ingegneria sismica
International Journal of Earthquake Engineering
Anno XLIII - Num. 3 - 2026

Who is a digital countryside nomad? --An empirical study on the typology of value orientation of rural digital nomads based on Q methodology

Mengxi Lin[1,*]

[1] School of Digital Commerce, Zhejiang College of Security and Technology, Wenzhou 325016, Zhejiang, China

SUMMARY: *Digital technology has given rise to a global wave of digital nomads, and the Chinese context shows a localised shift towards 'digital villagers' - a group that returns to the countryside on its own initiative, combining digital connectivity with local rootedness. Currently, the construction of digital villages favours material support such as infrastructure and neglects the inherent diversity of value demands, leading to the dilemma of 'high introduction and low retention'. Taking Wenzhou as a case study, this study employs the Q method to conduct an empirical study on 56 typical digital villagers, integrating literature, in-depth interviews and online texts to construct a system of 32 Q statements covering the four dimensions of personal development, relationship building, cultural identity and spatial perception. Factor analysis identifies four types of value orientations: cultural co-creation (knowledge collaboration and cultural revitalisation), rational choice of residence (environmental adaptation and low-burden living), technological self-sufficiency (functional autonomy and skill growth), and eco-slow living (anti-alienation living ethics). The study reveals that digital villagers are actually strategic 'selective embedders' with significant differences in their value structures. The study proposes a theoretical model of 'digital-village inter-construction', which advocates a shift from 'one-size-fits-all' to 'precise adaptation' in rural governance, and the construction of a hierarchical, categorised, and demand-oriented policy system. The results effectively bridge the cognitive gap between 'policy supply' and 'subjective demand', provide empirical evidence for the governance of digital rural talents, and promote the construction logic from 'attracting people' to 'understanding people'. The results effectively bridge the cognitive gap between 'policy supply' and 'subject needs', and provide an evidence basis for digital village talent governance, promoting the construction logic from 'attracting people' to 'understanding people' and 'keeping people'.*

KEYWORDS: *Digital vagabonds; Digital villagers; Q method; Value orientation; Typology; Rural governance; Precise policy*

1 Research background

With the rapid development of digital technology and the popularity of remote working mode, a wave of "digital vagabonds" characterized by mobility and autonomy has sprung up all over the world. However, in the context of China's specific social culture and system, this phenomenon shows a significant localization turn - more and more individuals with digital skills no longer pursue rootless mobility, but actively choose to return to the countryside,

*lmx_2021@163.com
https://doi.org/10.65102/is20261126 Published: 10 June, 2026

forming a "digital villagers" group with both digital connectivity and local embeddedness. They rely on the Internet to carry out professional activities, while deeply embedded in the rural social and cultural network. While enjoying the natural environment and slow pace of life, they also feed back rural development through e-commerce, content creation, digital services and other ways. As an eastern coastal area with highly developed private economy, profound clan culture and rich landscape resources, Wenzhou has become an important gathering place for digital nomads in recent years. Digital nomad communities have begun to take shape in Taishun, Yongjia and other places. This new phenomenon not only expands the talent source of rural revitalization, but also reconstructs the connotation of urban-rural relationship. However, in practice, local governments often use unified policies to attract digital talents, ignoring the diversity of their intrinsic value demands, resulting in the dilemma of "high introduction and low retention". Therefore, it is urgent to deeply understand the value orientation structure of digital nomads and provide scientific basis for precise policy design.

The phenomenon of "digital villagers" has dual attributes of "economic behavior" and "value practice". Its rural choice is not only related to the transfer of workplace, but also embedded in the redefinition of lifestyle, cultural identity, and social relations. However, in the current practice of digital village construction, policy design still focuses on material support such as infrastructure, network coverage and financial subsidies, and pays insufficient attention to social and cultural dimensions such as intrinsic value demands, identity, and willingness for community integration. There are various reasons for this policy blind spot, including vague cognition of emerging groups, inertia of talent-attraction thinking, and a "one-size-fits-all" governance path dependence. Among them, the lack of systematic identification of the subjective cognitive structure of digital nomads is the key sticking point, leading to a mismatch between policy supply and actual demand—there is a significant tension between the "ideal digital talents" imagined by governments and the "ideal rural life" pursued by digital nomads [1]. In fact, existing studies have revealed heterogeneity within the digital nomad group: Li and Zhong [2] drawing on self-determination theory, show that the well-being effects of a digital-nomadic lifestyle are closely tied to the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs; Koufodontis and Gaki [3] further propose a staged 'digital migration' framework that distinguishes short-term nomads from longer-term digital settlers, highlighting structural differences in embeddedness conditions and stay decisions; Zhou et al. [4] examine China's Digital Nomad Anji (DNA) community and identify multiple dimensions of (dis)embeddedness arising from everyday interactions with local residents, illustrating both the possibilities and limits of two-way integration, and highlighting that emotional and cultural identification is pivotal for longer-term embeddedness. In addition, cultural and landscape motivations should not be ignored: Zhang [5] finds that holistic landscape perception strengthens place identity and then translates into destination-relevant pro-environmental behavioral intentions; Yu et al. [6] interpret "Dalifornia"-style practices of Chinese digital nomads as a geo-arbitrage-oriented and meaning-seeking form of mobile entrepreneurship. However, these insights have not yet been translated into operational policy segmentation tools. Therefore, an in-depth typology of digital nomads' value orientations will not only help reveal the internal logic of stay decisions, but also bridge the cognitive gap between policy makers and actors [7], providing a scientific basis for building a people-oriented and differentiated governance system for digital village talent.

Previous studies have mostly used in-depth interviews, participatory observation or online ethnography to explore the life practice and spatial behavior of digital vagrants. Although they can present rich situational details, it is difficult to systematically reveal the differences in their internal value structure; Although the traditional questionnaire has the advantage of quantification, it is often unable to capture complex and dynamic subjective cognition due to the limitation of preset options. As a hybrid research tool specially used to explore the structure

of subjective views, Q method has shown its unique advantages in the fields of environmental psychology, tourism geography and community governance in recent years. It can effectively reveal the "relationship in the view" rather than only statistics "the view in the relationship" through forced ranking and factor analysis, taking into account both qualitative depth and quantitative rigor. However, this method has not been systematically introduced into the research field of digital village or digital migration. This study innovatively applies the Q method to the value orientation research of rural digital nomads. Based on literature review, in-depth interviews and online texts, it constructs a 32 Q sentence system covering four dimensions: personal development, relationship construction, cultural identity and spatial perception. It empirically analyzes 56 typical digital villagers, and identifies the value orientation typology with theoretical and policy significance for the first time. The research focuses on three core issues: what are the typical types of value orientation of digital nomads? What are the differences between different types in rural integration behavior, spatial preference and stability of residence? How to build accurate and differentiated digital village talent support policies based on value differentiation? By answering these questions, it aims to bridge the cognitive gap between "policy supply" and "subject demand", and promote the transformation of digital village construction from "attracting people" to "understanding people" and "paying attention".

2 Research design: a value orientation research framework based on Q method

Q-method is a hybrid research paradigm integrating qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Its core goal is to quantify subjectivity and reveal "the structural relationship within viewpoints" with the help of mathematical statistics, rather than the "correlation between variables" that traditional quantitative research focuses on [8]. This method was first proposed by Stephenson in 1935 [9]. It combines the interpretation depth of qualitative research with the systematic rigor of quantitative analysis, and is especially suitable for exploring how individuals interpret, perceive and give meaning to their life world [10]. In the context of this study, Q method shows three prominent adaptations: first, given that digital villagers belong to a new and not yet fully theorized group, the research is still in the exploratory stage, and Q method is specialized in dealing with the complex structure of subjective dimensions such as attitudes, views and perceptions in small samples [11], which can more effectively capture its multidimensional and intertwined value orientation than the conventional method relying on large sample random sampling; Second, the practice of digital villagers includes both subjective experience and explicit behavior, and Q method can connect the two, while maintaining the preciseness of the method, it can deeply explore the motivation logic under the behavior representation; Third, although the behavior of digital vagrants in different regions is highly similar (such as settling in rural areas and telecommuting), there may be significant differences in their internal driving forces, and the Q method can effectively distinguish the typical tension of "consistent behavior and diverse motivation", so as to reveal the heterogeneity within the group.

Compared with traditional research methods, Q method shows unique advantages in this study. Although standard questionnaire surveys can obtain large-sample data, they are often restricted by preset options and may miss the nuanced and internally inconsistent value orientations observed among mobile digital workers and related emerging groups [12]. Although pure ethnographic observation can penetrate deeply into the field, it is more vulnerable to researcher subjectivity and is less conducive to stable typological induction when viewpoints are highly fragmented and rapidly evolving [13], making systematic comparison

across value positions difficult [14]. By combining forced sorting with factor analysis, Q method not only preserves the richness of subjective experience but also enables structured clustering of viewpoints, offering a robust way to map differentiated orientations and their potential implications for place-based engagement and mediated destination representations [15].

2.1 Research and design based on Q method

The research design is directly related to the feasibility and operability of the research, and the scientific selection of Q statements and the standard setting of their sorting rules constitute the basic premise of subsequent data collection, processing and interpretation. The construction of the Q sentence should systematically integrate the existing academic literature and the actual views of the respondents. At the same time, its arrangement must strictly follow the basic procedures and technical specifications established by the Q method.

2.1.1 Q statement construction

According to the standard operation process of Q method, after the research problem is clear, it is necessary to carry out the collection and collection construction of propositions around the core theme of "digital nomad value orientation". This study uses the three source data integration strategy to form the initial proposition pool: first, a systematic review of 42 relevant academic literatures at home and abroad, extracts representative views on the value orientation of digital workers and rural migrants, and initially forms 20 statements; Secondly, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with four early digital villagers, and 20 typical expressions reflecting local practical experience were summarized from the interview text; Third, crawl and analyze 543 discussion posts about "digital nomads" and "digital nomads" on xiaohongshu and other platforms, and extract 15 statements reflecting the value demands in the network context through content analysis. A total of 55 initial propositions from the above three categories of sources comprehensively cover the value expression of digital villagers in the four dimensions of personal development, social relations, cultural identity and spatial perception.

In order to improve the scientificity and representativeness of the Q sample, the study invited four experts from different fields (specializing in rural revitalization, digital economy, regional planning, cultural research and behavioral psychology) to independently review all the initial propositions. Experts used Likert 5-point scale to score, ranging from "very irrelevant" (1 point) to "very relevant" (5 points). Only the statements with an average score of no less than 4 and a degree of consensus (i.e. the score consistency rate) of more than 80% are retained, and finally 32 valid Q statements are screened out. Based on literature review and pre survey interviews, this study systematically summarizes these sentences into four analysis dimensions: personal development (8), relationship construction (9), cultural identity (8) and spatial perception (7). Typical examples include: "even if the income decreases, I would like to stay in a village that can feel the changes of the four seasons" (belonging to the dimension of personal development), "I hope to use digital skills to help villagers sell agricultural products to further places" (belonging relationship construction dimension), etc. All statements pay attention to the balanced allocation of positive and negative statements in the preparation process to avoid inductive or biased wording.

2.1.2 Setting of Q statement arrangement standard

In this study, the "± 4 compulsory distribution structure" commonly used in the Q method was adopted, and the respondents were required to classify all 32 statements from "least agree" (–4) to "most agree" (+4) according to the degree of agreement. The specific distribution was as

follows: 1 statement for–4 and+4 respectively, 3 statements for–3 and+3 respectively, 4 statements for–2 and+2 respectively, 5 statements for–1 and+1 respectively, and 6 statements for level 0. The sorting task is completed in a mixed way online and offline: the offline respondents are guided by researchers in Zeya, Taishun, Dongtou and other places in Wenzhou, and are sorted according to the four stages of familiarity, preliminary classification, fine sorting, and explanation, and receive brief interviews; Online respondents independently completed the whole process through the open Q-sorting website built by the author, including providing text explanation for extreme statements placed at ± 4, and filling in basic information such as age and occupation and open suggestions. All online data is automatically recorded, and the whole process of offline process is recorded to ensure the integrity of sorting logic and subjective reasons. The survey will be completed from August 1 to October 25, 2025. The average time for a single task is about 70 minutes. The forced quasi-normal distribution template is shown in Fig. 1.

2.2 Case selection and data collection

As a new floating group, the migration and settlement practice of digital vagrants to the countryside is becoming a new topic to reshape the relationship between urban and rural areas and activate local culture and economy. As a leading area in Zhejiang Province and even the whole country to explore the integrated development of "digital nomads+Rural Revitalization", Wenzhou has systematically built digital nomad communities in Zeya, Taishun and other places since 2022, attracting a large number of remote workers from all over the country. This practice not only provides a rich realistic scene for observing the interaction between digital nomads and rural society, but also makes it a typical field to explore the tension between individual spatial cognition, lifestyle preferences and local development policies in the digital era.

This study takes the digital vagrants living and working in rural and small towns in Wenzhou as the main research object, and aims to explore their internal attitude structure and behavior preference for rural life. To ensure the depth and breadth of the research, the author and his research team adopted a multi-channel mixed recruitment strategy. On the one hand, the list of potential respondents was obtained through cooperation with Wenzhou township cultural and tourism bureaus, DN Zeya digital nomad commune, Taishun digital maker and other official and community organizations; On the other hand, recruitment information is also released on online social platforms such as "little red book" and "digital nomad China", supplemented by snowball sampling and field visits. The survey set clear screening criteria: (1) living in rural/small towns for more than 2 months; (2) The main work relies on Internet/digital technology for remote office; (3) Have real experience of digital nomadism and rural life.

In the stage of proposition collection and pre investigation, the research team has visited the rural digital nomad gathering place in Wenzhou for many times to conduct interviews and observations. The formal Q-method data collection was launched in the summer of 2025. More than 90 potential respondents were contacted in this survey. After screening and confirmation, 56 effective q-ranked samples were finally obtained, which constituted the analysis sample of this study. All respondents signed informed consent, which ensured the ethical compliance of the study. The thematic composition and content summary of the final Q-set (32 statements) are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Q statement contents

	S/N	Q statement content
Personal Development Dimension	1	Even if my income decreases, I am willing to stay in the countryside where I can feel the change of seasons.
	2	Working in the countryside gives me more time to think and create, enhancing my professional skills.
	3	I choose a digital nomad lifestyle not to escape workplace competition, but to seek a more creative way of living.
	4	The rural environment makes my work more sustainable, preventing burnout from excessive competition.
	5	I work in the countryside to explore a definition of success different from mainstream society.
	6	In the city, I was a cog in the machine; in the countryside, I have become a jack of all trades—fixing pipes, shooting videos, organizing events.
	7	In the countryside, I can focus more on creating real value rather than chasing short-term profits.
	8	I come to the countryside not to take it easy, but to use my digital skills to do something with long-term value, even if it's small.
Relationship Building Dimension	9	I hope to use my digital skills to help villagers sell their agricultural products to further markets.
	10	I actively learn the local dialect to communicate more deeply with villagers and build trust.
	11	My relationship with villagers goes beyond simple employment or cooperation; it resembles a mutually supportive partnership.
	12	I respect the traditional knowledge and life wisdom of villagers, believing it complements my digital skills.
	13	I believe digital villagers should participate in village public affairs decision-making, rather than being mere bystanders.
	14	I find that intergenerational communication (like teaching elders to use digital tools) is an effective way to build community trust.
	15	When handling disagreements with villagers, I tend to listen and understand rather than impose my modern views.
	16	The simplicity and sincerity of villagers make me feel that relationships here are more genuine and valuable than those in the city.
	17	I worry that leaders categorize people into hierarchies, creating cliques that exclude newcomers, making me feel unwelcome.
Cultural Identity Dimension	18	I am very interested in the clan culture of Wenzhou and am learning about its organizational wisdom.
	19	I try to use digital technology to record and preserve the village's traditional crafts and oral histories.
	20	I believe the ecological wisdom embedded in rural culture offers important insights for modern life.
	21	I strive to understand and respect local festive customs, even if some differ greatly from my urban experiences.
	22	The beauty of the countryside lies in its imperfection—roosters crowing, muddy roads, a slow pace; don't turn it into a trendy showcase.
	23	I attempt to combine modern design elements with traditional cultural symbols to create new forms of cultural expression.
	24	I believe true cultural preservation is not about freezing traditions but revitalizing them in a modern context.
	25	I disagree with transforming the countryside based on urban standards; real integration is about mutual learning rather than one-way output.
Spatial Perception Dimension	26	The most important reason I choose Wenzhou countryside is its rich natural landscape.
	27	Accessibility to the city within one hour is crucial for my work-life balance.
	28	What truly attracts me are places that have both natural beauty and like-minded young people—both are essential.
	29	The public spaces in rural communities (like ancestral halls and squares) are important places for my interaction with villagers.
	30	A good digital nomad space needs stable Wi-Fi, but more importantly, it should have a group of people willing to discuss ideals late into the night.
	31	I worry that excessive tourism development will destroy the authenticity and liveliness of the countryside.
	32	When I choose a countryside place to live long-term, I first observe whether there is a culture of inclusivity towards outsiders rather than solely focusing on scenery or facilities.

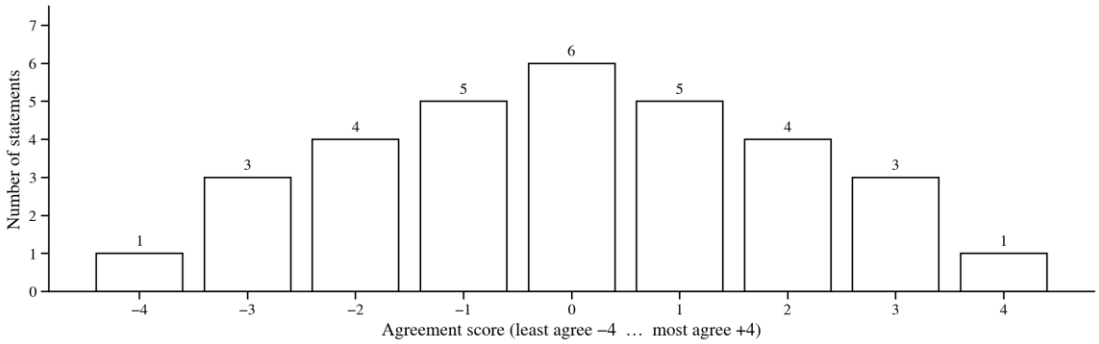

Figure 1: Forced quasi-normal distribution used for Q-sorting (32 statements). Note: Respondents place exactly 1/3/4/5/6/5/4/3/1 statements into score columns −4 to +4.

3 Data Analysis

This study mainly carried out Q method data analysis with the help of KADE v1.3.1 software. In the data entry session, the author imported 32 Q statements and 56 valid Q sorts into the software, and carried out the subsequent steps of factor analysis, factor rotation, factor score calculation, identification of consensus and discriminative statements, and factor interpretation sequentially as follows:

(1) Factor Analysis and Factor Rotation

The author used the Brown Centroid Factor Extraction Method to conduct a preliminary factor analysis of the 56 Q-rankings. The method extracts underlying attitudinal structures by iteratively calculating the correlation matrix between participants. After initially extracting eight factors, the author finalised the top four factors to be retained for subsequent analyses based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues greater than 1), the proportion of cumulative explained variance (up to 34%), and the clarity of the factor loading matrix.

Subsequently, the study performed Varimax maximum variance orthogonal rotation on the four retained factors. This rotation method maximises the variance of the internal loadings of each factor, resulting in a more concise factor structure with good theoretical interpretability. The maximum correlation coefficient between the factors is only |r| = 0.143, which indicates that the factors are highly independent of each other, and there is no significant structural overlap, thus providing clear discriminant validity.

(2) Factor scores

After completing the factor rotations, this study calculated the standardised loadings (i.e., factor scores) of each participant on the four factors using KADE software. The statistical threshold for identifying significant factor loadings was estimated using Eq. (1).

$$|f| \geq 2.58/\sqrt{N}(p < 0.01) \tag{1}$$

where f is the factor loading and N is the number of Q statements (N = 32 in this study). Accordingly, the critical value is approximately 0.46; to ensure robustness, a stricter cutoff of |loading| ≥ 0.52 was adopted. Typical representative participants for each factor were then identified as follows:

Factor 1:DN25 (0.808), DN28 (0.711), DN40 (0.700);

Factor 2:DN20 (0.669), DN12 (0.628), DN34 (0.617);

Factor 3:DN51 (0.611), DN55 (0.564);

Factor 4:DN05 (0.528), DN80 (0.528)。

The above highly loaded participants constituted the 'prototype sample' for each factor, and

their raw Q-sort data were used for subsequent factor content interpretation. Further, Distinguishing Statements, i.e., statements that were significantly higher on one factor than on other factors, were identified for each factor by Z-score tests ($p < 0.01$). For example, statement 28 ('What really attracts me are places that have both natural landscapes and young people of the same frequency - you can't have one without the other') has a $Z = 1.85$ ($p < 0.01$) on Factor 2, and is thus a Distinguishing Statement that defines the characteristics of this factor. core identifying statement. The standardized factor arrays (Z-scores and rank orders) for all Q statements are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Factor arrays of Q statements across four factors

S/N	Presentation	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4	
		Z-score	Arrange in order	Z-score	Arrange in order	Z-score	Arrange in order	Z-score	Arrange in order
1	Even if my income decreases, I am willing to stay in the countryside where I can feel the changes of the four seasons.	0.33	13	-1.03	28	-1.21	26	-0.31	22
2	Working in the countryside gives me more time to think and create, enhancing my professional skills.	1	6	0.2	15	-1.21	27	0	16
3	I choose the digital nomad lifestyle not to escape workplace competition, but to seek a creative way of living.	-0.73	23	1.18	4	0.98	4	0.31	14
4	The rural environment makes my work more sustainable, preventing me from exhausting myself due to excessive competition.	-0.9	25	0.22	14	0.23	18	1.84	1
5	I work in the countryside to explore a definition of success that differs from mainstream society.	-1.33	29	-0.51	24	-1.59	29	0.31	11
6	In the city, I am a cog in the machine; in the countryside, I become a jack of all trades—I can fix plumbing, shoot videos, and organize events.	-0.22	20	-0.04	16	-1.81	31	1.23	3
7	In the countryside, I can focus more on creating real value rather than chasing short-term benefits.	0.53	12	0.94	5	-0.23	22	0.92	6
8	I didn't come to the countryside to take it easy; I want to use my digital skills to do something of long-term value, even if it's small.	0.16	16	-0.16	18	0.98	5	0.92	7
9	I hope to use digital skills to help villagers sell their agricultural products to further markets.	0.79	8	-0.58	25	0.38	13	0.31	15
10	I actively learn the local dialect to communicate more deeply with villagers and build trust.	1.33	4	1.63	2	-0.61	24	1.23	4
11	My relationship with the villagers transcends simple employment or cooperation; it resembles a mutually beneficial partnership.	-1.58	30	0.46	13	0.93	6	0	17
12	I respect the villagers' traditional knowledge and life wisdom, believing that it can complement my digital skills.	1.42	3	0.86	6	0.33	15	-0.61	24
13	I believe digital villagers should participate in village public affairs decisions, rather than being mere bystanders.	0.75	9	-0.62	26	1.59	1	0.61	9
14	I find intergenerational communication (such as teaching the elderly to use digital tools) an effective way to build community trust.	0.16	15	0.53	12	0.61	10	0	18
15	When dealing with disagreements with villagers, I prefer to listen and understand	-1.75	32	-0.18	19	0.38	14	1.23	5

	rather than impose my modern views.								
16	The simplicity and sincerity of the villagers feel more genuine and valuable to me than urban interpersonal relationships.	1.07	5	0.63	9	0.88	7	-1.23	26
17	I worry that the organizers divide people into hierarchies, creating cliques that exclude newcomers, making me feel unwelcome.	-1.59	31	-1.85	30	-1.54	28	-1.53	29
18	I am very interested in the clan culture in Wenzhou and am learning to understand its organizational wisdom.	-0.32	21	1.47	3	0.51	11	-1.23	27
19	I try to use digital technology to document and preserve traditional crafts and oral histories of the village.	0.84	7	-0.35	22	0	19	-0.31	23
20	I believe the ecological wisdom embedded in rural culture has important implications for modern life.	1.69	1	-0.23	20	0	20	-1.53	30
21	I strive to understand and respect local festive customs, even if they differ significantly from my urban experiences.	0.64	11	-1.63	29	-0.83	25	0.61	10
22	The beauty of the countryside lies in its imperfection—rooster crowing, barking dogs, muddy roads, and a slow pace; don't turn it into an Instagrammable showcase.	0.33	14	-0.82	27	0.51	12	0	19
23	I attempt to combine modern design elements with traditional cultural symbols to create new forms of cultural expression.	-0.12	19	-0.39	23	0.28	16	0.31	12
24	I believe true cultural preservation is not about sealing traditions away but allowing them to rejuvenate in a modern context.	1.6	2	-0.08	17	1.54	2	0	20
25	I do not agree with transforming the countryside based on urban standards; true integration is about mutual learning rather than one-way output.	0.75	10	-2.07	32	0.65	9	-1.84	31
26	The most important reason I chose the rural area in Wenzhou is its rich natural landscapes.	-0.69	22	0.66	8	-0.1	21	-1.23	28
27	Accessibility to cities within an hour is crucial for my work-life balance.	-1.07	26	0.57	11	-1.77	30	-1.84	32
28	What truly attracts me are places that have both natural landscapes and like-minded young people—both are indispensable.	-0.74	24	1.85	1	0.28	17	-0.31	21
29	The public spaces in rural communities (such as ancestral halls and squares) are important places for my interaction with villagers.	-0.06	18	0.85	7	-1.81	32	-0.61	25
30	A good digital nomad space needs stable Wi-Fi, but more importantly, it should have a group of people willing to discuss ideals late into the night.	-1.16	27	-0.27	21	0.78	8	0.92	8
31	I worry that excessive tourism development will damage the authenticity and liveliness of the countryside.	-1.18	28	-1.85	31	1.16	3	0.31	13
32	When choosing a countryside area for long-term residence, I first observe whether there is a culture of inclusivity towards outsiders, rather than just looking at scenery or facilities.	0.06	17	0.58	10	-0.28	23	1.53	2

(3) Analysis of Consensus Statements

While identifying the differences, the author also conducted chi-square tests on the loadings of the statements on different factors through the F-test test. If there is no statistically significant difference between the loadings of a statement on all factors (i.e. *p* > 0.05), the statement is defined as a 'Consensus Statements', reflecting the commonly shared views among various groups of digital nomads. The results of the analyses show that the following three statements do not show statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) on any of the four factors, and are considered to be the basis of shared perceptions amongst the Digital Nomad community:

1. statement 14: 'I have found cross-generational communication (e.g., teaching seniors to use digital tools) to be an effective way to build trust in the community.' → All groups agree that using technology feedback as a pathway to social inclusion has a low barrier to participation with clear social initiation value.

2. statement 17: 'I am concerned that certain "masterminds" or "community leaders" will form cliques and ostracise newcomers.' → This reflects the digital nomad community's general alertness to potential informal power structures, as well as their shared emphasis on the governance principle of community "openness".

3. Statement 23: 'I try to combine modern design elements with traditional cultural symbols to create new forms of cultural expression.' → Despite the fact that 'eco-slow living' is not an 'eco-slow living' concept, it is not a 'eco-slow living' concept. → This suggests that cultural innovation itself has cross-group attraction, and that the differences between groups are mainly in the operational aspects of innovation subjects and implementation paths, rather than in the willingness to innovate itself.

The results of the consensus statement analysis show that although the digital nomad group is significantly differentiated in terms of rural social roles and practice orientations, there is still a clear common cognitive framework in terms of basic social ethics (e.g., intergenerational mutual support), consensus on community governance (e.g., opposition to closed power structures), and basic orientations in cultural practices (e.g., openness to innovation). This consensual foundation can provide a key value anchor for the construction and governance of rural digital communities.

(4) Factor Interpretation

Based on the loadings of the four factors in the table, this study interprets the overall factor analysis results around the dimensions of digital nomads' value cognition, behavioural preferences and subject orientation towards rural life. The principles of interpretation include: firstly, in order to further highlight the focus of each factor, four most distinguishable Q statements are retained for each factor; secondly, the interpretation basis is based on the content of positive perceptions, and low-scoring sentences play an auxiliary supporting role. As a result, it was found that there were differentiated combinations of the above four dimensions, presenting the following four cognitive-behavioural preference combinations.

3.1 Cultural co-creation digital nomads

In this cognitive model, digital nomads have a high degree of recognition of the value of rural culture, and hold a behavioural preference for in-depth participation and collaborative innovation (Table 3). They not only believe that "the ecological wisdom contained in rural culture is an important revelation for modern life" (S20), but also emphasise their role as recorders and revitalisers of local knowledge. This is manifested in their strong support for "attempting to use digital technology to record and preserve traditional crafts and oral history of villages" (S19), and their commitment to "combining modern design elements with traditional cultural symbols to create new forms of cultural expression" (S23). With this cognitive disposition, they are against any form of cultural hegemony, and are especially wary of "imposing my modern concepts when dealing with disagreements with the villagers" (S15),

and believe that the relationship with the villagers should be based on equality and mutual trust, rather than simple employment or co-operation. As one typical participant put it, "We respect the tradition here, we are not here to transform it, we are here to make it live together."

Table 3: Scores for Q statements in factor 1

	S/N	Content of the statement	Factor score
Highest Score	1	I believe the ecological wisdom embedded in rural culture has important implications for modern life. (S20)	1.69
	2	I try to use digital technology to document and preserve traditional crafts and oral histories of the village. (S19)	1.60
	3	I attempt to combine modern design elements with traditional cultural symbols to create new forms of cultural expression. (S23)	1.42
	4	I respect the villagers' traditional knowledge and life wisdom, believing that it can complement my digital skills. (S12)	1.42
Lowest Score	1	When handling disagreements with villagers, I prefer to listen and understand rather than impose my modern views. (S15)	-1.75
	2	I worry that certain "organizers" or "community leaders" may form cliques that exclude newcomers. (S17)	-1.59
	3	I hope to use digital skills to help villagers sell their agricultural products to further markets. (S9)	-1.58
	4	My relationship with the villagers transcends simple employment or cooperation and resembles a mutually beneficial partnership. (S11)	-1.58

3.2 Digital Travellers with Rational Choice of Settlement

Digital Travellers with this cognitive orientation have a clear rational calculation in their choice of the countryside, and their core demand is the precise matching of the ideal living environment (Table 4). What they value most is "a place with both natural landscape and young people of the same frequency - you can't have one without the other" (S28), and they take this as the primary criterion in their settlement decision. At the same time, they also paid attention to the uniqueness of local culture, for example, they were "very interested in the clan culture of Wenzhou area" (S18). However, this interest is more from an observer's point of view, and they are not keen to get deeply involved in community affairs, so they show less willingness to engage in empowering activities such as "participating in decision-making on public affairs in the village" (S13) or "helping villagers to sell agricultural products" (S9). They chose the villages to find a better way of life for themselves rather than to take on a social responsibility. One respondent confessed, "I came here to find a comfortable corner for myself, not to volunteer."

Table 4: Scores for Q statements in factor 2

	S/N	Content of the statement	Factor score
Highest Score	1	What truly attracts me are places that have both natural landscapes and like-minded young people—both are indispensable. (S28)	1.85
	2	I actively learn the local dialect in order to communicate more deeply with the villagers and build trust. (S10)	1.63
	3	I am very interested in the clan culture of the Wenzhou region and am learning to understand its organizational wisdom. (S18)	1.47
	4	The public spaces in rural communities (such as ancestral halls and squares) are important venues for my interactions with the villagers. (S29)	0.85
Lowest Score	1	I oppose transforming rural areas using urban standards and aesthetics, believing that this would destroy their original liveliness. (S25)	-2.07
	2	I worry that excessive tourism development will cause the countryside to lose its authenticity and tranquility. (S31)	-1.85
	3	I believe that digital villagers should participate in the decision-making of public affairs in the village, rather than just being bystanders. (S13)	-0.62
	4	I hope to use digital skills to help villagers sell their agricultural products to more distant markets. (S9)	-0.58

3.3 Technologically self-sufficient digital nomads

Under this cognitive orientation, digital nomads see the countryside as a testing ground for the full development of individual capabilities, and their behavioural preferences reflect a strong autonomy and functionalism orientation (Table 5). They are proud of the fact that they are "a screw in the city, but a multi-faceted person in the countryside - I can fix plumbing, make videos, and organise events" (S6). However, the construction of this "multi-faceted" identity mainly serves the convenience of their personal life and work, rather than the purpose of integrating into the community. As a result, they show a clear sense of detachment from social activities that require emotional investment, such as "learning local dialects" (S10) or relying on "public spaces such as ancestral halls and squares" (S29) for interaction. Their ideal state is "self-sufficiency", using technology to solve all their problems, and maintaining a bounded, instrumental connection with the outside world.

Table 5: Scores for Q statements in factor 3

	S/N	Content of the statement	Factor score
Highest Score	1	I believe that digital villagers should participate in the decision-making of public affairs in the village, rather than just being bystanders. (S13)	1.59
	2	I worry that excessive tourism development will cause the countryside to lose its authenticity and tranquility. (S31)	1.16
	3	Working in the countryside gives me more time to think and create, enhancing my professional skills. (S2)	-1.21
	4	I actively learn the local dialect in order to communicate more deeply with the villagers and build trust. (S10)	-0.61
Lowest Score	1	In the city, I am a cog in the machine; in the countryside, I have become a versatile person—I can fix pipes, shoot videos, and organize events. (S6)	-1.81
	2	The public spaces in rural communities (such as ancestral halls and squares) are important venues for my interactions with the villagers. (S29)	-1.81
	3	I find that intergenerational communication (such as teaching the elderly to use digital tools) is an effective way to build community trust. (S14)	-1.59
	4	I am willing to live long-term in a rural community that is inclusive of newcomers. (S32)	-1.59

3.4 Ecological slow-living digital nomads

Digital nomads with this cognitive orientation have a central aspiration to escape urban performanceism and seek an authentic, simple and sustainable lifestyle (Table 6). They believe that "a rural environment allows me to work more sustainably without over-competition" (S4), and see "the presence of a culture that is tolerant of outsiders" (S32) as the key to choosing a long-term home. It is worth noting that despite their longing for rural life, they are wary of the current popular narrative of "romanticising rural culture". They do not see "ecological wisdom" (S20) or "clan culture" (S18) as objects that must be learnt and promoted, but are concerned that these concepts have been over-packaged, turning the countryside into a new symbol of consumption. For them, the charm of the countryside lies precisely in its "imperfect" everydayness, such as the crowing of chickens and the barking of dogs and the dirt roads, rather than in carefully planned cultural performances.

Table 6: Scores for Q statements in factor 4

	S/N	Content of the statement	Factor score
Highest Score	1	The rural environment makes my work more sustainable and prevents me from exhausting myself due to excessive competition. (S4)	1.84
	2	When I choose to live long-term in a village, I first observe whether there is a cultural atmosphere that is inclusive of newcomers, rather than just looking at the scenery or facilities. (S32)	1.53
	3	In the city, I am a cog in the machine; in the countryside, I have become a versatile person—I can fix pipes, shoot videos, and organize events. (S6)	1.23
	4	Accessibility to the city within an hour is crucial for my work-life balance. (S27)	0.57
Lowest Score	1	Developing the tourism economy on Zhongshan Road and improving the lives of nearby residents are in conflict with each other. (S25)	-1.31
	2	The main problem with the poor development of the Zhongshan Road area is that the nearby residents are low-income groups. (S26)	-1.59
	3	Historic districts do not possess modern aesthetic appeal. (S2)	-1.75
	4	I understand the government's series of development plans for Zhongshan Road. (S32)	-2.19

4 Discussion: Multiple Subjectivities, Selective Embeddedness and Urban-Rural Symbiosis in the Digital Age

4.1 Ranscending Binary Oppositions and Constructing a New Paradigm of Digital-Village Interconstruction

Most existing studies place digital nomads in the framework of binary oppositions between "modernity and tradition," "city and countryside," and "technology and place," viewing them as "cultural implanters" or "carriers of modernity" that export digital logic in one direction. However, this study identifies four types of value orientations through the Q methodology, revealing that digital nomads are in fact reflective and pluralistic subjects whose rural practices are essentially differentiated processes of participating in the re-construction of local meanings. Therefore, this study proposes the framework of "digital-village mutual construction", which aims to transcend binary narratives and understand digitality and vernacularity as co-constructive relationships that are dynamically intertwined and mutually shaped in concrete practices, which are realised through four major mechanisms: translation, negotiation, selective embeddedness, and reflexive reconfiguration.

Among them, the mechanism of translation embodies digital technology as a cultural intermediary that transforms local knowledge into contemporary forms that can be disseminated and recreated. For example, the "cultural co-creation type" highly identifies with "using digital technology to record handicrafts and oral history" (S19), which is not simply preservation, but

activates local memories by means of imaging and archiving, so that they can regain vitality in the contemporary context.

The consultative mechanism runs through the continuous interaction between digital villagers and villagers on spatial rights, cultural interpretation rights and development paths. For example, the digital nomad's identification with "preferring to listen rather than to impose ideas" (S15) reflects a conscious restraint on the boundaries of outsider power, while the villagers form a reverse statute through local norms. This mechanism avoids the unidirectional dominance of digital logic and prevents localities from falling into closure, providing a basis for equal dialogue.

The selective embedding mechanism highlights the active control of the digital nomad subject over the dimension, depth and mode of embedding. The four types of groups show significant differences: the cultural co-creation type focuses on cultural embedding, the rational choice of residence type pays attention to the matching of space and community, the technological self-sufficiency type only accepts functional exchanges, and the eco-slow-life type emphasises value recognition and actively maintains social distance. This suggests that outsiders can form multiple coexisting relationships with the countryside, rather than a single integration model of 'all or nothing'.

Finally, the mechanism of reflexive reconstruction reveals the digital nomads' awareness of the dilemma of modernity and their value reassessment. For example, the 'eco-slow-living type' is wary of 'Netflix exploitation' (S31), and advocates the preservation of "imperfect" daily texture, which is essentially a redefinition of 'what is a good life' after departing from the logic of urban performance. Mobility is thus not only a physical displacement, but also a reflexive negotiation and reconstruction of systems of meaning.

4.2 Transformation of rural governance from 'one-size-fits-all' to 'precise adaptation'.

Currently, many local policies still regard digital nomads as a homogeneous group, and adopt the standardised strategy of 'building shared office space + creating a Netflix landscape', ignoring their intrinsic differences, which can easily lead to resource mismatch and subject alienation. This study advocates the establishment of a hierarchical, classified, demand-oriented and precise governance system to support the effective operation of the four inter-constructive mechanisms mentioned above.

For the "cultural co-creation type", non-extractive cultural collaboration platforms (e.g., digital archives, joint curatorial mechanisms) should be set up to protect the subjectivity of local residents in cultural reproduction and to promote fairness in the translation process; for the "rational choice of residence type", infrastructure and light social support systems (e.g., high-speed internet, flexible rental, interest communities) should be improved to reduce the cost of relocation and create a low-burden negotiation environment; For the "technological self-sufficient", modular skill exchange systems (e.g. time banking, project-based cooperation) can be designed to echo their functional orientation and respect their selective embedded boundaries; and for the "ecological slow-life", soft regulations, such as the Guidelines for the Protection of the Authenticity of Rural Life, should be adopted to limit over-commercialisation and spectacle development, maintain the daily texture and local sense of quality, and support them to realise their anti-alienation vision of life.

In summary, rural governance should shift to a subjectivity-centred paradigm of collaborative development, where digital nomads are no longer regarded as objects to be managed, but as collaborators in co-construction and co-management. The goal of the policy should not be to mechanically "retain the population", but to support different subjects to realise meaningful habitats in the countryside according to their own wishes, and ultimately to promote

the sustainable coexistence of urban-rural relations in the digital era.

5 Conclusions and suggestions: type identification of digital villagers' value orientation and reconstruction of policy guidance mechanism

This study takes the value orientation of digital villagers as the core research object, and uses the Q method to systematically explore 56 digital vagrants from villages and towns in Wenzhou and other parts of the country. The study found that there is significant value heterogeneity within the digital villagers' group, and its attitude structure can be divided into four typical types: "cultural co creation", "rational choice of residence", "technology self-sufficiency" and "ecological slow life". Each type not only presents a differentiated path in terms of spatial choice, cultural identity, social participation and so on, but also reveals that this group is not a "spatial Migrator" passively subject to the dual logic of urban and rural areas, but a "selective embedded subject" with reflective consciousness and action strategies. Among them, the "cultural co creation type" emphasizes knowledge collaboration and cultural reproduction, "rational choice of residence type" attaches importance to environmental adaptation and low-cost living mode, "technology self-sufficiency type" focuses on functional autonomy and resource exchange efficiency, "ecological slow life type" adheres to the anti alienation and daily life ethics. This multi subjectivity structure breaks the traditional framework of urban-rural opposition narrative and technological determinism, suggesting that in the digital era, rural development policies should go beyond the thinking of "standardized drainage" and turn to the differentiated governance path based on the value cognitive structure.

Although this study recruited a nationally representative sample through the combination of online and offline, there are still some limitations. First, there is a selective bias in the composition of the sample: relying on social platforms such as xiaohongshu may make it easier to reach groups active online and willing to share experiences, but it is difficult to cover those "silent practitioners" who deliberately keep a low profile. Secondly, Q method captures the typical structure of attitudes, and it is unable to infer the proportion of various groups in the overall population. In the future, it can be quantified and verified with a large sample questionnaire. Thirdly, this study focuses on the expression of attitude, and has not yet investigated the consistency between attitude and actual behavior. In the follow-up, we can track their daily practice through ethnographic observation. Finally, all participants meet the experience threshold of "having real experience", and future research can include short-term experimenters or quitters to present a more complete picture of rural digital flow.

Funding

This work was supported by Wenzhou Municipal Basic Scientific Research Project (2024).

About The Author

Mengxi Lin was born in Zhejiang, Mainland China, in 1996. She received her bachelor’s degree from Renmin University of China and later earned a master’s degree in Applied Economics from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She is currently serving as the Head of the E-Commerce Program at the School of Digital Commerce, Zhejiang College of Security and Technology. Her main research interests include the digital economy and e-commerce.

References

[1] Zhou, L., Buhalis, D., Fan, D. X. F., Ladkin, A., & Lian, X. (2024). Attracting digital nomads: Smart destination strategies, innovation and competitiveness. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 31, 100850.

[2] Li, J., & Zhong, S. (2025). Understanding the well-being of digital nomads from the perspective of self-determination theory - the case of China. Information Technology & Tourism, 27(4), 1229-1251.

[3] Koufodontis, N. I., & Gaki, E. (2025). Digital nomads or digital settlers? Rethinking regional development in the information age. Geoforum, 167, 104466.

[4] Zhou, L., Lian, X., Fan, D. X. F., Buhalis, D., & Ladkin, A. (2025). Digital nomads: Transient social interactions and local (dis)embeddedness in DNA, China. Tourism Geographies, 1-23.

[5] Zhang, K. (2025). Recreational landscape perception and pro-environmental behavior: The mediating roles of place identity and pro-environmental behavioral spillover. Frontiers in Psychology, 16, 1616154.

[6] Yu, K., Zhang, J., & Hannam, K. (2024). Welcome to 'Dalifornia': Chinese digital nomads as mobile entrepreneurs. Current Issues in Tourism (Published online: 20 Jul 2024).

[7] Yang, C., Shao, J., & Zhao, Y. (2025). Post-COVID-19 sojourn choices: Exploring the distribution and preferences of Chinese digital nomads based on the lifestyle migration theory. Sustainability, 17(1), 130.

[8] Brown, S. R. (1980). Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science. Yale University Press.

[9] STEPHENSON W. Technique of factor analysis [J]. Nature,1935,136(3434):297.

[10] Watts, S., & Stenner, P. (2012). Doing Q methodological research: Theory, method and interpretation. Sage.

[11] Frank, M., Kohn, V., & Holten, R. (2024). Q methodology and the sociotechnical perspective. Information Systems and e-Business Management, 22, 599–631.

[12] Jiwasiddi, A., Schlagwein, D., Cahalane, M., Cecez-Kecmanovic, D., Leong, C., & Ractham, P. (2024). Digital nomadism as a new part of the visitor economy: The case of the “digital nomad capital” Chiang Mai, Thailand. Information Systems Journal, 34(5), 1493-1535.

[13] Güzel, M. O., & Ay, E. (2024). Digital nomads in destination marketing. Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 16(3), 316-328.

[14] Zabala, A., & Pascual, U. (2016). Discourse diversity and stakeholder salience in ecosystem services research. Ecosystem Services, 17, 138-142.

[15] Simeli, I., Christou, E., & Chatzigeorgiou, C. (2025). Digital nomads as unintentional

influencers in destination branding: A multi-method study of ambient influence. Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research, 20(4), 340.