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## The Influence of Traditional Peri-urban Villages on Improving the Mental Wellness of Urban Residents: A Case Study of Dapeng District, Shenzhen City

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### Abstract

Urban residents tend to suffer from mental issues resulted from problems such as fast-paced lifestyle, over-crowdedness and environmental pollution, thus demanding for places to release pressure and keep balance. Featuring high accessibility as well as different landscape and cultural experience, traditional peri-urban villages have become the ideal tourism destinations for urban residents. In order to explore the influence of these villages on the mental wellness of urban residents, this study conducts an empirical study in Dapeng District of Shenzhen City. In this study, 100 randomly selected urban visitors to the district are invited to recall their itineraries and emotional feelings on prepared maps. Specifically they are asked to circle the villages they have visited, describe the main tourism images, and express their feelings to these images. Through analyzing the data collected from the mapping survey, the following two findings can be concluded. Firstly, in terms of tourism routes, urban visitors tend to visit villages with similar resources if the length of stay is within two days, on the other hand, if the length is longer they prefer villages with different themes. Secondly, besides cultural and natural tourism resources, the level of supporting tourism resources, especially infrastructure and service facilities, is very important in shaping tourists' positive traveling feelings. Therefore, it is suggested that measures should be given priority to preserve the authenticity of inherited resources, to improve the provision of supporting facilities, to promote coordination between different villages and village clusters, and to arrange people-oriented tourism routes.

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*Keywords:* Traditional Peri-urban Villages; Mapping Survey; Mental Wellness; Dapeng District

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## 1. Introduction and research context

### 1.1. Long-term exposure to fast-paced urban environment can threaten the mental wellness of residents

In nowadays China, many developing cities are being troubled by various urban problems, such as environmental pollution, over-crowdedness and traffic congestion. Especially, in first-tier cities, such as Shenzhen, living cost has become increasingly high and employment competition has been increasingly fierce. People have to push themselves into hectic daily work to make a living. Due to long-time exposure to the fast-paced urban lifestyle, residents suffer from mental pressure and negative emotion to different extents. If the accumulated pressure cannot be released properly, people will eventually lose their mental wellness. According to the research made by Buzzell and Chalquist (2010), reconnecting with nature and slowing down pace of life are highly effective for urban residents to keep mental balance. However, it is unlikely for urban residents to make long-distance trips, considering the fact that they do not have enough vacation time all year round. Thus, in this sense, traditional peri-urban villages can satisfy the above-stated demand because of easy accessibility and rich tourism endowment. These villages have the potential to become the ideal tourism destinations for urban residents who plan to pay a short visit.

### 1.2. Traditional peri-urban villages serve as places where urban residents can experience different lifestyles

Facing great pressure of urban expansion, a majority of peri-urban villages in Shenzhen area have conducted high-density real estate development in recent years. Among them are some traditional villages with great preservation value. Irrational development has endangered their distinctive history, cultural heritage and identity. In spite of this, there are still a number of traditional peri-urban villages that have become the exceptions. These villages successfully turn into popular tourism destinations, thanks to the preservation of their unique spatial texture and traditional culture accumulated from long-time history. It is evident that, the tourism-oriented renewal in these villages can not only satisfy the travelling demand of urban residents, but also utilize the authenticity of traditional villages to promote regional development. Aiming at improving their tourism service, the economic structure, social structure and physical environment of traditional peri-urban villages should make corresponding changes. In terms of economic structure, these villages do not only rely on agriculture and manufacturing industry any longer. They start to offer services in tourism, which will make their economy more diverse. In terms of social structure, tourism creates employment opportunities in these villages and substantially raises the income of villagers. In addition, the development of tourism requires urgent improvement in local built environment, including infrastructure, landscape and buildings.

## 2. The characteristics of traditional peri-urban villages

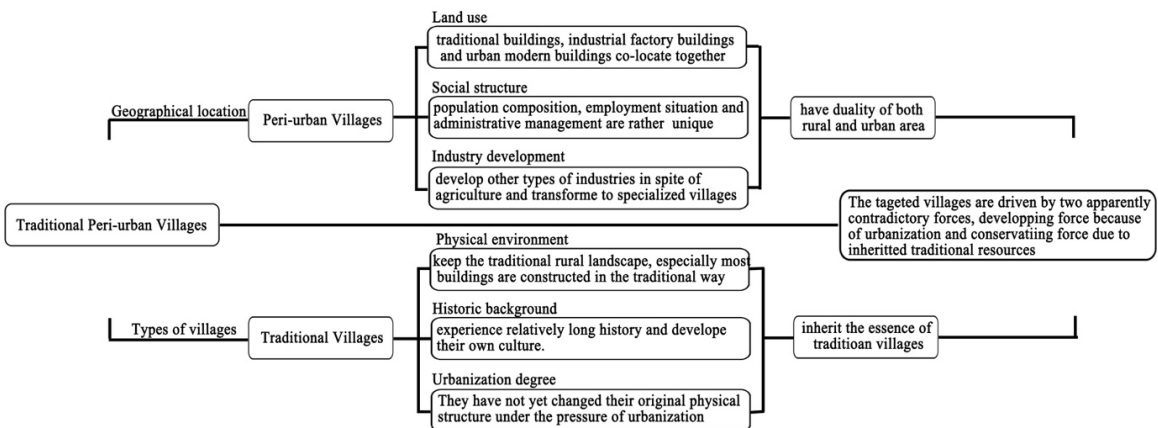


Figure 1. The characteristics of traditional peri-urban villages

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