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Dwelling in Mobility: Reconstructing Everyday Life Meaning among Digital Nomads through Rural Sojourns

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has enabled a growing number of workers to separate professional activities from fixed workplaces. Digital nomads represent a new form of mobile lifestyle, combining remote work with temporary residence across different locations. However, existing studies have mainly examined their mobility patterns, economic motivations, or destination preferences, while less attention has been paid to how rural sojourns reshape their everyday life meanings. Drawing on the case of Jianya Village in Xi'an, China, this study explores how digital nomads transform from temporary visitors into embedded participants through rural living practices. Based on Xiaohongshu user-generated content, semi-structured interviews, guided topic modeling, emotional meaning analysis, and semantic network analysis, the study investigates the relationship between mobility motivation, rural experience, and identity reconstruction. The findings reveal that digital nomads' mobility is driven not only by the pursuit of geographical freedom but also by dissatisfaction with urban time pressure and fragmented social relations. Rural spaces provide an urban-rural compatible environment where individuals can maintain professional productivity while reorganizing their temporal rhythms, social connections, and self-perceptions. Rather than being produced by explicit "healing" narratives, the reconstruction of life meaning emerges through accumulated feelings of belonging, relaxation, and autonomy. This study contributes to understanding contemporary forms of mobility and offers implications for the development of rural communities capable of supporting longer-term living practices.

KEYWORDS

Digital Nomads; Rural Sojourn; Everyday Life; Identity Reconstruction; Meaning Reconstruction; Urban-rural Integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between work and place has undergone profound transformation in the digital era. The emergence of digital technologies and remote working infrastructures has weakened the traditional association between employment and fixed workplaces, enabling new forms of geographically flexible labor.[1] Digital nomads represent one of the most visible outcomes of this transformation, combining location-independent work with temporary residence across different places.[2]

Unlike conventional tourists, digital nomads do not simply pursue short-term leisure experiences. Their mobility involves continuous negotiation between professional activities, personal lifestyles, and spatial attachment. Previous studies have emphasized that contemporary mobility should not be understood merely as physical movement but as a social process involving changing relationships between people, places, and identities. [3]

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Among the emerging groups shaped by this transformation, digital nomads have attracted increasing academic attention. Unlike conventional tourists who temporarily leave their everyday environments for leisure purposes, digital nomads integrate mobility into their working lives. Their movements are not simply recreational journeys but attempts to establish alternative forms of living in which work, residence, and personal development can coexist. In this sense, digital nomadism represents not only a change in workplace organization but also a reconfiguration of everyday life.

The rise of digital nomads is closely associated with broader changes in contemporary urban experiences. Although cities provide employment opportunities, cultural resources, and technological infrastructure, urban lifestyles are increasingly characterized by accelerated rhythms, competitive pressure, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. For many young professionals and independent workers, the city becomes a space of opportunity as well as exhaustion. Long working hours, unstable social connections, and limited control over personal time contribute to a growing perception of what may be described as "time poverty".

Against this background, rural areas have become attractive alternatives. Through social media platforms, rural spaces are increasingly represented as places of relaxation, authenticity, and slower living. Images of countryside cafes, artistic villages, natural landscapes, and community activities circulate widely online, constructing an appealing imagination of rural life. However, these digital representations mainly capture the visual and symbolic dimensions of rural spaces. They cannot fully explain how individuals actually experience rural environments after entering them.

For digital nomads, rural sojourns involve more than consuming rural landscapes. They require the negotiation of daily routines, work arrangements, interpersonal relationships, and personal identities. A village may initially attract visitors through aesthetic images, but whether it can become a meaningful living environment depends on its capacity to support everyday practices. Therefore, the key issue is not simply why digital nomads travel to rural areas, but how mobility eventually develops into a form of temporary dwelling.

This question relates to a broader theoretical discussion concerning the relationship between mobility and place attachment. Traditional understandings often assume that mobility weakens connections to specific places, while dwelling implies stability and permanence. However, recent studies suggest that contemporary forms of mobility do not necessarily eliminate attachment; instead, they may generate new relationships with places through repeated practices and emotional investment. Digital nomads provide an important case for examining this process because they simultaneously maintain mobility and seek belonging.

The concept of "dwelling in mobility" captures this apparent contradiction. It emphasizes that dwelling does not always require permanent settlement but can emerge through everyday engagement, emotional connection, and meaningful interaction. From this perspective, rural sojourns become a process through which digital nomads experiment with alternative lifestyles and reconstruct their understanding of work, time, and self.

This study focuses on Jianya Village (Liyukou Village) in Xi'an, China, a rural destination that has experienced transformation from traditional agricultural production toward a multifunctional space integrating tourism, cultural activities, creative industries, and rural residence. The village provides an appropriate context for examining digital nomads' experiences because it combines rural ecological qualities with urban-oriented facilities such as cafes, cultural spaces, and digital infrastructure.

By investigating this case, this study addresses three research questions:

(1) Why do digital nomads choose rural mobility, and what urban experiences motivate their departure?

(2) How do rural spaces support the transition from temporary travel to everyday dwelling?

(3) Through what mechanisms do digital nomads reconstruct their identities and meanings of life during rural sojourns?

To answer these questions, this study combines online user-generated content and offline interview materials. Xiaohongshu data are used to examine public representations and expectations surrounding rural spaces, while interviews reveal the lived experiences of digital nomads and other local actors. Through thematic modeling, emotional analysis, and semantic network analysis, the study attempts to reveal the micro-level mechanisms through which mobility becomes dwelling.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, it extends digital nomad studies beyond discussions of mobility patterns and destination choices by focusing on everyday life reconstruction. Second, it contributes to tourism and rural studies by examining rural spaces as lived environments rather than merely tourism consumption sites. Third, it provides empirical evidence for understanding how emerging mobile groups participate in rural transformation and community development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Tourism, Everyday Life, and Meaning Construction

Early tourism studies commonly conceptualized tourism as a temporary departure from everyday life. The distinction between ordinary and extraordinary experiences shaped classical tourism theories, which regarded travel as an escape from routine environments and a search for meaningful experiences beyond everyday constraints. [4] However, later studies questioned this binary perspective and argued that tourism experiences are deeply embedded within everyday practices, emotions, and identity construction. [5]

The everyday life perspective highlights that meaning is produced through repeated interactions between individuals and environments. Lefebvre argued that everyday life is not merely a collection of repetitive behaviors but a social process through which individuals experience and transform space. [6] Similarly, de Certeau emphasized that individuals actively reinterpret and recreate spaces through everyday practices. [7]

This perspective is particularly relevant for digital nomads. Unlike short-term tourists, digital nomads spend extended periods within destinations and incorporate local environments into their working routines. Their experiences involve cooking, working, socializing, and participating in community activities. As a result, rural destinations become not only places of leisure but also spaces where everyday meanings are negotiated.

Lefebvre's theory of everyday life provides a useful framework for understanding this process. He argues that everyday life is not merely repetitive behavior but a field where individuals experience social relations and produce meanings. Similarly, Certeau emphasizes that individuals actively reinterpret spaces through daily practices. These theories suggest that places acquire meaning through use and interaction rather than through physical characteristics alone.

From this perspective, rural sojourns can be understood as processes of meaning production. Digital nomads do not simply move into rural spaces; they actively reconstruct these spaces through their practices and relationships.

2.2. Digital Nomads and Rural Sojourns

Digital nomadism represents a new form of mobility emerging from the intersection of digital technologies, flexible employment, and changing lifestyle expectations. Previous research has identified digital nomads as individuals who combine remote work with geographical mobility while seeking greater autonomy over their working and living arrangements. [8] Although digital nomads are often associated with freedom and flexibility, existing studies suggest that their lifestyles also

involve continuous negotiation between independence and belonging..[9] Mobility does not necessarily eliminate attachment to places; instead, individuals may construct temporary but meaningful relationships through repeated practices and emotional investment.[10]

Rural areas have increasingly become attractive destinations for digital nomads because they provide relatively affordable living environments, natural landscapes, and opportunities for alternative lifestyles. However, rural sojourns differ from conventional tourism because they involve deeper engagement with local communities and everyday routines. [11]

This transformation challenges the conventional understanding of rural tourism spaces. Rural destinations have traditionally been viewed as places of leisure consumption, where visitors temporarily escape urban environments. However, the emergence of digital nomads suggests that rural spaces can also function as alternative living environments. Through digital infrastructure and community-based services, some rural areas have developed hybrid characteristics combining residential, occupational, and social functions.

The concept of rural sojourn provides a useful perspective for understanding this transformation. Unlike short-term tourism, rural sojourn emphasizes relatively extended residence and deeper engagement with local life. Individuals do not merely experience rural landscapes but integrate aspects of rural environments into their everyday routines. This process creates opportunities for identity negotiation and lifestyle experimentation.

In China, the development of rural sojourns has been closely associated with rural revitalization strategies and the transformation of rural spaces. Villages located near metropolitan areas have increasingly attracted young professionals seeking alternatives to intensive urban lifestyles. These places often combine natural landscapes, cultural resources, and improved infrastructure, creating conditions for emerging forms of urban-rural interaction.

Nevertheless, existing research still leaves several questions insufficiently explored. First, although previous studies have examined why digital nomads move and where they choose to stay, less attention has been paid to how their everyday meanings change after entering rural environments. Second, the emotional mechanisms through which rural experiences generate attachment remain unclear. Third, social media representations and actual lived experiences are often discussed separately, despite their close relationship in shaping mobility decisions.

Therefore, this study focuses on the transition from mobility to dwelling. Rather than treating rural areas as passive destinations, it examines how digital nomads actively construct meanings through everyday practices and social interactions.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Case Selection: Jianya Village as an Urban-Rural Compatible Space

The research site, Jianya Village (Liyukou Village), is located in Huyi District, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Situated approximately one hour away from the urban center, the village has experienced significant transformation from a traditional agricultural settlement into a multifunctional rural community integrating tourism, cultural creativity, and residential functions.

Historically, Liyukou Village relied primarily on agricultural production. Before rural revitalization initiatives, the village faced challenges including limited economic opportunities, population outflow, and insufficient development capacity. In recent years, however, through the integration of rural tourism, cultural industries, and creative consumption spaces, the village has gradually developed a new identity represented by the name "Jianya Village", which implies stress reduction and relaxation.

The importance of Jianya Village lies not only in its tourism resources but also in its hybrid spatial characteristics. Unlike remote rural areas that emphasize isolation from urban life, Jianya Village

maintains connections with the city while providing a slower living environment. Facilities such as cafes, cultural spaces, creative workshops, and community activities allow visitors to combine remote work with rural living.

This feature makes Jianya Village particularly suitable for examining digital nomads' experiences. The village does not represent a complete escape from modernity. Instead, it provides a space where digital technologies and rural lifestyles coexist. Digital nomads can continue professional activities while participating in local communities, thereby forming a new relationship between mobility and dwelling.

3.2. Data Collection

This study adopts a multi-source qualitative research strategy combining online platform data and field interviews.

First, Xiaohongshu user-generated content (UGC) was collected to examine how Jianya Village is represented in digital platforms. Social media plays an important role in contemporary destination imagination, influencing how potential visitors understand rural spaces before arrival. The dataset initially contained 641 posts collected through keyword-based retrieval. After removing duplicate entries based on post identification, 524 valid posts were retained for analysis.

The Xiaohongshu dataset mainly included titles, descriptions, hashtags, publication information, and interaction indicators such as likes, collections, and comments. These materials were used to analyze the public representation of Jianya Village, including dominant themes, symbolic images, and consumption narratives.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants, including digital nomads, community operators, business owners, volunteers, and local residents.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees

Interviewee ID	Identity	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Place of Origin	Occupation
Q1	Community operator	Female	38	Married	Xi'an	Community manager
Q2	Community volunteer	Female	21	Single	Beijing	University student
S1	Digital nomad	Male	45	Married	Xi'an	Freelancer
S2	Digital nomad	Male	43	Divorced	Xi'an	Career consultant
S3	Digital nomad	Female	32	Single	Xi'an	Designer
S4	Digital nomad	Male	35	Single	Guangdong	Catering entrepreneur
S5	Digital nomad	Female	27	Single	Sichuan	Freelancer
S6	Digital nomad	Male	31	Single	Xi'an	Self-media practitioner
Y1	Business operator	Male	28	Single	Xi'an	Store manager
Y2	Business operator	Female	53	Married	Xiazhuang Village	Catering manager
C1	Local resident	Female	43	Married	Liyukou Village	Catering service worker
C2	Local resident	Female	56	Married	Xinli Village	Catering service worker
C3	Local resident	Male	47	Married	Liyukou Village	Farmer
C4	Local resident	Male	65	Married	Liyukou Village	Self-employed business owner
C5	Local resident	Female	46	Married	Liyukou Village	Self-employed business owner

The interview questions focused on four dimensions:
(1) motivations for leaving urban environments;
(2) experiences of working and living in rural areas;
(3) interactions with local communities;
(4) changes in identity and life values.

The combination of online and offline materials allows this study to distinguish between imagined rural experiences and lived rural experiences. Xiaohongshu data reflect the public construction of rural images, while interviews reveal how individuals actually negotiate meanings within rural environments.

3.3. Analytical Methods

To examine how digital nomads reconstruct everyday life meanings through rural sojourns, this study adopts a multi-dimensional qualitative analysis strategy combining content analysis, guided topic modeling, emotional meaning analysis, and semantic network analysis. Rather than treating digital traces and interview narratives as equivalent sources, the analysis distinguishes between the public representation of rural spaces and the lived experiences of individuals. The analytical framework of this study is informed by theories of everyday practice and spatial production. Rather than treating rural space as a passive background, the study considers space as actively produced through social interaction and everyday activities.[12]

First, Xiaohongshu user-generated content was analyzed through descriptive content analysis. Social media platforms increasingly shape how rural destinations are imagined before physical arrival. Therefore, this analysis focuses on identifying dominant representations of Jianya Village, including major themes, symbolic elements, and consumption-oriented narratives. Keyword frequency and thematic classification were employed to reveal how rural spaces are constructed within online discourse.

Second, interview transcripts were analyzed using guided Latent Dirichlet Allocation (guided LDA). Compared with purely data-driven topic modeling, guided LDA incorporates theoretically informed categories to better capture themes related to everyday life reconstruction. Based on previous research on tourism experience, digital nomadism, and identity transformation, five analytical themes were identified: emotional restoration, relaxed dwelling, community participation, everyday practice, and identity meaning.

The purpose of guided LDA in this study is not to replace qualitative interpretation, but to provide an additional perspective for identifying recurring patterns within interview narratives. The generated topic structures were further examined through close reading of original interview materials to ensure contextual validity.

Third, an emotional meaning analysis was conducted to explore the affective mechanisms underlying digital nomads' rural experiences. Previous studies often emphasize the "healing" function of rural tourism; however, such descriptions may overlook more subtle emotional processes occurring in everyday interactions. Therefore, this study examines six emotional dimensions, including healing, relaxation, freedom, belonging, meaning, and anxiety. The analysis calculates the occurrence patterns of emotional expressions in interview texts and compares their relative importance in shaping lived experiences.

Finally, semantic network analysis was applied to investigate relationships among key concepts in interview narratives. By examining co-occurrence patterns among frequently mentioned words, this method helps identify the central concepts connecting work, community, identity, and emotional experience.

Together, these analytical approaches establish a connection between digital representations and embodied experiences. Xiaohongshu data reveal how rural spaces are imagined before arrival, while

interview analysis demonstrates how digital nomads actually negotiate their identities and everyday meanings after entering rural environments.

4. FINDING

4.1. Mobility Motivation: Reflection on Urban Everyday Life

The movement of digital nomads into rural areas is closely associated with their reflection on urban everyday experiences. Although digital technologies provide greater flexibility in workplace arrangements, they do not necessarily eliminate the pressures embedded in contemporary urban life. For many participants, the decision to leave the city temporarily was not driven by a simple desire for leisure or geographical exploration, but by an attempt to regain control over time, personal rhythms, and social relationships.

The interview data demonstrate that work-related pressure constituted the most prominent background condition preceding mobility. Among the high-frequency concepts in interview narratives, "work" appeared most frequently and formed a semantic cluster with terms including "company", "state", "time", and "pressure". These expressions suggest that participants' urban experiences were strongly organized around occupational demands.

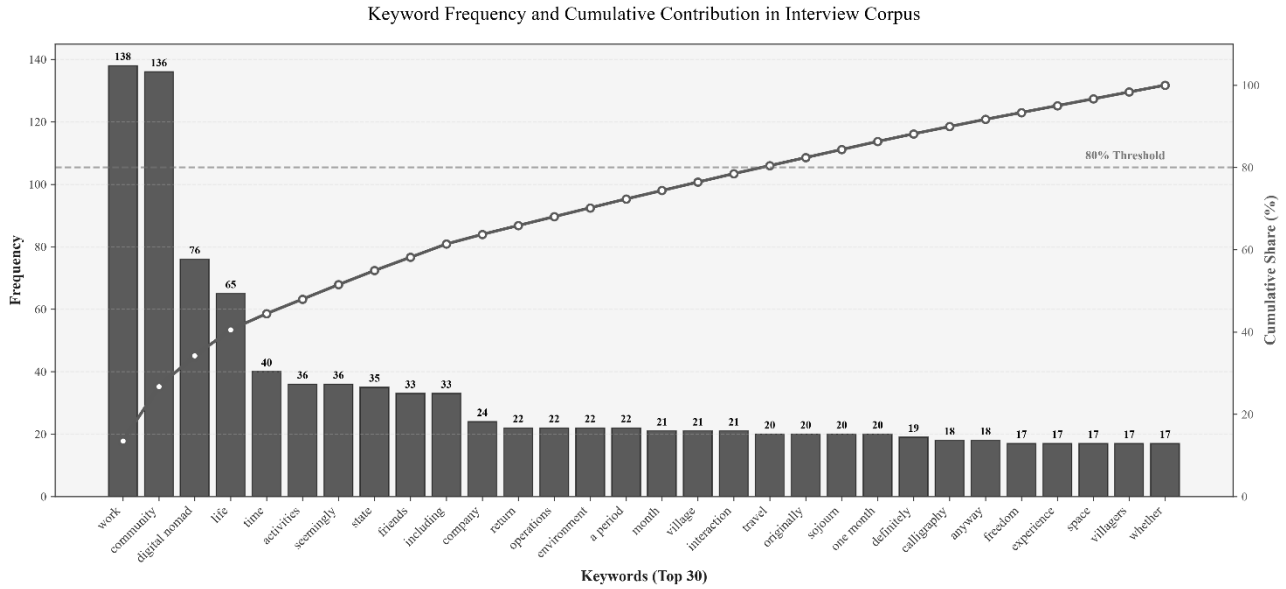


Fig 1. Pareto distribution of high-frequency keywords in interview texts (Top 30)

The dominance of work-related expressions reflects a broader transformation of urban everyday life. Digital nomads did not necessarily reject professional activities themselves; rather, they questioned a lifestyle in which work gradually occupied the majority of personal time. Several interviewees described urban employment environments as spaces where boundaries between working hours and private life became increasingly blurred.

One participant described this transition:

"Before coming here, I had just finished an internship. Sitting in an office made me feel restricted. Here, I do not experience the same kind of pressure."

Such narratives indicate that rural mobility represents a search for alternative temporal arrangements. The motivation was not simply to escape work but to reconstruct the relationship between work and life. Rural environments became attractive because they offered possibilities for reorganizing daily rhythms without completely abandoning professional identities.

This interpretation differs from the common understanding of digital nomads as individuals pursuing unrestricted mobility. Instead, their mobility was often a response to a perceived loss of autonomy in urban life. The rural journey therefore represented an attempt to recover personal agency through spatial change.

Beyond occupational pressure, participants also expressed dissatisfaction with urban social relationships. Several interviewees contrasted city interactions, which were often described as functional or interest-oriented, with rural communities where relationships were perceived as more spontaneous and emotionally meaningful.

As one community operator explained:

"In the city, many relationships come from work or school environments. Here, people interact without such obvious interests, and the relationships feel more genuine."

This contrast reveals that digital nomads' mobility was driven not only by time pressure but also by a search for alternative forms of social connection. Rural spaces became meaningful because they provided opportunities to rebuild interpersonal relationships beyond urban efficiency-oriented networks.

4.2. Rural Imagination and the Transition from Visiting to Dwelling

Before entering rural spaces, digital nomads often encounter villages through digital platforms. Social media representations play an important role in shaping expectations and influencing mobility decisions. However, the rural image constructed online does not necessarily correspond to the lived experience after arrival.

The analysis of Xiaohongshu user-generated content shows that Jianya Village is primarily represented through aesthetic and consumption-oriented narratives. Keywords and thematic categories emphasize landscapes, artistic spaces, coffee, photography, and leisure experiences. Rural space is therefore initially constructed as an attractive destination for temporary escape.

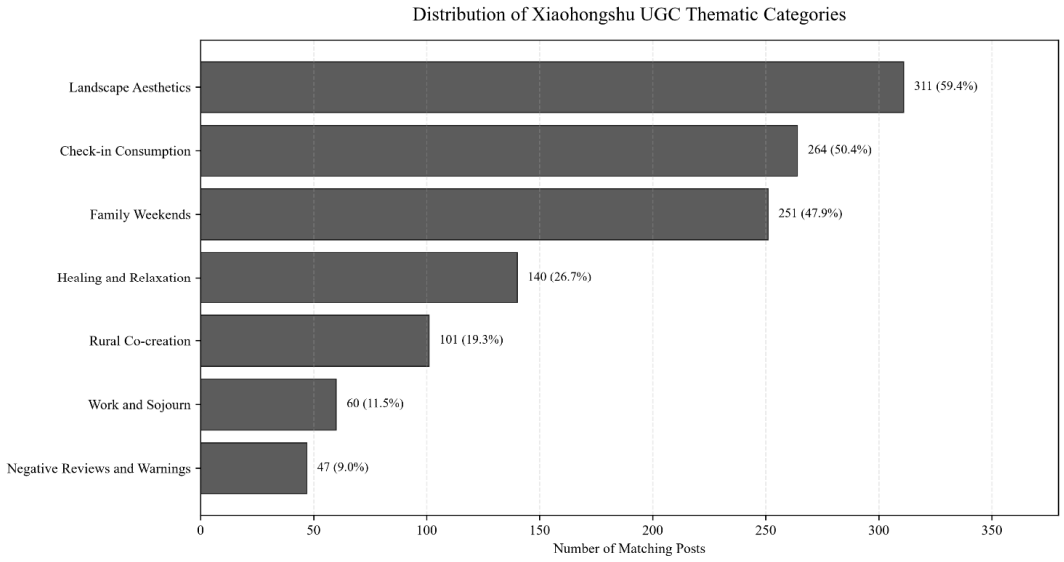


Fig 2. Distribution of Xiaohongshu UGC thematic categories

The dominant online themes include landscape appreciation, leisure consumption, and weekend travel. These representations contribute to the attractiveness of Jianya Village by presenting it as a place associated with beauty, relaxation, and cultural creativity. In this sense, social media functions as an important mechanism through which rural spaces become visible to potential visitors.

However, interviews with digital nomads reveal a more complex experience after arrival. Although online representations provide the initial motivation for visiting, they do not explain why some individuals choose to stay longer or repeatedly return. The lived experience of rural sojourn extends beyond visual consumption and involves participation in everyday practices.

Participants gradually shifted their understanding of Jianya Village from a destination to a living environment. Cafes, cultural spaces, and community facilities were not merely attractions but became practical settings where individuals worked, communicated, and developed routines.

One participant described the village as:

"A fourth space. You can drive from the city to the village within an hour, meet familiar people, have conversations, and then return to the city after gaining new energy."

This description illustrates the hybrid nature of Jianya Village. It is neither a complete departure from urban life nor a traditional rural settlement isolated from modern systems. Instead, it functions as an intermediate space connecting urban productivity and rural lifestyle.

The transition from visiting to dwelling occurs through repeated everyday practices. Digital nomads gradually establish personal routines, develop relationships with local actors, and incorporate rural environments into their working lives. Through this process, rural space changes from an external landscape into an experienced place.

Therefore, the attraction of Jianya Village does not lie only in its natural environment or cultural symbols. More importantly, it provides conditions for individuals to experiment with alternative forms of everyday life.

4.3. Spatial and Temporal Reorganization: Reconstructing Work-Life Boundaries

One of the most significant changes experienced by digital nomads concerns the reorganization of time and space. Remote work enables them to maintain professional activities while changing their physical environment. Rural sojourn therefore does not eliminate work; instead, it transforms where and how work is embedded within everyday life.

In urban environments, work often follows externally defined schedules and spatial arrangements. Offices, commuting systems, and organizational structures create relatively fixed patterns of daily life. By contrast, rural settings provide greater flexibility, allowing individuals to adjust working rhythms according to personal preferences.

Interview narratives frequently mentioned concepts such as "time", "state", "freedom", and "one period of time", indicating that participants experienced a renewed sense of temporal control.

Rather than waking up according to strict urban schedules, some participants described their daily rhythms as being influenced by natural environments and personal choices:

"I am no longer awakened by an alarm clock, but by sunlight or the sounds of the village. It feels like I have regained control over my own time."

This transformation does not represent withdrawal from modern work. Most participants continued their professional activities through digital technologies. However, the relationship between work and life became less oppositional. Work was incorporated into a broader lifestyle rather than dominating it.

The physical environment of Jianya Village supported this transformation. Coffee shops, shared spaces, and cultural venues provided locations where professional activities could coexist with leisure and social interaction. These spaces allowed digital nomads to maintain productivity while experiencing a slower pace of life.

The emotional dimension of this spatial-temporal reconstruction is reflected in the coexistence of relaxation and freedom. Participants did not seek unlimited leisure or complete escape from responsibility. Instead, they pursued a more balanced relationship between professional obligations and personal well-being.

This finding challenges the assumption that digital nomadism represents pure mobility and independence. In practice, digital nomads continuously negotiate between movement and stability, freedom and connection. Rural sojourn provides a temporary but meaningful arrangement through which these tensions can be managed.

4.4. Emotional Reconstruction: Beyond the "Healing" Narrative

Rural tourism is frequently associated with emotional recovery and psychological healing. Social media narratives surrounding rural destinations often emphasize concepts such as "healing", "escape", and "slow living". However, interview data from Jianya Village suggest that the emotional transformation of digital nomads operates through more subtle mechanisms.

The emotional meaning analysis shows that explicit references to "healing" were relatively limited compared with other emotional dimensions. Instead, belonging, relaxation, and freedom appeared more consistently throughout interview narratives.

This result suggests that rural experiences do not necessarily transform individuals through a direct therapeutic process. Rather, emotional change emerges gradually through everyday interactions and accumulated experiences.

Relaxation was closely connected with changes in lifestyle rhythms. Participants valued the ability to slow down, adjust schedules, and experience a different relationship with their surroundings. However, relaxation alone did not create long-term attachment. A deeper emotional connection developed through participation in local communities.

Belonging became one of the most important emotional dimensions. Unlike short-term tourists who mainly observe rural landscapes, digital nomads often participate in local activities and establish repeated interactions with residents and other mobile groups.

The semantic structure of interview narratives further demonstrates this mechanism.

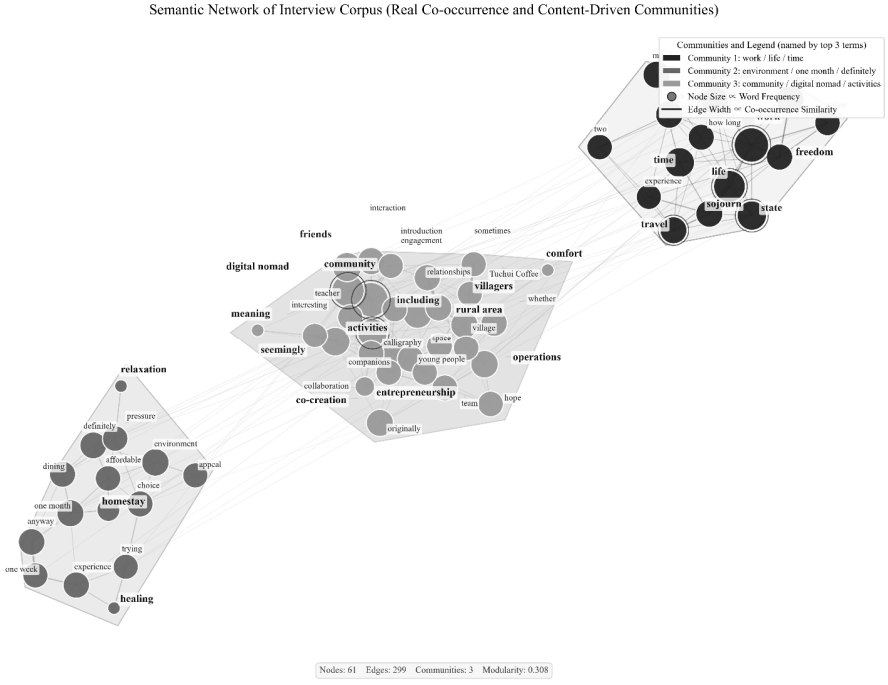


Fig 3. Semantic co-occurrence network of interview texts

The network shows that concepts related to community, friends, activities, and cooperation occupy central positions. Emotional attachment therefore emerges through social participation rather than passive appreciation of rural scenery.

This finding challenges the dominant "rural healing" narrative commonly presented on digital platforms. Rural spaces do provide psychological benefits, but these benefits are not simply generated by natural landscapes. Instead, they result from the combination of social relationships, everyday participation, and regained autonomy.

4.5. Identity Reconstruction and Transformation of Life Values

The final stage of rural sojourn involves changes in self-perception and personal values. Through sustained engagement with rural environments, digital nomads gradually move beyond identities defined solely by occupation.

In urban contexts, many participants were primarily recognized through professional roles. Their sense of achievement was closely connected with productivity and career performance. However, rural experiences encouraged them to reconsider the relationship between work and personal life.

Guided LDA analysis identifies identity meaning as an important thematic dimension across interview narratives.

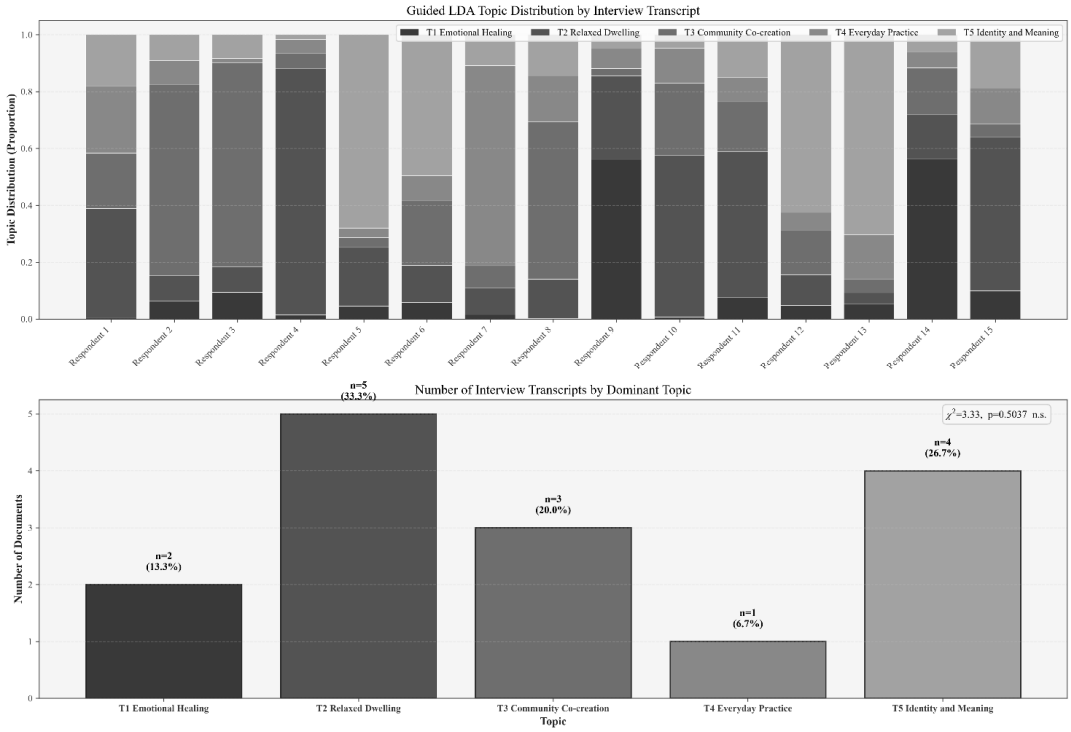


Fig 4. Guided LDA topic probability distribution across interview texts

The identity reconstruction process involves a shift from being a "worker" toward becoming a more integrated individual who manages different aspects of life. Digital nomads did not abandon professional identities; instead, they incorporated work into a broader understanding of personal development.

Several participants emphasized that rural living provided opportunities for reflection:

"After becoming a digital nomad, I have more freedom in terms of time and space. More importantly, I have more opportunities to think about myself."

This transformation indicates a movement from efficiency-oriented values toward meaning-oriented values. Participants increasingly emphasized experience, relationships, autonomy, and personal satisfaction rather than purely economic achievement.

Importantly, this identity transformation does not imply permanent settlement. Many digital nomads continued to move between different locations. However, rural experiences provided them with a new understanding of what a meaningful life could involve.

Thus, dwelling in mobility does not require abandoning movement. Instead, it represents the ability to establish meaningful connections while remaining mobile.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. From Mobility to Dwelling: Rethinking Place Attachment in Mobile Lifestyles

The experience of digital nomads in Jianya Village challenges the conventional assumption that mobility and dwelling represent opposite conditions. In traditional understandings, mobility is often associated with temporary displacement, while dwelling implies stability, permanence, and attachment to a fixed location. However, the case of digital nomads demonstrates that contemporary forms of mobility may generate new forms of dwelling through everyday engagement. The findings challenge the conventional assumption that mobility and dwelling represent opposite conditions. Recent mobility studies have argued that movement does not necessarily weaken place attachment; instead, mobile individuals may develop new forms of belonging through temporary engagement with places.[13]

Rather than searching for unlimited movement, participants in this study used mobility as a means of reorganizing their relationship with work, time, and place. Their movement into rural areas was not an abandonment of social connection or professional responsibility. Instead, it represented an attempt to establish a more balanced mode of living in which occupational activities, personal interests, and social relationships could coexist.

This finding contributes to existing research on digital nomads, which has often focused on mobility patterns, destination selection, or lifestyle preferences. While these perspectives explain why individuals move, they provide less insight into how mobile individuals develop emotional connections with places. The case of Jianya Village suggests that place attachment among digital nomads is not necessarily produced through long-term settlement. Instead, it emerges through repeated participation in everyday practices.

The concept of “dwelling in mobility” therefore provides a useful lens for understanding contemporary mobile lifestyles. Dwelling should not be limited to permanent residence; rather, it can be understood as an ongoing process through which individuals create familiarity, belonging, and meaning within specific environments. Digital nomads dwell through temporary but meaningful relationships with places.

This perspective also extends discussions of tourism and migration. Traditional tourism studies often distinguish between tourists and residents, assuming that visitors consume places while residents produce everyday life. However, digital nomads occupy an intermediate position. They are neither conventional tourists nor permanent residents. Their practices blur the boundary between visiting and living, producing a transitional form of spatial belonging.

In Jianya Village, this transition is particularly visible. Digital nomads initially arrive through online images of rural beauty and leisure, but gradually develop deeper relationships through work routines, community participation, and interpersonal interactions. The village becomes meaningful not because of its physical characteristics alone, but because it provides opportunities for individuals to practice alternative ways of living.

Therefore, mobility does not necessarily weaken attachment to place. Under certain conditions, movement itself can become a pathway through which new forms of dwelling emerge.

5.2. Beyond the "Healing" Narrative: Everyday Practices as the Mechanism of Meaning Reconstruction

Rural destinations are frequently represented as spaces of healing and emotional recovery. Such narratives are especially prominent on social media platforms, where countryside landscapes are often associated with relaxation, escape, and psychological restoration. However, the findings of this study suggest that this explanation is incomplete.

Existing tourism studies have increasingly argued that tourist experiences are not generated solely through visual consumption of landscapes, but through embodied practices, emotional engagement, and interactions with places. [14] Therefore, the emotional value of rural experiences should be understood as an outcome of everyday participation rather than a direct consequence of environmental exposure.

The emotional reconstruction experienced by digital nomads was not primarily generated by passive exposure to rural environments. Instead, it developed through continuous participation in everyday practices. The important mechanism was not simply being located in a rural setting, but engaging with people, routines, and activities within that setting.

This distinction is theoretically important because it shifts attention from rural space as a therapeutic object to rural life as a relational process. A village does not automatically produce emotional recovery. Rather, emotional meanings are constructed through interactions between individuals and their surroundings.

The limited occurrence of explicit "healing" expressions among interviewees further challenges the dominant discourse surrounding rural tourism. Although participants often experienced relaxation and psychological improvement, they rarely described these changes using therapeutic language. Instead, they emphasized more concrete experiences: having time for themselves, developing friendships, participating in community activities, and regaining control over daily rhythms.

Such findings indicate that meaning reconstruction operates through three interconnected emotional dimensions: belonging, relaxation, and autonomy.

Belonging emerges from social participation. Through repeated interactions with villagers, operators, and other digital nomads, individuals gradually develop a sense of connection with the community. Relaxation results from the transformation of everyday rhythms, allowing individuals to escape excessive acceleration without abandoning productivity. Autonomy comes from the ability to reorganize work and life according to personal preferences.

Together, these dimensions constitute a more complex mechanism than the simple idea of rural healing. Rural experiences become meaningful because they enable individuals to rebuild relationships with themselves, others, and places.

This argument contributes to tourism studies by emphasizing the importance of everyday practices in shaping experiences. Rather than viewing rural tourism as a temporary emotional escape, it is more productive to understand it as a process of meaning negotiation. The value of rural spaces lies not only in what visitors see, but also in what they are able to do and become within those spaces.

5.3. Urban-Rural Compatible Spaces and the Transformation of Rural Functions

The case of Jianya Village also provides insights into changing rural functions in the context of digital transformation. Traditional rural tourism development often emphasizes landscape consumption, cultural display, and short-term visitation. However, the emergence of digital nomads suggests that

some rural spaces are developing new functions as hybrid environments combining residence, work, and social interaction.

Jianya Village represents such an urban-rural compatible space. It does not reject urban elements; instead, it integrates digital infrastructure, creative industries, and cultural consumption into rural settings. This combination allows individuals to maintain connections with urban economic systems while experiencing rural lifestyles.

This transformation reflects broader changes in rural tourism and mobility, where rural destinations increasingly function as hybrid spaces integrating tourism, residence, cultural production, and new forms of work. [15]

For digital nomads, the attractiveness of Jianya Village lies precisely in this balance. A completely isolated rural environment may satisfy the desire for natural escape but cannot support professional activities. Conversely, highly urbanized environments may provide career opportunities but fail to address emotional and lifestyle concerns. The hybrid characteristics of Jianya Village provide an intermediate possibility.

This finding extends discussions on rural revitalization. Rather than treating rural development as a process of attracting tourists for short visits, emerging rural spaces may need to consider their capacity to support temporary residents and mobile populations. Infrastructure, community interaction, and cultural openness become increasingly important resources.

Digital nomads also contribute to rural transformation by introducing new forms of knowledge, consumption, and social networks. Their presence changes the meaning of rural space from a destination to a living environment. Through interaction with local communities, they participate in the production of new rural identities.

However, this transformation should not be understood as simple urbanization of rural areas. The value of rural spaces lies precisely in their ability to maintain distinctive social and environmental characteristics while accommodating new forms of life. The challenge is therefore not to replace rural traditions with urban functions, but to create conditions for meaningful coexistence.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how digital nomads reconstruct everyday life meaning through rural sojourns, focusing on Jianya Village in Xi'an, China. By combining Xiaohongshu user-generated content, semi-structured interviews, guided LDA, emotional meaning analysis, and semantic network analysis, the research explored the relationship between mobility motivation, rural experience, and identity transformation.

The findings demonstrate that digital nomads' rural mobility is rooted in broader reflections on urban everyday life. Their movement is not simply a search for leisure or geographical freedom, but an attempt to respond to experiences of time pressure, fragmented relationships, and reduced control over daily life. Rural spaces provide opportunities for reorganizing these conditions by offering alternative temporal rhythms and social environments.

The study further shows that rural sojourns represent a transition from visiting to dwelling. Through participation in work routines, community activities, and interpersonal interactions, digital nomads gradually transform rural spaces from external destinations into meaningful living environments. Their attachment to place is therefore produced through practice rather than permanence.

A particularly important finding concerns the emotional mechanism of meaning reconstruction. Contrary to the dominant online narrative of rural "healing", digital nomads' experiences are shaped less by direct therapeutic effects and more by the accumulation of belonging, relaxation, and autonomy. Meaning is reconstructed through everyday engagement rather than temporary escape.

Theoretically, this research contributes to discussions of tourism, mobility, and rural transformation by demonstrating that contemporary mobility can generate new forms of dwelling. Digital nomads represent an emerging group that challenges conventional boundaries between tourists and residents, movement and settlement, and urban and rural spaces.

Practically, the case of Jianya Village suggests that rural development strategies should move beyond short-term tourism consumption and consider the creation of spaces capable of supporting diverse forms of living. Improving digital infrastructure, encouraging community interaction, and maintaining local characteristics may help rural areas become more attractive to emerging mobile populations.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. First, this study focuses on a single rural case, and experiences may vary across different regions and cultural contexts. Second, although multiple data sources were combined, the qualitative nature of the research limits broader statistical generalization. Future research could compare different rural destinations and examine how digital nomads' experiences evolve over longer periods. Nevertheless, the case of Jianya Village illustrates an important transformation in contemporary relationships between mobility and place. In an increasingly digital and mobile society, dwelling is no longer necessarily tied to permanent residence. Instead, it may emerge through continuous negotiation between movement, everyday practice, and emotional connection.

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