

Value Co-Creation: The Integration and Symbiosis of "Art" in Rural Development

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Abstract: In recent years, the research perspective on rural art development has continuously expanded, and concrete practices have gradually emerged in Chinese rural areas. Art, with its diverse facets, aids in the aesthetic retrospection and manifestation of the countryside. The involvement of social subjects in rural art development practices also contributes crucially to rural revitalization. The integration of art into rural development can promote the reconstruction of rural cultural scenes and spaces, fostering high-quality rural development. This paper, based on the background of art integration into rural development, clarifies the intrinsic relationship, development process, and academic progress of art integration and rural revitalization, and establishes the "theoretical and practical" value of rural art development. On this basis, it delineates the diversified paths of art integration into rural development, achieving practical integration and symbiosis of art in rural development, thereby providing theoretical and practical references for future art integration into rural areas in China.

1. Introduction

"Art intervention" also known as "art intervening in society," is an avant-garde art form that began in the 1950s. The essence of "intervention" lies in blending artistic creation with life practice. According to avant-garde art theory, art serves as a medium for human cognition of the world and culture, which inevitably relates to reality, as society mirrors reality. Therefore, art must transcend its "abstract and independent" boundaries to engage with society and the masses, utilizing artistic forms to participate in social transformation and exert its transformative power ^[1]. In his book *Art and Intervention*, Long Island University Professor Arnold Berlant explicitly identifies art intervention in society as a significant research topic. Reflecting on social practice under this academic direction, the social spaces where art practice can intervene are diverse, such as urban, rural, and community spaces. With the maturation of early urban art intervention experiences, rural art intervention has gradually become a mainstream focus in contemporary social research.

The Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022) explicitly states that rural development should deeply integrate "excellent ideas, humanistic spirit, and moral standards, creatively

transforming and innovatively developing them based on protection and inheritance in line with the requirements of the times." Guided by the rural revitalization strategy, the government, and social organizations involved in rural revitalization must emphasize optimizing rural cultural and ideological systems. They should collaborate with social artists, university scholars, and other entities to form the backbone of rural revitalization, using diverse methods to optimize and reshape the rural cultural environment, thereby establishing a sustainable force for "rural art development" [2].

The primary objective of "rural art development" can be understood as extracting and reproducing the intrinsic artistic value of rural "agricultural roots" and "locality". This involves interpreting the latent social spirit and artistic substance inherent in rural areas through higher forms of cultural and artistic expression [3]. In simpler terms, it is about re-examining rural culture through the medium of art, discovering and reconstructing the intrinsic artistic and cultural value of the rural natural environment, humanity, and geography. Based on this understanding, the essence of "rural art development" is a "new cultural revolution" in rural cultural construction within a new social context [4]. This revolution leverages the social intervention capabilities of art to rejuvenate traditional rural culture within the modern social context, thereby aiding in the comprehensive revitalization of rural culture and economy. Following this research approach, this paper explores the evolution of art intervention in rural development, the intrinsic nature of rural art, and the concepts of intervention and symbiosis from an artistic perspective.

2. The Intervention and Evolution of Rural Art Development

2.1 Retrospective of Rural Art Development Practices

The earliest practice of artistic intervention in rural areas in China began in August 1992 with the "Village Project" conducted by over 20 artists. This project centered around a comprehensive art activity plan, involving painting and photography along the Yellow River in Lvliang, Shanxi. *The Village Project•1993* marked the starting point for artistic intervention in rural areas. Following the social impact achieved by this activity, similar projects and plans began to emerge, eventually forming numerous creative rural art practices.

As artists further innovated the methods of rural art development based on previous rural art forms, they spurred a trend of packaging rural environments and cultures in the art world. By the 21st century, artistic intervention in rural development flourished. In 2001, an unintended village investigation by students from Tainan University as part of the "Creative Learning Plan" triggered environmental transformation activities in Togo Village, Taiwan. The student team reached a consensus with village leaders, collaborating to establish the "Togo Village Cultural Creation Association." This initiative delved into the "Togo Spirit," focusing on water buffalo and ox cart culture. During this period, the village saw the optimization of the "Settlement Park," the construction of the Togo Village Art Museum, and the Cultural School Project. These efforts continuously amplified the cultural and spiritual value of Togo Village, designing the "Last Water Buffalo" art product to evoke villagers' spiritual identity with their lifestyle. Subsequent projects like the "Xu Village Plan" and "Bishan Rural Construction" propelled rural art development activities to their peak of development.

2.2 Academic Progress in Rural Art Development

With the expansion and promotion of academic research, rural art development has made breakthroughs in both practical and academic fields. However, due to institutional constraints in the social environment and obstacles in truly integrating art into rural construction, rural artists began to

influence a diverse range of scholars interested in rural art development, including those from anthropology, sociology, and history ^[5]. These scholars were guided to conduct observational theoretical research on rural art development activities from their respective fields, differing from traditional practical experiences ^[6]. In 2016, the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Peking University held the "Rural Construction and Its Artistic Practices" academic symposium. Over 20 experts and scholars from history, sociology, architecture, and art, including Qu Yan, Wang Changbai, and Liang Qindong, conducted in-depth discussions on rural art development. The symposium revolved around five key topics: "What can artists do for rural construction?", "Social changes in rural areas", "Challenges in rural art development", "Forms of Chinese society", and "Changes and possibilities in Chinese rural areas". In August of the same year, the China Academy of Art organized the "Art Intervention in Society: Academic Symposium on Beautiful Rural Construction" and compiled *the Art Intervention in Beautiful Rural Construction: Dialogues between Anthropologists and Artists*, which further expanded the academic research of rural art development.

With increased academic attention and the influence of rural revitalization strategies, the direction of academic research on rural art development has shifted in recent years. Initially, artists like Qu Yan, who were key participants in rural art development, focused on the cultural and civilizational value of art in rural construction, aiming to restore and shape rural social order and beliefs through art. However, in the new context of social development, experts from anthropology, sociology, and history have joined the research on rural art development, extending the traditional cultural benefits of rural art development to encompass economic and social benefits ^[7]. For instance, scholar Jiang Ling has studied the industrialization benefits of art intervention from the perspective of "local creation." Scholar Shang Chaoyu emphasized creating high-value differentiated models based on the demands of rural communities, combined with existing art and cultural resources. Research on rural art development has gradually shifted from traditional case studies like the "Xu Village Plan" and "Bishan Plan" to more localized studies, leading to the generation of broader research topics such as "subject cooperation" and "community building" in rural art development.

3. The Internal Forces and Endogeneity of Rural Art Development

3.1 The Inherent Motivation of Villagers in Rural Art Development

In recent years, under the strategic development of rural revitalization, the social status of farmers has been continuously strengthened. *The Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022)* explicitly emphasizes ensuring the primary role of farmers in development, focusing on leveraging the inherent strength of villagers to aid in rural revitalization. Consequently, rural development policies such as *the Regulations on the Work of Rural Areas by the Communist Party of China*, *the Law of the People's Republic of China on Promoting Rural Revitalization* and *the Five-Year Action Plan for Improving Rural Living Environments (2021-2025)* have all incorporated provisions to uphold the primary role of farmers. In the practice of rural art development, villagers have transitioned from early onlookers to active participants and promoters. Over time, they have developed an "artistic consciousness" ^[8]. Today, art is no longer a static, spiritual product for farmers but a cultural resource that demonstrates unique artistic value within their villages. Under the impetus of contemporary artistic development, the endogeneity of rural art development revolves around rural society, achieving rural governance through cultural objectives from the bottom up. For example, in 2019, Gejia Village in Ninghai County, Zhejiang Province, launched the "Artists in Residence" program with the support of the Ninghai County government. The initiative aimed to stimulate the inherent artistic motivation of villagers. Many villagers voluntarily requested

to transform their courtyards artistically, using readily available materials like bamboo, stones, and straw, along with green plants such as onions, garlic, and vegetables, to create natural courtyard spaces. To date, the village has established 24 shared artistic spaces, including "Gejia Light" and "Happy Park," and 23 art display areas, such as "Women's Painting Academy" and "Xianrong Art Museum." There are also 26 unique art-themed homestays. Following the artistic intervention in Gejia Village, the artistic and cultural endogeneity of the village has been continuously explored, and villagers' "artistic consciousness" has been stimulated. This has driven the local industry towards homestays, cultural creativity, tourism, and specialty agricultural products, enabling rural art development to both cultivate artistic and cultural values and generate economic benefits ^[9]. Thus, it is evident that the deepening of rural art development continuously stimulates the active role of villagers. Their demands and attention towards rural art development are amplified, fostering their interest in diverse artistic participation. This process of establishing artistic and cultural confidence creates empathy between villagers and rural art development organizers, enhancing the inherent motivation of villagers to participate in rural art development. Therefore, without the inherent motivation of villagers, rural art development cannot fundamentally succeed.

3.2 Enhancing Inherent Motivation through Rural Art Education

Artistic intervention in rural areas should focus on "human development," emphasizing the spiritual and value-oriented construction of individuals through art. *The Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022)* highlights the need to promote the integration of urban and rural cultures, enrich rural cultural products and services, and invigorate rural culture to provide spiritual nourishment for farmers. These directives indicate that while stimulating rural inherent motivation, external forces must also play a catalytic role ^[10]. Reflecting on the past century of rural cultural construction, scholars like Yan Yangchu, Liang Shuming, Tao Xingzhi, and Huang Yanpei have all dedicated themselves to advancing rural development. Today, deepening villagers' awareness of rural art development and supplementing it with diverse educational forms has become a crucial path for promoting rural construction. Villagers' participation in cultural learning often encompasses local and popular demands, and the cultural characteristics exhibited by villagers of different age groups vary. Young villagers tend to seek the development of "specialized institutions + multiple resources + market entities" to meet their development needs. In contrast, middle-aged and elderly villagers prefer to engage in artistic and cultural activities. Meanwhile, children and young villagers look forward to artistic education and art enlightenment ^[11].

4. The Intervention and Symbiosis of "Art" in Rural Construction

4.1 Public Art Intervening in Rural Construction to Promote "Art Festivals + Tourism" Development

The Opinions on Promoting the Cultural Industry's Empowerment of Rural Revitalization mentions the integration of the cultural industry with rural tourism to boost rural and tourism consumption, cultivating new models for rural cultural and tourism industries. Therefore, during the process of rural art development, it is essential to highlight the industrial support role of artistic intervention. The potential for the development of art festivals is substantial, involving both external participation and internal motivation ^[12]. Art festivals, centered around rural resources, integrate public art into the native cultural resources of rural areas through activities such as land art, art forums, and rural art exhibitions. This process enhances the development of local industries, including homestays, dining, products, and tourism, by making them more distinctive and artistic. Consequently, art festivals not only cultivate artistic thought but also stimulate the village economy

and industrial growth, creating a model of multi-stakeholder participation (Figure 1).

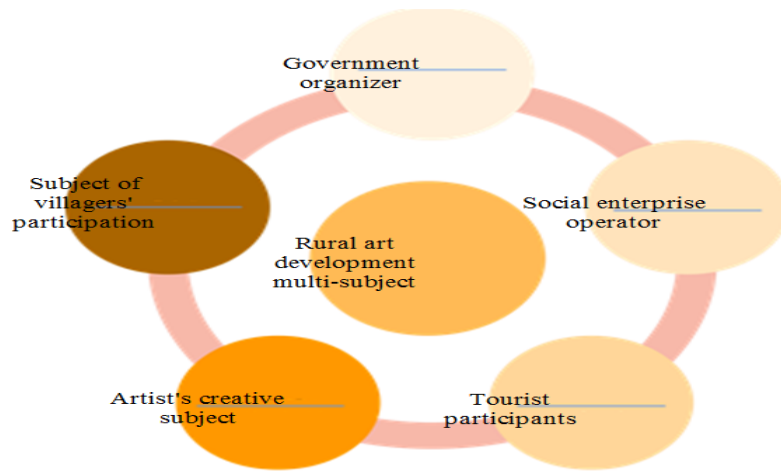


Figure 1: Rural art development multi-agent participation model

This approach draws on the experience of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale in Niigata Prefecture, Japan, which is considered a model for art-driven rural development and a typical example of how art festivals can support rural revitalization. Since its inception in 2000, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale has brought together artists from around the world. The event has evolved into an activity with a comprehensive art development operation system, encompassing diverse development modes such as public art, art spaces, exhibitions, seminars, volunteer services, and the tourism industry. The economic benefits generated not only offset the event costs but also provide significant economic income for the local rural areas. In 2022, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale featured 263 groups of artists from 38 countries and regions, with participation from hundreds of surrounding villages. According to data from the Japan Economic Research Institute, the revenue from ticket sales and surrounding merchandise sales alone accounted for 80% of the operating costs. Over the past 20 years, the Triennale has revitalized the Seto Islands through art, transforming them from abandoned islands into a world-renowned art destination. Similar activities have also been carried out domestically. For instance, in Qiandongnan, Guizhou, the public art event themed "Book of the Earth, Beyond Blue" has been conducted and is referred to as the "Rongjiang Model" in the industry, recognized for empowering rural areas through art.

4.2 Integrating Artistic Cultural Industries into Rural Construction for Creative Development

Creative cultural design centered on handicrafts and agricultural products, viewed through the lens of rural art development, requires a unified approach in its content design. This involves not only visual and systemic planning but also extracting the cultural essence of rural areas. The process should encompass creative packaging, cultural connotation, cultural branding, channel resources, and modern marketing strategies, systematically intervening from the visual and content aspects to the industrial level. The goal is to achieve a dual enhancement of cultural and economic value for village products through art (Figure 2)^[13]. For example, Zhang Lei's cultural practice in Qingshan Village illustrates this approach. Wearing multiple hats as an artist, expert, entrepreneur, and new villager, and with the support of the local government, he combined market perspectives with artistic thinking. He established artistic application scenarios that integrate traditional materials with modern techniques from multiple perspectives and dimensions.

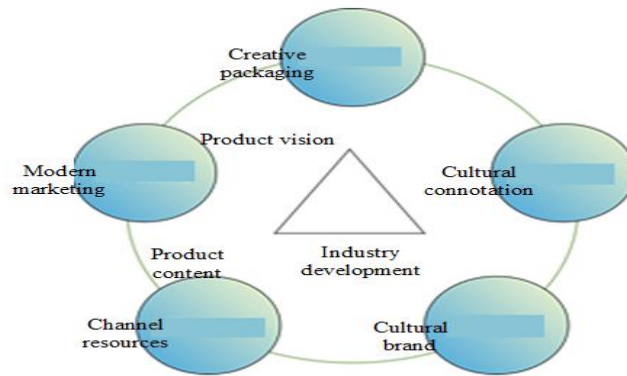


Figure 2: Two-way appreciation of village product culture and economic value

4.3 Digital Art in Rural Construction: "Art + Digital Media" Development

4.3.1 "Digital Art + Cultural Communication" Mechanism

In the digital age, the proliferation of media provides a new avenue for external forces to stimulate the inherent strengths of rural areas. Participants or organizations involved in rural art development can leverage digital media to enhance the artistic connection and educational bond with villagers. By integrating the artistic educational needs of villagers across different age groups, they can design and record categorized art education courses. Under organized leadership, these efforts can facilitate standardized, large-scale educational research, guiding individuals to awaken artistic thought and stimulating rural inherent strengths through the dissemination of digital art culture [14].

Beyond the development of digital art education, digital technology can be combined to create design concepts based on local rural resources. Many rural areas possess advantages in intangible cultural heritage, and elements such as mountains, water, humanities, houses, and fields can all serve as mediums for artistic intervention. Maintaining sustainable cultural and environmental development, integrating digital art with cultural dissemination allows the integration, design, and re-output of rural art resources. This method drives the development of rural art through dissemination (Figure 3). For instance, video series such as "Li Ziqi," "Ah Fei Goes Fishing," and "Huanong Brothers" integrate and disseminate content based on rural culture, presenting it in a way that evokes a longing for rural life. Rural art development can adopt this approach, making art more scenographic and life-like, thereby awakening external interest in rural areas.

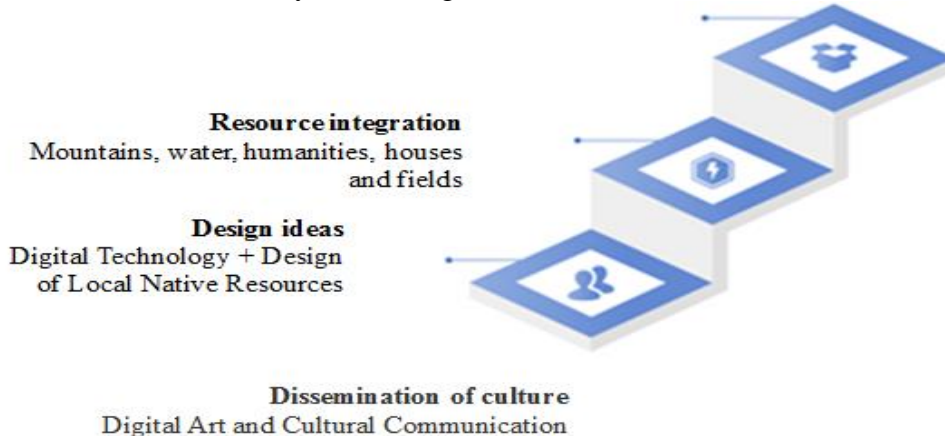


Figure 3: Integration, Design and Re-export of Rural Art Resources

4.3.2 "Digital Art + Creative Products" Mechanism

Traditional marketing and development models for rural products no longer hold a competitive edge in the current market. With the rise of the online economy, rural art, integrated with digital technology, needs to evolve towards branding, culture, and creative products. The "Digital Art + Creative Products" development mechanism can focus on mediums such as artistic illustrations, animations, and virtual reality. This approach integrates rural art with digital art resources and layers cultural, artistic, creative, and design elements to enhance the artistic, cultural, and brand value of products (Figure 4) ^[15].

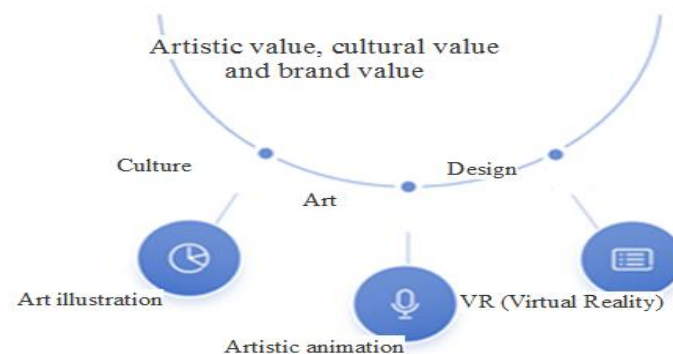


Figure 4: Realizing Artistic, Cultural, and Brand Value

Through the intervention of digital technology in rural product design, products can serve as static, tangible expressions of art. This approach helps build rural art products or industries that reflect the unique regional characteristics and cultural customs of rural areas, which is of significant importance to rural art development. For instance, the digital art town "Gankeng Hakka Town" in Shenzhen has developed multiple digital IP images such as "Little Cool Hat" around the Hakka people. Its artistic derivatives cover areas such as rural culture, animation, and films. The town has not only achieved the goal of integrating art with economic development but has also been selected as a "National-level Cultural Tourism Characteristic Town."

4.3.3 "Digital Art + Cultural Tourism Integration" Mechanism

The key to the "Digital Art + Cultural Tourism Integration" mechanism lies in leveraging digital art to transform rural cultural resources into audio-visual representations. This comprehensive display of the rural landscape and cultural artistic features highlights the artistic beauty and charm of rural areas, thereby attracting external tourists and providing sustained momentum for rural art interventions. For example, "Boao Town" uses the artistic element of "Ao" in its designs, focusing on its historical and cultural context. The town has created an "Ao" IP image based on related artistic resources, extending its story into films, products, and other cultural creations. This approach immerses visitors in an artistic setting, allowing them to experience the local culture through both visual and auditory stimuli. This not only deepens their cultural impressions but also enhances their overall cultural experience (see Figure 5).

China's rural art development possesses distinct characteristics of being people-oriented, intrinsic, traditional, and artistic. It serves as a community of traditional society and modern art. Under the impetus of rural revitalization, rural art development has been tasked with cultural revitalization, necessitating that its initiatives be rooted in the cultural heritage of the countryside. It is essential to preserve the rural social structure while integrating modern art and economic development features ^[16]. During the process of art intervention in rural construction, it is crucial to closely manage the

regional culture and the elements that constitute rural life, meeting the villagers' aspirations for a better life. Additionally, it is important to uncover the unique cultural forms and heritage of rural areas, activating historical and cultural artistic vitality, and to avoid imposing specific artistic forms and cultural content that could harm the villagers' nostalgia and folk memories ^[17].

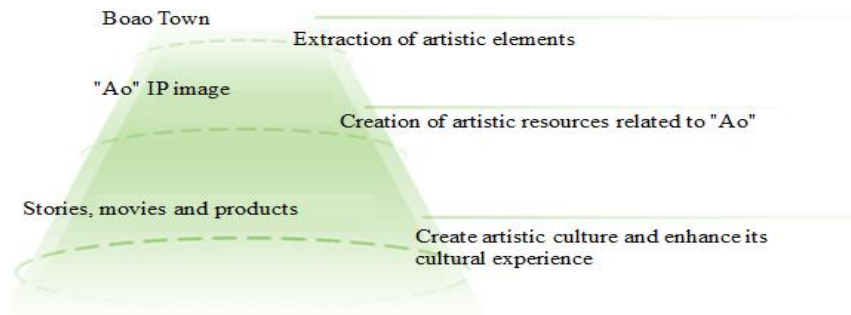


Figure 5: Development of Digital Travel Service in Boao Town

5. Conclusions

China's rural art development should continue to integrate diverse experiential approaches and revolve around the requirements of the rural revitalization strategy. It is essential to explore development paths that are suitable for China's unique characteristics, while emphasizing artistic features and balancing the benefits of economic and cultural revitalization. The construction process should form a self-reflective feedback loop to identify potential issues in rural art development and explore practical solutions. Under the future trends of rural revitalization, rural art development will play a leading cultural support role. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously expand diverse construction approaches such as artistic environmental design, cultural and creative art design, and landscape art design, based on the existing forms of art intervention in rural construction, to highlight the distinctive features of China's rural art development.

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