

A Study on the Sustainable Development of the Construction of Art Townships in China—Taking the Bishan Project as an Example

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Abstract: With the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization, the decline and extinction of the countryside has become a global problem, and various modes of countryside construction have emerged at home and abroad, among which artistic countryside construction has received extensive attention from all walks of life. Experts and scholars in related fields have intervened in the construction of the countryside by carrying out art education and organizing art exhibitions and other unique forms through field visits, which has opened up a new path for artistic rural construction in the new era. Taking China's "Bishan Project" as an example, the author analyzes its practical activities and the reasons for its failure, summarizes the problems, and proposes a new path for sustainable development to find partnerships and establish organizations. If art interventions in rural construction cannot make the countryside sustainable, it will become a shaky utopia.

1. Overview of rural development and construction in China

The history of village construction can be traced back to 1904. Jiansan Mi and Digang Mi, father and son, founded the "Village Governance" in Zhaicheng, Ding County, Hebei Province, which influenced the rise of the nationwide rural construction movement. In the twenties and thirties, the rural construction movement reached a climax, with more than 1,000 experimental areas and experimental sites established nationwide, a trend that historians call "China's modern rural construction movement.[1]" Yangchu Yan was a famous pioneer of rural construction in the civil period, and he carried out a campaign against the four major problems of the peasants, namely, "stupidity," "poverty," "weakness," and "selfishness." In response to the four major problems of the peasants: "stupidity," "poverty," "weakness," and "selfishness," he carried out the four major education programs of arts and culture, livelihood, health, and citizenship. Shuming Liang, one of the outstanding thinkers and philosophers of the 20th century, believed that the only way to revitalize China was to restore the traditional Chinese culture represented by Confucianism and to build a new country that inherited the traditions of "ethical orientation" and "occupational separation," thus solving the problem of cultural dissonance. This would solve the problem of

cultural imbalance. In addition, there was also the "modernized countryside" advocated by Zuofu Lu. Although all these movements failed, they have played a great role in reshaping the countryside into a Chinese, modernized, and popularized countryside nowadays.

After the reform and opening up, the poor collectivist economy of the countryside began to shift to a small-farmer family economy, which ushered in a turnaround in the development of the countryside. The rural infrastructure, medical and health care, and other aspects of people's livelihoods were greatly improved. Still, the countryside population continued to move to the cities, and the gap between the urban and rural areas gradually widened. As the state attaches more importance to new rural areas, the leading forces in constructing the rural regions have gradually diversified. However, there are still many problems in the construction of the rural areas of the new era, such as in the implementation of the "Bishan Program," the team encountered insufficient funding, unreasonable institutions, excellent traditional culture inheritance blocked, and other problems, which will be investigated and explored in this paper, to find a better way to improve the rural development. In this paper, we will also research and explore these problems and seek more open and diversified solution paths.

2. Origin and practice of the Bishan Project

Bishan Village, located in Biyang Town, Yixian County, Anhui Province, has a long history and rich natural resources. As the initiators, Ou Ning and Zuo Jing had the idea of establishing the "Bishan Community" in 2007, hoping that artists, intellectuals, and other groups could pay attention to the village and return to it. On June 5, 2011, the Bishan Project was officially launched at the Guangzhou Times Art Museum.

2.1 Folk art revival

First, "folk art revival" is one of the important practical directions of the Bishan Plan. French sociologist Bourdieu (Pierre Bourdieu) put forward the theory of "cultural reproduction," which shows that culture can be inherited through continuous reproduction to enable the continuation of the community through the multiple factors intertwined with the interaction of time, the reproduction of the culture after the renewal and re-creation, will have a stronger vitality after being renewed and re-created. The "Yixian Hundred Crafts" project successfully practices the theory of "cultural reproduction." Zuo Jing led the team to visit and research dozens of surviving or disappeared traditional folk handicrafts in the county over three years, conducting interviews, filming and recording, categorizing and organizing them, establishing a database, and then publishing the results of the book, "Hundred Crafts of Yixian County." This set of books provides a detailed account of the historical development and production process of each handicraft item in Bishan Village, as well as the living conditions of the artisans and craftsmen. At the same time, designers are invited to carry out "reproduction" so that the combination of ancient traditional skills and modern innovative ideas can develop new products with a wider group acceptance and also lay the foundation for establishing the Bishan Industry and Trade Association. It also laid the foundation for the establishment of "Bishan Supply and Marketing Cooperative". "Bishan Supply and Marketing Cooperative" is a comprehensive cultural space with many contents such as publishing, exhibition, retail, village residency, handmade experience, etc., and includes the store activity body - D&DEPARTMENT China's first branch. In 2018, "Bishan Supply and Marketing Cooperative" formally joined LOCALAND (Xi'an), the first demonstration space in China, which is the first city window for exporting village value of the first urban window and a new development direction for rural construction - building a mutually feeding urban-rural community through urban-rural interaction. In terms of results and impacts, Yixian

Hundred Workers and “Bishan Supply and Marketing Cooperative” are the projects with the highest level of villagers' participation and the greatest benefits, which shows that truly understanding the needs of farmers and practically solving the problems related to their interests and promoting the sustainable development should be the core purpose of the art of rural construction.

2.2 Building public cultural spaces

Secondly, the practice of the Bishan Project is also reflected in the construction of public cultural space. German scholar Jürgen Habermas has defined "public space" and "cultural space" and considered public cultural space as a community of material and spiritual construction of public cultural activities. Bishan Bookstore is a public cultural space in Bishan Village. Bishan Bookstore is one of the most representative rural public cultural spaces in Bishan Village. It was renovated from the ancestral hall of the Qing Dynasty, preserving the original features of the building, repairing the dilapidated parts, and adding furniture displays in the same style. The bookstore mainly displays books about the history and culture of Huizhou and rural civilization, as well as popular science books introducing local customs and traditional handicrafts, which is similar to Zuofu Lu's initiative of establishing libraries in towns in Beibei during the Republican period, both of which brought local villagers convenient reading conditions and improved their quality of life.

However, foreign tourists frequent the Bishan Bookstore more, and villagers choose to go to the Farmers' Bookstore or play cards and drink tea at home in their spare time. There are only two employment opportunities offered by the bookstore. Although cultural and recreational activities are carried out occasionally, they are not closely related to the residents' lives and do not stimulate their desire to participate.

2.3 Reconstructing public life

With the system's reform, villagers have lost the organizational basis for their collective activities, and the scope of their public life has shrunk. This, coupled with the diversification of villagers' value orientations due to significant population mobility and the development of the market economy, has made the integration of rural communities and rural social governance difficult. According to Habermas's theoretical analysis, believes that public life has three basic functions: first, to promote the negotiation and dialogue between citizens to form a resonance; second, to coordinate the behavior of citizens and promote the behavior of the rational; third, to promote the socialization of the actors, and to enhance their sense of social identity. It is thus clear that reconstructing public life is particularly important.

Recognizing the importance of restructuring the villagers' public life, Zuo Jing and Ou Ning , together with artists and villagers, organized the first “Bishan Harvest Festival” in 2011, which featured ritual performances by villagers in "rice straw costumes" and a ritual dance called "Out of Place" as well as exhibitions of old photographs and folk crafts. The festival featured a ritual performance in which villagers dressed in straw costumes performed the "Out of Place" ritual dance and an exhibition of old photographs, folk crafts, and poetry recitals. Artist Shaoji Liang's work “Water Ritual” and Feibo Chen's waste-remodeled furniture use unused public space, combining it with local traditional skills to give them new life. The creators hope to continue the local sacrificial tradition and rebuild the forgotten public life in the countryside through this ancient ritual. This is not only a display and summary of the past achievements of the Bishan Project but also a spark that will light up the future. The poetry class of the “Bishan Harvest Festival Celebration” is set in the ancestral hall. Zuo Jing believes that teaching poetry to left-behind children is an attempt to integrate literature into the countryside so that children will be more attentive to observing and experiencing their environment. Those remaining ancient times will be given more connotations

through cultural enrichment, adding to the possibility of protecting and building the countryside.

2.4 Summary

The Bishan Project is not just an art project. Its starting point is the concern for the reality that China's excessive urbanization has led to an imbalance in urban-rural relations, agricultural bankruptcy, rural withering, and disempowerment of peasants; the historical experience it relies on is the cultural practice of the Chinese intellectuals' movement for rural construction since the Republic of China; and the ideological resources it adopts are the traditional Chinese ideas of agriculture and philosophy of the countryside, as well as anti-globalization and anti-liberal left-wing ideology. Although it uses art as its initial entry point, it is ultimately implemented in its work on a political and economic level. The project encountered problems such as incomplete local public facilities, traditional and conservative villagers who were wary of outsiders, poor communication with the government, and incomplete fundraising, all of which contributed to the abortion of the Bishan Project.

The Bishan Project was fortunate enough to follow one of the tributaries of the era that is gradually filling up - the boredom with the urban hiatus that turns to an unrestrained romantic imagination of the countryside. Although the Bishan Project failed, its voice awakened more people's love for the countryside and made all walks of life participate in the art of rural construction, which is the real value of the Bishan Project.

3. China's art countryside construction of inspiration and paths

3.1 Constructing urban and rural communities

The "holistic view of culture" of Raymond Henry Williams, a famous thinker in the 20th century, was revised based on the classic Marxist theory, and he extended the ideological culture from the upper, elite, and conscious levels to the grassroots, popular, and daily social life. , arguing that culture covers all aspects of social life and has a "holistic nature". [2]

In the Cultural Development Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council, the promotion of coordinated cultural development in urban and rural areas is also mentioned. It is necessary to improve the system and mechanism of artistic development by bringing the city to the countryside and integrating the city and the countryside, to give full play to the role of cities in driving the radiation, to accelerate the two-way flow of cultural elements between the city and the countryside, and to form a new pattern of urban and rural cultural development that is based on the point to lead the countryside with distinctive features, complementary advantages, and balanced allocation. Yu Ding mentioned in *New Trends and New Aesthetics of Urban Cultural Development* that when the "creation" and "culture" in urban construction reach a perfect combination, the harmony between human and nature, human and society, and human and human can be formed.[3]

Art in rural construction should also try to achieve the integration of "creation" and "culture" and develop a benign balance in the construction of each other. Bishan Industrial and Marketing Association is a case of successfully connecting urban and rural areas, following Xiaotong Fei's economic and cultural thoughts, penetrating the essence of urban-rural relations, downplaying the dichotomy structure, opening a window in the city to export rural values, and constructing an urban-rural community that feeds on each other.

3.2 Establishment of Multi-faceted Cooperation Mechanism

Compared with the “Echigo Tsumari Art Festival” in Japan, the leading force behind China's rural art construction needs to be bigger. The government often requires more energy to develop the program, and the power of individual groups needs to be more manageable. There needs to be more civil non-profit organizations that can connect the government, social forces, and villagers to coordinate and handle the coordination of various things.

In 2015, “Rongshutou Rural Conservation Public Welfare Foundation” was established, the first rural revitalization public welfare organization initiated by local entrepreneurs in the private sector. On the one hand, entrepreneurs have the status of philanthropists. They are constrained by their professional corporate philosophy and capital logic, which cannot guarantee the "purity" of the public welfare cause. On the other hand, due to the government's strength, the foundation is in the "subordinate" position, cannot independently use the villager's voice, and is easy to discipline and alienate.

China should introduce relevant laws and regulations as soon as possible so that the activities of private non-profit organizations to support and supervise to promote more private non-profit organizations to join the public welfare activities, China's art of rural construction projects will become a more complete and reasonable organizational structure, organization, and operation work will be more efficient, the art of rural construction may be a better development of the cause. It is necessary to form a common governance platform between party and social organizations, self-governing organizations, and economic organizations, integrate the main body of governance, play the leading role of rural social resistance in public affairs, and promote the downward shift of the center of gravity of governance. Secondly, a mechanism for cooperation between village enterprises and villages and towns should be established to realize the docking between villages and external capital markets. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase talent support, encourage villagers to return to their hometowns and increase the inflow of talent through relevant policies and systems.

3.3 In-depth construction of aesthetic education in the countryside

Art intervention in the countryside should not only stop at the level of artistic creation and improvement of life but also play the role of aesthetic education of art. Yu Ding mentioned in the article "Souls are Taught by Beauty" that "in constructing core values with faith and morality, aesthetic education can provide the core power for it." [4] In 2020, the government issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Work of Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era. In the future site of China's artistic countryside construction, rural aesthetic education should also be one of the important practices. Still, it should not be blindly indoctrinated and should be considered by the acceptance level of villagers—gradual and diversified development.

In the rural revitalization policy of the “Echigo Tsumari” region of Japan, villagers are located in the first place of each link. In China's rural construction, the villagers' subjectivity, the local nature of creation, and the importance of multi-party cooperation are also important guarantees for the implementation and sustainability of the project, and the promotion of the cultural consciousness of the local people should be a step ahead. Rural aesthetic education, in the final analysis, is "to give people a unique aesthetic pleasure through its artistic expression and means of communication: through its social communication and educational functions, it becomes a basic and indispensable activity for human and social life, and spiritually improves people's quality of life." [5]

4. Conclusion

With the rapid expansion of industrialization and urbanization in modern society, villages all over the world are facing serious problems such as aging population, hollowing out, and cultural and welcoming disconnection. The action of "saving the countryside" has never stopped, among which art, as a kind of flexible revitalization power, silently intervenes in the countryside and coexists with the countryside and its inhabitants. However, many projects have been shelved in the middle of the project, resulting in huge losses. In this context, how to protect the cultural spirit of the traditional Chinese countryside and realize sustainable development based on the absorption of modern spiritual concepts has become an urgent issue. Development based on absorbing modern spiritual concepts has become an urgent problem that needs to be solved.

Art in the countryside is an act of public aesthetics in the practical sense. From the planting of the first oak tree by the German artist Beuys in Kassel until the nature of social action was about to enhance the beauty of true humanity and its cons, it never ceased. The art of rural construction not only affects the art and culture itself but also indicates a development trend of the future society, but there is still a certain distance from the ideal of awakening the villagers' cultural self-awareness and fundamentally changing the current situation of the countryside. Art intervention in rural construction, to avoid the impact of modern consumer culture in rural aesthetics caused by the phenomenon of "one side of a thousand villages," we should base on the existing resources and conditions in the countryside to take the road of differentiation and characteristics of the development. The road is long but will come; we still need to work together and always pay unremittingly.

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