In short, the experience of exploring the
knowledge economy on the basis of Pu Jing and folk beliefs helps in understanding how local residents perceive traditional culture, local and human experience, and social relations from multiple dimensions.

6. Conclusions

As a means of rural resilience and the establishment of sustainable rural communities, the knowledge economy has become a global issue and the key to responding to rural changes in order to realize a sustainable future. The experience of transforming Yongning and Xunpu communities into heritage sites in an innovative way echoes the targets of China’s policies of regional revitalization and serves as an example of development. Creativity education relating to the knowledge economy has been endowed with new roles. Economically, creative talents must be trained for heritage conservation and for the relevant industries in rural areas, and more people who can appreciate arts should be nurtured in the future. Also, it is imperative to organize diversified activities in rural communities so as to promote social integration. The main findings are:

1. The repairing and decoration of the traditional “Pu Jing” space as an exhibition space and the communication of the inheritance and participation of intangible cultural heritage has created connections and formed a knowledge economy in sites with unique local characteristics.

2. The introduction of folk beliefs to heritage conservation, culture, economy, and industrial forms has promoted integration and competition and reconstructed social relations. Besides, strengthening social identity helps to enhance community resilience.

3. The notion of the self-organized “Local Tourism Alliance” integrating heritage education can facilitate the development of individuals, communities, and local areas whilst improving popularity and enriching the tourism content. The knowledge accumulated on heritage sites and community development has strengthened innovation and education.

4. Universities serve as a favorable support for rural development in the form of a local think tank. Strengthen innovation education, promote local knowledge as well as heritage education, use information technology and festival culture as a carrier to strengthen the connection between schools and local areas, and shape the mutual promotion of economy, industry, and culture as a replenishment station for resilience perpetuation.

By successfully exploring community experiences, this study aimed at identifying the different forms of knowledge economy whilst discussing and probing the economic potential of the resilience of local Chinese communities. The analysis of the two communities’ innovation knowledge, competitiveness, and the dynamic demand for social production helps formulate strategic policies for planning the tourism development of heritage sites. More importantly, this study exploited different methods to analyze the application of direct and indirect governance instruments which may influence the conservation and development of Quanzhou’s world cultural heritage and rural resilience. There are distinct disparities between China and the international community, with the previous lagging behind in relevant studies. Also, China still rarely adopts the term resilience in its policy and dialogue systems. Resilience is mainly considered from the perspective of combating natural disasters rather than the wider significance of society and the economy [78]. Obviously, addressing the method of developing a knowledge economy in rural areas is an important problem, particularly when the development of a functional knowledge economy in rural communities is arousing increasing concerns. Besides, the focus on the development of heritage and local development may transfer which means that the implementation of a stable knowledge economy based on local consensus is the key response to local resilience. These trends reflect Jeffrey and Craft [91] who observed that recent discussions on creativity education contained “empowerment” propaganda. Governments have devolved their accountability to individuals in the face of global economic and social changes, and creativity education, which provides a creative labor force, has helped manage
global changes and competition [91]. Additionally, research into resilience now focuses on communities within developed countries, with limited attention paid to developing countries or economies in transition [92]. Future research hopes to combine more typical cases of rural cultural heritage sites to make more specific and in-depth discussions. If quantitative research is used, multi-criteria decision-making and structural equations will be considered to discuss the key factors, faces, weights, correlations, etc., that influence rural development.

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