

# Research on the practice of interventional art township construction in the new era

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**Abstract:** China's rich farming civilization and its cultural heritage provide the foundation for the rural revitalization strategy. The emergence of art townships, employing various models like brand IP development and industrial integration, reflects a modern approach to leveraging traditional rural art. This study examines the origin and context of art township building, analyzes current cases, and identifies issues in subjectivity, locality, implementation, and talent cultivation. The aim is to chart a path for sustainable development and enhance the impact of art in rural areas, contributing to the overall cultural and economic prosperity of the countryside.

**Keywords:** art village building; subjectivity; intervention; existing problems; implementation path

## 1. Introduction

The roots of Chinese civilization are embedded in farming culture, carrying the timeless genetic code of the nation. Covering 92% of the country's land area, the countryside plays a pivotal role in natural, human, social, and economic aspects. It serves as the primary space for economic and social development, intertwining with urban areas to create a symbiotic relationship that forms the backbone of production, livelihood, and culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

Simultaneously, the diverse farming cultures across the land constitute a crucial foundation of Chinese culture, shaping the national character and providing valuable resources for cultural heritage. As China faces significant transformations, particularly in the context of global ecological protection and sustainable development, rural areas are poised to play a vital role. They may emerge as a focal point for national cultural construction and rejuvenation.

Against this backdrop, the timely introduction of the rural revitalization strategy in the Party's 19th report marks a significant step. It addresses the deep connection between farming civilization and the transformation of the new era, positioning rural China as a key player in national development. This strategic move injects vigor into rural development for the new era, prompting scholars to explore multi-faceted and sustainable perspectives on rural development modes.

## 2. Basic overview of the context of Chinese art township construction

The genesis of China's art township construction can be traced along two historical trajectories. Firstly, it emanates from the Chinese rural construction movement of the 1930s, spearheaded by intellectuals like Liang Shuming, Yan Yangchu, Lu Zuofu, Tao Xingzhi, and Yang Kaa. In the backdrop of social turmoil, domestic challenges, and foreign invasions during modern times, this movement emerged as a response to the collapse of the Qing government, political fragmentation, economic upheaval, and the exacerbated plight of rural life due to the world economic crisis.

Liang Shuming, a key figure in this movement, recognized the impact of Western culture on China and the resulting "self-abandonment" of traditional values. In Zouping, Shandong province, he initiated a rural construction movement rooted in traditional Chinese Confucianism and Russellian philosophy. Identifying "cultural imbalance" as the root of rural issues, Liang Shuming proposed a comprehensive approach. He envisioned the coexistence of rural education and village schools, complementing each other to address cultural problems and empower villagers. The establishment of rural construction colleges aimed at democratic farmer participation, breaking away from previous top-down directives.

Within this framework, Liang Shuming designed village schools with directors, seniors, teachers,

and scholars. Directors organized and managed, persuading reluctant villagers to participate and assisting in various activities. Seniors, moral leaders, presided over education, while teachers, often graduates of the Shandong Rural Construction Research Institute, undertook dual roles of teaching and promoting social work. The movement focused on reshaping culture, fostering rural education, and aligning with contemporary rural aesthetic education.

However, the movement's idealistic pursuit of national salvation overlooked the social environment and political unrest affecting villagers. Despite these challenges, the rural construction movement, driven by idealistic individuals, laid a foundation for subsequent studies on rural aesthetic education and cultural participation.

Secondly, the construction of modern art townships in China drew influence from participatory art theories in European and American societies. Advocating for the integration of art and society, these theories, including Joseph Beuys's "social sculpture" concept and Susan Lacy's idea of a "new type of public art," emphasized the transformation of society through artistic intervention and social participation.

The core of this movement challenged the traditional role of artists, turning villagers from bystanders to active participants. While these theories informed the discourse on subjectivity disorder in art village construction, early explorations primarily viewed rural contexts through an artistic lens. This approach, dominated by modern art styles and artists' personal styles, lacked sufficient sociological depth and often led to a utopian vision detached from the cultural richness of the countryside. Further research is needed to bridge this gap, exploring the sociological perspective and local creation to enhance the participation of villagers in the evolving art township construction.

### **3. Problems existing in the practice of Chinese art township construction in the new era**

#### ***3.1. The subjectivity is fuzzy***

The crux of the issue lies in the term "village," which often merely represents local culture in a geographical sense, necessitating a more profound interpretation. A village is not just a geographic entity; it is an organic gathering formed by the will of villagers, constituting a community with a unified cultural connotation. From a communication perspective, the production and reception of information should form a coherent closed loop, where effective audience interpretation is the fundamental prerequisite for information "effect." Stuart Hall, a British scholar, defines "effect" as a successful decoding process that influences, pleases, guides, or persuades others, producing complex results in perception, cognition, emotion, ideology, or behavior.<sup>[2]</sup>

In practical terms, individual decoding and coding methods are shaped by the surrounding environment or inherited through long-term life accumulation, naturally integrating into one's knowledge system. The purpose of rural construction in China is to serve local villagers, improving various aspects of their lives to enhance their happiness. If rural construction is seen as a decoding process, villagers are the exclusive audience, and "artists," "government," and "capital" represent the forces assisting in the decoding. Ignoring the needs of the audience in this decoding process leads to failure.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the rural construction movement of the Republic of China, various forms of participation in township construction existed. Liang Shuming, a scholar, once summarized the movement's failure as "the rural movement, but the villagers did not move." Examining cases of traditional art villages reveals a tendency for wishful acts that disrespect local culture. Artists often use the countryside merely as a backdrop for their artistic creation, shaping content and presentation methods based on their own thoughts and styles. This subjective approach in rural reconstruction disconnects the participation behavior from benefiting the villagers, leading to unsustainable assistance. The construction subject often becomes the "artist," "enterprise capital," or "local government," sidelining the real creators and consumers of rural culture—the villagers. Suppressing the subconscious and logical inclusion of the villagers in various artistic behaviors risks turning them into bystanders rather than active participants in the process.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### ***3.2. The loss of locality***

During the construction of art townships, some practitioners face challenges due to a lack of understanding and difficulty in innovation. They often perceive art townships as a shortcut to rural

economic development, neglecting the importance of implementing aesthetic education and spiritual construction. The tendency is to adopt a single-minded approach, applying urban development strategies without adapting them to the unique aesthetic concepts of rural development. In some cases, the implementation of the "art township built" project becomes a mere replication of urban strategies, driven solely by capital in pursuit of economic leaps. Unfortunately, this approach has weakened the later-stage development of certain art township projects, rendering them less impactful and robust within the local context.

However, the internal logic of the construction of art townships is the cultural industry. Different from other industries, the objects of the production, operation and management of the cultural industry are spiritual products. Different understandings and understandings of the cultural connotation behind it determine how people understand and operate the cultural industry. The management of cultural industry should not only follow the general law of industrial economic operation, but also conform to the special law of culture itself<sup>[5]</sup>.

### ***3.3. Lack of platform and talents***

At present, China's participation of cultural industry in rural construction in China is still in the exploratory stage, and most of them stay at the theoretical level. Analysis of relevant cases, we can find that the scientific research projects of universities and the guidance of local governments constitute the main body." The biggest difference between the post-industrial society and the knowledge society is that they attach importance to the construction of theory. Without enough theoretical resources or theoretical discussion, many practices may be blind, and the faster the advance, the more mistakes will be made." Moreover, due to our cultural industry discipline started late, now about the township and research crowd for art, architectural design, humanities and social science scholars, township and just one of its many academic topics, which also led to the theoretical research on the problem of system and in-depth, stay in the experience and intuition, fragmentation of practice makes rural difficult to get sustainable development.

## **4. The realization path of Chinese art township construction in the new era**

### ***4.1. Build multiple subjects with villagers as the core***

The foothold of art township construction lies in the construction of countryside, whether economic construction or spiritual construction, all serve the countryside. The countryside is not the background board for the artists to create and express their own style. The purpose of the art township construction is to activate the original resources of the countryside through the artists' artistic techniques and creativity, cooperate with the government and enterprises, and build a new life with artistic experience and creativity together with the local villagers. On the one hand, it can improve the villagers' perception of beauty and happiness; on the other hand, it can better help the local economic construction. The villagers are the people who know this land best and the most direct vested interests.

Hence, rural construction should lean on those born and raised in the village, respecting their emotional needs and subjectivity. Villagers serve as the cornerstone of rural development, and the strength of their subjective awareness is a pivotal factor influencing the sustainable development of rural areas. Throughout the construction process, it is crucial to empower villagers with the right to voice their opinions and actively participate, ensuring the central position of the villagers' meaning system and aesthetic experience in township construction practices.

Nevertheless, the involvement of artists, enterprise capital, and the government remains essential as integral components of art township development. These stakeholders, approaching rural culture from distinct perspectives, collectively unearth artistic elements, contributing to the holistic construction of the art township. Therefore, the art township development can revolve around the villagers as the core, with the government and enterprises forming a collaborative, multi-subject approach.

### ***4.2. Pay attention to the local construction of the art township***

A large number of practical cases of art township construction show that the implementation of art township construction has different perspectives and priorities, but the common premise is to respect the traditional cultural connotation of the countryside, respect and protect the inherent natural resources of the countryside, and strengthen the degree of fit between urban aesthetics and local culture. China's

rural areas have a large number of cultural heritage, but many have been submerged in the long river of history. What today's practitioners need to do is to explore the past, base on the present and face the future, and should correctly understand the relationship between the future and the past and combine them in series." All the symbol goods need to have the meaning of culture, and the culture often need to be derived from a certain maternal culture, the maternal culture carries some gene can bring some new vitality to the new culture, but only is the maternal culture is not enough, it must have modern science and technology, or modern new form of expression. In the theory of cultural succession, it is meant that its new life still needs to be cultivated and grown in the new ecological environment and group species."<sup>[6]</sup> Modern aesthetics and modern art just have this ability, which can become the way for local culture to see the light of day again.

### **4.3. Build an exchange platform for art townships**

Currently, research on art township construction in China primarily falls into two categories. Firstly, it is driven by various scholars and manifested through scientific research projects. This approach benefits from collaboration among experts from diverse fields and demonstrates robust innovative capabilities. However, it often has a short duration, tends to remain theoretical, and encounters challenges related to fragmented practical implementation. Secondly, the initiative is led by local governments in collaboration with cultural enterprises or artist organizations. Despite being in its early stages, this approach lacks more profound and systematic theoretical discussions, occasionally leading to stagnation or replication and imitation.

In essence, the construction of art townships lacks a comprehensive platform for diverse stakeholders to exchange ideas and discuss within the industrial chain. Establishing a systematic platform serves multiple purposes. Firstly, scholars and experts from various disciplines can use it to release relevant theoretical research, engage in active discussions, and continually enhance the theoretical framework related to art township construction. Secondly, the platform can facilitate the public sharing of diverse art township construction practices, allowing for timely experience-sharing and providing opportunities for mutual learning. Additionally, considering the relatively recent development of China's cultural industry and the shortage of professionals with expertise in management, art, and society, the platform also serves as an avenue for talent cultivation.

In summary, the establishment of a comprehensive platform addresses the need for collaborative discourse, theoretical development, and knowledge sharing within the art township construction domain. This inclusive space encourages practitioners, scholars, and experts to collectively contribute to the advancement and sustainable development of art townships in China.

## **5. Conclusions**

The purpose of the construction of art township is to let the villagers improve their aesthetic quality and then meet the people's yearning and demand for a better life. The second is to promote the development of rural cultural tourism through cultural and artistic participation in rural construction. The core is "those who are near are happy, and those who come far away". But in essence, the construction of art township is still a kind of external driving force, which is an "interventional" path with the countryside as the background board<sup>[7]</sup>. This also requires that in the implementation process, the builders are bound to deeply cultivate regional culture, explore and protect local culture, and build multiple subjects with villagers as the core<sup>[8]</sup>. To begin with, in the construction process, it emphasize the emotional connection and experiences of villagers with the local culture, developing a profound understanding of the natural environment, cultural heritage, and the lifestyle inherent in rural areas. This will not only cultivate a stronger sense of identity and pride in their own culture but also contribute to steering the evolution of the rural cultural structure towards greater diversification. Secondly, the villagers should become the builders of rural development, and use modern culture and technology to explore a new development model more suitable for themselves, and walk out of a unique new direction, so as to achieve economic prosperity and rural revitalization. The construction of art township should not only be plastic and soul, not only have material development goals, so that the villagers can live more rich, but also have spiritual good pursuit, so that the villagers have the ability to perceive happiness. It is a systematic project with multi-dimensional goals<sup>[9]</sup>. Although the construction of art townships in China is late, new explorations have emerged, and a lot of experience has been accumulated in the process, and some problems have been summed up. Its theoretical construction and concrete practice are still in the exploration stage, far from over, and the future still needs to be

improved in continuous reflection.

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