

Rational Thinking on the Characteristic Development of Urban Public Culture in Central China

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Abstract: The central region is a key region for China to solve the “unbalanced and insufficient” problem of public cultural development during the “14th Five-Year Plan” period. It is the key region that can comprehensively promote the high-quality development of public cultural services. After nearly 20 years of development, some remarkable public cultural service innovation and development bright cities have appeared in the central provinces. However, overall, the public cultural development in the central region is still lack of characteristics. The cultural development is still low quality, and low efficiency. The current situation is still facing the prominent problem of the “collapse of the central region” of public cultural services. The characteristic development of public cultural services reflects not only the geographical environment and national life customs, but also the good traditions of culture. These are all issues of the times that must be faced in the characterization of public cultural services. Therefore, how to excavate, preserve and utilize local characteristic culture in public cultural services has very significant practical significance in the current urban public cultural service construction.

1. Introduction

The central region is located in the center of China's vast territory. It is the region with the deepest accumulation of five thousand years of civilization in China. It is also an important hub area for China's current cultural power construction. It is also a functional area connected to the east and west. It can balance and coordinate the source as well. All in all, it is an integrated development region. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to strengthen the construction of modern public cultural service system in central China and effectively improve the quality of public cultural service in central China to promote the high-quality development of national public cultural service. Culture is deeply rooted in the power of the region's history, economic and social development. The vitality of public cultural services, attractivity, which deeply rooted and area natural humanities, and the folk custom. A side water and soil raise a side people. When constructing a humanistic, at the same time, it must or should permeate in the side of the public cultural services. The public cultural service that lacks the self-restraint of humanistic and historical roots and the infiltration of characteristic culture is always feeble and difficult to sustain.

2. Reasons of Focusing on the Central Region

The central region is the region with the largest population and towns, low per capita income, and the largest development disparity. It is a key region to solve the problem of uncoordinated regional development and the “unbalanced and inadequate” urban-rural development in China [1]. Since the government work report in March 2004 first clearly stated “promoting the rise of the central region”, top-level designs on the rise of the central region have been launched one after another. On March 30, 2021, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee convened a meeting to deliberate *Guiding Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development in the Central Region in the New Era* [2]. It pointed out that “strive to improve the level of basic public service guarantees and promote the accelerated rise of the central region.” As the central region connects east and west, connects south and north, is rich in resources, well-developed transportation, good industrial foundation, profound cultural heritage, huge development potential, and significant role as a spatial hub, the rise of the central region and the promotion of its high-quality development have a global significance.

In terms of economic aggregates, as of 2020, the central region’s GDP exceeded 22 trillion yuan, and its share in the country rose from 18.6% in 2006 to 21.9% in 2020 [3]. Although the central region has now achieved partial prominence, for a long time, under the continuous effect of the first development strategy of the coastal areas, the development pattern of the central region has been in a relatively serious unbalanced state. The regional development is uneven, and the latecomer advantages have not been fully utilized. From the analysis of indicators such as per capita GDP, industrial proportion, and urbanization rate of the 6 central provinces, they are almost at a similar stage of development. Taking per capita GDP as an example. In 2020, except for Hubei Province with a per capita GDP of more than 70,000 yuan and Shanxi Province with a per capita GDP of less than 55,000 yuan, the per capita GDP of the other four provinces were between 55,000 yuan and 60,000 yuan. The development level of urban agglomerations and central cities in the central region is obviously lower than that of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen urban agglomerations in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomerations in the Yangtze River Delta. For example, the city with the highest GDP in the central region is Wuhan. In 2020, its GDP was 1.5 trillion yuan, which is equivalent to 40% of Shanghai’s GDP and 56% of Shenzhen’s GDP. The development gap between urban agglomerations is obvious [4].

The “14th Five-Year Plan” and the 2035 long-term goal outline proposes to develop and expand urban agglomerations and metropolitan areas, classify and guide the development direction of large, medium and small cities, and focus on construction to promote high-quality development in the central region. Therefore, the cultivation of world-class urban agglomerations and central cities in the future is one of the important tasks facing the promotion of high-quality development in the central region. The high-quality development of the central region is not only an upgraded version of the central region's rise strategy, but also a comprehensive upgrade of China's regional coordinated development strategy under the new situation [3].

3. Basic Concept

“Characteristic” is the sign that distinguishes a thing from other things. It is determined by the specific environmental factors in which the thing is located. One interpretation of “characteristic” is individuality, that is, things that allow people to remember or leave an impression, such as geographic location, historical culture and social customs, architectural style, natural resources, and industry types. Another explanation for “characteristic” is comparative advantage, which can be the ecological environment, natural resource endowment, geographical location advantage, or characteristic culture, characteristic industries, etc. [5]. It can form development competitiveness

and support the city. Every city has the historical accumulation of human heritage and natural evolution, material cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, natural landscape, etc. These can be called local cultural characteristics. The unique natural conditions and historical evolution of each region have cultivated their own unique regional cultures, reflecting the unique material and spiritual values of the local area. As long as they are good at mining, protecting, developing, and utilizing, and correctly handling the relationship between cultural commonality and individuality, a good atmosphere can be created for the characteristic development of public cultural services [6].

The characteristic development of public cultural services refers to the public cultural facilities, cultural products, cultural activities and other related services with obvious historical deposits, humanistic traditions, regional characteristics and social characteristics that are provided under the leadership of the government and the participation of social forces for the main purpose of meeting citizens' basic cultural needs. These characteristics are widely recognized by the local or urban public in the process of public service. At present, the characteristic development of public culture is a new thing highly adapted to the construction of cultural power in the new era and the high-quality development of public culture. To a certain extent, it is a new development form created by the adaptability of The Times, carrying the new ideas, new demands, new formats and new functions of the construction of public cultural service system in the new era. It is open, diverse, inclusive and innovative in the new era.

4. Theoretical Perspective

4.1 Humanistic Theories in Urban Planning

Lewis Mumford's urban thoughts are all permeated with the characteristics of humanism. In his *Urban Culture, Urban Development History* and many other research results on urban culture, the humanism of urban planning is always the highlight. In his thoughts on urban material culture, Mumford put forward the two metaphors of “magnet” and “container” respectively. He regarded the functions of the city's “magnet” and “container” as one of the essential functions of the city. He called “cultural storage, “cultural dissemination and exchange, cultural creation and development” are called “the three most basic functions of a city”, so that the functions of “attraction” and “storage” of the city are analyzed at different levels. The “magnet” is the metaphor of the attraction of the city. From a diachronic perspective, he analyzed the various social functions that play the main attraction at each stage of the city's development from rise to development, the so-called “magnetic poles”. After the city's “magnet” function takes effect, it can successfully attract a large number of people and various social organizations, thus a “living closed container” can be formed. This closed “container” gathers scattered, unorganized social functions, social institutions, and people in a limited regional environment, compulsorily forming an urban complex [7]. In this complex, various social functions, organizations and human beings that were previously in a dispersed state “achieve” the maximum mutual induction and interaction. Mumford believes that, to a certain extent, the form of a city is a “container” composed of countless material entities, and the city also has the function of storing and carrying culture as a container with material entities. However, there is a prerequisite for cities to store all kinds of cultures, that is, cities first need to exert the function of magnets to attract all kinds of spiritual cultures to gather in the city [8].

Another figure that emphasizes humanism in urban planning is Kevin Lynch. In 1960, in his book *Urban Image*, Lynch proposed that the beauty of the city not only requires the harmony of composition and form, but more importantly, it comes from physical and psychological real feelings, emphasizing the need to organize through paths, boundaries, regions, nodes, and signs. People's image system of the city, so that people's perception of space can be integrated into the city's culture [9]. In Lynch's view, urban planning paints a magnificent blueprint for urban development,

and urban culture is like a dark line that guides urban development.

In addition, in 1971, Shumash also put forward the theory of contextualism in “Contextualism: The Ideal and Disintegration of the City”, saying that “the content that already exists in the city, no matter what it is, should not be destroyed. Instead, we should try to make it possible to integrate people into the city as a whole, and make it one of the organic connotations of the city.” The context is the relationship between people and architecture, the relationship between architecture and city, the relationship between the entire city and its cultural backgrounds. There is an inherent and essential connection among them [10].

Therefore, the characteristic culture of a city is the sum of civilizations created and formed in the course of long-term practice. One part is the culture that can be preserved, expressed, and transmitted through certain material carriers, such as urban historical and cultural heritage, street art sculptures, libraries, museums, etc. The other part exists in the brains, words and deeds of urban residents in the form of values, mental states, and mental states, such as urban spirit, cultural traditions, and customs. The main task of urban cultural development is to explore, organize, and preserve the cultural relationship between urban space and these internal elements. However, some scholars also pointed out that from the perspective of urban characteristic culture, China’s urban characteristic cultural construction so far still lacks attention to its own outstanding cultural traditions, lacks more distinctive cultural characteristics, and is keener to imitate those brands that have already had a greater impact. These have led to a serious tendency to “homogenize” urban culture.

4.2 “The Third Urban Place” in Urban Public Products

Henri Lefebvre pointed out that the productive value of space had shifted from “the production of things in space” to “the production of space [11]”. “This structural change also led to the emergence of new relations of production. The meaning and extension of space production also had a passing momentum. [12]” Later, Edward Sawyer, on the basis of Lefebvre’s “giving complex meanings to social space”, through sorting out and thinking about the space concept of postmodern scholars and postcolonial scholars, overturned the traditional space thinking mode of “material-spirit” and “objective-subjective”. He also developed the concept of “third place” [13]. “The first place” refers to the materiality of space form, which can be described by experience. “The second place” refers to the spaciality of human cognition form, which is represented by the concept of place. The “third place” is developed on the basis of the “first place” and the “second place”. It is different from the two, inclusive of the two, and beyond the two. It is the result of the joint participation and production of multiple forces. It can be said that the “third place” is the third style that transcends the binary opposition between physics and spirit. It is the place with the most vitality and cultural diversity in a city. It can even be regarded as the cultural landmark of a city.

In 1999, Ray Oldenburg proposed the concept of “third place” in his book “The Perfect Place” from the perspective of urban and social studies. Oldenburg’s “third place”, that is, informal public life, is a social scene separated from the place where one lives (the first space) and the place where one spends a lot of time working (the second space) [14]. Oldenburg believes that the “mode that people only go from work place to their residence” is by no means a satisfactory “way of social bonding”. Instead, the “third place” should be “a social place where people connect emotions, release themselves and communicate freely” [15]. In his point of view, places such as public libraries, coffee shops, museums, community centers, bookstores, bar, barber shops and other places, should be more prominent in their social effect as a “third place”. The connotation of city images and city spirits should be more apparent, free and open. The bearing of the freedom and openness of modern cities should also be more intuitive. Oldenburg’s division of “three places” clearly

delineates the relationship between residence, workplace and social field, and constructs human experience on the basis of connection, distinction and autonomy.

Thus, it can be seen that the concept of “third place” is born with rich emotional value, social value and cultural value. “Third place”, as a medium of cultural communication, gradually turns to “study, life, social” and other cultural communication services. The transformation of public cultural Spaces from the traditional physical place to constructed “third place” is based on the humanistic foundations. It is consistent with the idea that public cultural facilities focus on providing public services to all people and their positioning as urban public space [16].

5. Conclusion

Since the reform and opening up, China’s cultural development as a whole has been developing rapidly. However, for different regions, due to the influence of economic policies, geo-environment, industrial foundation and various other factors, cultural development has always been in a state of imbalance. The culture of some regions develops rapidly due to the good economic foundation and obvious geographical advantages, while the development of some regions is slow. One of the most direct results is that there is a big gap in service content, products, means, methods and efficiency of public culture between regions. Therefore, different cities need to have their own cultural characteristics. The local characteristics and individual charm in the development of public cultural services need to be based on the development and utilization of regional cultural resources.

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