

# ***Exploring Experience-Based Cultural Tourism under the Background of Rural Revitalization: A Case Study of Chengzi County Village in Jinan City, Shandong Province***

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**Abstract:** The integration of culture and tourism promotes the realization of rural revitalization. In recent years, many examples in China have achieved rural revitalization by developing a new model that integrates agriculture with tourism, deeply exploring local cultural characteristics. This paper focuses on Chengzi County Village in Yangli Town, Laiwu District, Jinan City, Shandong Province, known as the "Millennial Ying City." Utilizing the SWOT model and conducting field surveys, this study comprehensively analyzes the future development of experience-based cultural tourism in Chengzi County Village. Recommendations are proposed for future development, including creating a "1+N" cluster of experience-based cultural tourism projects, incubating distinctive cultural tourism brands, leading with talent, and improving tourism infrastructure. The study concludes that the opportunities and strengths of developing experience-based cultural tourism in Chengzi County Village generally outweigh the threats and weaknesses.

**Keywords:** Culture and tourism integration, rural revitalization, Chengzi County Village, Jinan City

## **1. Background and Current State of Cultural Tourism Development in Chengzi County Village**

Rural tourism, as a new form of development integrating "agriculture + tourism," serves as a new platform for the integrated development of the primary and tertiary sectors in rural areas [1]. In recent years, the integration of agriculture and tourism to revitalize villages through the exploration of local cultural features has become a hot topic. Chengzi County Village in Jinan, with its slogan "Millennial Ying City, the Birthplace of the First Emperor," has a rich historical and cultural heritage, giving it unique advantages in the competition of rural cultural tourism. Research on leveraging these unique resources to develop experience-based cultural tourism can help promote the construction of beautiful villages and achieve rural revitalization.

Chengzi County is a traditional tourist village in Shandong Province. In 2015, it was selected as one of the first batch of traditional cultural villages in the Shandong Province Rural Memory Project. During the Chinese Lunar New Year of Jia Chen Long Year, Chengzi County meticulously prepared the 2024 Spring Festival Shandong Rural Cultural Tourism Festival "Lai · Ying City Celebrates the

New Year." The festival, based on "Millennial Ying City Cultural Gathering, Rich Ying City New Year's Market, Happy Ying City Celebration, Virtuous Ying City Gathering, and Elite Ying City Talent Gathering," included Spring Festival blessing ceremonies, folk ancestor worship, and traditional respect for teachers' activities participated by Chinese ritual music practitioners, folklore experts, and the public. Tourists were given a card to collect stamps at famous village sites to exchange for prizes and a specially set-up play area organized activities around local agricultural products like ginger, garlic, corn, and wheat. These experience-based cultural tourism activities significantly increased the number of visitors to Chengzi County Village during the Spring Festival.

To promote the construction of a beautiful countryside and aid rural revitalization in Chengzi County Village, Jinan, it is proposed to fully utilize the village's existing natural and cultural advantages to create a series of regular experience-based cultural tourism projects that can attract and retain visitors and evoke nostalgia.

## **2. SWOT Analysis of Experience-Based Cultural Tourism Development in Chengzi County Village, Jinan**

### **2.1. Strengths**

#### **2.1.1. Geographical Location Advantage**

Chengzi County Village is located in Yangli Town, Laicheng District, 20 kilometers northwest of Laicheng District and 3 kilometers east of the town government. The Yao mouth highway crosses the south of the village, and there are five vertical and four horizontal main roads facilitating easy access by private car. For public transportation, two bus routes (k208 and k208 Water North Branch) serve Chengzi County station, connecting Laicheng city area and the bus terminal directly to the village, significantly easing access for tourists. The village is near several renowned attractions like the Laiwu Campaign Memorial, Xueye Lake Tourist Area, and Fanggan Ecotourism Area, making it easy to integrate tourism resources and create a holiday circuit.

#### **2.1.2. Captivating Historical and Folk Culture**

Known as "Millennial Ying City" and "The Birthplace of the First Emperor," Chengzi County Village has a rich history and numerous cultural tourism resources. Attractions such as Yingcheng archaeological site, ancient city walls, Shao Di land, Zhu Tongmeng Royal Burial Forest, Dongzhen Temple, Sanqing Hall, Zhu Family Ancestral Hall, and ancient towers are significant draws for tourists. The Yingcheng site, dating from the Neolithic to the Han dynasty, was designated a major national cultural protection unit by the State Council in 2013. The village also celebrates folklore like the Qi Mengjiang woman story, the Mid-Yuan Festival (Laiwu Mid-Yuan customs), and the Cuo Di dance, alongside heritage brands and intangible cultural heritage like Shun Xiang Zhai and Qi's Soy Sauce Meat, which add to its cultural richness.

#### **2.1.3. Rich Cultural and Artistic Heritage**

The village has a strong tradition of cultural arts, dating back to the Qing dynasty's "Laiwu Clappers," a national intangible heritage. Most villagers possess unique skills, and the local drama troupe, formed by villagers, has a long history of performing locally and in nearby villages. It frequently participates in cultural performances organized by city and district levels. The village's robust cultural and artistic foundation offers advantages for developing immersive performance-based tourism activities.

## **2.2. Weaknesses**

### **2.2.1. Project Weaknesses:**

Experience-based cultural tourism is a popular new tourism model, and Chengzi County Village, starting later than others, must establish a unique identity among many similar projects. Additionally, many of its cultural tourism activities, such as the New Year's blessings, folk ancestor worship, and traditional teacher-respecting ceremonies, occur during specific festivals or contexts. These projects are short-term and cannot sustain the long-term development of experience-based tourism in the village, making the development of new, ongoing core projects crucial.

### **2.2.2. Talent Weaknesses:**

Field visits revealed a polarization in the age of drama team members and experience-based activity staff. Some are older, which may limit their ability to support large-scale projects due to age constraints. Younger staff, often returning home for the festival season, are not available for long-term roles. The village also faces challenges in passing down unique cultural arts like "Laiwu Clappers," with fewer young people willing to learn and carry on these traditions.

### **2.2.3. Management Weaknesses:**

The village lacks a professional cultural tourism management team; current management is mostly handled by village officials part-time. This results in two major issues: officials are distracted by daily administrative duties and lack professional management expertise, leading to inadequacies in village infrastructure like insufficient garbage bins and toilets, reducing visitor satisfaction.

## **2.3. Opportunities**

In the Government Work Report of March 5, 2024, Premier Li Qiang emphasized the relentless focus on agriculture, rural areas, and farmer issues, and the solid advancement of comprehensive rural revitalization. The integration of culture and tourism, as a powerful method to promote rural revitalization, will surely receive policy support. Additionally, favorable policies for the collective operation of rural construction land continue to emerge, facilitating the rational flow and optimal allocation of rural land resources [2] and enabling significant projects in Chengzi County Village.

## **2.4. Threats**

The tourism market is highly competitive, and rural tourism faces severe homogenization issues with numerous similar inns and agritourism offerings. Chengzi County Village must also compete with well-known attractions in Jinan such as Daming Lake, Baotu Spring, and Red Leaf Valley. Jinan is known as "Spring City," and both Daming Lake and Baotu Spring are iconic attractions with substantial pull for tourists. Red Leaf Valley, as an early developed scenic area in the southern mountains of Jinan, offers comprehensive services that significantly surpass the experiences offered by Chengzi County Village, posing a significant threat to its visitor numbers.

### 3. Exploring the Development Path of Experience-Based Cultural Tourism in Chengzi County Village, Jinan

#### 3.1. Developing a "1+N" Experience-Based Cultural Tourism Project Cluster

Following a SWOT analysis, Chengzi County Village can leverage its existing resources to develop a "1+N" cluster of experience-based cultural tourism projects. This means focusing on creating one immersive, large-scale cultural performance program and establishing N number of non-immersive, smaller experiential points. The immersive cultural program could utilize historical sites such as the Yingcheng ruins, ancient city walls, and Shao Di land, to recreate the glorious eras once witnessed on this ancient land. Alongside the existing village performance teams, a portrayal of the ancient pre-Qin people's spirit could be crafted, perhaps by reenacting ancient smelting scenes at Shao Di land, using the weight of years and the mystery of history to attract tourists. Non-immersive cultural activity points could be distributed throughout Chengzi County Village, integrated with existing ancient sites to enhance visitor engagement and improve the experience. For example, next to the small stage at "Cultural Square," a pitch-pot interactive game could be installed; when no performances are scheduled, visitors could enjoy playing pitch-pot. Alternatively, a poetry-matching challenge could be set up at the "Large Bowl Tea Station," with small gifts awarded by staff to those who answer a set number of questions correctly.

In addition to fully exploring its cultural tourism resources, Chengzi County Village could also actively develop its natural tourism offerings. For instance, fruit and vegetable picking gardens could be established according to the seasonal crops; for relaxation and convalescence groups, a suitable location within the village could be chosen to construct field cottages complete with swings, rocking chairs, and fitness equipment, creating a vacation area primarily for health, recuperation, and family leisure.<sup>[3]</sup>

Below is a table outlining the proposed experiential activities for Chengzi County Village:

Table 1: Experiential Activities Chart

NO.	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	TIME
1	Main Road	Immersive Cultural Program	Starts around 7:00 PM, ends approximately at 9:00 PM
2	Cultural Square	Traditional small drama	Two shows each in the morning and afternoon
3	Cultural Square	Pitch-pot, archery games	When no dramas are scheduled
4	Sanqing Hall	Ancient ritual experience	Opens at 7:30 AM, closes at 6:00 PM
5	Large Bowl Tea Station	Poetry challenge	Open all day
6	Field Leisure Area	Seasonal picking, fishing	Open all day
7	Central Street	Specialty agricultural ring toss	Open all day
8	Shao Zha Land	Intangible cultural heritage performance (Iron Flower, etc.)	Starts at 9:15 PM, lasts about 30 minutes
9	Main Road	Drone show	Starts around 10:10 PM, lasts about 30 minutes
10	Sites like Summer Shang Yingcheng Ruins	Traditional Han Chinese costumes photo experience	Mainly in the evening during the festival lights

By arranging experiential activities throughout the day, especially by concentrating more entertaining events in the evening, the village can enhance guest retention and significantly increase the income of local inns and restaurants, thus enriching the villagers.

### **3.2. Incubating Distinctive Cultural and Tourism Brands**

To further enhance the quality and competitive edge of Chengzi County Village's cultural and tourism offerings, it is essential to incubate unique cultural and tourism brands and themes. The village can delve deep into the cultural implications of the Ying culture, designing culturally symbolic local icons, thematically integrating and packaging existing projects and facilities [4]. In the overall planning of Chengzi County Village, attention should be paid to using local cultural symbols extensively. For instance, lanterns bearing the "Ying" symbol could be hung throughout the main roads to create a rich cultural atmosphere. Internal village amenities should maintain a consistent style, with unified colors for all trash bins, restrooms, signposts, and street lamps, reflecting Ying cultural symbols and motifs. Additionally, the village could launch "Ying culture" themed cultural and creative products, such as ice cream molded in shapes found in Ying Qin archaeological finds, various cultural and creative stationery items, bookmarks, and even collaborations with popular anime brands to feature characters wielding Ying culture weapons or wearing Ying-themed apparel, thus attracting a younger audience. Staff in Chengzi County Village should also wear period-appropriate attire to match the Ying Qin era, enhancing the immersive experience for visitors from the moment they enter the village. As for accommodation, unique themed inns, such as the "Unity Inn" inspired by the proverb "Qiyuewuyi, Yuzitongpao" ( “岂曰无衣,与子同袍” ) and a specialty music-themed inn featuring Qin dynasty sounds, could be developed. By establishing these distinctive cultural and tourism brands, Chengzi County Village can create a unique identity distinct from other rural areas.

### **3.3. Leading with Talent**

From the SWOT analysis, it is evident that Chengzi County Village has significant gaps in both skilled craftsmen who carry on traditional arts and experienced managerial talent. To maintain a core competitive edge among many cultural and tourism villages, it is crucial to attract sufficient talent. Upon recruiting adequate management talent, the village could establish a professional management institution dedicated to cultural and tourism management, focusing on how to enhance existing cultural tourism products and develop new and better ones, greatly improving the overall efficiency of Chengzi County Village's cultural and tourism management.

### **3.4. Enhancing Tourism Infrastructure**

With societal progress and rising economic levels, consumers increasingly value experiences over products and services [5]. To provide visitors with an enhanced tourism experience, Chengzi County Village must improve its existing infrastructure. First, parking issues need resolution. Field inspections revealed that most visitors must park along the roadside and walk a distance to enter the village. Between the central street and the village gateway, some land is underutilized and could be designed to include a number of parking spaces. Secondly, increasing the number of trash bins and establishing adequate public restrooms is crucial as the current provisions are insufficient for visitor needs. Thirdly, maintenance of ancient buildings within the village needs to be strengthened. Some of the ancient structures are deteriorating due to continued habitation and lack of repairs. The local village committee should actively seek government funding to focus on the preservation of these historic buildings.

#### 4. Conclusion

During the 2024 Spring Festival event "Lai·Ying City Celebrates the New Year", Chengzi County Village has demonstrated a unique ability to attract tourists. Against the backdrop of rural revitalization, Chengzi County Village overall still presents opportunities and strengths outweighing threats and challenges. By leveraging its unique cultural and natural resources, vigorously developing experiential cultural tourism activities, Chengzi County Village can carve out a niche in today's fiercely competitive rural tourism landscape. In the actual development process, flexible development models should be adopted, and the village's development strategy should be adjusted promptly in response to practical issues that arise. Due to constraints such as time, the field survey sample size was limited in this study, and there was also a lack of detailed discussion on how to better utilize the internet for promotion and integrate high technology (such as AR, VR, etc.) into the development of experiential projects. It is hoped that future research will address these shortcomings and make improvements accordingly.

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