

Research Paper

## **The Revised Effect on Community Residents' Perception and Support in Rural Historical Tourism: The Case of Qintong Ancient Town**

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**Abstract:** The paper analyses and investigates the factors influencing residents' perception and support in the context of rural historical tourism destination based on a revised stakeholder theory. As a core stakeholder, residents' reluctance and ignorance in participating in tourism activities have led to some deterioration and damage to historical sites. Thus, the sustainable evaluation of local residents is an essential prerequisite to boost a balanced historical tourism development. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to test and analyse the measurement model along with the structural model. A survey was undertaken in Qintong ancient town in China, and 232 usable questionnaires were screened to testify the hypotheses. The results show that economic effect, psychological effect, and social effect are significant to indigenous residents' perception and support. Conversely, the findings do not support the positive influence of the sustainable evaluation, or the political effect. The study contributes theoretically to the synthesis and supplement of the previous influential effect in the historical tourism site and proposes certain practical applications for local authorities and practitioners on the implementation of sustainable development in the heritage tourism.

**Keywords:** Community, historical tourism, sustainable evaluation, residents' perception and support, the stakeholder theory

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## Introduction

Tourism is a major global economic sector involving new places and destinations as well as new experiences (Giampiccoli, Mtapuri, & Nauright, 2020). Tourism is experiencing a tremendous growth over the decade (Chin, Thian, & Lo, 2017). As one of the largest industries in the world today, tourism has been recognised for its vast contribution to the economy in many countries in terms of economic diversification, profitability, and employment opportunity (Ismail & Turner, 2008). Shahbaz, Solarin, Azam, and Tiwarei (2019) noted that tourism has become a key driver of socio-economic development through job creation, foreign currency exchange, new enterprises, and infrastructure to the extent that it has succeeded in reducing income inequality and thereby improve the social welfare of citizens.

However, being a resource-based industry, either natural or artificial, the massive traditional sightseeing tourism has caused great damage to resources and the environment. To protect the environment and resources as well as emphasise the harmonious unity of humankind and nature, a new tourism pattern, namely rural tourism, has emerged after decades of exploration and development, which can better attain the balance between humankind and nature. Rural tourism is often located in remote countrysides, far away from neighbours (Pesonen, Komppula, Kronenberg, & Peter, 2011). But there is no consensus on the concept of rural tourism, which is evidenced by the many different definitions used in the literature both by international and regional-level organisations (Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam, & King, 2015). As a significant part of cultural heritage and tourism resources (Giannakopoulou & Kaliampakos, 2016; Rapoport, 1969), rural tourism includes not only important precious architectures but also the artificial environment in ancient towns or villages (Council of Europe, 1977). It is considered as an important cultural attraction and a testimony of the historical changes of a place (Bakri, Ibrahim, Ahmad, & Zaman, 2015; Lourenço-Gomes, Pinto, & Rebelo, 2014). Unfortunately, many historical tourism attractions have been damaged as a result of urbanisation (Ruijgrok, 2006).

The stakeholder theory (ST), which can be traced back to 1984, was proposed by R. Edward Freeman (Wang, Liu, Zhou, & Wang, 2019). The purpose of this theory is to balance the benefits of all stakeholders, which includes not only the substantial shareholders but also other internal and external stakeholders (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2005). Generally speaking, government authorities, business enterprises, organisations and locals are all stakeholders in community-based

tourism (Wang, 2015). Amongst these, government authorities hold the leading position in the construction of community-based tourism, and business developers are in a strong position, while the influence of community residents is relatively weak. But in actual fact, community residents are an important stakeholder in rural historical tourism considering that these activities are closely related to the residents' daily life. The United Nations has demonstrated a general consensus on tourism's "capacity to strengthen public-private partnerships and involve multiple stakeholders" (UNWTO & UN Global Compact Network Spain, 2016, p. 39), and to "empower host communities" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 10). Giampiccoli et al. (2020) argued that equity and social justice should be pursued in order to reduce inequality and to positively contribute to socio-economic development. Top-down models are usually created by external actors, which lead to a strong dependency on the support of these external actors (Garrod, 2003). A consensus exists on the importance of partnerships for community-based tourism success, relating both to interactions between community members themselves (Burgos & Mertens, 2017), and community members and external actors (Bhuiyan, 2019).

Therefore, greater effort should be made by different stakeholders both individually and organisationally because no single stakeholder can be fully responsible for or be capable of the sustainable maintenance and conservation (Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Failure to identify the interest of even a single primary stakeholder group may result in the failure of the process of establishing sustainable tourism (Clarkson, 1995). Due to the lack of a complete system of institutional protection and evaluation, community participation can be merely a formality. Some scholars in developed Western countries explored the mechanism of community participation focusing more on the main position of the government, tourism enterprises, and other stakeholders, while research on community residents was relatively limited (Zhang, 2012). Hence, in the context of rural tourism, the identification of the essential stakeholder is a vital target in ST.

Residents' attitude is key in the process of developing sustainable tourism in aboriginal villages (Fan & Li, 2016). The development of sustainable tourism would be difficult without the support and participation of community residents (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009). Rural tourism depends heavily on the concerns and perceptions of the local rural community (Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Sharpley, 2014). Local community participation in managing tourism is carried out at all stages starting from decision-making, planning, and evaluation (Arintoko, Ahmad, Gunawan, & Supardi, 2020). Yet community rural tourism development is a double-edged sword that can have substantial effects, both negative and positive. For community residents, focusing on the perceived positive effects of tourism encourages them to support tourism development, while focusing on the perceived negative effects reduces their support

(Sharpley, 2014). Besides, when local residents participate in tourism planning and management, they have a positive attitude to tourism development and support for tourism (Panyik, 2015). An imbalanced power relationship leads to residents' negative perception towards tourism in the host community (Suess, Baloglu, & Busser, 2018). Therefore, residents' perception and attitude are important in planning and policy consideration, which are essential for successful tourism development and marketing in the short- and long terms (Ap, 1992). However, there is a paucity of research exploring the effects that contribute to creating strong motivational factors for local residents to participate in community-based tourism projects (Jaafar, Md Noor, Mohamad, Jalali, & Hashim, 2020).

Furthermore, past research on community participation in tourism mainly focused on qualitative methods and natural resources. The abundant wealth of nature such as the natural equanimity and attractive riverine scenery, limestone formation, mini waterfall, caves, and wildlife animals are the major attractions to visitors (Chin et al., 2017). Zielinski, Kim, Botero, & Yanes (2020) pointed out that the most common approach to community-based tourism case studies is qualitative, providing a descriptive account of the process or results. Boley, McGehee, Perdue, and Long (2014) designed a 3-dimensional measurement table from the individual levels, adding certain supplementations to previous qualitative research. Chen (2009) conducted an empirical study on rural tourism of Chinese ethnic minorities and found economic effect to be the fundamental factor in community participation. Attracting community residents to participate in rural tourism and linking their interests directly with the protection of the environment and resources can alleviate the contradiction between the traditional way of life and the protection of the natural environment, as well as achieve the balance among economy, ecology, and society in the tourist destination community. Arintoko et al. (2020) used the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) approach to test rural tourism in Indonesia, and found that the strengths and opportunities factors had an importance score and that the percentage of agreement was higher than the weakness and threats factors. Plenty of studies focus on the operational aspects of community-based tourism, such as the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and educational institutions; but attention to the internal conditions that influenced the success or failure is lacking (Zielinski et al., 2020). This paper aims to identify a comprehensive and revised set of factors that affect the residents' perception in China.

The authors tried to transfer the research scope of community rural tourism from ecotourism and minority villages to historical and cultural resources tourism in rural areas. These kinds of tourist destinations are highly representative in contemporary rural tourism in China. Accordingly, by analysing the sustainable evaluation, a more practical and sound theoretical background can be applied to promote balanced ancient town tourism development. Quantitative analysis is

used to further explore the interaction of these constructs. Therefore, the results are more objective and comprehensive with strong theoretical persuasion, and provides significant practical guidance for subsequent related research. The findings can also provide some suggestions for tourism destinations with the similar development patterns or backgrounds.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Problems**

Because rural areas provide immense opportunities for recreation and tourism activities (Jaafar et al., 2020), rural tourism is growing at a phenomenal rate in Asia and is expected to be a major contributor to overall tourism receipts in the coming years (Nair, Hussain, Lo, & Ragavan, 2015). Rural tourism today has become a new trend and an inevitable choice for sustainable development in the tourism industry (Wang, 2015). It is considered an appropriate development strategy for rural areas in many developed and developing countries (Ayhan, Taşlı, Özkök, & Tatli, 2020). Tour operators are beginning to show interest and extend their cooperation to form partnerships with the local community (Nair & Hamzah, 2015). Although rural tourism has been growing over the last decade, there are a number of challenges experienced by the tourism destinations (Chin et al., 2017). Community participation is a relatively new topic with less than 40 years' history when it was first mentioned by Murphy (1985). Currently, the theoretical system and concept are still incomplete, and there are only few studies on tourism practice. With the rapid development of tourism, this concept was gradually applied to Western villages (Smith, Morgan, & van der Meer, 2003) and some rural areas.

Community-based tourism is widely acknowledged for its ability to improve local economies because it often improves the quality of infrastructure, which benefits the residents' quality of life (Dodds, Ali, & Galaski, 2018; Kayat, Ramli, Mat-Kasim, & Abdul-Razak, 2014). It often comes with locally-developed tourism products, public-private cooperation, and sustainable tourism development, which are increasingly recognised as a means to achieve economic growth, reduce inequalities, improve livelihoods in developing countries, and alleviate negative environmental and sociocultural impacts (Khan, Bibi, Lorenzo, Lyu, & Babar, 2020). Thus, community-based tourism development is an important tool (Sebele, 2010; Taylor, 1995) which even plays a key role in rural regions. Moreover, the development of community-based tourism is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the aim of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local way of life (Ayhan et al., 2020). In contrast, the tourism industry in developing countries can provide much-needed economic benefits in rural and remote areas to communities that lack the knowledge and

financial resources needed to participate in tourism development without external support (Zielinski, Jeong, and Milanés, 2021). The concept of community-based tourism village development also becomes important in the sustainable tourism development strategy part (Arintoko et al., 2020). If community-based tourism is implemented to maximise the benefits of local communities, all the three pillars of sustainable tourism development, namely economic efficiency, social value, and environmental sustainability, have to be respected so the community gains control of tourism from the early planning stages onward (Müllera, Hucka, & Markovab, 2020).

In rural tourism, community participation is basically at the initial stage, with many problems and shortcomings: most community residents have the desire to participate in tourism activities but lack confidence in participation; the overall participation rate of community residents is not high; community residents generally lack the right to know the progress; the participation structure of residents is unbalanced, and so forth. Sood, Lynch, and Anastasiadou (2017) argued that a top-down tourism planning approach results in conflicting interests between tourism planners and rural communities. Given that the planning process is often centralised and starts at the government level (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016), the top-down approach fails to provide opportunities and/or incentives to the local communities to further develop community-based tourism projects (Kubickova & Campbell, 2020). Tourism development can also cause substantial negative impacts, such as an unequal distribution of revenue (Alam & Paramati, 2016), low-skilled employment (Davidson & Sahli, 2015), and a low degree of resident empowerment (Hatipoglu, Alvarez, & Ertuna, 2016). It can harm aspects of society, culture, and the environment by, for example, generating excessive noise, traffic congestion, and overcrowding (Huong & Lee, 2017; Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Segota, Mihali, & Kuscer, 2017).

On the recurrent hindering factors associated with the lack of skills, knowledge, and favourable public policy, many of the community-based tourism challenges lie in defining participation, particularly in less developed countries (Dolezal & Novelli, 2020). It is understood that a spectrum of operational, structural, and cultural conditions must be met for a participatory initiative to succeed in rural tourism development (Zielinski, 2021). The conditions of participation in community-based tourism are often very complex and multidimensional since they involve a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political aspects (Zielinski et al., 2021). But if unfavourable conditions related to participation are detected and dealt with earlier, corrective action should be implemented and many community-based tourism initiatives would be less likely to fail (Zielinski et al., 2021). In short, community participation in tourism as a whole is still in a depressed state.

## Concepts

### *Community*

“Community” is an important concept of sociology and first appeared in Germany in the late 19th century (Sun & Bao, 2006). Although the term “community” has been widely used in sociological, anthropological, and other fields of study, there has not been a consensual understanding of “community” due to the differences among scholars in research purposes, perspectives, and orientations. The term “community” has several main meanings. Firstly, it is viewed as an organic regional community. The so-called community refers to a certain number of residents, with the inherent interaction and cultural maintenance of the regional identity of life (Xu, 2000); geographical location, population, structure, and so on are also the basic elements of community composition (He & Li, 1991). Secondly, it is recognised as a research and analysis method. For example, the “community-oriented tourism planning” or “community-based planning” approach proposed by Murphy (1985) refers to community participation as an important way or method to achieve sustainable tourism development; Fei (1985), a famous sociologist in China, believed that a trend in modern sociology is community research, also known as community analysis, and subsequently proposed a “type comparison method” for community research. Thirdly, community is a kind of social work and action. Yang (2002) stated that the community has become the basic unit of public management in the global society, and this cognition is actually to recognise the community as a means of understanding and adapting to the vast and changing society (Sun & Bao, 2006). In addition, some scholars have pointed out that the ownership, management, operation, and supervision of tourism businesses belong to the community (Arintoko et al., 2020). Besides individual personality, the community is a kind of unit in which the members can undoubtedly shape the way they view tourism (Moghavvemi, Woosnam, Hamzah, & Hassani, 2021).

### *Community Participation Tourism*

Community participation generally refers to the process, ways, and means government and non-governmental organisations intervene in community development, which also includes the community residents' behaviour and the participation process of the residents in various public affairs and activities, such as community development plans and projects (Xu, 2000). The study of community participation in tourism began in the late 20th century, and its masterpiece is Murphy's book, *Tourism: A Community-based Approach*. Since then, scholars at home and abroad have defined the concept of community participation tourism from different angles. Rural tourism initiatives in developed countries share most of the positive and negative characteristics of community-based tourism in developing nations (Zielinski et al., 2021). In the

process of tourism decision-making, planning, development, management, and supervision, communities take the opinions and needs of the residents into account and regard them as the main body of development and participation (Sun & Bao, 2006). In community-based tourism and rural tourism, authenticity is an important characteristic (Zielinski et al., 2021).

The concept of community-based tourism development is development with the tourism sector as a pioneer with priority scale at the village level through community participation in local economic development (Arintoko et al., 2020). Evidence shows that engagement, participation, commitment and active discussion of and among community members are some of the most important aspects of community success (Lee & Park, 2019). In the rural tourism context, local communities play a vital role in tourism development as they are sometimes regarded as “service suppliers” which can influence the total number of tourists arrivals (Law & Lo, 2016). Since the emergence of rural tourism around the world in the middle and late 1980s, residents’ self-employment is the main pattern in the tourism destination, and presents a good development trend. Most community residents around the tourism area are engaged in tourism-related accommodation, food, local products sales, and other service activities, and they make profit from these activities (Wang, 2015). On a macro scale, community-based tourism in traditional communities (rural, ethnic, or indigenous) of developing countries has largely taken shape as a collectively owned and managed business (Zielinski et al., 2020).

### ***Historical Rural Tourism Development***

In 1933, the Charter of Athens first referred to the concept of “historical tourism site” (Ma, 2000). The trend of protecting historical ancient town blocks in foreign countries has experienced three periods: firstly, the protection trend focused on single buildings; secondly, the trend was extended from the protection scope to historical buildings, architectural environment, and urban landscape; and thirdly, the protection trend emphasises the formulation of local protection policies, that is, protection is more targeted and far-sighted (Zhang, 2007). Xiao (2009) pointed out that protecting historical sites without commercial factors is impossible to maintain. There are many development models in historical sites, such as the real estate development model, tourism development model, mixed development model, and so on. Development of tourism is one of the effective ways to solve the contradiction between the protection and development of historical sites.

However, problems emerged in the process of tourism development in historical blocks of ancient towns, including the outflow of resources, loss of community personality, distortion of history and culture, and deterioration of the ecological environment. Fischer (2004) pointed out that the cultural context is the premise of in-depth development of tourism in the historical blocks of ancient towns, and

“cultural context” is largely composed of local historical culture and social psychology, and its real carrier is the life of residents and the residents themselves. Therefore, in the process of tourism development in historical sites, we should not only delve into the visible “tradition and culture”, but also establish the dominant position of community residents, and deeply analyse and strengthen the positive social psychology of community residents (Wang, 2015). In terms of specific development, some scholars oppose the great demolition and construction in tourism development and advocate gradual and small-scale development. For example, Zhu and Luo (2008) believed that large-scale planning and development only benefit architects, politicians, and real estate developers but the masses often become victims.

### ***Sustainable Tourism Development***

With the goal of achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call for action in a global partnership by all countries (Müllera et al., 2020). Sustainable development has been extensively discussed in the tourism sector for many years because such development can meet the needs of tourists, provide opportunities to enhance economic growth, protect physical locations, and improve the quality of life of residents while strengthening opportunities for the future through the coexistence of tourism development and environmental quality (Eagles, McCool, & Haynes, 2002). Ecotourism is regarded as one of the most common manifestations of sustainable tourism development, and there are other common approaches promoted to achieve sustainability (Müllera et al., 2020). Elaborating the indigenous residents' true perception and support for historical sustainable tourism development is an essential step in the management and operation of community-based tourism. Support for sustainable tourism development related to nature-based tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, and heritage sites has been examined in Western nations but remains an intensely debated subject in Eastern nations (Gursoy et al., 2002, 2019; Lai & Nepal, 2006; Nicholas et al., 2009). Active involvement of local residents in planning for tourism, for example, in decision-making, knowledge sharing, and gaining commitment, will in turn increase community satisfaction and help foster more sustainable tourism development (Jusoh & Ahmad, 2018).

Analysing community residents' support for sustainable tourism development can help local authorities and business practitioners to predict the scale of support of residents. Factors that affect community residents' support for sustainable tourism development have been widely studied from different perspectives. These factors, such as attitudes (Lai & Nepal, 2006; Lepp, 2008), perceived effects (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma, & Carter, 2007; Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001), community attachment (Nicholas et al., 2009), and perceived benefits (Gursoy et al., 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011), may influence residents' support for sustainable tourism

development. Nevertheless, not many studies have been conducted on community residents' participation in sustainable historical tourism. To supplement the research gaps, this paper aims to develop a theoretical model to examine the sustainable evaluation between residents' perception and support in rural historical tourism sites by combining the classical theoretical factors, such as economic, politic, psychological, and social factors (Scheyvens, 1999).

Rural community-based tourism is an effective way to ensure sustainable tourism development through the process of sharing benefits among all community members and the conservation of natural resources (Ellis & Sheridan, 2015). This has been extensively tested in tourism planning and marketing. Compared with massive sightseeing tourism in the early stages, sustainable tourism development not only provides economic growth in communities but also fulfils tourists' needs, enhances residents' life satisfaction, and preserves the physical environment for future generations (Din, 2018; Lee, 2013; Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). That is, rural community-based tourism has been considered a critical way to accomplish successful sustainable tourism development (Sebele, 2010; Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017).

### ***Stakeholder Theory***

The basic idea of the stakeholder theory (ST) originated in the 19th century. Since then, this trend of thought has not been viewed seriously until it was first used by the Stanford Institute in 1963. ST has been widely valued and studied in various fields because of its advantages of maneuverability, accuracy of expression, and universality. R. Edward Freeman, a pioneer in applying the theory of "subject of interest" in the United States, believed that "the subject of interest of an organisation refers to any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the objective of the organisation" (Freeman, 1984). Bryson and Crosby (1992) defined the subject of interest as "any person, group or organisation affected by the cause or result of a matter". In this view, tourism enterprises, employees, residents, tourists, national and local governments, and tourist attractions staff are all stakeholders of the architectural heritage (Robson & Robson, 1996).

In the tourism industry, ST plays a vital role because the implementation of a tourism plan relies heavily on the preparation of various stakeholders. Walle (1995) pointed out that as a comprehensive industry, tourism involves more stakeholders than most other industries. Hence, the stakeholder model is used when analysing the political, social, and moral issues of tourism (Wheeler, 1994; Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Li and Wang (2013) defined the stakeholders of cultural heritage sites as any individual or group that influences the formation of the fundamental goal of resource protection and development of cultural heritage sites, or receives the influence of both two objectives. Communication and cooperation among all stakeholders through a unified organisation composed of critical stakeholders must be considered

as of utmost importance (Lee, 1996; Ryberg-Webster & Kinahan, 2014). As the host of the tourism destination, indigenous residents are the managers of cultural heritage sites. Consequently, they are closely connected with other stakeholders. When local residents have an opportunity to experience the benefits and be involved in the decision-making process, this could elevate long-term successful destination development (Moghavvemi et al., 2021). Ferretti and Gandino (2018) pointed out that the community residents and other stakeholders such as tourists, territorial authorities, and tourism associations should be co-designers of programmes on regeneration projects of architectural heritage as well as the whole maintenance plan of the heritage site. Therefore, integrating relevant stakeholders into the planning and decision-making process is the key to ensure the sustainable development of tourism activities.

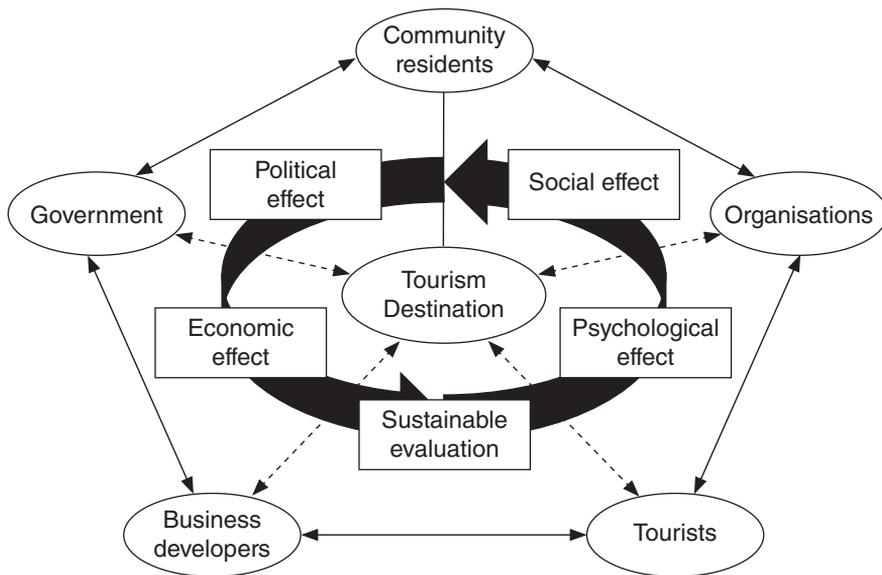


Figure 1. Stakeholders in rural tourism

### *Hypotheses Development*

**Economic effect.** Rural tourism often plays a key role in economic development by helping communities improve their economy and enjoy a better standard of living (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Sharif & Tuan Lonik, 2014). Although the socio-economic status of the local people is a central theme that differentiates community-based tourism initiatives in developing and developed countries (Zielinski et al., 2021), community-based tourism is regarded as the form of tourism that helps local communities generate additional income (Müllera et al., 2020). Economic effect

(EE) is reflected in the sustained economic gains that local community residents have received as a result of the development of tourism (Scheyvens, 1999; Tatoglu, Erdal, Ozgur, & Azakli, 2002). In the current stage of tourism development, the residents of the tourist destination community are most sensitive to the economic interests, which mainly include the realisation of tourism employment and the improvement of income (Du & Su, 2011). The greater the income gained, the more positive the support and welcome attitude will be towards tourism development, and vice versa (Pan & Li, 2002). Being the host and important stakeholder, indigenous residents make great sacrifices and contributions to the protection of rural tourism resources and the development of local tourism. According to ST, they should be compensated accordingly through participation in the development of local tourism. However, due to the lack of skills or rights to engage in tourism efficiently, the majority of residents do not get the deserved economic feedback equally (Webster and Ivanov 2014). Consequently, community residents lose interest and confidence in community-based tourism development. On this basis, the hypothesis is given as follows:

*H1: EE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' perception.*

**Political effect.** Political effect (PE) means that tourism provides an occasion or channel for all community-based organisations to express concerns and doubts about tourism development, and that the political structure of the community can fairly represent the needs and interests of all stakeholder groups (Scheyvens, 1999). Due to limited public funding in developing countries, the role of residents is often assumed by NGOs and ODA (official development assistance) organisations (Zielinski et al., 2020). Officials have realised that sustainable tourism development will not be successful without the support and involvement of local residents (Moghavvemi et al., 2021). In the framework of community-based tourism empowerment, PE is one of the important dimensions that empowers tourism development. Latkova and Vogt (2012) confirmed that political empowerment is not a pre-dependent variable of tourism perception. Previous researches conducted on the relationship between PE and residents' attitude towards tourism development have shown great differences under diverse circumstances and demographic characteristics. Analysis on the failure of community participation in tourism indicated that inadequate political engagement is an important element obviously. Besides, experience has shown that short-life-cycle project-based support is not as effective as long-term government support and adequate policies (Zielinski et al., 2021). Hence, the community's political environment and residents' perception on the development of tourism are highly correlated. On this basis, the hypothesis is given as follows:

*H2: PE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' perception.*

**Social effect.** In the early stages of rural tourism development, some community residents of tourism destinations experienced a gradual loss of their local traditional culture due to the continuous interference of external values and ideas. Indigenous/ethnic and sometimes rural communities in developing countries face additional restrictions for private ventures due to common collective land ownership issues, in that without land tenure, they are restricted on the type of use, permitted activities, and development (Zielinski et al., 2021). The integration, relevance, and labour-intensive characteristics of the tourism industry determine the importance of tourism division of labour and cooperation, and the cohesiveness of a community can be both an advantage and an obstacle in tourism development, depending on various factors (Zielinski et al., 2021). So the objective force demand in the tourism industry makes it more important in getting the social participation and connection. Di Castri (2004) believed that social effect (SE) plays a significant role in helping communities cultivate the spirit of collectivism. In a study of the increasing power efficiency of the Shangri-La Yuba community in Yunnan, Guo (2011) found that the behaviour of community participation in tourism regulated the local social order and increased community unity to some extent. The role of the inclusion of SE in enhancing solidarity and cooperation clearly has an important impact on the attitude of community residents towards tourism development (Boley et al., 2014). Furthermore, good social relations are conducive to overcoming the lack of funds and technology for community residents to participate or invest in tourism (Scheyvens, 1999). On this basis, the hypothesis is given as follows:

*H3: SE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' perception.*

**Psychological effect.** Psychological effect (PSE) is manifested largely by the recognition of the value and uniqueness of the local culture or traditional knowledge by tourists and other aliens (Wang, 2015). They improve the pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence of local community residents (Scheyvens, 1999). In rural tourism, if tourists believe that the culture, natural resources, or traditional heritages of the local community are valuable or unique, it helps increase the pride and self-esteem of the residents of the local community, which is clearly reflected in the increase of visitors and material flow. Sharing the unique culture and local products with tourists increases the confidence of local community residents. The growing number of visitors also encourages local residents to further their education and training (Brunt & Courtney, 1999), aside from reaping the economic benefits. Stronza and

Cordillo (2008)'s study of three Amazon ecotourism projects found that residents' pride is the most important non-economic benefit in local tourism development. However, a community is not a homogeneous group of like-minded people since the residents possess differing levels of the social fabric, for example, attachment, commitment and involvement, personalities, and mixed feelings in relation to perceived tourism impacts (Moghavvemi et al., 2021). In certain community-based tourism destinations, the opposite is observed, especially in the areas where the tourism development level is not high. Local people are upset and even aggressive towards the newcomers. Furthermore, the ability of the community to accept external stakeholders that migrate from urban areas attracted by a rural business/lifestyle opportunity is another differentiating factor (Zielinski et al., 2021). On this basis, the hypothesis is given as follows:

*H4: PSE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' perception.*

**Sustainable evaluation.** Sustainable evaluation (SUE) is one of the important conditions that affect community residents' perception. A large part of rural tourism is ecotourism, which is closely related to nature. Ecotourism is an ecologically sustainable tourism activity undertaken to appreciate nature that requires the participation of community residents (Lu & Wang, 2001). Weaver (1999) believed that natural resources are interdependent with the sustainable development evaluation of local communities. Moreover, the development of ecotourism can better cultivate residents' awareness of ecological protection and enhance protection ability. The stronger SUE community residents show in tourism, the easier it is to develop, utilise and protect tourism resources, and support the sustainable development of rural community-based tourism. Stronza (2000) believed that once local residents participate in ecotourism development, they will take the initiative to protect the natural resources, environment, and local traditional culture according to the needs of tourists. If the community residents take a negative attitude, especially a hostile attitude towards tourists, it will directly affect the tourists' subjective evaluation of this ecotourism scenic spot, which then affects the flow of visitors, and finally threaten the survival and development of scenic spots. Similarly, if the participation of community residents is ignored, the development of ecotourism will also be affected (Zhang, 2012). Ross and Wall (1999) put forward an overall framework for successful ecotourism development and postulated that ecotourism development must be coordinated with the relationship among local communities, biodiversity, and tourism.

Previous studies have suggested that sustainable tourism development would not be successful without the cooperation, support, evaluation, and participation of the local residents. Thus, local residents' support is a critical factor. Researchers have

emphasised residents' support for sustainable tourism development using different methods of evaluation. Local residents' involvement in decision-making and a positive attitude towards tourism are essential for tourism sustainability (Canalejo, Tabales, López, & Fuentes-García, 2015), and a positive SUE can promote residents' cognition and behaviour on sustainable development significantly. On this basis, the hypotheses are given as follows:

H5: *SUE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' perception.*

H6: *SUE of rural community-based tourism has positive influence on residents' support.*

**Residents' perception and support.** Over the last four decades, the most utilised theory to explain residents' perspectives of and support for tourism development is the social exchange theory (Ap, 1992). Ap (1992) found that residents' support for tourism development mainly depends on the level of rewards obtained from the industry, whereby the greater the perceived rewards, the more positive individuals' attitudes would be in supporting tourism initiatives. Community residents have the best knowledge of their own community subject. In rural tourism destinations, local communities play an important role in tourism development as they are the only service providers who can offer the variety of services to visitors (Lo, Chin, & Law, 2019). Psychological and emotional tourism cognition can fully support the residents to participate in the development of rural tourism (Wang, 2015). Perceptions and attitudes are extracted from the perceived tourism-related benefits and costs experienced by residents (McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Residents identify with their own community and develop a sense of pride and belonging that can inspire them to love the community, join in the affairs of the community, and regard the affairs of the community as their own. The theory of social cognition holds that the degree of individual cognition to the group has a positive correlation with the individual's participation in group activities and actions (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Residents' support (RS) and residents' perception (RP) complement each other. The cognition of residents will be higher when residents support the development of rural tourism. It is believed that community support, in terms of involvement and participation in the provision of rural tourism services, can create a more favourable condition for the successful development of tourism destination competitiveness (Lo et al., 2019). Through the support and development of rural tourism, residents can also improve their awareness of rural tourism (Zhang, 2012). In order to increase residents' awareness, efforts should be made from economic, political, social, ecological, psychological, and other aspects. It is a gradual and systematic process, which cannot be completed in a short time. The development of rural tourism

belongs to an economic behaviour which will bring a certain impact on the original community relationship and residents' cognition. Therefore, the development of rural tourism needs to strengthen the exchange of information within the community, and enhance the residents' objective and rational understanding of community-based tourism development in various ways. Consequently, it can be more easily recognised and supported by local residents in terms of tourism development (Jaafar, Noor, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). Gursoy, Boğan, Dedeoğlu, & Çalışkan (2019) indicated that if residents are satisfied with community conditions, they will support tourism development. On this basis, the hypothesis is given as follows:

H7: *Community RP has a positive impact on community RS.*

Based on the above analysis of research gaps and hypotheses, we formulate the conceptual framework as follows:

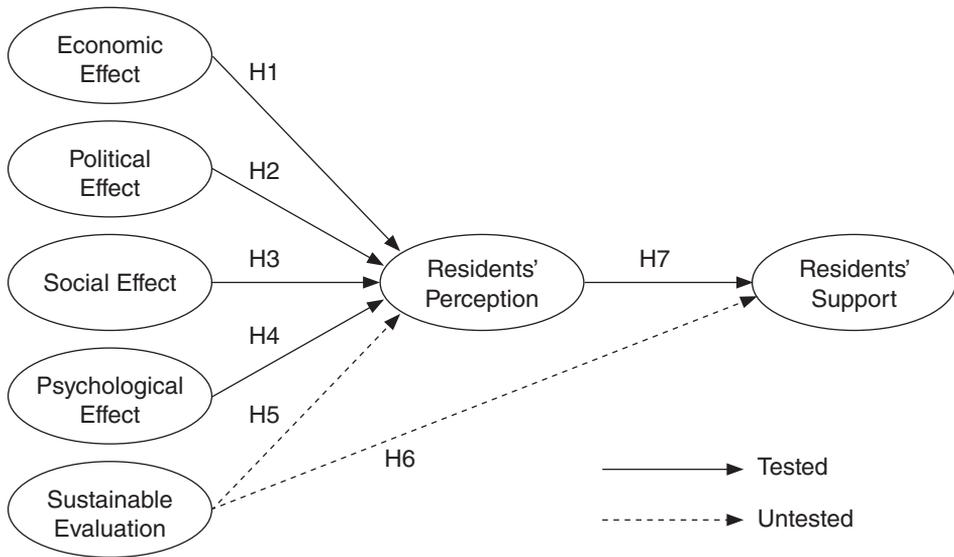


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

### Methodology

#### The Research Site

As one of the most developed provinces in China, Jiangsu is divided into northern and southern regions respectively, with the Yangtze River running through. Consequently, we selected Qintong ancient town, which is in the middle of Jiangsu for the purpose of embodying the regional characteristics comprehensively. Qintong ancient town

is located in Jiangyan District, Taizhou City, and belongs to the Lixia River area. It covers an administrative area of 75.52 square kilometers with a population of 58,500. The water surface of Qintong Town is 13.09 square kilometers, accounting for nearly one-third of the total area. The ancient town area is 0.54 square kilometers. It has jurisdiction over 18 village committees and four neighbourhood committees (People's Government of Jiangsu Province, 2019).

Qintong ancient town is an AAAA scenic spot with a 1000-year-long history. On October 14, 2016, it was listed as the first batch of small towns with Chinese characteristics by the Ministry of Housing and Construction of China. Its most famous food offering is the Qinhu Eight Fresh Banquet, comprising fresh crab, shrimp ball, fish cake, and turtle. Crab Soup in Steamed Bun is a traditional snack of Jingjiang with a history of more than 200 years. It is listed as one of the "four famous pastries in China", along with Tianjin Goubuli Steamed Bun, Shanghai Nanxiang Small Cage Bun, and Yangzhou Three Dice Bun. Each year, Taizhou holds a large-scale Qinhu Food Festival in April and May.

### **Questionnaire and Pilot Test**

The authors have been to the site twice. Through previous interviews and literature research, the questionnaires were designed, including constructs and the demographic characteristics of the residents. The Likert scale method was used as the evaluation standard (Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Lundberg, 2017). It is a rating scale that can be used to measure an individual's point of view, attitude, belief, and behaviour intention (Zheng, 2010; Pham, 2011). It is ranked from 5 to 10 (Fan, 2004). All items in the survey questionnaire were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 for "strongly disagree"; 7 for "strongly agree"). There are three parts to the questionnaire: participants' basic information; measurement items; and an open-ended question. The demographic information of the participants includes gender, age, income level, education degree, and so on. Pre-test was conducted with six volunteers (comprising experts, academics, and others) to ensure the questions or items are clear and easily understood. After redesigning the items in the questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out. We selected 30 residents from a tourism destination with resembling factors in order to measure the reliability and validity as well as adjust the relevant measurement items as needed.

### **Formal Survey**

The targeted population of this paper is the residents who have lived in Qintong ancient town for more than three years. Given that the respondents need to have some basic knowledge and cognition about tourism and its influence, the formal investigation was carried out by applying the convenience sampling technique (Stylidis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014). To ensure the efficiency of the interview,

volunteers were trained during the preparatory process of the investigation to make sure that key words and important views can be recorded quickly and accurately. The duration of each interview was set at between 15 to 30 minutes. Additionally, with the consent of the respondents, recording may be used during the survey.

The authors used the SEM and Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker., 2015) to analyse the model. The minimum sampling size for PLS-SEM is 100 in the previous literature (Reinartz, Haelein, & Henseler, 2009). Besides, the PLS-SEM sampling rule recommends the “ten times rule” (Henseler & Chin, 2010; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Alternatively, one can revert to the more restrictive minimum sample size recommendations based on statistical power (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). A total of 250 questionnaires were dispatched and the survey was conducted in pairs, and 243 questionnaires were collected. After screening, 18 responses were excluded because of missing values or straight line answers. Hence, 232 efficient samples were finally chosen and coded into the computer, which is an adequate total for this study. The percentage researched was 92.8%. G\*Power was also used to calculate the sample size (Hair et al., 2013). Based on a power of 0.95, we needed a sample size of 70 for model testing. Moreover, the minimum power required in social science research is typically 0.8. Therefore, our sample size is arguably deemed sufficient in SEM analysis.

### Analysis and Results

Table 1 shows that the number of female respondents is much higher than males, and they are categorised into six age groups. The highest proportion are respondents in the 21–30 age group, followed by those aged 31–40, which shows that more young people live in Qintong ancient town. This is partly because the high industry level in this area is able to provide more jobs. As for education level, most residents hold a certificate from high middle school to undergraduate, which accounts for 90.52%. Local residents are mainly engaged in the tourism field (i.e., 35.34%). Hence, there is huge potential for inviting more people to participate. Most of the 232 respondents earned approximately 3001–6000 CNY per month (about USD 444–888 at the time of this study). It may be said that the local residents enjoy a high standard of living since 88 respondents earn more than 6000 CNY per month, which is relatively high compared to the general national income level.

**Table 1.** Profile of the respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	141	60.78%
	Male	91	39.22%

**Table 1** (con't)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Marital status	Married	98	42.24%
	Unmarried	134	57.76%
Level of education	Below high middle school	11	4.74%
	High middle to junior college	85	36.64%
	Undergraduate	125	53.88%
	Postgraduate	11	4.74%
Age	Below 21	30	12.93%
	21–30	109	46.98%
	31–40	60	25.86%
	41–50	26	11.21%
	51–60	6	2.59%
	Above 65	1	0.43%
Job	Tourism related	82	35.34%
	Farmer	34	14.66%
	Government or public department	38	16.38%
	Other job	77	33.19%
	Retired	1	0.43%
Income per month (CNY)	Below 3000	44	18.97%
	3001–6000	100	43.10%
	6001–9000	47	20.26%
	9001–12000	35	15.09%
	above 12000	6	2.59%
Total		232	100%

**Measurement Model**

The assessment of the reflective measurement model entails an evaluation of its reliability and validity with respect to the latent variables (Chin, 1998, 2010; Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017). Mostly, convergent validity and discriminant validity are applied for testing measurement model reliability and validity. The convergent validity of the measurement for reflective measures is usually ascertained by examining the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Cronbach's alpha is used for the assessment of reliability, which is considered as the supplement for the CR.

There were seven measurement models in this paper: economic effect (EE), political effect (PE), social effect (SE), psychological effect (PSE), sustainable evaluation (SUE), residents' perception (RP), and residents' support (RS). The loading should be higher than 0.7 if reliability can be considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2011; Kock, 2011). Most of the loadings on their constructs were higher than

0.7, as shown in Table 2. This indicates that the CRs in the measurement model were all higher than 0.8. Thus, the measurement model meets the requirement for acceptable reliability. Besides, all AVEs exceed 0.5 so their convergent validity was considered acceptable (Chin, 2010). Recent studies have proposed the assessment of both lateral and vertical collinearity among constructs when assessing a model (Kock & Lynn, 2012). Full collinearity VIF for all the constructs was less than 5.0, which suggested that the model was free from collinearity (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 2.** Assessment of the measurement model

Construct and Items	Loading	CR	AVE	Full collinearity VIF
<b>1 Economic effect (EE)</b>		0.843	0.520	
1.1 Tourism can improve my income.	0.685			1.336
1.2 More jobs are supplied because of the tourism development.	0.818			1.761
1.3 Many residents work in tourism.	0.749			1.515
1.4 Tourism improves my material living standard.	0.735			1.570
1.5 I invest more money in tourism.	0.602			1.353
<b>2 Political effect (PE)</b>		0.851	0.590	
2.1 I can participate in the planning of local tourism project.	0.816			1.769
2.2 I can issue my opinions on tourism development.	0.671			1.500
2.3 My advice and action have some influence on tourism development.	0.829			1.509
2.4 I am more familiar with local policy.	0.746			1.474
<b>3 Psychological effect (PSE)</b>		0.887	0.664	
3.1 I am proud of being a resident here.	0.857			1.969
3.2 I prefer to share the story and culture with tourists.	0.788			1.718
3.3 I am more confident to do my work.	0.877			2.389
3.4 I prefer to introduce commercial opportunities to my friends.	0.728			1.508

**Table 2** (con't)

<b>Construct and Items</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Full collinearity VIF</b>
<b>4 Social effect (SE)</b>		0.809	0.515	
4.1 I share a better relationship with others because of the tourism.	0.673			1.247
4.2 Community residents have more opportunities to participate in the cooperation of local affairs.	0.693			1.524
4.3 My status is improved in family and community.	0.724			1.173
4.4 Residents care more about the difficulties in their community.	0.777			1.623
<b>5 Sustainable effect (SUE)</b>		0.870	0.572	
5.1 Residential environment changed for the better.	0.765			1.605
5.2 I improve my ecological consciousness due to the tourism development.	0.710			1.465
5.3 Natural and human resources are better protected and used in business activities.	0.754			1.571
5.4 There are more regulations and promotion of ecological protection.	0.741			1.596
5.5 Ecological improvement brings more tourism flow and consumption.	0.808			1.777
<b>6 Residents' perception (RP)</b>		0.926	0.808	
6.1 I have strong perception to participate in the tourism development.	0.900			2.568
6.2 I will cooperate with other residents to promote the tourism.	0.917			2.910
6.3 I believe tourism development can be a pillar industry and can last for decades.	0.879			2.166

**Table 2** (con't)

Construct and Items	Loading	CR	AVE	Full collinearity VIF
<b>7 Residents' support (RS)</b>		0.868	0.623	
7.1 I comply with all the tourism planning requirements.	0.777			2.004
7.2 I will invest more money in tourism.	0.869			2.289
7.3 I am very friendly to tourists if I meet them by chance.	0.757			1.712
7.4 I will keep the manager informed to protect the tourism facilities.	0.748			1.718

Note: VIF = variance inflation factors

The discriminant validity was examined by comparing the correlations and the square root of the AVE for that construct (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). The square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than all of the correlations among the construct and the other constructs in the model (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2011; Kock, 2014). As seen in Table 3, all the values on the diagonal line were higher than the corresponding values, which meant that the measurement of the model was discriminant.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity (AVE testing)

	EE	PE	PSE	RP	RS	SE	SUE
EE	<b>0.721</b>						
PE	0.552	<b>0.768</b>					
PSE	0.328	0.308	<b>0.815</b>				
RP	0.437	0.393	0.396	<b>0.899</b>			
RS	0.406	0.453	0.378	0.505	<b>0.789</b>		
SE	0.452	0.502	0.361	0.425	0.675	<b>0.718</b>	
SUE	0.451	0.545	0.203	0.318	0.307	0.334	<b>0.756</b>

The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations is applied as an alternative approach to valuate discriminant validity. It is suggested that HTMT should be less than 0.85 (Kline, 2011). Most of the values in Table 4 were less than 0.85, indicating that discriminant validity was again verified.

**Table 4.** Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) testing

	EE	PE	PSE	RP	RS	SE	SUE
EE							
PE	0.696						
PSE	0.406	0.374					
RP	0.519	0.445	0.459				
RS	0.503	0.570	0.462	0.590			
SE	0.592	0.682	0.461	0.524	0.947		
SUE	0.574	0.704	0.245	0.374	0.389	0.433	

**Structural Model**

We used 5000 bootstrapping re-samples to test the hypothesis by focusing on *T*-value (*T*-value > 1.96) and *p*-value (*p*-value < 0.05) with the confidence interval in 95% (Hair et al., 2017). The results in Table 5 illustrate that EE showed a positive and significant effect towards RP (*p*-value = 0.013). H1 was testified with 20.2% variance explained. However, PE had a positive but non-significant effect on RP (*p*-value = 0.468), hence H2 was rejected. Meanwhile, SE and PSE both positively and significantly affected the RP (*p*-value = 0.002; *p*-value = 0.006) and explained 22.3% and 18.8% variance of RS. The finding indicated that RP had a strong positive and significant effect on the RS (*p*-value = 0.000), meaning that the assumption in literature review and 45.3% variance was explained. Thus, H3, H4 and H7 were all supported. Moreover, SUE revealed significant effect on RS (*p*-value = 0.005) but did not support RP (*p*-value = 0.235). H6 was confirmed, while H5 was rejected.

**Table 5.** Result of hypotheses testing

Relationships	Hypotheses	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P-values
EE → RP	H1	0.202	0.081	2.497	0.013**
PE → RP	H2	0.077	0.106	0.726	0.468
SE → RP	H3	0.223	0.070	3.171	0.002***
PSE → RP	H4	0.188	0.068	2.774	0.006***
SUE → RP	H5	0.077	0.064	1.189	0.235
SUE → RS	H6	0.197	0.070	2.816	0.005***
RP → RS	H7	0.453	0.069	6.563	0.000***

Note: \* *p* < 0.1; \*\* *p* < 0.05; \*\*\* *p* < 0.01.

The paper also valued the mediating effect of RP between SUE and RS in the model. The common method used to analyse mediation effect is a Sobel test,

which compares the changes of the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables after the addition of mediator (Helm, Eggert, & Garnefeld, 2010). However, the method is limited by the assumption of data allocation and distribution. So we could use variance accounted for (VAF) to test mediating effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).  $VAF = (p12 * p23)/(p12 * p23 + p13)$ . If  $VAF > 80\%$ , it represents a full mediation effect; 20%–80% means a partial mediation effect;  $< 20\%$  shows nearly no mediation effect. When we tested the mediation effect, there is one requisite:  $p12, p23, p13$  should all be significant. It indicated that mediation effect may absorb part of direct effect. Otherwise, no effect can be detected in the mediation model. In Table 5, SUE was not significant on RP, which illustrated RP had no mediating effect between SUE and RS.

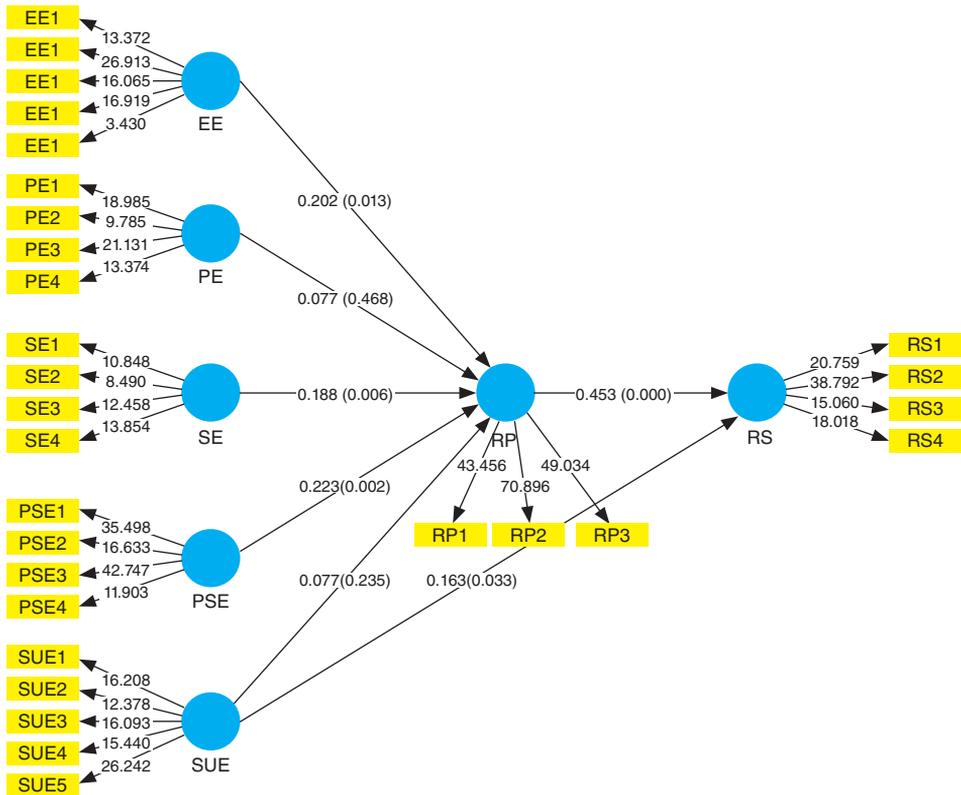


Figure 3. Result of model assessment

### Discussion

The means by which classic effect (Scheyvens, 1999; Boley et al., 2014) and sustainable evaluation of the local residents for historical tourism development are

rarely discussed in the middle area of Jiangsu Province. This paper contributes to rural tourism by proposing a new model which involved the elements of community perception and ecological tourism development. In this study, we investigated classic community empowerment from the perspectives of economic effect, political effect, social effect, and psychological effect under the conditions in Qintong ancient town. Based on the social exchange theory, it was shown that economical effect has a direct and significant influence on residents' perception. Economic benefits are a major concern and is the most influential factor that leads to a more favourable attitude among the local community towards tourism development (Chin et al., 2017). The finding corresponds with other previous studies (Du & Su, 2011; Pan & Li, 2002). Thus, economic benefit is essential for tourism development and uplifts living standards. However, the multiplying growth of rural tourism destinations has led to stiff competition among the industry (Lo et al., 2019).

The resident survey undertaken in this study indicated that due to the advanced economic development level and sufficient options for earning money, local residents are more focused on the tangible and direct benefits. Conversely, political effect does not influence the residents' perception significantly as observed in Table 5, which is consistent with the findings of previous research (Timothy, 1999). Residents in rural areas are more dependent on the economic effect. From their perspective, participation is synonymous with economic involvement (Rasoolimanesh, Ringle, Jaafar, & Ramayah, 2017). Perceived economic benefits and community involvement exerted the greatest influence on resident support of tourism development (Nugroho & Numata, 2020). On this basis, we speculate that residents in Qintong ancient town are more inclined towards the economic benefits rather than participating in the decision-making process or giving advice to the local authority.

Moreover, Qintong ancient town has been established since the Neolithic period and witnessed the change of past dynasties, with over 5000 years of history and glorious culture. It is the home to multiethnic heritages and is rich in food, culture, and festivals, among others. The local people are proud of these intangible treasures and hold a strong motivation to promote their culture to the outside world. Conceptually, motivation describes the trigger that causes an individual to act or behave in a particular way (Meimand et al., 2017). Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar (2017) observed that motivation persuades people towards goals and favourable conditions, thus encouraging them to participate in decision-making processes. They recognise culture promotion as a psychological activity as well as a commercial model. Tourism is one of the best methods of cultural exchange among the rural communities and visitors from other parts of the world (Chin et al., 2017). Therefore, tourism development helps local community residents to enhance their psychological cognition; promotes their unique culture; contributes towards the preservation of local cultures by promoting cultural activities; and increases residents' pride in

their culture (Gursoy et al., 2002; Jaafar et al., 2015; Kim, 2002). Accordingly, psychological effect has a significant and positive influence on indigenous residents' perception in H4. Also, community involvement may empower residents, enhance their awareness of the potential impacts of tourism, and boost their respect for their culture and values (Molina-Murillo, Otarola, & Shreeve, 2016).

Table 5 shows that SE directly and positively correlated with RP for the historical tourism development in Qintong ancient town. A resident who has greater community attachment will be more likely to support sustainable tourism development (Lee, 2013). Community attachment in tourism development affects residents' collaboration, participation, willingness, and so on. Communities with opportunities to participate in the planning and management of tourism development initiatives are more likely to support tourism initiatives (Nunkoo & So, 2016). The more collaborative opportunities they have in the tourism development, the more motivated they will be to actively participate. In addition, the financial benefits from tourism development can provide different channels for local residents to be involved, such as infrastructural building, wholesale and retailing businesses, as tour guides, giving recommendations, catering, and so on. To reach a balance between tourism development, individual profit, and resource protection, there must be joint efforts and cooperation amongst the local people (Scheynens, 1999). This is consistent with previous research.

One of the starting points for rural tourism development is to support the sustainable development of social culture and environment. Efforts in promoting sustainable tourism development will lead to greater awareness of environmental issues among communities and significant livelihood gains for the community-based tourism members and the community as a whole (Pichdara, Mizoue, Ota, Kajisa, & Yoshida, 2018; Reimer & Walter, 2013). Generally speaking, historical rural tourism destinations often offer unique insights into community culture including music, dance, drama, customs, architecture, and so on. They provide an overview of the social life of community residents, which serve as compelling tourism attractions. Tourism development is able to improve community service ability, provide more opportunities for community residents to contact with the outside world, and improve the residents' personal comprehensive qualities (Brunt & Courtney, 1999). Furthermore, the effective protection of a community's ecological environment and cultural heritage can improve the welfare of community residents on the condition of scientific development of ecotourism and stakeholders' positive participation. Therefore, sustainable evaluation has a positive and significant effect on the residents' perception (H5), as has been highlighted in the previous studies (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Panyik, 2015; Canalejo et al, 2015).

This study demonstrates that there is no significant effect between SUE and RS. Given the long and stable culture background in Qintong ancient town, local

people indicated some anxiety in our interviews, especially elderly men with lower education level. Negative sociocultural implications such as the erosion of traditions, increasing crime rates, and security issues were raised (Chin et al., 2017). They also worry that external culture could have a negative impact or backlash on local culture. At the same time, the residents of adjacent communities are also experiencing the benefits and costs of tourism due to the increasing number of visitors (Nugroho & Numata, 2020). In actual fact, it is difficult for local culture to develop without cultural contact or blending (Khalid, Ahmad, Ramayah, Hwang, & Kim, 2019). Nevertheless, if tangible and intangible resources are protected, they can ultimately promote the sustainable development of tourism. Strengthening stakeholders' efforts in preserving the natural environment and monitoring tourism activities can help reduce the negative impacts of tourism development (Chin et al., 2017). Therefore, we suggest that greater attention be paid to the feasibility of conducting sustainable tourism in terms of RS, such as conversion and protection of both social and natural resources.

Table 5 shows a strong significant effect between RP and RS. Community support for tourism is significantly and positively related to the competitive advantage of rural tourism (Chin et al., 2017). This is consistent with previous studies which illustrated that indigenous residents with high positive perceptions towards tourism development are more likely to support and participate in the community-based tourism development processes (Ko & Stewart, 2002; Nicholas et al., 2009). Furthermore, when local residents' level of perception improves, their support for historical tourism development will also increase. In addition, communities should be aware of their touristic potential and selling points, and at the same time be equipped with specific skills and environmental awareness, in order to be seen as "ready" to receive tourists (Wijaya, Hartati, & Sumadi, 2020). Based on the conceptual model, we assume that RP plays a mediating role between SUE and RS in the tourism development of Qintong ancient town. However, in the analytical comparison between the conceptual model and competing results, SUE shows no significant effect on RS, which leads us to the conclusion that RP does not play the mediating role.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

This paper models classic effect and SUE in the context of historical rural tourism development, and analyses the meditating role of SUE between RP and RS. We collected and screened 232 questionnaires from respondents for data analysis in Qintong ancient town, Jiangsu Province. The results show that EE, PSE, SE as well as SUE are all important factors that affect RP. RP indicates strong and significant impact on RS, which is consistent with previous studies. The findings both practically and theoretically contribute to previous studies. Rural community-based tourism has produced economic benefits through the conservation of natural and cultural

resources, and promoted local communities and nations in achieving sustainable environmental development (Lewis, 2001).

For the four classical dimensions, EE, PSE, and SE all effectively influence residents' perception. It is suggested that local authorities and business managers should develop more attachments for local residents. Sene-Harper, Matarrita-Cascante, & Larson (2019) found that in Senegal, the absence of a legal framework for communal land tenure and tourism concession rights have reduced the channels through which communities can benefit from tourism around national parks. In historical tourism development, festivals and events with glorious or well-known fairy tales will be an alternative for marketing strategy. Residents' daily life and living habits are part of tourism attraction, especially for certain intangible resource-based tourism destinations. In regard to rural tourism destination competitiveness, Lo et al. (2019) found that tourists are also concerned about the quality of accommodation, infrastructure, range of activities, and special events. Enhancing community attachment may lead to the improvement in support for sustainable tourism development among local residents (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008). However, local residents did not show great interest in PE in terms of tourism development. Conversely, they pay greater attention on economic benefits. Thus, profit distribution among the different stakeholders should be re-evaluated to ensure the residents earn reasonable income. This is critical for the future planning in historical tourism areas.

The results of this study will help tourism authorities in choosing the right tourism development paradigms in specific rural areas (Law & Lo, 2016). We suggest that more opportunities and platform should be given to local residents to expand their involvement in historical tourism development. This paper has illustrated that residents show a greater intention to be involved when they have a high level of social acceptance towards tourism. Given that local people are proud of their culture and heritage, local authorities or managers ought to provide more opportunities for local residents to make full use of their inherent potentials to explore new tourism patterns. Hence, new innovative mechanisms or requirements should be carried out. Additionally, tourism enterprises can be committed to responsible tourism by being selective in purchasing decisions (Nair, Mohamed, & Chuin, 2015).

Moreover, sustainable evaluation is a key point in people perception on tourism, but not significant to their support. Residents' perception did not play a mediating role between them. Therefore, local authorities and leaders should increase the connection between resource protection and economic gains by introducing new concepts and methods. Greater understanding about tourism enhances community involvement in tourism activities or businesses because the community residents value tourism development as an income generator (Chin et al., 2017). On one hand, they have to guarantee their income and reach a balance among stakeholders. On the other hand, the concerns and worries should be handled properly. Therefore,

historical protection and ecotourism should be given high priority in order to enhance the consciousness of local people. Good maintenance of tourism resources will result in the long-term prosperity of the tourism industry. Since rural tourism is an integral part of the services field, the services provided need to meet tourists' demands and hence enhance tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention (Lo et al., 2019).

Despite the interesting findings, some limitations still need to be addressed in this study. Firstly, this study took Qintong ancient town as an example to illustrate the factors affecting residents' perception and support. But different types of rural tourism may hold different opinions and intentions. Therefore, we will select and compare more community patterns in future, such as coastal rural area, agricultural area, and so on. Secondly, given the demographic characteristics, a study comprising different age groups, income level, educational background, and other factors may result in different conclusions. To overcome this barrier, a mixed method will be used to explore the different community types and demography by conducting multi-group analysis (MGA) in the future (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

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