

Local Culture and Ecology in Beautiful Rural Construction: Principles, Practices and Preservation

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Abstract

With the prosperity and development of the economy and culture, the society pays more and more attention to the construction of beautiful villages. The local cultural landscape can fully express the geographical characteristics and development process of a village and has an important protection and continuity effect on the material spiritual culture. In the context of advocating the Beautiful Rural Construction (BRC), the paper aims to analyze local culture landscapes according to different local conditions and cultural differences. Detailed insights are drawn from the analysis of Wuyuan's successful preservation of its local culture, the snowscape of Heilongjiang and how it has tailored its landscape construction to local conditions, Yan'an's expression of both old and new cultural elements and Xinjiang Muji County's harmonious blending of ecological beauty and cultural life. The paper concludes with design suggestions to respect original ecology, inherit national customs and embrace modern styles in revitalizing local landscapes.

Keyword : Beautiful Rural Construction; Local culture; Local landscape; Landscape design

1. Introduction

As society progresses, the significance of local culture in landscape design is being increasingly recognized. Each region hosts numerous villages and each distinct in its geographical, economic and cultural conditions. This diversity gives rise to a rich tapestry of local and national cultures unique to each region. When undertaking landscape construction that reflects local culture, it is imperative to understand relevant government policies and design principles that are tailored according to the actual development and unique characteristics of each region [1].

Local culture refers to everything that individuals create and share as part of their daily lives in the place where they reside or work [2]. It acknowledges the expertise that people possess from living their daily lives and highlights the knowledge that people have from shared experiences and information transmitted by family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. It permeates the relations with the local

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environment and landscapes, the local music and artistic expressions, the community's history and contemporary social issues and personal stories [3].

Research on local culture have been initiated by Western countries as early as the first half of the 20th century and most of them aimed to preserve and develop rural areas, local cultures and landscapes [4][5]. In addition, recognizing the distinctiveness of communities and their local cultures aids to elucidate the paths of development for community growth as well as the preservation of local culture. China began to carry out rural land reform in 1947 including property rights reform and land use system reform. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, they vigorously developed urban construction but neglected the protection of the rural cultural environment. Thus, it lead to the loss of some local culture, the lag of construction and widening the gap among different regions [6]. Until the end of the 20th century, experts and scholars began to pay attention to the research of rural living environment and landscape construction in China. In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to examine Chinese local culture landscapes and to grasp the principles of adapting to these rural constructions. The paper pays attention to the four different rural cities and analyzes the principles and applications of lanscape design, further suggestions with the future directions of the Beautiful Rural Construction (BRC) project that can make the local culture 'live' in there.

2. Beautiful Rural Construction and its relation to local culture

In the context of rural development, the Beautiful Rural Construction is a concept that has been promoted in countries like China. It encompasses a broad range of efforts aimed at the revitalization of rural areas from the restructuring of the agricultural sector to the social and spatial reorganization of rural landscapes. The goal of BRC is to create environmentally friendly, aesthetically pleasing and livable rural environments. This involves an integrated approach that considers agricultural production, social governance, landscape construction, ecological environment and cultural construction [7].

BRC is a process heavily influenced by both external factors and internal elements of the rural area. It recognizes the importance of community participation in governance and emphasizes the sustainable utilization of different social forces and resources. BRC involves the innovation of space production, the networking of industrial integration, social governance, regional cultural construction and ecological environment protection [7]. One critical aspect of this is the revitalization of rural social culture that requires paying attention to the development of the local economy. However, the transformation of traditional agricultural production modes, the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization and a

significant rural population outflow have led to challenges such as idle rural cultivated land, a weak rural cooperative collective economy, single forms of agricultural production and a lack of rural civilization [8]. These issues highlight the need for an approach that considers the limitations of local production, life and ecology and the approach that promotes a community-based collaborative mode led by the government. The preservation and promotion of local culture play a crucial role in this context to form an integral part of constructing a beautiful countryside. It ensures that development efforts do not overlook the inherent local cultural value, prevent the replacement of the original local character with a homogenous style and avoid damage to the material culture of the countryside. Therefore, local culture and BRC are inherently interconnected with the former providing a foundation and guiding principle for the latter.

Inheriting local culture is an important part of the construction of beautiful countryside. Carrying out the construction of beautiful countryside is needed to promote the construction of ecological civilization and achieve sustainable development. Local culture contains a region of material culture, spiritual civilization, production and ecological content from rural construction farmland to the courtyard street, from the spirit of residents to the national culture and historical background. These are all within the scope of local culture even in the process of rural construction [9]. Only by grasping the characteristics of the local culture, retaining the local flavor and the natural landscape and integrating the local culture into the rural construction can the residents see the landscape and remember the real homesickness.

3. Analysis of the principle and application of landscape design in China

In order to identify a range of regional cultures, rural forms and distinctive cultural elements that embody typical local culture construction were analyzed as shown in [Table 1]. The design principles for local cultural landscapes were listed and examined.

[Table 1] Typicality of local culture in four different rural areas of China

| Typicality of local culture | Rural area | Local form | Unique cultural elements |
|--|--|--|---|
| Preservation of the complete local culture and landscape environment | Eastern region (Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province) | Well-preserved ancient villages from the Ming and Qing dynasties surrounded by mountains | -Huizhou residential buildings, wooden corridor bridges, Wuyuan green tea, Wuyuan Hui opera, Wuyuan three carvings and Wuyuan she inkstone. -Emphasis on mountain areas, terraced fields, covered bridges and banana architecture. |
| Consideration of the time and local | Northeast region | A scenic mountainous spot | -Adobe dwellings, paper-cut paintings, errenzhuan and heated kang. |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| conditions | (Heilongjiang Snow Town) | A scenic mountainous spot | -Emphasizing the local customs and characteristics of the mountain, birch forest, rime landscape, and snow landscape |
| Full embodiment of the regional local spiritual civilization | Inland hinterland (Yan'an City, Shaanxi Province) | A city of cultural relics located amidst the mountains and hills. | -Cave architecture, Xuanyuan Yellow Emperor Mausoleum, Zhongshan Grottoes, revolutionary sites like Zaoyuan and Yangjialing, Northern Shaanxi Yangko dance and Ansai waist drum - Highlighting the Loess Plateau, hills and ravines, Yellow River snake koji, and Hukou Waterfall |
| Integration of local culture and natural ecology | Northwest region (Xinjiang Muji county) | Nomadic communities or small clustered villages with mountains and hills as the background | -Kazakh yurt houses, Uyghur clay dwellings, shade houses and traditional Kazakh festivals like Eid al-Adha, Meat Festival and Nuze Festival. -Cultural heritage includes high mountain fireworks and Kazakh embroidery. -Preservation of the complete local culture and landscape environment including rivers, mountains and singing sand mountains. |

3.1 Wuyuan

In implementing local cultural landscape design, protection should be prioritized. The act of safeguarding the local cultural landscape does not merely involve preserving the physical aspects of villages, fields, buildings and houses. It is more significantly about preserving the living and production environments of rural residents to maintain strong village community bonds and to uphold local traditions and spiritual values that have been passed down over time [10].

Wuyuan, in Jiangxi province, is renowned as one of China's most beautiful rural towns. On December 12, 2018, it was recognized as the second batch of practice and innovation bases for the Clear Waters and Green Mountains in Golden and Silver Mountains initiative [11]. Wuyuan is rich in local cultural resources and it is most famous for its Hui-style dwellings, tea culture, terraced landscape and wood carvings as shown in [Fig. 1]. In addition, Rainbow Corridor Bridge and Small Bridge and Flowing Water Family is famous as shown in [Fig. 2].

The success of the Beautiful Rural Construction project in Wuyuan County can be attributed to the preservation of local cultural resources. The cultural landscape is primarily represented by architecture with efforts made to retain the original characteristics of residential communities as shown in [Fig. 3].

Repairs were made to the road corridor bridge while preserving the water system and original water sources. The village county shop retains its original rough green stone material while the entire arrangement has been optimized without disrupting the lifestyle of residents. Within the ancient town, Wuyuan residents can be seen everywhere when washing vegetables and clothes by the stream and reverting to the simplicity of local life. This not only preserves the living habits of the village people but also protects them.



[Fig. 1] Wood carvings in Wuyuan



[Fig. 2] Rainbow corridor bridge in Wuyuan

In reality, the principles and strategies of constructing local culture all stem from the idea of protection. This involves the preservation of natural ecology, the safeguarding of the land environment and the development and activation of cultural heritage. The goal is to encourage more people to pay attention to the protection of local culture, appreciate it and thus integrate into nature and return to it. The objective is to continue and inherit the local culture to prevent it from being overlooked and forgotten and gradually disappearing with the passage of time and construction.



[Fig. 3] Traditional buildings in Wuyuan

3.2 Heilongjiang Snow Town

Climate and geographical conditions have a direct impact on the local customs and modes of production within a region. When preserving local culture and constructing beautiful countryside, the principle of tailoring measures to local conditions can be considered. The temperate monsoon climate with four distinct seasons in Northeast China creates a unique snowscape in winter. The vast fertile soil nurtures crops like corn and rice and forms a large-scale agricultural landscape. It also results from the protection of farmland landscapes and implementation of measures suitable for local conditions. Under the same conditions, the culture of Northeast China possesses a unique charm. The cold weather and expansive lands shape the forthright and cheerful character of its residents.

Located in the southeast of Heilongjiang Province, Xuexiang Shuangfeng Forest Farm is a tourist attraction that integrates natural culture and cultural landscapes. It features traditional architectural

landscapes like thickened adobe and cabins and the forest snow natural ecological landscape as shown in [Fig. 4]. The warm-hearted people of Northeast China bring more vitality to the winter forest and snow landscape with the high hanging red lanterns, millstones, dog sleds and wooden houses as shown in [Fig. 5].



[Fig. 4] Lin Sea snow field in Heilongjiang Snow Town



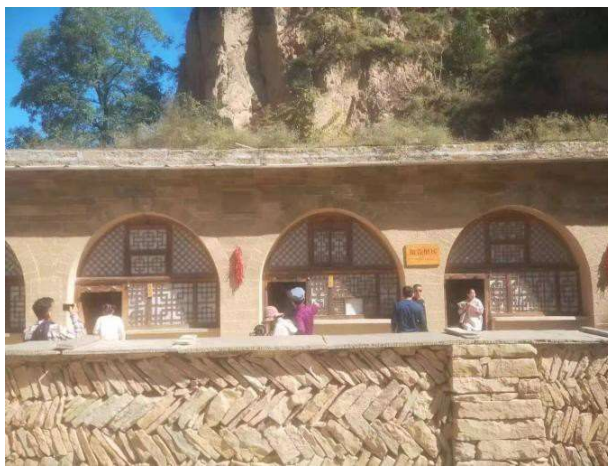
[Fig. 5] Dog sled in Heilongjiang Snow Town

3.3 Yan'an

The principle of cultural expression refers, on the one hand, to the development of local folk culture, national culture and material culture. On the other hand, it refers to the inculcation of the new countryside and its fresh image. Different cultures are unique and as such, targeted strategies for

landscape culture construction can be launched for each. The extension of local culture is not only focus on the ancient buildings, skills and products themselves, but also gives significant attention to their cultural connotation. It emphasizes the expression of the inner spirit that underlies all local culture.

Yan'an is one of the three major educational bases for Chinese patriotism, revolutionary tradition and the Yan'an spirit. Part of the landscape captures the revolutionary scene while another part succinctly summarizes local cultural elements. For example, as shown in [Fig. 6], there are cave sites featuring lattice window elements and pepper corns hanging outside the walls while newly constructed villages and renovated site roads are seen together. These elements mainly unify the traditional cave-building form in the developed tourist area in order to ensure both a new spirit and the retention of revolutionary memory.



[Fig. 6] Residence of cave building

3.4 Muji county

Environmental beauty is a characteristic of beautiful countryside and the harmony of life. Adhering to the principle of natural ecology is essential when extending local culture. Ensuring ecological balance while protecting the development of the local cultural landscape is crucial for the continuation of cultural life and it can effectively provide economic, social and environmental benefits. It is vital to preserve the local natural ecological landscape that includes safeguarding fundamental ecological facilities such as rivers, trees, farmland and fields. In addition, it includes maintaining the stability of the regional ecosystem through sensible ecological cycles and energy transformations and protecting the diversity of

animals, plants and microorganisms [12].

Xinjiang's Muji County, listed in the third batch of Chinese Traditional Villages, has a variety of landscape types including mountains, foothills, plains, gobi and desert. Based on the natural backdrop, Kazakh dwellings known as yurts are located at the foot of the mountains. Herds of cattle and sheep reflect the ecological cultural characteristics. The nomadic lifestyle, ecological tourism, ecological culture, agricultural culture, unique homestays and other regional experiences contribute to the landscape's appeal as shown in [Fig. 7] and [Fig. 8].



[Fig. 7] Hills and villages in Muji county



[Fig. 8] Nomad yurt under the mountains in Muji county

4. Local cultural landscape construction and design suggestions

4.1 Respect the original ecology and protect the natural art landscape

Building a local cultural landscape requires a commitment to maintaining the original ecology. To foster the development of such a landscape, the local natural landscape can be considered to optimize and adjust it while prioritizing natural preservation. This applies to both the natural environment and the cultural living environment. For the natural landscape, it is crucial to protect mountains, woodland, natural water bodies and agricultural areas. During construction, efforts can be made to prevent water pollution and to favor the use of functional water-purifying plants. The green ecology of water resources can also be maintained by utilizing floating and submerged plants to degrade and remove organic matter. Thus, it is crucial to maintain the relationship between nature, humans and objects in local areas.

4.2 Inherit national customs and enhance interactive experiences

To continue the material culture, several elements can be considered including spatial form, layout, color, materials and surrounding cultural derivatives. First, understanding of the classical local spatial form leads to extract elements and symbols from local buildings, structures and artworks. These can then be applied to the scene through design and processing to provide people with memorable local touchpoints. Second, traditional spatial layouts can provide different scenes. An open space with a curved surface exudes a modern feel while traditional northern dwellings offer spaciousness and openness. Third, because regional culture varies, people often have an inherent color impression of the region. In design, regional color can be used as the theme to strengthen the representation of local culture [13]. Colors can be extracted from ethnic instruments, pictures, costumes and totems for landscape representation to display local style and match color with form. Fourth, it is important to leverage local cultural materials as they often best reflect local characteristics. In terms of landscape paving, material use is versatile. For example, tile materials used in the Suzhou Museum can be repurposed for different uses and scenes. Combined with modern materials and innovative arrangements, they can bring out the original flavor. Fifth, designing cultural peripheral products in the scene can enhance the interactivity of the experience. For instance, the deeds of local celebrities can be depicted through carvings and paintings and representative local products and historical activity tools can be added. This increases the scene experience's functionality and deepens people's sense of connection to local culture.

4.3 Embrace modern styles and revitalize local landscapes

Inherently, the term ‘rural’ alludes to the concept of homeland. Local culture is shaped by its natural environment with the protection and conservation of this environment being crucial for its preservation. Thus, an ideal rural setting can epitomize a symbiotic progression of people, land, production, landscape and culture. Within this broader rural landscape, it is essential to facilitate land and industrial development conducive to cultural enrichment. Rural public spaces provide visitors with an intuitive understanding of the region’s collective ethos while more private courtyards manifest the intellectual and cultural refinement of the rural inhabitants, indicative of their living standards.

The design of public spaces ought to be cognizant of residents’ lifestyles and behavioral patterns. In response to enhanced living standards, cultural life is increasingly gaining prominence. As such, in the conception of landscape spaces, functional planning is vital. Beyond the establishment of roads, agricultural land and infrastructure, the optimization and enhancement of the natural landscape in parallel with human activity is of paramount importance.

5. Conclusion

The revitalization of rural areas puts culture first. Chinese culture with its long history is recorded in the local landscape through human historical activities. To build beautiful countrysides, the principle of ecological development while respecting local conditions and cultural expressions is important to protect local culture. This requires creating a balance between the ‘new’ changes and the ‘old’ aspects of the local landscape. For this, the study explores the principles and strategies of local culture construction, revolving around protection, local adaptability, cultural expression and natural ecology. The paper concludes with design suggestions to respect original ecology inherit national customs and embrace modern styles in revitalizing local landscapes. Even though the paper has a limitation in the scope of examples and its actual applications, it expects to contribute to the discourse on local cultural landscape construction and offer a roadmap for future Beautiful Rural Construction initiatives in China and beyond.

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