

Research on Traditional Village Landscape Design From the Perspective of Rural Tourism

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Abstract: The large-scale growth of rural tourism has opened up new avenues for the revitalization and utilization of ancient traditional villages. As a core carrier integrating local culture and natural ecology, the quality of landscape planning in these villages directly determines tourists' travel experience and the long-term sustainable development of rural areas. Taking landscape construction of traditional villages under the background of rural tourism as the research subject, this paper elaborates the inherent connotation of village landscapes and sorts out three core features: original local cultural context, unique natural texture, and intergenerational inheritance over time. Three guiding principles are clarified accordingly, including regional adaptation, living cultural inheritance and ecological sustainability. Four operable design strategies are put forward: localized construction of village entrance landmarks, adaptive restoration of ancient building clusters, multi-functional layout of farmland spaces, and ecological integration with mountain and water textures. This research intends to ease the inherent conflicts between heritage conservation and tourism development, carry forward local historical culture, improve rural ecological conditions, advance the upgrading of rural tourism industries, and offer theoretical references and practical guidance for constructing beautiful countryside and implementing the rural revitalization strategy.

Keywords: Rural tourism; Traditional villages; Landscape design; Local culture; Ecological inheritance

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1. Introduction

With the full implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, rural tourism has evolved into a key industry that activates idle rural resources and boosts villagers' income. Endowed with profound historical deposits, pristine natural scenery and authentic rural customs, traditional villages stand out as the most attractive resources within the rural tourism market. Nevertheless, inappropriate landscape development in numerous villages has triggered a series of problems: excessive modernized decoration, broken cultural inheritance and irreversible ecological damage. Finding optimized landscape planning approaches within the framework of rural tourism to realize coordinated progress between conservation and exploitation has become a shared

concern among scholars and industry practitioners. Against such a backdrop, this paper explores the logical thinking and practical paths of landscape design tailored to rural tourism demands, so as to lay a solid foundation for the sustainable development of traditional villages.

2. Connotation of landscapes in traditional villages

Formed based on specific geographical conditions, clan social structures and farming production modes, landscapes in traditional villages represent complex settlement systems. They constitute organic combinations of natural ecosystems and humanistic heritage accumulated over centuries, rather than simple piles of isolated buildings or natural sceneries. They function as living communities where physical spaces and intangible cultural elements interpenetrate and interact. From a tangible perspective, village landscapes cover mountains, water systems, farmlands, vegetation, street patterns, ancient building complexes, old wells, stone bridges, stone mills and farm tools. Distributed in line with local landforms, these physical elements form spatial textures that embody the ancient Chinese philosophy of harmony between humanity and nature ^[1]. From an intangible dimension, village landscapes carry folk customs, traditional crafts, clan rituals and local dialects. Every landscape node records the growth trajectory and collective memories of villagers, serving as vital mediums for passing down regional culture from generation to generation.

3. Distinctive traits of traditional village landscapes under rural tourism

3.1. Originality of local cultural context

Original local cultural context distinguishes traditional village landscapes from urban landscapes and newly built modern rural areas. It derives from the production and living practices passed down among villagers without excessive commercial reconstruction or modern remodeling. Each village owns exclusive cultural features shaped by local geography and lifestyles: the gentle and elegant styles of water towns in southern China, the unadorned simplicity of villages on northern plains, and the layered exquisite views of mountain hamlets. Architectural forms, folk activities, plant collocations, and daily utensils all reflect original cultural genes. Within rural tourism development, such originality becomes the core appeal, drawing visitors who pursue genuine rural atmospheres and authentic cultural experiences. It also helps villages escape homogeneous development and build unique competitive advantages in tourism markets.

3.2. Uniqueness of natural spatial texture

Natural textures take shape in accordance with villages' geographic surroundings, reflecting deep integration between natural ecosystems and residential layouts, as well as ancient residents' wisdom of adapting to and utilizing nature. Most traditional villages follow the layout logic of constructing houses beside mountains, rivers and farmlands. Mountains, watercourses and croplands form the natural base of village landscapes, and diverse landforms create differentiated textures: open farmland views in plain villages, winding bridges and streams in water towns, and karst peak forests surrounding mountain villages. These natural patterns emerge from long-term environmental adaptation instead of artificial fabrication. During tourism development, distinctive natural textures not only provide natural materials for landscape design but also create unique ecological identities, supporting eco-travel and leisure vacation experiences ^[2].

3.3. Continuity of intertemporal inheritance

Continuity across time represents the temporal attribute of village landscapes, referring to the intergenerational transmission of history and ecology that maintains the integrity of village appearances through ages. Landscape elements of traditional villages do not take shape overnight. Renovation of ancient buildings, annual farming activities, long-term water system management and oral inheritance of folk customs rely on consistent maintenance by successive villagers, keeping stable forms and cultural connotations of landscapes. From the perspective of rural tourism, this continuity endows villages with profound historical weight, allowing tourists to perceive local evolution and real historical traces during sightseeing. Meanwhile, it guarantees sustainable utilization of village landscapes and prevents landscape destruction and cultural fractures caused by short-sighted profit-oriented exploitation.

4. Design principles for traditional village landscapes under rural tourism

4.1. Originality principle of regional adaptation

The regional adaptation and originality principle demands that landscape design fully respect local geographical environments and retain primitive rural features, avoiding blind copying of foreign design styles or modern landscape techniques. Before planning, designers need to conduct comprehensive investigations into landforms, climate, native building materials, and folk customs; adhere to local material utilization and measures adjusted to local conditions; and align landscape forms with regional characteristics to preserve original spatial textures and village appearances. This principle acts as a core safeguard against homogeneous and over-commercialized village landscapes. It balances tourism experience demands and protection of village originality, presents regional rural charm completely, and delivers authentic rural travel experiences to visitors.

4.2. Inheritance principle of living culture

The living cultural inheritance principle focuses on sustaining and revitalizing historical context in villages. It requires landscape planning to protect tangible landscape carriers while activating the vitality of intangible culture and realizing deep integration between culture and spaces. Designers ought to dig deep into village historical stories, folk crafts, clan culture and folk activities, embedding these core elements into landscape nodes to turn scenery into visible carriers of cultural inheritance. Meanwhile, planners should avoid static display of cultural landscapes. Instead, they reserve sufficient space for folk events, craft workshops and cultural exchanges, enabling traditional culture to be inherited vividly within tourism scenarios and enriching cultural connotations as well as tourism attractiveness of landscapes^[3].

4.3. Sustainability principle of ecological balance

Centered on natural ecological protection, the ecological sustainability principle pursues balanced progress between tourism construction and environmental conservation for long-term rational use of landscape resources. During design procedures, planners must respect natural village ecosystems, safeguard mountains, farmlands, vegetation and water systems, and refrain from overdevelopment or river blockage that damages ecology. Eco-friendly construction methods and building materials are adopted to maintain the integrity and stability of ecosystems. In addition, planners coordinate ecological and tourism functions, turning natural landscapes into core sightseeing zones while maintaining their roles in water conservation, biodiversity

protection and microclimate regulation, thus fostering a virtuous cycle where ecology and rural tourism develop side by side.

5. Practical design methods for traditional village landscapes under rural tourism

5.1. Construct village gateways with local materials to retain original rural charm

As the primary interface connecting villages with the outside world, entrance landscapes concisely display local culture and regional styles. Adopting indigenous construction materials maximizes the preservation of primitive village features, ensures a consistent initial travel experience with rural characteristics, and prevents separation between village styles caused by modern industrial materials. First, designers prioritize local raw materials and abandon mass-produced industrial building supplies. Materials are selected based on regional resources: bamboo gateways, railings and decorative frames are built with traditional weaving techniques in Dai villages in Southwest China; local bluestones are quarried to build foundation walls and landmark bases in Bai villages, matched with painted plaster walls to integrate local construction wisdom and cultural genes. Second, local folk symbols are extracted to shape entrance landmarks. Intangible heritage patterns, ethnic totems and characteristic daily utensils are embedded into structural design. For instance, Mudi Stream Village in Zhangjiajie applies elements including Tujia brocade, stilt houses and back baskets to entrance installations, visualizing Tujia cultural characteristics and boosting regional recognition of gateways. Third, native vegetation softens entrance spaces. Ancient trees and local flowers originally growing on-site are retained without introducing rare exotic ornamental trees. Natural scattered planting recovers primitive vegetation landscapes and seamlessly connects gateways with the overall ecological texture of villages, creating pure authentic rural atmospheres for tourists.

5.2. Adaptive restoration of ancient building textures to vitalize historical heritage

Ancient architectural complexes serve as core carriers of village history and culture. Adaptive living restoration does not equal simple reconstruction in antique styles. Instead, it optimizes internal functions while protecting original building appearances and structures to integrate traditional architecture with modern tourism scenarios. Prior to renovation, professional teams conduct thorough surveys of ancient buildings, recording architectural styles, materials, craftsmanship, historical backgrounds, and damage conditions. Following the core standard of restoring old buildings to their original appearance, constructors prioritize identical local raw materials for repair. Local timber, blue bricks, adobe tiles and mortise-and-tenon components are adopted or customized via traditional craftsmanship, while modern concrete, ceramic tiles and tempered glass that ruin historical styles are forbidden. Traditional carpentry, tile-laying and carving skills are maintained to preserve delicate carvings, roof ridges, window grilles and bracket systems^[4]. For buildings with minor damage, reinforcement and partial repair are the main measures. Corroded components are replaced with materials of identical texture and size without altering outer facades or internal layouts. For severely damaged buildings with historical value, internal spaces are moderately renovated while original layouts and facades remain intact. Old dwellings can be transformed into folk culture exhibition halls, intangible craft experience rooms, distinctive homestays or rural reading spaces, decorated with simple rural furnishings and traditional ornaments rather than luxurious modern decorations. Take Huizhou's Xidi and Hongcun Villages as examples. Renovation of Huizhou-style architecture strictly complies with original textures, fully retaining horse-head walls, brick carvings, wood carvings and dark tiles. Local bricks, timbers

and tiles are applied in accordance with classic Huizhou craftsmanship. Ancestral halls and old houses are reconstructed into Huizhou culture exhibition spaces and research experience venues, enabling living inheritance and renewal of Huizhou architectural culture within rural tourism contexts.

5.3. Functional planning of farmland textures to integrate agricultural production and sightseeing

Farmland spaces embody farming civilization in traditional villages and deliver ecological and agricultural experience for rural tourism. Multi-functional layout balances production, ecology and tourism values to form multi-level farmland landscape systems with diverse experience types. Combining local landforms and planting traditions, planners divide farmlands into functional zones. Core crop planting areas are reserved to guarantee fundamental agricultural output, while characteristic planting plots, ornamental flower belts, farming experience zones and rural rest corners are added according to tourism demands to coordinate production and sightseeing. Core planting zones maintain traditional farming modes, growing staple local crops such as rice, tea and rapeseed on a large scale to retain primitive agricultural landscapes. Pathways inside farmlands are paved with local materials, with widths controlled between 1 and 1.5 meters to avoid damaging field textures. Native weeds and wildflowers are preserved alongside paths to create natural rural scenery. Characteristic planting zones grow ornamental and practical local crops, including coarse cereals, medicinal plants, and special fruits, in block layouts to form layered, colorful farmland views. Simple picking facilities and introduction signs are arranged to support crop identification and fruit-picking experiences for tourists. Farming experience zones build display sheds for traditional farm tools such as plows, harrows, waterwheels and winnowing baskets. Small experimental farm plots are reserved with simple farming equipment, allowing visitors to participate in sowing, irrigation, harvesting and drying activities and gain immersive farming experience.

5.4. Ecological integration with mountain and water textures to protect primitive natural ecosystems

Mountain and water patterns form the natural skeleton of village landscapes. Ecological integration takes ecological protection as the premise, coordinating mountain ranges, water systems and residential spaces to build tourism landscapes featuring harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. In the early design stage, comprehensive ecological surveys are carried out on surrounding mountains, rivers and wetlands, focusing on controlling soil erosion and river siltation. Large-scale mountain excavation and river rerouting are prohibited to fully retain original mountain and water forms and their ecological functions. Mountain landscape construction centers on ecological restoration. Local arbors, shrubs and herbs are planted to form four-season mountain views. Mountain trails are renovated based on original footpaths and paved with local materials, without constructing rigid asphalt mountain roads ^[5]. Mudi Stream Village in Zhangjiajie maintains primitive mountain forests, lays wooden boardwalks along original mountain paths, plants shade-resistant native plants under woods, and installs simple leisure facilities to build low-disturbance mountain wellness landscapes. River regulation prioritizes sediment cleaning and flexible ecological revetment. Rough stones and wooden stakes are adopted to protect river banks, maintaining natural curved watercourses and diversified aquatic habitats. Taking Mudi Stream as an example, natural stone platforms are built alongside the stream without changing river routes to preserve original aquatic ecology. Land beside water follows the

traditional layout of residences along rivers and mountains. Renovated waterside houses are transformed into tourism-supporting facilities with architectural scales and appearances matching mountain and water textures. Riverside leisure zones are constructed to form an organic whole of mountains, rivers, villages and residents, consolidating ecological foundations and providing tourists with primitive mountain and water sightseeing experiences.

6. Conclusion

In summary, landscape design for traditional villages under rural tourism constitutes a systematic project balancing cultural heritage, ecological protection and tourism development, with core objectives of retaining local originality, activating cultural vitality and ensuring ecological sustainability. Future landscape planning for traditional villages should continuously promote coordinated conservation and exploitation, incorporate villagers' participation, and respect indigenous wisdom. In this way, villages can preserve historical roots and natural foundations while achieving new vitality via rural tourism. The research outcomes inject lasting momentum into beautiful countryside construction and deepened rural revitalization, making rural landscapes a core force for inheriting Chinese culture and empowering rural development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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