

## RURAL TOURISM AND INSTITUTIONAL TURN IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION: A CASE STUDY ON MIAOLI, TAIWAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Since the twenty-first century, the global market has entered a new economic era, the emphasis on the improvement of the cultural environment and enforcement force to change the mode of governance, the impact of the industry outlook. With the growing trend of the global tourism industry, the Taiwan government has tried to promote the cultural creative and leisure tourism industries, rural tourism and the development of leisure agriculture despite the attention, but they are not integrated but also generate a lot of trouble. Agricultural extension in agricultural development in the past played a key role, especially in the promotion of leisure agriculture also plays an important function in the future. This article explored the rural tourism trend in Taiwan and its economic effect on Miaoli, a local county. This study indicated that rural travel accounted for 63.9% (121.65 million people) of domestic tourism. It also found out that the tourism expenditure of Miaoli grew by 107% from 2010 to 2016. In 2016, the direct economic benefits were 713.48 million, and the indirect and induced effects reached 1087.34 million. Finally, this study discussed the institutional change in farming organizations in response to the growth in demand of rural tourism.*

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, Agricultural Extension, Institutional Turn

### INTRODUCTION

Since the 21st century, the global market has entered a new economic era. Knowledge has quickly begun replacing traditional tangible assets such as land, labor, raw materials, and natural resources. Knowledge has also become a key factor in the competitiveness of contemporary industries, changes in social structure, and economic prosperity. Countries worldwide have started to integrate culture with creativity into their industries to improve industrial competitiveness. Many countries have sought to modify modes of governance in order to improve their cultural environments; this in turn has affected the development of industry generally.

On the other hand, according to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) in 2016 grew by 3.9% to reach a total of 1,235 million worldwide, an increase of 46 million over the previous year. Asia and the Asia-Pacific region led growth in 2016 with a 9% increase in international arrivals. UNWTO forecasts that international tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% annually between 2010 and 2030 to reach 1.8 billion (UNWTO, 2017).

Taiwan's government promotes the policy of "chimneyless industry" and the expansion of cultural and tourist industries. All agencies in Taiwan — government, academia, and enterprises — have made it their goal to follow the global tourism trends by utilizing Taiwan's cultural features. Rural tourism and rural cultural celebrations have begun to receive attention. Since 1989, rural tourism in Taiwan has been driven by leisure agriculture.

The Department of Agricultural Extension, National Taiwan University, hosted the “Seminar on the development of leisure agriculture,” which focused on the origins of Taiwan’s rural tourism. Today, rural travel is the most common vacation activity and has become the main financial source of the agricultural sector. To date, all research on leisure agriculture in Taiwan has focused on two aspects: supply management as the main vehicle to analyze the operational strategies, service quality, and market segmentation of leisure farms; and consumer demand as the main vehicle to analyze the consumer (tourist) behavior, experience, cognition, and satisfaction. There is little research on the transition from agricultural production to leisure agriculture or the institutional turn of extension agencies, or on the relationship between the implementation of leisure agriculture and experiential economy.

This article first explores the rural tourism trend in Taiwan and its economic effect on Miaoli, a local county. Second, this study discusses the institutional change in farming organizations in response to the growth in demand of rural tourism.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism refers to tourism that takes place in rural areas. Jansen-Verbeke (1991) argued that rural tourism is all that is happening in rural areas. Although this spatial definition of rural tourism appears too simple, it is easy to understand. Lane suggested that “rural tourism” exists as a concept, albeit a diverse one, and introduced the notion of a “pure” rural tourism: tourism that is located in rural areas; is rural in scale, character, and function; and reflects the differing and “complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location” (Lane, 1994). Rurality, the nature of rural tourism, can be represented as a continuum. Rurality should make up the core aspect of tourism marketing.

Gannon (1994) suggested that not all rural areas are equally attractive to rural tourists and that simply providing accommodation facilities does not guarantee demand. The total product package must be sufficient to attract and engage tourists, offering suitable opportunities for spending. Lane (1994) suggested that the most basic forms of rural tourism should (1) be located in rural areas; (2) have the rural function of small-scale enterprise, open space, natural environments, historic sites, traditional societies and customs; (3) comprise both the buildings and the environment; (4) have traditional characteristics, a relatively slow growth rate, and be closely related to the localities and families; and (5) be a combination of rural environment, economy, history, and location.

The Taiwanese scholar Cheng (2007) suggested that rural tourism is a type of leisure service that provides local leisure products or services through proper planning and design, the use of original natural ecology, agricultural production, rural life, and cultural activities within the scope of the rural geography. Rural tourism must not only meet consumer demand for leisure but also play a native educational function. Since rural tourism takes place in rural areas and rural areas mainly rely on agricultural production as their major industrial activity, the development of rural tourism in Taiwan is mainly focused on leisure farms or leisure agriculture. Tsai (2005) notes that rural tourism includes spectacular rural communities, outdoor attractions, natural scenery, cultural monuments, cultural relics, and art, among others; this diverse assortment of activities means that all aspects of rural areas can be enjoyed. In fact, Guo et al. (2007) noted that the term “rural tourism” is not universally used in Taiwan and that it is sometimes replaced by “leisure agriculture.” Leisure agriculture refers to the use of the rural landscape, natural ecology, and environmental resources (including agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery production, agricultural management

activities, rural cultures, and farm life) to provide recreation and enhance the experience of agriculture and rural regions for the purpose of agricultural management.

### **Rural Tourism and Agricultural Extension System in Taiwan**

The concept of “agricultural extension” appears to have been gradually forgotten, especially as developed countries have begun to rely less heavily on agriculture. However, reviewing agricultural extension work has its specific tasks in every stage of national economic development and has also played a key role in policy assistance and promotion. As long as people need agriculture, agricultural extension work will continue to exist.

In Taiwan, agricultural extension work differed at different stages of economic development. In the 1950s and 1970s, agricultural extension work successfully implemented through technology transfer to various agricultural research institutes, health clubs, and home improvement classes. Improve operational efficiency, cultivate young peasants and improve the important role of farmers and community life. Since the 1970s, the rapid transformation of Taiwan's economic structure, the slowdown of the agricultural sector, the gradual expansion of social and economic problems in rural areas, and the shift from knowledge and technology transfer in agriculture to the remedial measures to assist the government in solving various agricultural problems have become the role of fire brigade, past education goals have become increasingly blurred (Chiu, 2002).

The Taiwan agricultural extension system can be divided into the following categories: administrative institutions, educational institutions, and nongovernmental institutions. Usually, agricultural extension agencies are part of the government’s agricultural administration, the idea being that it is the government’s duty to execute agricultural extension work. In addition, it is the government’s responsibility to work toward the overall agricultural development goal through agricultural extension programs. Agricultural extension agencies that are part of agricultural education institutions are the most suitable for the agricultural extension system. Educational institutions such as colleges have access to agricultural research outputs and information, can educate farmers on new and innovative techniques, and have a relationship with the local community. Agricultural extension agencies belong to nongovernmental organizations and are part of an institutional arrangement corresponding to the economic and social environment. Nongovernmental agricultural extension institutions can be subdivided into two categories: those designed for business objectives and those designed for the welfare and development of its members or farmers (Hsaio, 1995).

The promotion of rural travel in Taiwan comprises two main features. The first is the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables and the organization of agricultural festivals, both of which attract urban residents to rural areas. The second is the creation of a positive rural environment to allow urban residents a sense of escape from the congestion of the city and the pressure of work (Feng, 2013). The first feature falls under the purview of agricultural extension institutions and rural farming groups, and is referred to as “leisure agriculture.” The second comes under the purview of community development associations, which strive to maintain traditional rural cultures and ecological environments. Following the creation of the government’s rural regeneration program, it has also been gradually implemented by agricultural extent agencies since the government rural regeneration program. That is, both dimensions have been integrated into farmers’ associations and agricultural groups for rural tourism.

## **Institutional Turn of Agricultural Extension**

In the era of the “experience economy,” not only have there been significant changes in areas of business management such as consumption and marketing, but industrial groups and even social institutions also face the problem of organizational deconstruction or reconstruction. Research into this institutional turn is flourishing in the humanities and social sciences. Per Martin (2000), there are three main conceptual approaches to the institutional turn: rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and historical (evolutionary) institutionalism. By contrast, Jessop (2001) posited three types of institutional turn: thematic, methodological, and ontological. The thematic turn takes institutions seriously by recognizing and problematizing their existence, but also argues that institutions can be fully explained by the neoclassical paradigm. The methodological turn can take several forms and is usually associated with an alleged mediating role. It is a radical strategic change in the direction of the institution. The third, and the most radical, type of institutional turn is ontological. It rests on the belief that institutions and institutionalization form the primary axis of collective life and social order.

Regarding local development, Amin (1999) stressed that local effort must focus on developing the supply base (skills, education, innovation, and communication) and the institutional base (developing agencies, business organizations, and autonomous political representation) to transform particular sites into key staging points or centers of competitive advantage within global value chains. Amin recommended four novel areas of action: building clusters and local economies of association, learning to learn and adapt, broadening the local institutional base, and mobilizing the social economy.

The goal of the institutional turn in agricultural extension is to make farmers conscious of how they contribute to improving the quality of life of their fellow citizens, to protecting the ecological environment, and to social justice. Hsiao (1995) reported that agricultural extension institutions belong to the institutional system that is created when people recognize the value of agricultural extension. Therefore, when the public value of agricultural extension changes, the agricultural extension institution is adjusted accordingly.

However, given the values of the experiential economy and the importance of leisure and life aesthetics, how will the agricultural extension agency transform its role and function with respect to these ideals regarding peasant life, agricultural production, and rural ecology? Will the institutional turn in agricultural extension (especially the farmers’ association) take place? These important topics are discussed herein.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The problem of defining rural tourism has been addressed extensively in both rural community and tourism development, with its size and value, level of participation in the market, and status as domestic tourism being the important topics. Regarding the number of travelers traveling in rural areas, several variables must be considered, including time and whether the traveler stayed in or passed through the rural area. The choice of one variable over another depends on the subject of analysis. Whenever possible we sought to determine the “economic size” of rural tourism, an economic indicator used to compare the type of tourism system (e.g., transportation, food service, souvenir). Elsewhere, we relied on non-rural tourism or tourist questionnaires to obtain an estimate.

The status of the rural community with respect to tourism is of three major types: local government, community development association (community or cultural workers subsidized by the Ministry of Culture), and farmers association (which typically receive grants from agricultural departments). A significant percentage of rural tourism falls into the last

category, which generates income from the sale of its products and services. We have focused our analysis on this category.

Although farmers' markets comprise the main mode of promoting rural tourism in Taiwan, little data is available regarding the number of visitors and the output value. Chen et al. conducted a systematic survey in 2007 by interviewing 1,056 operators via field questionnaires in 50 leisure agriculture areas around Taiwan. From the perspective of farm operators, the survey estimated that the total annual revenue of domestic leisure agriculture areas was between 136 million and 362 million dollars. Supplemented by survey values in other research, the total output value of leisure agriculture was estimated to be 329 million dollars in 2006 (Chen et al., 2007).

Regrettably, these studies have focused on the sales of goods or services provided by agricultural producers to estimate the economic value of rural tourism, neglecting the goods or services provided by nonagricultural producers. In addition, they have failed to estimate the number and consumption value of tourists. However, this lack of data reveals a feature of rural tourism: estimating the number of tourists in an open area is difficult, which in turn makes estimating the economic output difficult. Therefore, this study focused on the estimation of tourist arrivals and the analysis of the output value of rural tourism.

Author used a case study to observe the development trend of rural tourism. Through field investigation, we analyzed the number of visitors and their and consumption to estimate the output value and potential of rural tourism. Moreover, we observed the role of and institutional turn in the farmers' association. At the Asian and national levels, there is little empirical evidence available to analyze the shift in the agricultural extension system. However, this shift can be demonstrated through the relationship between rural tourism and farmers' associations. At the regional level, some data can be found. The empirical content of this paper relies mainly on a regional simulation model to sample survey and estimate visitor numbers. However, data from the Taiwan's Official Tourism Statistics Database, together with analyses of data collected from direct surveys at the regional level and from interviews with farmers' association advisors, provide a clearer picture of rural tourism.

Miaoli County was chosen for this study, and Gongguan Travel Information Center was reviewed for the discussion of the institutional turn of farmers' association. The research steps and methods were as follows:

### **Step 1 – Official Tourism Statistics Database**

This study used the Official Tourism Statistics Database to organize the inbound, outbound, domestic, and internal tourism and their flows and expenditure in Taiwan in recent years. The official Tourism Statistics Database contains data on inbound and outbound tourists with several topics and options, including residence, gender, purpose of visit, occupation, means of transportation, and length of stay. The database provides yearly statistics from 1956 as well as the number of visitors to Taiwan's scenic spots from 2012. The survey data is based on the "Annual Survey Report on Visitors Expenditure and Trends in Taiwan" and the "Survey of Travel by R.O.C. Citizens." Rural tourism is an excerpt compiled from the survey data.

### **Step 2 – System or Simulation Models to Sample Survey and Estimate Visitor Numbers**

Prediction of tourist arrivals is crucial for planning and developing scenic areas and should therefore be carefully considered. Many methods can be employed to predict the number of tourists in a common scenic area. Stynes (1984) summarized the Delphi Technique, Time Series, Structural Model, and System or Simulation Model. The system or simulation model combines a time series model with a structural model. The main feature of this model is the

feedback effect. The number of visitors is influenced not only by current factors but also by past factors. Therefore, the system model usually includes a series of related equations to describe the relationship between tourist participation and other variables at different times.

The objective of this study was to explore the number of visitors to Miaoli County and the tourism output value. This study selected 43 important spots in Miaoli and dispatched officers to investigate vehicles and passengers on the same holiday and at the same time to record the traffic situation at the various attractions. In addition, we referred to the Visitor Survey Statistical Reference Manual (Tourism Bureau, MOTC, 2004) as the basis for estimating the average ride factor of all types of vehicles in order to convert all types of vehicles to passenger data.

$$\begin{aligned}D &= D_p * 8 \text{ hrs} \\Y_r &= D * 104 \text{ days} \\Y &= \alpha * Y_r\end{aligned}$$

D: number of tourists in single holiday  
D<sub>p</sub>: average number of tourists per hour  
Y<sub>r</sub>: raw data of total tourists in this year  
Y: annual tourist number  
 $\alpha$ : correction factor

### Step 3 – Estimating the Output Value of Rural Tourism

The economic impact of rural tourism, which covers many different departments, is complicated (Fletcher, 1989; Crompton, 1999; Frechtling, 1994). First, there are the direct economic benefits brought by a tourist to the locality. Second, rural tourism has other economic impacts on the locality through indirect and induced effects. Calculating the direct economic benefits is easy: multiply the daily average expenditure by the number of visitors. The daily average expenditure of tourism per person is based on the survey of the tourist conditions from the Tourism Bureau. It is relatively more complicated to calculate the indirect economic benefits or induced effects. The indirect and induced effects of rural tourism should consider the structure of the regional economy. Input-output analysis is used to calculate the relevancy of each department or industry in the economic system and the distribution of each department's products in the final demand department. The tourism expenditure multiplier I is 2.85 and the multiplier II is 1.75 (Tourism Bureau, 2016). It means that the indirect and induced effects of tourism are between 0.75 and 1.85 times direct economic benefits. A case study by Chen et al. (2012) found that the economic indirect and induced effects are 1.52 times by tourists in the tourism and retail industries. This study calculates both the direct and indirect benefits of rural tourism to the local economy.

### Step 4 – Interview with Farmers' Association Advisors about Rural Tourism

Taiwan's rural tourism promotion agencies are mainly in the government agricultural sector or agricultural extension system. To understand the institutional turn in agricultural extension in response to the growth and demand of rural tourism, we conducted deep interviews with the Gongguan Farmers Association and its Travel Information Center. "Deep interview" is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents. Researchers use face-to-face interviews with verbal interviews to obtain respondents' opinions about a phenomenon or research topic. This study adopted a semi-structured interview, which is a data collection method whose nature lies between that of structural and nonstructural interviews. Based on the research questions and objectives, we designed an interview outline to serve as a guideline for the interviews.

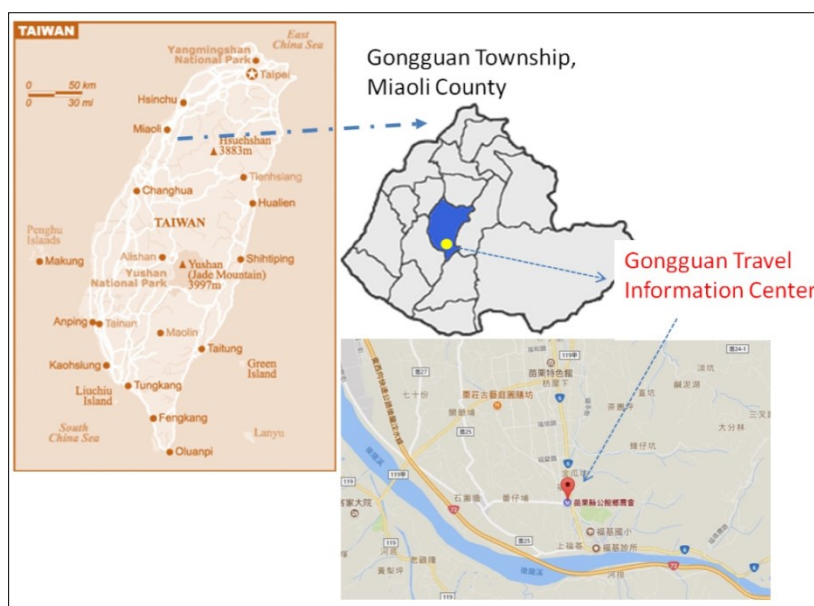


Figure 1. Location Map of Gongguan Travel Information Center

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Trends of Rural Tourism in Taiwan

Tourism in Asia and the Pacific is growing at a greater rate than in any other in region in the world; it provides opportunities for reducing poverty, providing employment, and preserving unique cultural heritages and natural environments. The United Nations World Tourism Organization and Griffith University released a report at the UNWTO General Assembly in Chengdu on 15 September 2017 entitled “Managing Growth and Sustainable Tourism Governance in Asia and the Pacific.” This report estimates that by 2030, there will be 535 million international arrivals to Asia and the Pacific, a 90% increase over 2015. This rapid growth in tourism, coupled with the region’s large population, calls for an effective management of tourism development in order to protect communities and tourism resources (Griffith Institute for Tourism Insights, 2017).

In 2015, more than 10 million tourists visited Taiwan. According to the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, this number reached 10.69 million in 2016, not only breaking the record high but also generating more than 13.37 billion USD in foreign exchange receipts (Tourism Bureau, 2017). The number of domestic trips made by tourists in 2016 totaled 190.38 million trips. Although this is a decrease of 6.64% from 2015, the number of domestic trips grew by 53.61% in 2010, resulting in a direct economic benefit of 12.30 billion USD. The Taiwan Tourism Bureau continues to promote tourism top-notch, travel in Taiwan, high-quality tourism and other programs in order to reach its goal of more than 10 million inbound tourists and 200 million domestic passengers in one year.

Table 1 presents total tourism statistics in Taiwan from 2010 to 2016: 10.69 million international tourists visited Taiwan and 14.59 million Taiwanese traveled outside of Taiwan in 2016. Similarly, there are 190.38 flows in domestic tourism. Between 2010 and 2016, tourism grew rapidly: inbound growth was 53.33%, outbound growth was 61.49%, and domestic growth was 63.13%, indicating that Taiwanese love to travel both domestically and internationally. The tourism industry’s significant growth has made it one of the most important sectors of the Taiwanese economy.

Table 2 summarizes the data on rural tourism in Taiwan excerpted from the Tourism Bureau’s “Surveys on the Tourism of Taiwanese citizens.” The total number of domestic trips taken by Taiwanese citizens has grown greatly since 2010. The number of trips taken per person grew to 9.04 in 2016. Rural travel accounted for 63.9% (121.65 million people) of domestic tourism, with rural scenery (51.6%), eating local food (39.2%), hiking, camping and mountain climbing (35.2%) being the most preferred types and learning traditional skills (0.5%), participating in festivals (1.1%), and experiencing rural life (2.1%) the least. Accordingly, it makes little sense that the public sector so ardently promotes rural travel through local festivals, traditional skills, and rural life. It appears that these events have never been attractive to tourists, and these marketing campaigns appear to have failed to consider the psychology of the tourist.

**Table 1. Total Tourism Statistics of Taiwan**

Item Year	Inbound Tourism		Outbound Tourism		Domestic Tourism		Internal Tourism	
	Flows	Expenditure	Flows	Expenditure	Flows	Expenditure	Expenditure	GDP
2010	5.57	8.72	9.42	13.84	123.94	7.54	16.26	3.64
2011	6.09	11.07	9.58	15.75	152.27	10.53	21.59	4.45
2012	7.31	11.77	10.24	16.85	142.07	9.11	20.88	4.21
2013	8.02	12.32	11.05	18.12	142.62	9.15	21.47	4.20
2014	9.91	14.62	11.84	19.90	156.26	10.20	24.81	4.68
2015	10.44	14.39	13.18	20.92	178.52	11.34	25.73	4.90
2016	10.69	13.37	14.59	22.35	190.38	12.30	25.67	4.84

Flows: million, Expenditure: billion UAD

Source: Tourism Statistics Database, MOTC (2017); adapted and calculated by author.

**Table 2. Summary of Rural Tourism** (multiple choice test)

Item	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>Domestic Tourism (million)</i>	123.94	152.27	142.07	142.62	156.26	178.52	190.38
<i>Average number of per person</i>	6.08	7.42	6.87	6.85	7.47	8.50	9.04
<i>Rural Tourism (million)</i>	66.68	91.06	80.55	82.72	91.94	111.93	121.65
<i>% of Domestic Tourism</i>	53.8%	59.8%	56.7%	58.0%	58.7%	62.7%	63.9%
<i>Rural scenery</i>	31.8%	38.8%	40.0%	46.1%	45.4%	49.9%	51.6%
<i>Watching wild animals</i>	5.1%	6.7%	7.2%	8.0%	7.6%	8.2%	7.8%
<i>Watching wild plants</i>	12.0%	21.0%	17.7%	17.3%	15.8%	17.6%	17.1%
<i>Watching natural landscape</i>	3.2%	4.2%	3.5%	3.3%	2.9%	4.7%	5.1%
<i>Hiking, camping, mountain climbing</i>	25.5%	29.3%	29.4%	30.5%	32.7%	35.2%	35.2%
<i>Riding a bicycle</i>	2.9%	2.8%	2.5%	2.8%	2.9%	3.4%	3.3%
<i>Experience rural life</i>	1.2%	1.3%	2.4%	2.0%	2.2%	2.2%	2.1%
<i>Participate in festivals</i>	1.3%	1.7%	2.2%	2.1%	1.3%	0.9%	1.1%
<i>Learning traditional skills</i>	0.9%	1.2%	0.9%	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%
<i>Eating local food</i>	32.3%	41.6%	36.7%	40.8%	37.9%	40.2%	39.2%

Source: Tourism Statistics Database, MOTC (2017); adapted and calculated by author.



### Tourists and Tourism Expenditure of Miaoli

According to Chen et al. (2005), Miaoli County has the third highest number of leisure farms and countryside B&Bs in Taiwan. This study selects Miaoli County and the Gongguan Travel Information Center to serve as a follow-up case for analysis and discussion. The author had taken part in the "Miaoli County Thematic Experience-Based Tour Packages Planning" project moderated by Dr. Lin in 2013–2014. Project investigators counted tourist arrivals in 43 important spots in Miaoli on holidays and calculated the number of travelers on a single holiday. Although rural tourism is significantly higher on weekends and holidays, the number of weekday visitors cannot be ignored. Through sampling studies and field analysis, we calculated the ratio of weekday to holiday visitors in one year to be 0.089, with a correction factor  $\alpha$  of 1.089. Finally, we calculated the number of visitors for 2013–2014. The number of visitors in the rest of the years were based on official data or statistical estimates. Table 3 shows the results of tourist arrivals and growth rates in Miaoli from 2010 to 2016.

This study also calculated the tourism expenditure of Miaoli direct economic benefits are equal to the number of visitors multiplied by average daily expenditure. Indirect and induced effects are 1.52 times the direct economic benefits. Table 3 shows the number of tourist arrivals in Miaoli from 2010 to 2016 and the tourism expenditure, including direct, indirect, and induced economic benefits. There was explosive growth in 2011 and 2012 because Miaoli hosted two mega events: National Day Fireworks and the Taiwan Lantern Festival. Because of these festivals, the number of tourists exceeded 10 million, and the annual number of tourists continued to grow to more than 10 million. Tourism expenditure grew by 107% from 2010 to 2016. In 2016, the direct economic benefits were 713.48 million, and the indirect and induced effects reached 1087.34 million.

**Table 3. Tourists and Tourism Expenditure of Miaoli**

Item	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>Tourists</i>	8,431,293	17,970,073	18,813,405	11,757,759	13,051,112	14,910,895	15,900,979
<i>Growth rate</i>	--	113.13%	4.69%	-37.50%	10.99%	14.25%	6.64%
<i>Direct Economic Benefits (million)</i>	344.00	828.42	821.39	513.34	587.43	657.87	713.48
<i>Indirect &amp; Induced Effects (million)</i>	524.25	1262.51	1251.80	782.34	895.24	1002.59	1087.34

Source: author's computations.

### Case Study – Gongguan Farmers' Association, Miaoli

Miaoli County offers the most unique rural travel experience in Taiwan. Approximately 5,829 leisure farms and countryside B&Bs are present in Taiwan, 502 of which are in Miaoli (Chen et al., 2005). This number has risen sharply in recent years, not only in Miaoli County but other counties. Currently, Taiwan is classified into 82 leisure agriculture areas. According to a 2016 national assessment of these 82 areas, Miaoli won two of the five top prizes and obtained six first-class ratings. Miaoli's seems to be highly focused on the development of leisure agriculture and rural tourism.

This study focused on the Gongguan Travel Information Center of farmers' associations to understand the institutional turn in agricultural extension. The Gongguan Farmers'

Association is a nongovernmental agricultural extension agency for the welfare development of local farmers. Gongguan, located in central Miaoli, and is an important transport hub. Tourists have access to the county's attractions via the Gongguan highway interchange. The Gongguan Travel Information Center, created in 2015, was one of the first five agricultural travel centers. Moreover, the Gongguan Farmers' Association revised its organizational structure to create a tourism marketing department.

The director-general of Gongguan Farmers' Association believes that the mansion's property is rich and varied enough to be suitable for rural tourism throughout the year. Visitors can pick fruit, taste the local culinary specialties, and visit the nearby attractions. He points out that the service objective of the farmers' association is not limited to farmers, but includes consumers by the provision of high-quality farmers' products. Features of the rural community can be introduced to tourists through rural tourism and experiential activities. For example, tourists can learn about food safety through the "farm to table" process, which itself presents one solution to the food safety problem.

Gongguan Travel Information Center provides the normal exhibition of local agricultural products, also provides hot food services and planning as a holiday farmers market. However, Gongguan Farmers' Association would get together with local culture association to provide travel advice, attractions and other services, in order to promote leisure agriculture.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Council of Agriculture (COA) held its first award ceremony to recognize outstanding leisure agricultural areas in April this year. It noted that leisure agriculture combines first-level agricultural production with second-level manufacturing and third-level service industries to create a sixth-level new agriculture. Leisure agriculture is the most outstanding characteristic of rural tourism activity. The COA expects that the number of tourists who visit leisure agricultural areas will grow by more than 10%, and that leisure agriculture will attract more than 500,000 foreign tourists (COA, 2017). In addition to commending professor Chao-Lang, Chen of National Taiwan University for his contribution, the COA issued the special contribution award. Regarding the development of leisure agriculture in Taiwan, agricultural extension agencies play a crucial role in having an impact on rural tourism.

Rural travel accounts for 63.9% of domestic tourism and includes some 121.65 million people. However, accurately estimating the number of rural tourists is difficult, and more accurate estimates are needed to measure the value of rural tourism. The COA and other government institutions have focused on local cultures and traditional skills in their promotion of rural tourism. However, because these institutions cannot apply a one-size-fits-all administrative model to the unique cultural characteristics of localities, learning traditional skills and participating in local festivals make up a relatively low proportion of rural tourism. Creating better methods of enhancing the sophistication of local cultures and bringing visitors unique and surprising experiences is the key to promoting rural tourism in the future.

In rural Miaoli County, tourism expenditure grew by 107% from 2010 to 2016. In 2016, the direct economic benefits were 713.48 million, and the indirect and induced effects reached 1087.34 million. Tourism is arguably Miaoli's most important source of income. The Gongguan Farmers' Association has created a Travel Information Center and tourism marketing department to revise its organizational structure, and now provides a variety of travel propaganda and tourism services. It is indeed to promote the institutional turn in the farmers' association or the agricultural extension system. For agricultural production and consumer services and for farmers and tourists, agriculture will no longer be a concern for

farmers, producers, and rural areas; these entities can focus on food safety and the travel quality.

With respect to the institutional turn, this study reminds agricultural extension agencies to change with the times and reposition their social responsibility. With respect to rural tourism, it reminds agricultural extension agencies to recheck their content design and event arrangements by experience service.

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