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# The Impacts of World Cultural Heritage Site Designation and Heritage Tourism on Community Livelihoods: A Chinese Case Study

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## Highlights

- The sustainable livelihood framework has been modified for cultural heritage tourism research
- The western-based heritage management could reduce the sustainability of livelihoods
- Tourism development strategies widen the gap in the livelihood level of different villages
- The weak self-organisation capacity of communities negatively affects traditional livelihoods

## Abstract

This article examines how cultural heritage conservation, often reflective of Western values, impacts local sustainable livelihoods (SL) in a living cultural heritage site. The article argues for the modification of the SL framework for analysing cultural heritage tourism through including an explicit focus on the transforming structures and processes of local livelihoods in Fujian tulou, China, a World Cultural Heritage Site. Drawing on data collected through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observations, and secondary sources, findings show that changes related to tourism development and heritage conservation can reduce the sustainability of livelihoods in living heritage sites. Tulou clusters tend to be regarded as tourist attractions and cultural relics rather than lived-in places. Traditional livelihoods have been affected as residents are forced to adapt to the demands of tourism. This research helps to expand the SL theory by incorporating cultural heritage capital and community self-organisation, and highlighting residents' self-controlled capacity toward assets.

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**Keywords:** heritage tourism; sustainable livelihoods; transforming structures and processes; World Cultural Heritage Sites; living cultural heritage sites; China

## 1. Introduction

A living cultural heritage site can be regarded as a site with a changing community (Bui, Jones, Weaver, & Le, 2020; Poulios, 2014). Unlike monuments and ruins, residents are an integral part of the living heritage and they are constantly involved in shaping the cultural heritage space (Chapagain, 2013). In such a context, cultural heritage is embodied in “ordinary everyday landscapes” created, maintained, and modified by residents’ belief systems and everyday practices to meet their needs in an evolving society (Taylor, 2004). The cultural heritage of Asia, especially China, is primarily derived from human experience, spiritual or intangible beliefs and worldviews, rather than from tangible material (Endong, 2018; Zhu, 2015). Although Chinese heritage is rooted in its own traditions, it is also currently affected by the UNESCO heritage discourse and the rapid development of tourism (Sun, Zhou, & Wang, 2019).

As of July 2021, China had the second-largest number of World Heritage Sites (WHS) in the world, with 56 sites, 38 of which are World Cultural Heritage Sites (WCHS) (UNESCO, 2021). Due to the recession faced by rural areas, the national government has proposed tourism as an essential means of rural revitalisation, especially since 2018 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China, 2018). Some argue that, rather than a way of protecting heritage, local governments in China tend to regard WHS as a marketing tool to attract tourists and to increase revenue from tourism (Gao, Zhang, & Liu, 2019; Li, Lau, & Su, 2020). Scholarship has also identified that the designation of WHS might profoundly change a village’s original structure and management (Qian, Sasaki, Jourdain, Kim, & Shivakoti, 2017; Su, Wall, & Xu, 2016). The nomination of WHS with criteria for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) can affect local regulations and practices on cultural conservation since the intrinsic OUV of these sites is usually derived from expert identification, which leads to an emphasis on specialist knowledge and the “authenticity” of the property’s original materials (Labadi, 2013; Smith, 2006; Winter, 2014). Additionally, the rapid development of tourism accompanied by WHS might significantly affect the existing livelihoods of the local community. Residents usually go through a transition from traditional livelihoods to livelihoods based on tourism (Lichrou, O’Malley, & Patterson, 2017; Xue & Kerstetter, 2019).

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66 Although sustainable development has been an important part of mainstream tourism research,  
67 many scholars are concerned that sustainable tourism development focuses too narrowly on the  
68 growth of a single tourism sector (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Lew, Ng, Ni, & Wu, 2016). However,  
69 the sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach provides a new perspective for tourism research,  
70 holistically focusing on the connection between tourism and other sectors to examine the impact of  
71 tourism development on destination residents (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Towner & Davies, 2019).  
72 As a people-centred approach, it highlights the use of locally available resources to promote the  
73 sustainability of livelihoods (Suntikul & Dorji, 2016; Tambe, 2022). An essential component of the  
74 SL framework is “transforming structures and processes”, which refers to formal and informal  
75 institutions formulating policies, legislation, and other measures related to livelihoods (DFID, 1999;  
76 Scoones, 1998). The regulations related to tourism development and heritage conservation can  
77 mediate complex livelihood systems to achieve livelihood outcomes (Badola et al., 2018). This is  
78 accomplished by extending its influence throughout other livelihood elements, including the access  
79 and transformation of assets, the restriction or encouragement of tourism livelihood strategies, and  
80 vulnerable contexts (Lee, 2008). However, current tourism research focuses on the role of livelihood  
81 resources in implementing tourism strategies as well as on the outcomes (e.g. Aazami & Shanazi,  
82 2020; Pasanchay & Schott, 2021). The underlying dynamics of the structures and processes are often  
83 neglected, so this component needs further examination.

84 However, the SL approach is not suitable for direct application to living cultural heritage sites  
85 since it has been criticised for disregarding cultural factors and power inequalities among different  
86 stakeholders (Ma, Wang, Dai, & Ou, 2021; Quandt, 2018). In fact, cultural factors play an important  
87 role in living heritage sites. To some extent, tangible aspects of heritage, such as architecture,  
88 preserve residential functions, whereas intangible traditional cultural activities can enrich the  
89 residents’ daily lives (Ma et al., 2021). With the rapid tourism development, many residents have  
90 employed cultural heritage resources to achieve livelihood outcomes (Ahebwa, Aporu, & Nyakaana,  
91 2016; Song, Cheong, Wang, & Li, 2020). Furthermore, similar to many emerging destinations,  
92 tourism development in China is often driven by external stakeholders such as government and  
93 commercial companies (Qian et al., 2017). Due to a lack of empowerment, residents are often  
94 excluded from the decision-making process of heritage tourism, a fact that neglects or even threatens  
95 their livelihoods (Alipour, Rezapouraghdam, & Akhshik, 2021; MacRae, 2017).

96 Therefore, this article modifies the SL framework for the study of cultural heritage tourism. By  
97 utilising this adapted framework to analyse the specific example of Fujian *tulou* in China, this article  
98 seeks to understand the impact of WCHS nomination on local residents’ livelihoods. It primarily

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99 addresses two objectives: to identify what changes in processes and structures have occurred due to  
100 WCHS nomination; and to understand how these transformations affect other livelihood  
101 components.

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## 103 **2. Sustainable Livelihoods and Cultural Heritage Tourism: Exploring the Debates**

104 This section introduces the concept of sustainable livelihoods and its application in tourism  
105 research. Thereafter, a critical review of the current research is provided in relation to the influences  
106 of heritage tourism on communities. Following this, the study restructures the sustainable livelihood  
107 framework for analysing living cultural heritage in a tourism context.

108

### 109 **2.1 The Sustainable Livelihood Approach in the Tourism Context**

110 The term sustainable livelihood was first formally proposed in the late 1980s in a report from  
111 the Advisory Panel of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED),  
112 originating from issues surrounding sustainable rural development, especially agricultural practices  
113 (Conroy & Litvinoff, 1988; WCED, 1987). The SL approach (SLA) concentrates on the resources,  
114 knowledge, and skills that residents already possess (Chambers, 1988). After reviewing the previous  
115 literature, Chambers and Conway (1992) enhanced the definition of SL:

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117 *A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and*  
118 *activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and*  
119 *recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide*  
120 *sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits*  
121 *to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. (p. 6)*

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123 While there is no uniform SL framework, the one established by the UK Department for  
124 International Development (DFID) is the best-known framework (Gao & Wu, 2017; Shen, Hughey,  
125 & Simmons, 2008). This framework identifies five essential elements in the livelihood system,  
126 including livelihood assets, the vulnerability context, transforming structures and processes,  
127 livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes (DFID, 1999) (see Section 2.2). The SLA proved a  
128 useful aid in analysing the complexity of community livelihoods (Kausar & Nishikawa, 2010; Ma et  
129 al., 2018; Tao & Wall, 2011), as it recognises the multi-sectoral characteristics of real life (Lee,  
130 2008; Su et al., 2016).

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131 Over the past ten years, the SLA has been applied to the field of tourism research, including  
132 pro-poor tourism, rural tourism, and heritage tourism (see, for example, Burbano & Meredith, 2020;  
133 Chen, Qiu, Usio, & Nakamura, 2018; Maingi, 2021). Rather than maintaining tourism over an  
134 indefinite period, this approach aims to explore how tourism can better align with local livelihood  
135 strategies and improve sustainable livelihood outcomes (Tao & Wall, 2009). When tourism is  
136 introduced to a community, it can potentially enrich livelihood activities, improving economic  
137 diversification in rural areas (Aazami & Shanazi, 2020; Tao & Wall, 2009). However, tourism may  
138 also replace traditional economic activities and reduce livelihood diversity (Lichrou et al., 2017;  
139 Salukvadze & Backhaus, 2020) as a high level of dependence on tourism would undermine the  
140 sustainability of livelihoods (Su et al., 2016; Taylor, 2017). Although tourism may generate  
141 prosperity and profits, residents' ability to maintain their livelihoods may be threatened by  
142 vulnerabilities such as the seasonality of travel and fierce business competition (Huang, Yang,  
143 Tuy n, Colmekcioglu, & Liu, 2021; Lasso & Dahles, 2018; Su, Aaron, Guan, & Wang, 2019). Other  
144 researchers have concluded that, if earning a living through tourist-based activities does not meet the  
145 community's needs and wishes, alternative occupations should be made available (Wu & Pearce,  
146 2014).

## 147

### 148 **2.2 Heritage Tourism and Community Livelihoods**

149 Heritage can be regarded as the ways in which contemporary societies participate in and  
150 understand aspects of history (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994; Light, 2015; Smith, 2006). In this sense,  
151 heritage tourism is an experiential activity whereby tourists can interact with and consume heritage  
152 resources (Moscardo, 2001; The National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2012).

153 The emergence of heritage tourism usually changes livelihood assets. Tourism can increase  
154 economic capital by generating employment opportunities or increasing income (Chakravarty &  
155 Iraz bal, 2011; Chong & Balasingam, 2019). However, the income gap between residents often  
156 widens, due to the difference in family assets and individuals' socio-economic backgrounds (Ma et  
157 al., 2018; Su et al., 2019; Taylor, 2017). Research has shown that heritage tourism development can  
158 also increase non-economic forms of resources. Residents also benefited from improvements to  
159 infrastructure such as cable TV, telephones, roads, and libraries (Matiku, Zuwarimwe, & Tshipala,  
160 2020; Qian et al., 2017). Some studies have found that WHS heritage tourism helped restore and  
161 protect heritage buildings (Kausar & Nishikawa, 2010; Omar, Muhibudin, Yussof, Sukiman, &  
162 Mohamed, 2013). Additionally, to successfully run homestays and rural guesthouses, residents

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163 proactively acquired skills (e.g. marketing and hospitality) and built social connections with tour  
164 agencies to attract tourists (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Xue & Kerstetter, 2019).

165 However, a site's resources are not only consumed by tourist-based activities and, consequently,  
166 tourism trades off with other livelihood activities (Tao & Wall, 2009). Especially when a WHS is  
167 established for the primary purposes of conservation and tourism, residents may be forced to give up  
168 or limit the use of their traditional natural resource-based activities (Melubo & Lovelock, 2019;  
169 Sirima & Backman, 2013). Local communities often have little or no access to prime natural capital  
170 such as grazing lands (Bedelian, 2014; Suntikul & Dorji, 2016), forests (Qian et al., 2017; Su et al.,  
171 2016), and water (Gao, Lin, & Zhang, 2021; Melubo & Lovelock, 2019). For example, Burbano and  
172 Meredith's (2020) research on the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador found that increased regulations had  
173 restricted residents' access to coastal zones, negatively affecting people who relied on fishing for  
174 their livelihood.

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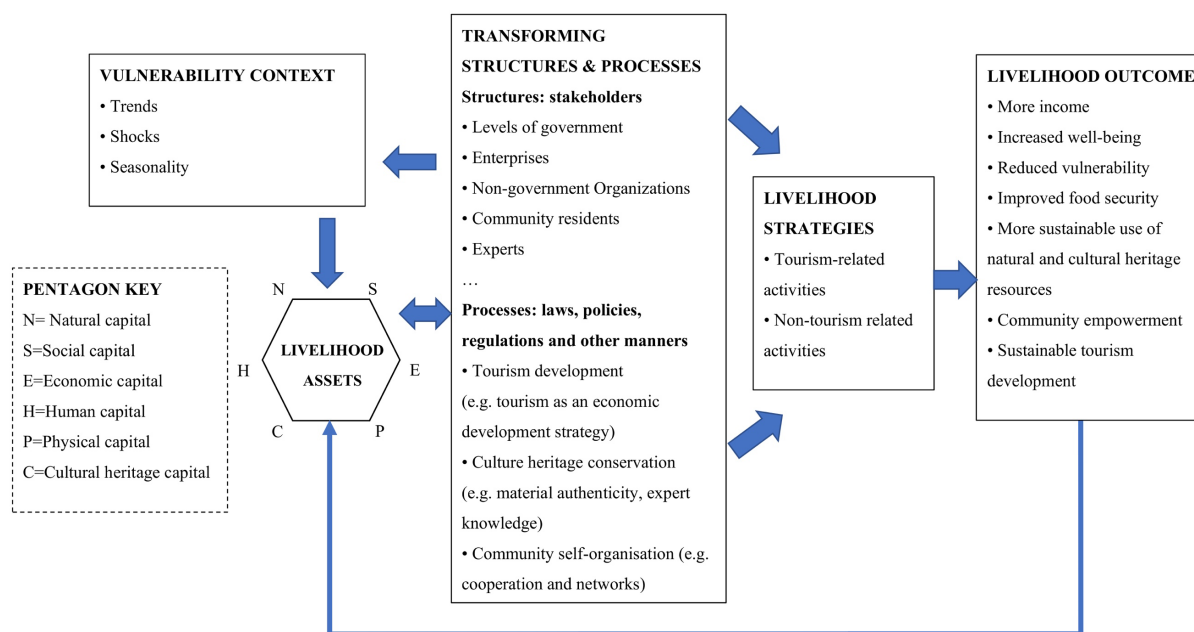
### 176 **2.3 Transformed structures and processes in living cultural heritage sites**

177 Most heritage tourism studies on livelihoods have been carried out on nature reserves or natural  
178 heritage sites. The SLA has rarely been applied to cultural heritage sites, especially living heritage  
179 sites. The trade-offs between tourism and traditional livelihoods could be obvious in WCHSs. On  
180 questions of heritage conservation, UNESCO's criteria for OUV usually conflict with heritage values  
181 in Asia, especially China (Winter, 2014; Zhang, 2017). Authenticity is often perceived through the  
182 longevity of original materials in Europe, but this understanding is not necessarily predominant in  
183 China, where "authenticity" is often attributed to intangible elements (Zhu, 2015). Although  
184 intangible cultural heritage is increasingly recognised, OUV is still primarily attached to material  
185 authenticity (Alivizatou, 2012; Tucker & Carnegie, 2014). The World Heritage Committee considers  
186 the criteria for living traditions in conjunction with other criteria (e.g. material heritage) (UNESCO  
187 World Heritage Centre, 2019) while ignoring the fact that living heritage sites reveal a continuous  
188 cultural landscape, where contemporary residents actively engage with their heritage and historical  
189 environment (Labadi, 2013). A material authenticity approach creates a discontinuity between the  
190 heritage of the past and the community of the present (Poulios, 2014). Living heritage sites often  
191 face isolation from social change and inheritors, potentially affecting local livelihoods. It will be  
192 valuable to explore how livelihoods change in a WCHS.

193 Based on the frameworks of DFID, this research attempts to modify the SL framework,  
194 especially its transforming structures and processes elements, for the study of cultural heritage  
195 tourism (see Fig. 1). Traditionally, "transforming structures and processes" refers to the ways in

196 which regulations and other measures implemented by the private and public sectors affect local  
 197 livelihoods (DFID, 1999; Serrat, 2017). In the cultural heritage tourism context, structures are  
 198 stakeholders such as different levels of government, enterprises, non-government organisations,  
 199 community residents, and experts who join heritage conservation and tourism development.  
 200 Processes refer to laws, policies, regulations, and other factors affecting tourism development and  
 201 cultural heritage conservation. This adapted framework (Fig. 1) also incorporates community self-  
 202 organisation, where residents can make their own rules to guide their livelihood practices. Self-  
 203 organisation highlights how community residents' collective agency, power, and social interactions  
 204 shape livelihoods (Chen, Xu, & Lew, 2020; Speranza, Wiesmann, & Rist, 2014).

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206

207 Fig. 1. Sustainable livelihoods framework for cultural heritage tourism © the first author  
 208 (Adapted from DFID (1999))

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210 Conventionally, transforming structures and processes may affect recourse (human, natural,  
 211 financial) or economic, physical, and social capitals accessible to residents for the creation of  
 212 livelihoods (DFID, 1999; Lee, 2008; Scoones, 1998; Shen et al., 2008). However, this adapted  
 213 framework focuses on residents' self-controlled capacity toward assets rather than on the existence  
 214 of assets within a particular area. Cultural heritage, including tangible and intangible forms, has been  
 215 included as an important form of livelihood capital in this framework. Tangible cultural heritage  
 216 generally exists in material forms such as archaeological sites, monuments, and historical artefacts  
 217 (Hassan, 2014; Ruggles & Silverman, 2009). Intangible cultural heritage usually encompasses

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218 folklore, performing arts and social practices, etc. (Lenzerini, 2011; Ruggles & Silverman, 2009). In  
219 the cultural heritage tourism context, livelihood strategies involve tourism-related activities such as  
220 running restaurants and selling souvenirs, as well as non-touristic activities. Transforming structures  
221 and processes can reinforce positive choices, such as increasing the return on tourism income.  
222 However, they can also limit the livelihood options of residents by restricting access to assets (DFID,  
223 1999). Vulnerability context includes trends, shocks, and seasonality, which fundamentally impact  
224 people’s livelihoods and the availability of assets, but these factors are beyond the control of local  
225 residents (Scoones, 1998; Shen et al., 2008). Positive livelihood outcomes encompass “more income,  
226 increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, more sustainable use of the  
227 natural resource base, and recovered human dignity” (Serrat, 2017, p. 24). In the cultural heritage  
228 tourism context, the sustainable use of cultural heritage resources, community empowerment, and  
229 sustainable tourism development also require attention.

### 231 **3. Research Context**

232 Fujian *tulou* is an exemplary site for research into the impacts of heritage tourism on residents’  
233 livelihoods, as it serves as a rural residential area and has been a WCHS since 2008. *Tulou* (literally  
234 translated as earthen building) showcases outstanding architecture, as an example of large rammed  
235 earth and timber architecture with compartmentalised interiors, often with highly decorated surfaces.  
236 Either circular or square, a classic round *tulou* consists of more than 1000 square meters, spanning  
237 three to five floors, and can accommodate up to 600 people (Fujian Provincial Bureau of Cultural  
238 Heritage, 2008). As such, *tulou* promotes a distinctive type of compact communal living,  
239 demonstrating the harmonious co-existence between nature and humankind.

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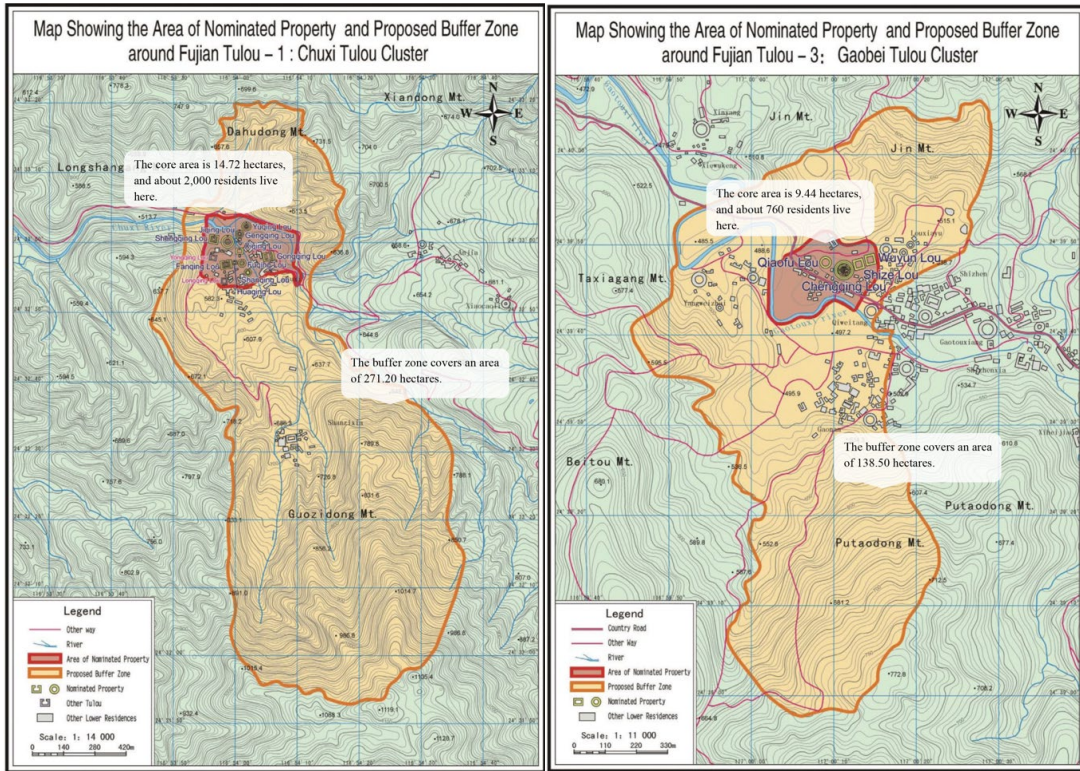




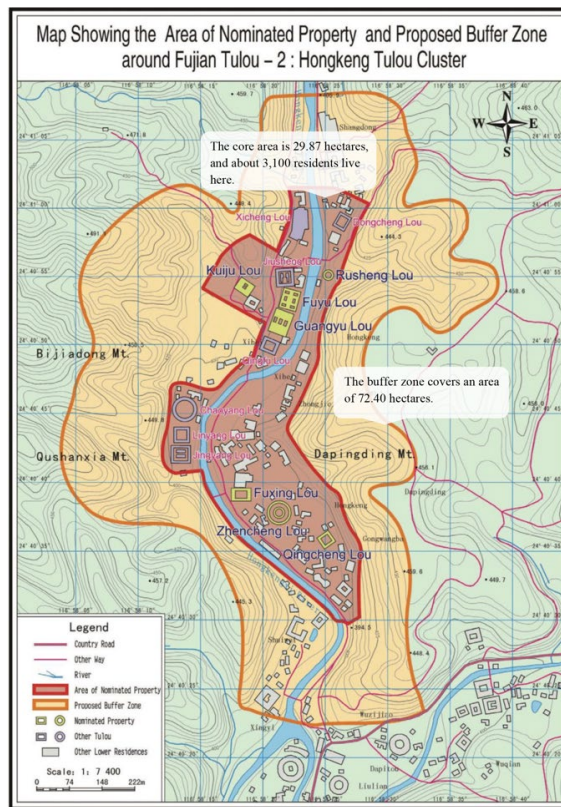
Fig. 2. The map of Fujian *tulou* location based on Google map © the first author

There are six WCHS *tulou* clusters, located in three counties/districts in Fujian, a province on the Chinese coast (Fig. 2). Yongding district has the most WCHS *tulou* clusters (three), which are dispersed across three traditional villages (Chuxi, Gaobei and Hongkeng), and have existed for centuries. Most residents live in the same cluster, sharing blood relations, surnames, and cultural customs. These three clusters were all planned as tourist attractions in 2007 (Yongding County History Gazetteers Compilation Committee, 2009; Official Website of Longyan Municipal People’s Government, 2018), with different characteristics in terms of population and surface areas to visit (see Fig. 3, the data from Xiayang, Hukeng, & Gaotou town governments). After the Fujian *tulou* were elevated to a WCHS, the number of visitors to *tulou* tourist attractions in Yongding increased dramatically, rising from 375,000 in 2008 to over 6.86 million in 2019 (Longyan Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2020; Southern Fujian Website, 2018). Consequently, Yongding was selected for this study to assess how tourism growth impacted local livelihoods. (See Figs. 3 and 4.)

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Fig 3. The maps of three WCHS clusters in Yongding (Cultural Relics Bureau of Yongding District of Longyan Municipality, 2008)



262  
263 Fig 4. Example of *tulou* in Yongding © the first author  
264

#### 265 4. Methodology

266 This section outlines the research methodology and describes the sampling of this project, the  
267 processes of data collection and data analysis. Interpretivists realised the uniqueness of human  
268 inquiry and how the existence of multiple realities is formed by various socio-cultural contexts  
269 (Mohajan, 2018; Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivism uses qualitative methods to understand the  
270 perceptions of communities or individuals and to explain their actions in the social world based on  
271 this understanding (Chowdhury, 2014; Goldkuhl, 2012; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This study uses  
272 interpretivism as its methodological framework. This paradigm allows the researcher to explore  
273 phenomena in a natural setting (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Bryman, 2016), considering community  
274 residents' subjective livelihood experiences after their residential buildings have been designated a  
275 WCHS and tourist attractions.

276 To enhance credibility and rigour, this research employed triangulation, using multiple methods  
277 or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena as suggested by Baxter and  
278 Eyles (1996) and Patton (1990). Thus, this study collected data through three approaches: semi-  
279 structured interviews, non-participatory observation, and secondary data. To understand the case site,  
280 secondary data were collected from the local government official website, UNESCO website, and  
281 policy documents (e.g. WCHS nomination, heritage conservation, and tourism development). In June  
282 2019, observation was employed, which enables researchers to record information about the visual  
283 elements of the heritage site, such as the authenticity and integrity of *tulou*, housing conditions, and  
284 facilities. In addition, the researcher lived with villagers and learned about *tulou* from their  
285 perspective. The researcher observed residents' daily life, including how they participate in tourism  
286 and other livelihood activities. Field notes were taken during the observation. Semi-structured  
287 interviews were also conducted to investigate stakeholder perceptions of the impacts of nominating  
288 WCHS on local livelihood practices. As community residents' livelihoods are affected by external

289 stakeholders, this research not only interviewed residents, but also key government officials and  
 290 managers of tourism development companies (Table 1).

291

292 Table 1. Basic information about interviewees and main interview questions

Interview Type	Role	Location	Number of interviewees	Main interview questions
Household	Community residents	Chuxi	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic information about households (e.g. family size, residence time)</li> <li>• Are local residents encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of heritage protection and tourism development?</li> <li>• How do the WCHS nomination and transformation into tourist attraction affect residents' livelihoods assets and strategies?</li> <li>• What vulnerabilities do residents face in their livelihood?</li> </ul>
		Gaobei	6	
		Hongkeng	6	
Town government	The key town government official	Chuxi	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the local government participate in heritage conservation and tourism development?</li> <li>• What are the main laws and regulations related to tourism development and heritage protection?</li> <li>• What are the main documents related to <i>tulou</i> WCHS nomination?</li> <li>• How do tourism development and cultural heritage conservation affect the livelihoods of local residents?</li> </ul>
		Gaobei	1	
		Hongkeng	1	
Fujian Hakka Tulou Tourism Development Co., Ltd	The key manager	Hongkeng	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What business scope does the enterprise include?</li> <li>• What responsibilities and rights does the enterprise have in tourism management?</li> <li>• How does the enterprise affect community livelihood assets, such as providing skills training to residents?</li> </ul>

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294 Semi-structured interviews are a flexible research tool that allows the interviewer to prepare  
 295 questions ahead of time and investigate any interesting points raised by the interviewees (Bryman,  
 296 2016). This study developed the research protocol and interview questions following the four-stage  
 297 interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework suggested by Castillo-Montoya (2016) and Yeong,  
 298 Ismail, Ismail, and Hamzah (2018). First, based on previous literature, the research team formulated  
 299 preliminary interview questions consistent with the research questions (Jones, Torres, & Arminio,  
 300 2013). Second, the initial questions were refined to make them less of an academic inquiry, but more  
 301 of an inquiry-based conversation. The third step involved two experienced qualitative researchers  
 302 reviewing the interview protocol's structure, content, writing style, and ease of comprehension  
 303 (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). In the final step, five participants from the case study site were randomly  
 304 recruited on the street to participate in a pilot test. Feedback from pilot testing helped refine the

305 interview questions' clarity and user-friendliness, and ensure the smooth flow of conversation,  
 306 enhancing the interview's reliability and validity (Maxwell, 2012).

307 Snowball sampling was used for participant recruitment. Due to the social relations established  
 308 by staying in a homestay in the village, the first author approached the first interviewee and asked for  
 309 a referral at the end of each interview. Nevertheless, a snowball sampling method can be problematic  
 310 because it may be affected by self-selection bias (Baxter & Eyles, 1996). To reduce this bias, the  
 311 researcher visited various *tulou* and approached diverse households to listen to different voices.

312 According to the demographic statistics from the three town governments in 2018, the total  
 313 number of households in the three clusters (Chuxi, Hongkeng, and Gaobei) was about 1590. The  
 314 research did not stop collecting information until data reached the point of saturation, when there  
 315 were no new themes generated from the last two interviews (Saunders et al., 2018; Vandecasteele et  
 316 al., 2015). Finally, twenty-two in-depth stakeholder interviews, including eighteen household  
 317 interviews, were carried out with the consent of participants in the core areas, since these  
 318 households' livelihoods are most susceptible to tourist development and the restrictions of cultural  
 319 heritage protection. Representatives of family interviews include combinations of different genders  
 320 and ages. Their families engage in various tourism activities and non-tourism activities (see Table 2  
 321 for details).

322  
 323 Table 2. Profiles of interviewed community residents

No. Household	Gender	Age	Education level	Household size	Livelihood activities	Tourism activities
H1	Male	66	Elementary school	5	Tourism activities, agricultural activities	Local speciality store
H2	Female	47	Middle school	5	Tourism activities	Restaurant, tourist guide
H3	Male	47	High school	6	Tourism activities	Local speciality store, restaurant
H4	Male	53	Elementary school	5	Tourism activities, urban migration	Scenic spot cleaner
H5	Female	38	Junior college	4	Tourism activities, education	Convenience store
H6	Male	64	High school	4	Tourism activities, medical treatment	Convenience store
H7	Male	84	Middle school	5	Tourism activities, urban migration	Souvenir store
H8	Male	39	High school	7	Tourism activities	Restaurant, homestay
H9	Female	32	High school	5	Tourism activities	Tourist guide, homestay
H10	Female	49	Middle school	6	Tourism activities	Tourist guide, souvenirs store
H11	Male	65	Middle school	6	Tourism activities, urban migration	Souvenirs store, hotel staff
H12	Female	51	Elementary school	5	Tourism activities	Local speciality store, scenic spot cleaner
H13	Male	27	Middle school	4	Tourism activities	Restaurant
H14	Male	25	High school	5	Tourism activities	Homestay, restaurant
H15	Female	52	Middle school	6	Tourism activities, agricultural activities	Photographer, restaurant

H16	Female	41	High school	6	Tourism activities, agricultural activities	Local speciality store, tourist guide
H17	Female	58	Elementary school	2	Tourism activities	Convenience store
H18	Male	37	Junior college	5	Tourism activities	Local speciality store

324

325 This study utilised coding to reorganise the data to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning  
 326 (Moscardo, 2001). Interviews and observation data from the recorded sources were translated from  
 327 Chinese into English, transcribed, and then imported to NVivo for analysis. Current research utilises  
 328 deductive thematic analysis to analyse data. This approach is considered appropriate when there is a  
 329 predetermined research framework or theory (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).  
 330 Based on Fig. 1, the predetermined categories were organised into five general themes: the  
 331 transforming structures and processes, livelihood assets, livelihood activities, vulnerabilities and  
 332 livelihood outcomes. Themes were further segmented based on the frequency found in interview  
 333 transcripts. By identifying the connection between themes, this research gained deeper insights into  
 334 the meaning of the data. This study conducted member checking after the interview sessions to  
 335 enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Clark, 2017). Interview transcripts and  
 336 interpretations were presented to participants to check whether their views were reflected accurately  
 337 (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).

338

### 339 **5 Results**

340 Based on the adapted livelihood framework, this section analyses how the nomination of  
 341 WCHS status and the introduction of tourism activities have reshaped the structures and processes of  
 342 local livelihoods. The section will then examine the consequent changes in the six types of livelihood  
 343 capitals, livelihood strategy, livelihood outcomes, and vulnerabilities.

344

#### 345 **5.1 The Transforming Structures and Processes of Livelihoods in *tulou* clusters**

346 This section focuses on heritage conservation, tourism development and community self-  
 347 organisation in terms of structures and processes. Regarding heritage conservation, traditionally,  
 348 clan-based institutions played a dominant role in *tulou* management (Yongding County History  
 349 Gazetteers Compilation Committee, 2009). The patriarch was selected by the villagers and regarded  
 350 as *tulou*'s manager, organising cultural activities, promoting the family motto, and arranging the  
 351 maintenance of *tulou*. In the 1990s, the *tulou* management model was gradually based on political  
 352 institutions, as the local government was responsible for the management and protection of *tulou*  
 353 (Yongding County History Gazetteers Compilation Committee, 2009). To prepare for WCHS  
 354 nomination, the Yongding government established a *tulou* World Cultural Heritage Nomination

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355 Committee and also established heritage conservation regulations adhering to the “Operational  
356 Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention”, mandated by the UNESCO  
357 World Heritage Centre (2008). These guidelines highlight expert knowledge, involving “evaluation  
358 by qualified experts” and “the delineation of a buffer zone” to ensure “the survival of the property  
359 and protect it from developments and changes that may negatively affect the OUV or the integrity  
360 and authenticity of the property” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2008, pp. 6, 25). Consequently,  
361 the primary responsibility for the designation and conservation of heritage belongs to heritage  
362 authorities, namely political officials and heritage experts. Heritage authorities have formulated  
363 corresponding conservation rules at the national and local levels to protect the integrity and  
364 authenticity of heritage and oversee the construction of buildings around *tulou*.

365 After *tulou* clusters were successfully listed as a WCHS, the local government incorporated  
366 “making every endeavour to develop tourism” and “regarding tourism as a strategic industry to boost  
367 economic development” into “Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan in Yongding District”. In  
368 2011, the WCHS *tulou* clusters were designated as tourist attractions and upgraded to a national 5A  
369 tourist attraction (the highest level in China’s tourist categorisation) (Yongding County History  
370 Gazetteers Compilation Committee, 2009; Official Website of Longyan Municipal People’s  
371 Government, 2018).

372 Although residents have the ownership of *tulou* through the village collective, the building’s  
373 operating rights have changed significantly. Based on an operating lease, the operation rights of  
374 *tulou* have been ceded to Fujian Hakka Tulou Tourism Development Co. Ltd. (hereafter abbreviated  
375 as FHTTDC). The enterprise fully leases the site and then develops *tulou* clusters, operating them  
376 through ticket collection. Within this model, the enterprise shares a portion of its revenue with  
377 relevant stakeholders, in accordance with their agreement. FHTTDC is state owned, with the local  
378 district-level government owning over 70% of its shares. The enterprise mainly engages in tourism  
379 services, tourism resource development, the construction of tourist attractions, and skills training.  
380 Although the FHTTDC controls the management and planning of these services and development,  
381 the state retains substantial control over the enterprise because it has majority ownership (Goldeng,  
382 Grünfeld, & Benito, 2008). Before 2017, the FHTTDC’s senior managers and employees were  
383 basically all from Yongding’s district tourism bureau. These dual identities led to the formation of  
384 alliances between the local government and the FHTTDC. Although workers in the FHTTDC are not  
385 civil servants, one key manager revealed in the interview that the enterprise’s scenic planning  
386 documents still need to be approved by the local government.

387 In terms of community self-organisation, most interviewed residents indicated that they only  
 388 serve as tourism providers, providing services or products for tourists. They do not see opportunities  
 389 to participate in decisions regarding tourism development and heritage protection, nor is there any  
 390 community organisation to enable resident participation in decision-making. Some participants  
 391 reported that:

392  
 393 *In the early planning stages, the government expropriated land from residents near tulou to*  
 394 *build tourism infrastructure. Land acquisition is actually mandatory. I found that the land*  
 395 *acquisition team held a scenic area planning map. I think the land acquisition team should first*  
 396 *consult with the public before planning such maps. If the residents agree, the team can*  
 397 *expropriate land and plan the tourist attractions. (H6)*

398  
 399 *We don't have any community organisations here to organise villagers' meetings to collect*  
 400 *residents' opinions. It's all the government's decision. We can't decide anything and no one*  
 401 *will listen to us. (H18)*

402

403

Table 3: The transforming structures and processes in cultural heritage tourism

	Structures		Processes	
	Main stakeholders	Primary role	Main laws, policies or regulations	Issued year
Heritage conservation	UNESCO	• Formulates and issues the WHS nomination guideline	• UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention	2008
	Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China	• Formulates and issues national regulations related to cultural heritage protection	• National Measures on the Protection and Management of the World Cultural Heritage	2006
	Province government/ Standing Committee of Peoples Congress of Fujian Province	• Formulates and publishes cultural heritage protection regulations related to Fujian tulou	• Management Measures of Fujian Province for the Protection of Fujian Tulou	2006
			• Fujian Tulou: Protection Plan of Yongding Hakka Tulou Provisions on the Protection and Management of earthen buildings in Fujian (Yongding)	2006
			• Regulations of Fujian Province for the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage Fujian Tulou	2011
	District government	• Formulates and publishes cultural heritage protection regulations related to Yongding tulou	• Provisions on the Protection and Management of earthen buildings in Fujian (Yongding)	2007
Town government	• Popularises laws and regulations related to cultural heritage • Manages tulou buffer zone and core area	• Supplementary provisions on the Protection and Management of the Cultural Heritage of Tulou in Fujian (Yongding)	2008	



	Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the authenticity of heritage</li> <li>• Review heritage discourse</li> <li>• Provide suggestions to tulou maintenance and conservation</li> </ul>		
Tourism development	National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulates rating standards for national tourist attractions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Measures for the Quality Grade Evaluation of Tourist Areas</li> <li>• Classification and Evaluation of Quality Grades in Tourist Attractions</li> </ul>	2003 2003
	District government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulates district tourism development plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2008-2020 Overall Plan for Tourism Development in Yongding County, Fujian Province</li> <li>• Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan in Yongding District</li> </ul>	2008 2016
	Town government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates and implements tourism development plans</li> </ul>		
	FHTTDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages tulou tourist attractions</li> </ul>		
Community Self-organisation	Village collective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide services or goods to tourists</li> <li>• Share economic benefits from the tourism industry</li> </ul>		

404

## 405 **5.2 The Consequences of WHS Status on Livelihood Capitals in *tulou* clusters**

### 406 **5.2.1 Natural Capital**

407 Upgrading *tulou* clusters as a national 5A tourist attraction was taken into account in the early  
408 planning stages, resulting in the local government building tourism infrastructure to meet the  
409 requirements from “Classification and Evaluation of Quality Grades in Tourist Attractions”.  
410 Consequently, the natural capital was directly affected by land acquisition measures for tourism  
411 development. Many fertile farmlands and vegetable fields were then transformed into tourism-related  
412 infrastructure such as roads, parking lots, and ticket sales centres. The cultivated areas within the  
413 tourist attraction decreased. For example, as of the end of December 2018, these areas in Chuxi and  
414 Hongkeng were reduced by 133,334 square meters and 100,000 square meters, respectively (The  
415 data from Xiayang and Hukeng town governments). Similarly, although Gaobei was only reduced by  
416 36,667 square meters, the reduced area accounted for about 60% of the total cultivated land area  
417 (The data from Gaotou town government).

418

### 419 **5.2.2 Physical Capital**

420 Many interviewees reported that they believed tourism development would increase local  
421 infrastructure, most notably roads and public toilets. However, it was observed that the significant  
422 improvements of facilities are limited to Gaobei and Hongkeng. In Chuxi, tourism infrastructure  
423 such as the ticket centre is still under construction. All interviewees in Chuxi reported discontent

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424 with ‘FHTTDC and local government’ s lower investment in their *tulou* cluster, and the general  
425 feeling that resource allocation across scenic spots was unfair.

426 During government officials’ interviews, respondents usually used the term “authenticity” to  
427 legitimise the deconstruction plan, referring to the action of demolition houses as environmental  
428 improvement measures. For example, one key official explained, “To meet the authenticity  
429 requirements of the application for the WCHS, experts suggested developing a management plan to  
430 delineate a protected core area and buffer zone. In the core area, it is necessary to carry out  
431 environmental improvement measures to demolish modern buildings, since these buildings are too  
432 intrusive and incompatible with the traditional style of *tulou* heritage area.” In order to apply for the  
433 WCHS, environmental improvement measures demolished more than 56,800 square meters of  
434 building area (Yongding County History Gazetteers Compilation Committee, 2009). Conservation  
435 regulations also restrict the construction of new buildings in tourist attractions to protect a consistent  
436 architectural style of *tulou*. Over 70% of residents in the interviews revealed that many residents face  
437 restricted housing renewal, relocation or limited living space due to environmental improvement  
438 measures. Some interviewees reported:

439  
440 *I am delighted that the earth building constructed by our ancestors was selected as a WCHS,*  
441 *but our new house was demolished. Our family can only live in tulou. Ten years ago, my*  
442 *husband, two sons and I lived in a room that was 10m<sup>2</sup>. But now my sons are over 20 years old,*  
443 *still living with us. It is difficult for young bachelors living in tulou to find a wife because there*  
444 *is no spare room to live. (H15)*

445  
446 *In the past, toilets were not allowed to be built in a tulou due to technical problems. Nowadays,*  
447 *with technical improvements, every household has its own toilet, but our tulou residents do not.*  
448 *It is very inconvenient to go to the toilet in the middle of the night. I have to go downstairs and*  
449 *go to the public toilet next to the tulou. (H12)*

450

### 451 **5.2.3 Cultural capital**

452 Since successfully applying for the WCHS status, Yongding government has significantly  
453 strengthened and has started including *tulou* protection and management funds in its financial  
454 budget, which contribute to protecting earthen building materials. However, intangible cultural  
455 heritage has been nationalised to some extent since the unified, official discourse has become  
456 dominated by FHTTDC and experts. For example, the Qingcheng Building not only displays the

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457 Hakkas family motto, but also illustrates the socialist values proposed by the Communist Party of  
458 China. By contrast, the heritage discourse of the villagers has been weakened. All interviewed tour  
459 guides reported that they could not receive payment for presenting *tulou* to tourists based on their  
460 understanding or the knowledge they inherited from their grandparents; otherwise, they would be  
461 treated as illegal guides. One interviewee commented:

462

463 *The content we explain has a unified standard, since we need to attend tour guide training from*  
464 *FHTTDC, read books edited by experts and pass the exam. (H9)*

465

466 In addition, rapid tourism development may lead to a decrease in traditional cultural activities.  
467 Before their homes were designated as tourist destinations, residents frequently celebrated traditional  
468 festivals, held worship services, and joined folklore performances, such as puppet shows and Minxi  
469 Han opera. There are significant numbers of tourists during holidays, which represent the peak  
470 season for tourism. Over 70% of the interviewed people reported that they must sacrifice time  
471 otherwise spent engaging in cultural activities in favour of the tourism business. One interviewee  
472 stated:

473

474 *Worship service is a Hakka traditional ritual, held to show respect and gratitude to the gods*  
475 *and ancestors of local residents. On the birthday of Bogong, the villagers have to offer rich*  
476 *sacrifices to the Bogong Temple. In the past, Bogong was regarded as a patron saint of the*  
477 *village, and the residents would pray to him for a great agricultural harvest. Now, the residents*  
478 *are busy entertaining guests and have no time to worship the gods. (H15)*

479

#### 480 **5.2.4 Human Capital**

481 It is not easy for residents to adopt heritage tourism as a new livelihood activity. For this new  
482 industry, residents require a different set of skills than their already mastered farming and rammed  
483 earth skills. Many interviewees pointed out that in order to become a qualified tour guide, FHTTDC  
484 provides them with training in skills such as Mandarin, communication, and first aid. Self-employed  
485 residents also actively learn skills. Notably, homestay families learn online marketing skills to  
486 further promote sales.

487 However, heritage conservation has the potential to adversely affect the human capital of the  
488 site. From national to district regulations, all refer to protecting the authenticity and integrity of  
489 heritage. Protective measures in Article 22 of “Regulations of Fujian Province for the Protection of

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490 the World Cultural Heritage Fujian *tulou*” require that the repair of “Fujian *tulou*” shall follow the  
491 principle of not changing its original state, and maintain its original materials, traditional structure,  
492 shape and craft, and historical appearance. This kind of rigid maintenance has the potential to  
493 adversely affect the safety of community residents. For example, vertical cracks have appeared on  
494 the wall of a west side room in Zhencheng Building. The walls have begun to incline outwards and  
495 the main beams have become significantly bent, with the potential for rain to damage the cultural  
496 relics and for the house to collapse at any time. One interviewee commented:

497

498 *A group of residents jointly applied for repairs five years ago, but there was still no result at*  
499 *present. The government informed us that the experts claimed there are no suitable materials*  
500 *for repairs. Although the earth building belongs to our local residents, it seems that we do not*  
501 *have enough power to repair it. In desperation, our residents can only use a few pieces of wood*  
502 *to support this dangerous building. We feel that the expert is acting too rigidly. We argue that*  
503 *the maintenance materials do not necessarily need to be completely in accordance with the*  
504 *previous materials, as long as they are in harmony with the cultural relics. Although the image*  
505 *of tulou is very important, the safety of its residents also needs to be provided for. (H18)*

506

### 507 **5.2.5 Economic Capital**

508 Almost all interviewees reported that they believed tourism increased their household income  
509 from ticket dividends and tourism business. Residents living in scenic spots receive 8% of ticket  
510 revenue. However, the income gap among different households or villages has widened. Gaobei is  
511 the most famous cluster, attracting about 900,000 tourists, followed by Hongkeng with about  
512 700,000 in 2018 (data from interviewed government officials). As a result of its poor infrastructure  
513 and remote location, Chuxi *tulou* cluster was visited by approximately 30,000 tourists in 2018 (data  
514 from interviewed government officials). Thus, the per capita ticket dividend in Gaobei *tulou* cluster  
515 (RMB 2800) is seventy times that of the Chuxi *tulou* cluster (RMB 40). The number of tourists and  
516 infrastructure conditions increase the disparity in household income between different villages.

517

518 One Gaobei interviewee stated:

519 *My family transformed our house into a snack restaurant and a homestay, generating a yearly*  
520 *income of about RMB 350,000. This income supports the daily expenses of seven family*  
521 *members. (H8)*

522

---

523 However, one interviewee in Chuxi reported:  
524 *Our five-person household annual income is RMB 98,000, mainly composed of remittances,*  
525 *while the tourist income from doing cleaning in scenic spots is only RMB 15,000. The reason is*  
526 *that Chuxi attracts very few overnight tourists, and you cannot make money from homestay even*  
527 *if you have extra rooms. (H4)*

528

### 529 **5.2.6 Social Capital**

530 Arguably, heritage tourism promotes cultural exchange and fosters the community's pride. All  
531 interviewed tour guides expressed that, when they explain the structure and functions of these  
532 buildings to tourists, they take pride in the wisdom of their ancestors. However, the development of  
533 tourism has also caused ruptures in a formerly cohesive community. Seeking to capitalise on the  
534 economic benefits of tourism, many people have begun to set up stalls and open restaurants. One  
535 interviewee revealed:

536

537 *In the past, residents lived in harmony. As commercial competition has increased, so too have*  
538 *disputes between residents, such as poaching competitors' consumers. Many residents focus on*  
539 *economic benefits while ignoring the simple and honest neighbourhood relationship. (H17)*

540

541 Beyond this intra-community tension, the development has also negatively impacted the sense  
542 of cohesion and solidarity between villages. When tour guides introduced *tulou* to tourists, some  
543 gave a hierarchical ranking of *tulou* clusters, deliberately destroying the reputation of other villages,  
544 resulting in the cancellation of the joint ticket (H7; H9; H10; H12). One interviewee in Gaobei  
545 explained:

546

547 *Some Hongkeng tour guides slanderously said that the ugly Gaobei tulou cluster was only*  
548 *worth RMB 8, since the single ticket for Hongkeng tulou cluster was RMB 90 and a combined*  
549 *ticket was RMB 98 for these two clusters. As a result of this particular dispute, our villagers*  
550 *boycott the tourist guides from Hongkeng and tourists who purchased a joint ticket. The reason*  
551 *is we feared that the tour guides would destroy the image of our village and our villagers'*  
552 *income would decrease. (H10)*

553

### 554 **5.3 The new livelihoods strategy: Cultural heritage tourism activities**

---

555 Tourism development has led to multiple uses of the same livelihood asset, creating a conflict  
556 between traditional livelihoods and tourism activities. Some interviewees (H1; H5; H9; H13; H15;  
557 H16) reported that it was not convenient for villagers to dry grains anymore. One interviewee  
558 explained:

559  
560 *In previous grain harvest seasons, we would put the grains on a flat, broad land designated for*  
561 *drying grain. However, squares and roads have now been built in these areas. If we continue*  
562 *drying grain in the same place, the scenic area management staff will stop us. (H16)*

563  
564 The residential place as a tourist attraction also disturbs the daily life of residents. There are no  
565 restrictions on the opening hours of the tourist attractions unless there are natural disasters or a virus  
566 pandemic. Over 60% of interviewees in this research reported that the tourism industry had disturbed  
567 their living conditions, most notably through an increase in noise and crowding. Some interviewees  
568 revealed:

569  
570 *During this holiday period, tourists congested tulou. Although the distance between the kitchen*  
571 *and dining room is only one meter, it is difficult to bring food from the kitchen to the dining*  
572 *room because there are too many visitors in the corridors. (H10)*

573  
574 *It's too noisy to live here. Sometimes three tour guides talk through with three loudspeakers at*  
575 *the same time. I even use cloth to plug the ears. (H7)*

576  
577 In addition, some buildings even transformed into museums to exhibit antiques. For example,  
578 according to observations, Jiqing Building has been divided into more than 50 exhibition rooms,  
579 displaying ancient coins and defence weapons to show the life of ancestors. However, original  
580 residents face resettlement or displacement.

581 The residents outside WCHS *tulou* have also been significantly affected. The development of  
582 tourism erased their quiet living environment. During a protest in 2011, some villagers clashed with  
583 security personnel when attempting to prevent tourists from entering the tourist sites. People  
584 continued the protests until the FHTTDC decided to distribute 8% of ticket income to the villagers of  
585 all three sites, regardless of whether or not they lived in WCHS *tulou*. The interviewed government  
586 officials and FHTTDC manager regard this revenue distribution as “resource sharing fees”, but many  
587 villagers refer to it as “disturbance fees” (H4; H7; H13; H14; H15).

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588

589 **5.4 Livelihood outcomes and vulnerability**

590 Before the WCHS designation, most residents relied on agricultural activities for their  
591 livelihood, while some served as short-term urban migrant workers. After the WCHS designation  
592 and the growth of heritage tourism, new business opportunities motivated some migrants to return  
593 home.

594 Now, due to the decrease in the area of cultivated land for infrastructures, many residents who  
595 were originally engaged in primary industries rely on tourism activities. *Tulou* residents participate  
596 in tourism activities in two main forms. First, some residents are employed by the tourism enterprise,  
597 working as security guards, tourist guides, and hotel staff. Second, self-employed residents usually  
598 have household-based businesses; they have opened local speciality stores, convenience stores,  
599 homestay ventures, and restaurants. The excessive dependence on tourism as a single livelihood  
600 strategy can increase vulnerability. Tourism activities have seasonal attributes caused by the  
601 fluctuation in the number of tourists, and this directly affects the prices of tourism products and  
602 services. One respondent involved in homestay operations reported:

603

604 *Our homestay has six rooms. During the holidays, especially the Chinese New Festival, the*  
605 *rooms are fully booked since there are too many tourists. But in the off-season, the occupancy*  
606 *rate of the homestay is less than 20%, and the price usually drops by about 50%. (H14)*

607

608 **6. Discussion and implications**

609 This research has adapted the sustainable livelihood framework to study cultural heritage  
610 tourism. The findings reveal that the structures and processes of heritage conservation and tourism  
611 development have changed following the WHS nomination, influencing livelihood practices in a  
612 living cultural heritage site. The result shows that the livelihood sustainability of Fujian *tulou*  
613 residents is negatively affected.

614 Regarding the alteration of structures and processes, the local government and the FHTTDC  
615 utilise the WCHS brand and have joined forces to govern tourism, a strategic pillar of industry that  
616 has been incorporated into the local economic development. The model of heritage management has  
617 also changed, gradually shifting from clan-based institutions to political institutions. Under the  
618 influence of UNESCO and the persuasive heritage discourses it sanctions, China has adhered to  
619 Western criteria and management ideologies (Gao et al., 2019; Zhang, 2017; Zhu, 2015), as also  
620 observed in this study where a focus on experts' knowledge and tangible heritage authenticity has

---

621 significantly impacted local livelihoods. From a pure heritage conservation point of view, such an  
622 approach contributes to better heritage conservation, consistent with previous findings (Kausar &  
623 Nishikawa, 2010; Omar et al., 2013). However, maintaining an authentic past in living heritage sites  
624 can be illusory since it requires continual manipulations. Consequentially, *tulou* clusters face  
625 “museumification” and tend to be regarded as heritage relics and tourist attractions. The following  
626 policies and strategies for improving SL are proposed from this study on three key livelihood issues  
627 that arise from the structural and processual changes in heritage conservation and tourism  
628 development.

629 Firstly, heritage politics and regulations that aim to "freeze" the past negatively affect  
630 contemporary community livelihoods, increasing residents' safety risks and depriving them of the  
631 right to improve their housing conditions. In living heritage sites, heritage conservation should shift  
632 to a people-centered approach (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015; Poulios, 2014) that meets their livelihood  
633 needs and expectations. This approach echoes Chapagain's (2013) contention that Asian heritage is  
634 dynamic, beginning from and surrounding its people. The authenticity of living heritage is reflected  
635 in the continuation of spiritual values, but not necessarily material values (Silva, 2013). The current  
636 single heritage management paradigm, based on expert knowledge, ignores the inseparability of  
637 residents and living cultural heritage, leading to incomplete analyses of heritage authenticity and  
638 singularity. Consequently, current heritage conservation regulations do not consider the *tulou* as a  
639 residential building and do not respect the continuation of spiritual culture. It is suggested that  
640 indigenous knowledge should be an essential reference for WHS nomination. Heritage management  
641 should be shifted from expert-based management to a negotiated management system between  
642 experts and indigenous people, allowing residents to fully participate in heritage value identification  
643 and the formulation of heritage management rules, as suggested by Liu, Jin, and Dupre (2022) in  
644 another context. Based on the deep interaction between the community and heritage sites, residents  
645 can likely contribute to a management approach that maintains living heritage sites' singularity and  
646 authenticity. As a result, UNESCO could provide more flexible heritage management approaches  
647 incorporating more informal cultural practices based on indigenous tradition.

648 Secondly, tourism development strategies can widen the livelihoods gap between villages.  
649 Previous livelihood studies reveal that the rapid development of tourism has increased the gap  
650 between livelihood outcomes in different households, identifying that the main factors in this gap are  
651 household specific, such as residents' educational levels and political status (Ma et al., 2018; Su et  
652 al., 2019; Taylor, 2017). However, this study has observed that influential outsider stakeholders are a  
653 primary factor. By prioritising scenic spots with stronger resource endowments in the tourism



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654 industry to make profits, external stakeholders contributed to the increased gap in livelihood assets  
655 among different villages. An important reason for this is that China is a socialist country where  
656 paternalism prevails in governance (Brink, 2019). Residents often rely on the government, expecting  
657 it to help them develop tourism and improve their livelihoods (Chen et al., 2020). However, the local  
658 government does not consider the tourism-driven livelihoods gap between villages, nor is this  
659 disparity reflected in local policies. Moving forward, the tourism planning department should fully  
660 tap into the advantages of tourism resources in different villages and avoid competition between  
661 villages through heterogeneous tourism products and services. Tourism enterprises should promote  
662 cooperation and communication across villages, coordinate development, and carry out regional  
663 marketing to increase the overall tourism demand for the region.

664 Thirdly, weak community self-organisation could negatively affect residents' traditional  
665 livelihoods and cultural activities. Farmland has been transformed to improve infrastructure, forcing  
666 residents to abandon agricultural activities. Residents sacrifice time for traditional cultural activities  
667 to entertain the large numbers of tourists expected by external investors. A power disparity between  
668 residents and stakeholders puts residents in a vulnerable position in terms of livelihood development  
669 (Chen et al., 2020). This indicates that the SL approach cannot focus just on access to resources.  
670 Residents' decision-making power regarding livelihood resources and community self-organisation  
671 deserves more attention. Community organisations should be developed to foster self-organisation  
672 skills and enable residents to share their views, experiences, and knowledge. Additionally,  
673 community organisations should be empowered to engage in negotiations and dialogue with external  
674 stakeholders by establishing formal legal processes for community participation. In addition, digital  
675 media such as live streaming can be used to report on negotiation and voting among different  
676 stakeholders, making decision-making fairer and more transparent, therefore safeguarding the  
677 livelihood interests of residents.

678 Besides the practical implications discussed above, this study makes several theoretical  
679 contributions. The major contribution lies in extending the theory of sustainable livelihoods,  
680 modifying the SLF for living cultural heritage sites research. These modifications include (1)  
681 identifying cultural heritage as significant livelihood capital, (2) emphasising assets that residents  
682 can control, and (3) highlighting community self-organisation as an important aspect of transforming  
683 structures and processes. This modified SLF is a potential theoretical model that can be applied to  
684 other tourist destinations rich in cultural heritage resources, more comprehensively characterising  
685 sustainable livelihoods for households.

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686 This article also expands the understanding of cultural heritage management's impact on  
687 residents' livelihoods. This research indicates that it is insufficient for heritage management to focus  
688 solely on the heritage itself because cultural heritage conservation sometimes comes at the expense  
689 of other important livelihood assets and inhabitants' traditional activities. Therefore, future  
690 researchers need to develop a more integrated approach to heritage management, focusing on  
691 protecting and utilising cultural heritage and improving the synergistic relationship between heritage  
692 and other livelihood resources to improve residents' sustainable livelihoods.

693 This study has some limitations, as it mainly focuses on households participating in tourism  
694 activities in the core area of the *tulou* clusters. It has not explored the livelihoods of households that  
695 do not engage in the tourist industry or people who move to other villages due to heritage  
696 conservation. Concerning the structural elements that impact local livelihoods, this study considered  
697 only the local government, NGO, experts, and state-owned enterprises. In future studies, to gain a  
698 comprehensive understanding of the role of transforming processes and structures, a broader range of  
699 stakeholders (such as private enterprises and tourists) should be examined. Further studies would  
700 also benefit from exploring how vulnerable residents have experienced changes in their livelihoods  
701 due to WHS nomination.

702

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940 **Appendix A: Interview Questions (Duration of the interviews varied between 60 and 90 minutes)**

941 **Questions for community residents**

942 **Section 1: Background Information**

943 1. Respondent's gender

944 2. How old are you?

945 3. What is your highest level of education? Elementary school \_\_\_ Middle school \_\_\_ High  
 946 school \_\_\_ University/ Junior College \_\_\_

947 4. How long have you been living in there?

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5. How many people are there in your family?

**Section 2: The Transforming Structures and Processes**

1. Who owns the ownership and operation rights of *tulou*?
2. What are your viewpoints about the role of FHTTDC and local government in tourism development?
3. Do you have the opportunity to participate in the planning or management of *tulou* tourist attractions? If so, how?
4. Does local government/ FHTTDC listen to your opinions?

**Section 3: Sustainable Livelihoods**

**1. Economic Capital/ Livelihood Strategies**

1.1 Before *tulou* clusters being designated for a WCHS what did your family do for a living?  
Now what do your family do for a living?

- 1.2 Do your family participate in tourism activities? If so, how?
- 1.3 How has tourism influenced your family economically?
- 1.4 What is the annual income of your family?
- 1.5 What major expenditures has your family made?

**2. Natural Capital**

- 2.1 Does tourism affect your family's access to natural resources?
- 2.2 Does tourism cause pollution to the local environment?

**3. Physical Capital**

- 3.1 Does tourism improve local infrastructure?
- 3.2 Does tourism development improve your housing condition?

**4. Social Capital**

- 4.1 Does tourism help to protect earthen buildings?
- 4.2 Does tourism enhance your cultural pride?
- 4.3 Does tourism increase social networks?
- 4.4 Does tourism development increase the crime rate?
- 4.5 Does tourism affect local cultural activities and your family lifestyle?
- 4.6 What impacts does the *tulou* conservation regulations have on local residents?

**5. Human Capital**

- 5.1 Do you or your family members receive more skills training opportunities due to tourism development?
- 5.2 Have education and medical services improved with the development of tourism?



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**Section 4: Others**

1. What vulnerabilities do you face in your livelihood?
2. Do you have anything else to add interview? Thank you very much for your precious time.

**Questions for local government**

**Section 1: The Transforming Structures and Processes**

1. Who owns the ownership and operation rights of *tulou*?
2. Which stakeholders are involved in the management of Fujian *tulou* tourist attractions? How do they participate in tourism management?
3. What responsibilities and rights does the government have in tourism management?
4. Are residents encouraged to participate in tourism management and cultural heritage protection?
5. If so, what is the level of community involvement? If not, please provide some important reasons?

**Section2: The Impacts of Tourism Development on Local Livelihoods**

1. What impact does heritage tourism have on the livelihoods of local communities?
2. How do you evaluate the significance of heritage tourism in sustainable rural development?

**Section3: The Impacts of Cultural Heritage Conservation on Local Livelihoods**

1. Who are involved in the protection of *tulou* cultural heritage? And how?
2. What new conservation regulations have been brought to *tulou*, since it has been designated as a WCHS? if so, how do these regulations affect the community livelihood?
3. Do you have anything else to add interview? Thank you very much for your precious time.

**Questions for FHTTDC**

**Sections 1: The Transforming Structures and Processes**

1. Who owns the ownership and operation rights of *tulou*?
2. Which stakeholders are involved in the management of Fujian Tulou tourist attractions? How do they participate in tourism management?
3. What business scope does the enterprise include?
4. What responsibilities and rights does the enterprise have in tourism management?
5. Are residents encouraged to participate in tourism management and cultural heritage protection?

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1013 6. If so, what is the level of community involvement? If not, please provide some important  
1014 reasons?

1015 **Section2: The Impacts of Tourism Development and Cultural Heritage Conservation on**  
1016 **Local Livelihoods**

1017 1. How do you think tourism affects community livelihoods?

1018 2. Does the enterprise provide more skills training to residents?

1019 3. Is there any conflict or possible conflict between the local community and the enterprise?

1020 What has the enterprise done to mediate these conflicts?

1021 4. Is the enterprise involved in cultural heritage conservation?

1022 5. Do you have anything else to add to the interview? Thank you very much for your precious  
1023 time.