

How can the Explosive Popularity of Cultural and Tourism Phenomena Contribute to Rural Revitalization? — Taking Guizhou's "Village Super" as an Example

Zhao Yue

School of Government Management, Shenzhen University, Major in Administrative Management, Shenzhen, Guangdong, 518060, China

ABSTRACT

The phenomenal popularity of cultural and tourism events in recent years reflects the evolving and restructuring relationships among the state, market, and society in China. This paper attempts to move beyond the traditional research paradigm of social movements by integrating resource mobilization theory with the specific context of China. Using Guizhou's "Village Super League" as a case study of rural revitalization, this study explores the mechanisms behind the creation and spread of these phenomenal cultural and tourism events. The research finds that the Rongjiang County government, using political mobilization as its primary driving force, attracted and integrated high-quality resources from various actors in the state, market, and society through a combination of interest-based, emotional, and educational appeals. This collaborative effort transformed short-term gains in popularity into long-term cultural capital, injecting vital momentum into rural revitalization.

KEYWORDS

Phenomenal cultural and tourism events; Generation mechanism; Resource mobilization; Rural revitalization

1 Introduction

The phenomenal rise of cultural tourism in the last three years signals a quiet "development revolution" as we transition from a production-oriented to a consumption-oriented society. Generally, a genuine consumer society is underpinned by a service-oriented government. The popularity of these cultural events suggests that local governments are actively transforming into service-oriented entities, using them as key conduits to unlock market consumption potential and facilitate social mobilization, reflecting the nuanced evolution of the relationship between the state, the market, and society in this new era.

Taking Guizhou's "Village Super League" as an example, current research analyzes the reasons for its popularity through the lenses of emotional communication theory, embeddedness theory, and interactive ritual chain theory. Focusing on the government's role, the reasons for its success can be attributed to three key dimensions: mobilizing interests, fostering emotional connections, and disseminating information. However, most of the aforementioned studies adopt a single-dimensional approach, lacking an in-depth exploration of the synergistic evolution mechanisms between different dimensions. Resource mobilization theory, with its robust capacity for theoretical synthesis, offers a theoretical avenue for deeply analyzing complex synergistic evolution mechanisms. However, current resource mobilization theory is primarily employed as a key perspective for examining collective resistance events, with insufficient analysis and research beyond social movements, making it difficult to directly guide the resolution of the research problems in this paper.

In summary, this paper centers on the core issue of "the generation and dissemination mechanisms of phenomenal cultural and tourism events." By situating resource mobilization theory within the Chinese context to construct an analytical framework, and drawing upon the case of Guizhou's "Village Super League," it seeks to reveal the underlying logic of how local governments leverage phenomenal cultural and tourism events to stimulate rural revitalization.

2 Literature review

Resource mobilization theory emerged in the 1970s and has become a key perspective in the study of contemporary social movements. It illustrates how an organization actively transforms from a passive collection of individuals into an active participant in public life ^[1].

The development of resource mobilization theory has led to two major research areas: resource mobilization itself and the context of mobilization. However, the theory still has limitations. Methodologically, its focus on micro-level, single-case studies of institutionalized and organized social movements makes it difficult to explore the micro-mechanisms of grassroots self-organized social movements. It also struggles to capture multi-case interactions between organizations within broader macro contexts.

From an epistemological perspective, resource mobilization should not be the sole focus of social movement research.

In China, political mobilization for national governance is a salient political phenomenon with a significant impact on

citizens' national identity. Typically, political mobilization takes a leading role in market and social mobilization, a key characteristic of Chinese-style mobilization. In recent years, China has been gradually enhancing the market's role in resource allocation and further strengthening the vitality and autonomy of society. The relationship between the government, the market, and society is being reshaped in the process of Chinese-style modernization. Considering this case, political mobilization can only be regarded as a foundational, but not core, element of the "Village Super League's" explosive popularity in Guizhou. Neither political, market, nor social mobilization alone could have achieved such a sensational effect.

Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the generation and dissemination mechanisms driving its popularity, and the synergistic evolution across different dimensions.

3 Method selection

3.1 Method selection

This paper employs a single-case study method to investigate the generation and dissemination mechanisms behind the explosive popularity of phenomenal cultural and tourism events. First, at its core, this study uses an inductive single-case study approach. By observing phenomena, extracting data, and analyzing key situations and events, it abstracts theoretical propositions from empirical facts, thereby providing an in-depth answer to the complex process mechanisms driving the "Village Super League's" success. Second, insights that transcend existing frameworks, validation of established theories, and compelling evidence are crucial criteria for conducting this type of research ^[2]. As a complement, this paper uses deductive logical reasoning, initializing a theoretical model with resource mobilization theory. By re-conceptualizing this theory within the Chinese context, the study redefines the active agents and mobilization dimensions of resources, preserving the explanatory power of the original theory while extending its applicability through the lens of the local context.

3.2 Case selection

This paper selects Guizhou's "Village Super League" as a case study. From May 13 to July 29, 2023, the Rongjiang Harmony Village Football Super League in Rongjiang County became a breakout success. As of August 1, 2023, the event had generated over 30 billion views online. Over those two months, Rongjiang County leveraged the unique cultural IP of Guizhou's "Village Super League," blending local ethnic culture with sports, attracting 3,384,200 tourists and generating a total tourism revenue of 3.834 billion yuan. This not only spurred the revitalization of industries like food, accommodation, transportation, and entertainment but also boosted the cultural confidence of local residents and the nation as a whole.

3.3 Data collection

Due to geographical limitations, the data used in this paper is primarily secondary. Online searches using keywords such as "Village Super League" were conducted, and relevant materials from authoritative media outlets, including People's Daily and the official websites of the Guizhou Province and Rongjiang County governments, were collected. Supplementary information related to the case study was gathered from self-media content creation platforms like Weibo and Douyin.

3.4 Data analysis

This paper employs process tracing for preliminary data analysis. As a method for analyzing causal mechanisms in qualitative research, process tracing aims to reveal the generative logic of causal relationships by analyzing how processes influence outcomes through in-depth case studies ^[3]. Following a theory-building approach, this paper constructs a theoretical model, as depicted in Figure 1, by theorizing the causal process of the case to a certain extent ^[4].

Political mobilization serves as the initial driving force, while interest mobilization, emotional mobilization, and educational mobilization function as process mechanisms, and cultural mobilization manifests as the outcome. These elements collectively contribute to the widespread popularity of Guizhou's "Village Super League." Subsequently, through data analysis, this paper employs methods such as causal inference, triangulation, and counterfactual analysis to validate or refute the proposed theoretical model. By adopting an evidence-based "data-relationship-framework" approach, the model is continuously refined and improved, ultimately verifying its logical soundness and aligning with the expectations of a mechanistic narrative.

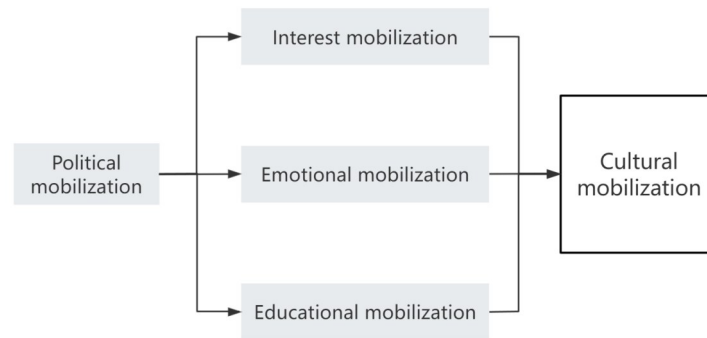


Figure 1 Research framework

4 Case presentation

4.1 Political mobilization

Resource mobilization strategies connect the subject and object of mobilization and determine its effectiveness^[5]. In political mobilization, the government usually takes the lead, introducing public policies to guide grassroots organizations and community efforts in promoting rural governance and revitalization. This includes two key elements: political will and political capacity. In this case, departments at all levels considered "Village Super League" a significant opportunity to seize development opportunities and cultivate a positive image. This shared vision fostered a strong political will that permeated all levels, from officials to the grassroots, creating a situation where the government's will guided local actions.

In this case, the Rongjiang County government capitalized on the "Village Super League's" explosive popularity to guide the community in continuously building its IP and promoting rural development and revitalization. The league's success not only harmonized official directives with public aspirations and strengthened political trust, but also streamlined the translation of political momentum into effective governance across the board. Throughout this initiative, the Rongjiang County government initially leveraged political momentum to overcome bureaucratic inertia, ensuring efficient coordination from county-level decisions to village-level implementation to manage the surge in attention brought by the "Village Super League." Simultaneously, it harnessed the league to foster a sense of local pride, converting "political tasks" into proactive public engagement, thereby transforming political momentum into effective social mobilization through emotional connections. Finally, it established sustainable mechanisms like cultural tourism development and service provisions, solidifying political momentum into lasting governance capabilities.

The initial campaign-style governance is gradually transitioning to a more regularized approach. Simultaneously, the government's "pairing assistance" model, with Guangdong supporting Guizhou, provides institutional opportunities for Rongjiang to equalize capacity and foster potential cooperation^[6], creating an innovative combination of "eastern resources + western scenarios." Foshan, as Rongjiang's counterpart assistance city, introduced the OCT Group to participate in scenic spot development while providing 10 million yuan in dedicated funds, resulting in "institutional embedding"^[7]. This significantly enhanced the resource integration capabilities of local grassroots governments and contributed substantially to converting the "Village Super League's" popularity into increased economic development.

Overall, political mobilization has been central to the entire process of the "Village Super League's" rise to prominence, evolving from campaign-style governance to a more routine approach, enabling the government to provide better services to the public with enhanced and more mature governance capabilities. However, the enduring popularity of the "Village Super League" relies on more than just political mobilization; it also hinges on its ability to resonate with the public's desire for participation and address their needs. Sustained success, rather than fleeting popularity, can only be achieved by fully galvanizing immediate social action and fostering long-term engagement. Therefore, while political mobilization may be the initial catalyst for its popularity, the underlying mechanisms and core effectiveness lie in fostering a synergy between incentives, emotional connection, and community education.

4.2 Process mechanism

First, interest mobilization is the fundamental guarantee of resource mobilization. At its core, it transforms dispersed individual interests into the economic driving force for collective action through policy incentives and resource redistribution, emphasizing how rational actors obtain resources through organized means to achieve their goals^[8]. As the underlying logic of resource mobilization, government-led interest mobilization in the context of China's "Village Super League" demonstrates unique advantages. The government can achieve efficient resource allocation and interest redistribution by coordinating market and social networks^[9]. With the "Village Super League" at its core, the government

is accelerating the construction of a full-chain industrial ecosystem encompassing "eating, lodging, transportation, tourism, shopping, and entertainment," and promoting the clustered development of small and micro enterprises through public platforms.

In addition, the local government embedded economic initiatives within social networks, fostering mutually beneficial collaborations with neighboring counties and municipalities, and developing shared cultural and tourism resources through a cross-county "supra-economic zone" development model ^[10]. Simultaneously, the government created opportunities for market and social engagement. On one hand, market mechanisms were integrated into public affairs. The "Village Super League" signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Premier League and secured brand partnerships with dozens of enterprises, including Huiyuan Group, deeply securing long-term capital. On the other hand, enterprises gained brand recognition by sponsoring events and developing derivative products, thereby reinvesting in public initiatives and achieving a two-way value enhancement in brand building. Furthermore, the "Village Super League" is positioned as an event organized by the people and shared by all, empowering villagers and enhancing individual autonomy in economic activities.

The participation of local villagers in the industrial chain, wearing multiple hats, fully unleashes endogenous motivation. In summary, the improved efficiency of resource allocation is not only reflected economically, but also through the "Village Super League" brand management company, which reinvests a portion of the profits back into the village's collective economy, revitalizing the productive functions of traditional social networks. This practice offers a model for a government-led shift in interest mobilization for developing countries worldwide.

Secondly, emotional mobilization is a critical component of resource mobilization. By superimposing background and situational emotions, emotional mobilization transforms interest-based connections driven by instrumental rationality into "emotional communities" propelled by value rationality. This enables individuals or groups to evoke, stimulate, or reshape each other's perceptions, attitudes, and evaluations through emotional expression during sustained interaction ^[11]. The "repressed" emotional landscape shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese men's national football team's repeated failures in international competitions resulting in their absence from five consecutive World Cups, and the emotional undertones of local populations migrating from their hometowns have collectively fostered a background sentiment rooted in repression and nostalgia. The meteoric rise of the "Village Super League" opportunely triggered a shift in these "situational emotions."

Cultural symbols, such as the vibrant culture sparked by real-time online and offline interactions involving hundreds of millions of people, the football culture showcased through grassroots football carnival-style performances, and the ethnic culture embodied by Dong folk songs and Miao brocade chicken dances, have awakened collective memories and emotional resonance deep within people's hearts, leading to a state characterized by emotional release and a sense of homecoming. The local ritual of collectively playing football has reconstructed social order through the gathering of emotional energy, transforming ordinary small-scale football matches into the nationally renowned "Village Super League." Furthermore, emotional mobilization can strategically leverage media content, using emotion as a tool to expand influence and solidify and connect emotional communities.

Due to the social integration function of collective emotions, and facilitated by the copresence and ritualized production of digital social media, individuals develop emotional resonance and a sense of belonging to a group identity, thereby enabling collective action. This politically charged emotional mobilization attracts the public with its perceived "near-perfect" qualities, and through shared attention and rhythmic entrainment, transforms individual emotions into collective consensus, fostering group solidarity. Therefore, this emotional mobilization mechanism not only reshapes the organizational structure of rural society but also creates a new governance paradigm for the public sphere in the digital age.

Finally, educational mobilization provides a sustained impetus for resource mobilization. By establishing behavioral norms, rebuilding capacity, and embedding institutions, it disciplines and facilitates the long-term accumulation of human capital. This promotes interaction between the "exogenous order" generated by policy incentives and the village's existing football culture, ultimately transforming it into an "endogenous order" that villagers consciously uphold ^[12]. Regarding behavioral norms, the government converts the informal customs of rural society into formal institutional standards by creating explicit competition rules and norms for public participation, thereby establishing a field for moral demonstration. The individuals being showcased within this moral field, deeply influenced by moral norms and ideals, will develop a social order grounded in a shared understanding of morality, inspiring the public to cultivate a value system that spontaneously protects collective interests.

This value system is gradually being internalized as a collective moral standard. In terms of capacity reconstruction, the "Village Super League" has spurred enthusiasm and yielded tangible benefits, accelerating a virtuous cycle of learning through competition and production through learning. A cultural community cluster centered on the "Village Super League" is also gradually taking shape. Villagers are building a sustainable rural public cultural service system by integrating and leveraging various community resources and enhancing the community's ability to connect resources.

This not only stimulates villagers' desire for self-development but also strengthens their capacity to participate in social change. Regarding institutional embedding, the "Village Super League - Ban Chao" dual-track system design embeds a rigid system, representing "standardized rationalism and the will of national unified action" ^[13], into the village's football cultural ecosystem, completing the "closed loop" of intergenerational transmission of the "Village Super League" culture. This achieves not only the cultural reproduction of the "Village Super League" but also shapes a social development ecosystem where education and industry are deeply integrated.

By progressively building cognition, capabilities, and institutions, the external attention garnered by cultural and tourism events can be transformed into an internal impetus for development, ultimately shaping new patterns of socialization and behavior within the village community.

4.3 Cultural mobilization

This article posits that cultural mobilization is fundamentally a process of discourse construction. Through the production, dissemination, and institutionalization of discourse, it transforms disparate, informal cultural practices into a formalized, institutional system of meaning, thus enabling the long-term sustainability of Guizhou's "Village Super League." From the perspective of discourse production, the "Village Super League" serves as a vehicle for deeply integrating Miao and Dong ethnic cultures with the spirit of football, aligning seamlessly with national narratives of rural revitalization, common prosperity, and the Chinese national community, thereby constructing a narrative landscape where "the state is present." This achieves not only a symbolic translation of local football culture and ethnic traditions but also a reconstruction of the local villagers' sense of self, ultimately shaping a meaningful framework for collective action.

From the perspective of discourse dissemination, the government, media, and the public collectively construct a "media ritual space," forming a network diffusion ecology. Official media, through agenda-setting, emphasize narratives of "people's agency" and "cultural confidence," incorporating the "Village Super League" into the political and cultural discourse. Self-media, conversely, generates complementary dynamics through platform algorithm recommendations and grassroots organic content creation, enabling emotional narratives of "authentic presence" to stimulate resonance. Simultaneously, algorithm-driven recommendations become an invisible engine for discourse reproduction. Platforms like Douyin and Weibo, through tag combinations such as "Village Super League + ," facilitate cross-community dissemination and meaning convergence of the "Village Super League." From the perspective of discourse institutionalization, the ritualistic solidification and cultural reproduction of the "Village Super League" are achieved through the establishment of recurring "Village Super League" competitions and other similar initiatives.

Simultaneously, the "Village Super League" was incorporated into the Central No. 1 Document, achieving institutional recognition. Ultimately, cultural mobilization will transform fleeting attention into local cultural capital, which will then be elevated into a widely shared social consensus, giving the "Village Super League" a lasting and far-reaching impact.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the explosive popularity of Guizhou's "Village Super League" is not attributable to the dominance of any single entity—government, market, or society. Rather, it represents a leap in governance resulting from the synergistic evolution of these three through resource mobilization. The local government initiates this process with political mobilization, leveraging its strong political will and momentum as the primary driving force. This is achieved through interest mobilization—based on benefit-sharing, brand co-creation, and social production; emotional mobilization—rooted in the evolving interplay of mood and state emotions; and educational mobilization—encompassing behavioral norms, capacity reconstruction, and institutional embedding. These efforts collectively foster cultural mobilization, fundamentally characterized by discourse construction, enabling phenomenal cultural and tourism events like Guizhou's "Village Super League" to sustain their popularity and achieve broader recognition. Figure 2 illustrates the main content.

5 Summary

The rise of phenomenal cultural and tourism events reflects the profound transformations in the relationship between the state, the market, and society in China. The success of Guizhou's "Village Super League" demonstrates that genuine, sustainable, and endogenous power for urban-rural integration can only be achieved when the countryside becomes an autonomous cultural entity. This not only fortifies the resilience of rural governance but also infuses long-term vitality into rural revitalization.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study achieves a dual breakthrough: First, it challenges the traditional assumptions of resource mobilization theory regarding contentious movements, revealing a four-dimensional synergy mechanism—political, interest-based, emotional, and educational mobilization—under government leadership, thereby expanding the explanatory scope in non-contentious collective action. Second, it constructs a generative and dissemination model of "political mobilization → three-dimensional process mechanism → cultural mobilization,"

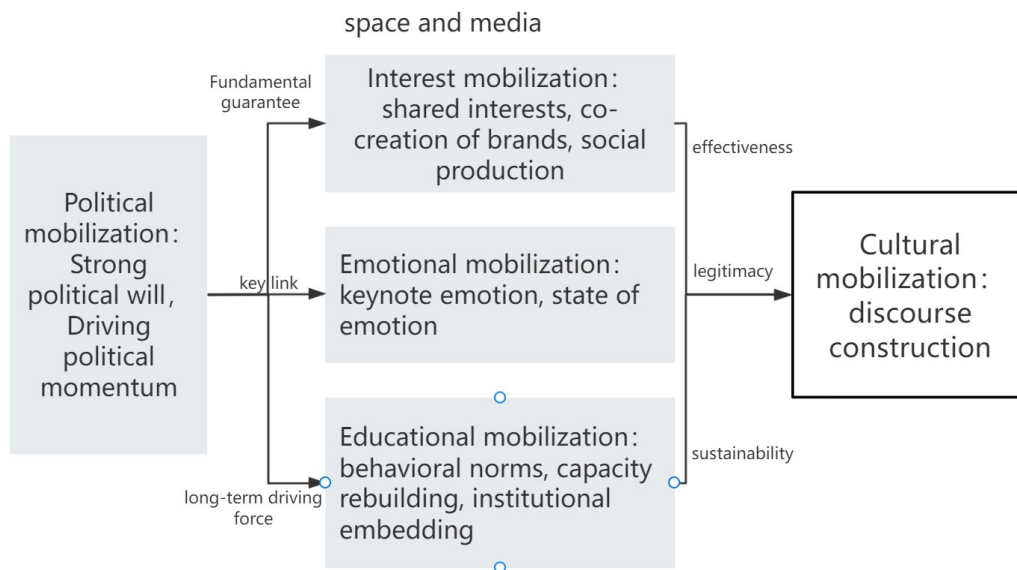


Figure 2 generation and dissemination mechanisms of phenomenal cultural and tourism events

elucidating the trajectory of phenomenal events from short-term popularity to enduring cultural capital, and providing a new paradigm for the study of rural revitalization in the context of a transforming consumer society.

The practical implications offer three key insights: Regarding cultural empowerment, the fusion of football and ethnic culture revitalizes dormant rural resources, pioneering an ecological model of "sports + culture and tourism + industry." Concerning urban-rural interaction, it not only boosts the rural economy through tourist consumption but also enriches the city with cultures such as the Dong people's Grand Chorus, creating a two-way resonance of values. With respect to governance innovation, the government balances its leadership role with social autonomy through a service-oriented transformation, offering a model for grassroots governance.

However, this study still has limitations. Methodologically, the generalizability of single-case conclusions is limited, and multi-case comparisons are needed to enhance explanatory power. From a perspective standpoint, the analysis of the mobilization mechanisms of digital technology is insufficient. In terms of long-term impact, the effectiveness of cultural capital's transformation requires continuous monitoring. In the future, interdisciplinary exploration of the mechanisms of digital empowerment and cultural reproduction can be further deepened.

References

- [1] Tilly Charles, "From mobilization to revolution." *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change*, (May 2017), pp. 71-91.
- [2] Eisenhardt, Kathleen M, "Building theories from case study research." *Academy of management review*, vol. 14., no. 4(Oct 1989), pp. 532-550.
- [3] Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds, *Process tracing*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- [4] Beach, Derek, *Process tracing methods*, Wiesbaden : Springer Fachmedien, 2020.
- [5] Ma Li and Dong Xiaodan, "Art Participation in Rural Construction from a Resource Mobilization Perspective: A Case Study of Longtan Village in Northeastern Fujian's Mountainous Region," *Guizhou Social Sciences*, no. 6, 2024.
- [6] Ye Min and Cao Luqiong, "Organized Cooperation: A Pairing Governance Mechanism with Chinese Characteristics," *Studies in Political Science*, no. 4 (2024).
- [7] Vertical Embeddedness of Central Government in Regional Environmental Governance: Mode and Function——Take Yangtze River Delta Water Environmental Governance as an Example.[J]. *Secretary*, 2022, (1): 28-41.
- [8] McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6), 1212-1241.
- [9] Evans, P. B. (1995). *Embedded autonomy: States and industrial transformation*. Princeton University Press.
- [10] Granovetter, Mark. "Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness." *American journal of sociology* 91.3 (1985): 481-510.
- [11] Bai Shuying and Xiao Benli, "Emotional Mobilization of Netizens on Sina Weibo," *Journal of Lanzhou University (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 39, no. 5 (2011).
- [12] Xu Yuanyuan and Zuo Daihua, "Endogenous Order in Rural Governance: Evolutionary Logic, Operational Mechanism, and Institutional Embedding," *Issues in Agricultural Economy*, no. 8 (2019).
- [13] Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, p. 94, Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2013.