

# Study on the Application of Land Art in Rural Public Space Against the Background of New Urbanization

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**Abstract**—With the rapid development of today's cities, people yearn for and tend to return to nature, making the construction and development of new urbanization in full swing. However, it is not difficult to find that on the urbanization path with Chinese characteristics, cultural construction is neglected due to the emphasis on material development. Those ancient villages carrying rich historical culture and natural ecological environment are gradually being abandoned by people, and the natural environment of villages and towns has been seriously damaged. In order to reconstruct the social value of villages and improve the visual environment of villages and towns, the design of public space in villages and towns should be combined with regional characteristics, including traditional culture, cultural landscape, ecological environment, regional characteristics and other elements, so as to achieve the harmonious coexistence between man and nature and coordination of visual environment of villages and towns. Since the late 1960s, land art, which originated in the United States, has been closely associated with nature from the day of birth. It creatively combines art with the environment, making it possible for people to coexist with the environment. The theories and methods of land art which inspire people's thoughts and feelings and awaken their homeland consciousness are worth exploring and learning from the current construction design of new urbanization.

**Keywords:** *land art, new urbanization, public space, ecological culture*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the modern cities develop rapidly, people yearn for and return to the countryside and nature, which makes the construction of small towns growing vigorously. The strategy for rural revitalization (issued in January 2018 by the "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on the Implementation of the Strategy for Rural Revitalization") provides great opportunities for the development of small towns. As a result, the public space of villages and towns has changed a lot. However, there are limitations of consciousness in the construction of small towns. Some people have moved the concept of cities to the countryside, which is made neither like countryside nor city. The transformation of towns has causes the problem of "thousand towns in the same style", losing their characteristics and culture. In the construction of public space, there are the phenomena of starting projects blindly

and following suit in many towns, which fall to severe form disorder, with neglect of spiritual connotation. Land artists have excavated deep cultural and social connotations in many land art projects and established a more meaningful relationship between people and regions. Land art is a school of art born in the era of Western society and prominent ecological contradiction. From the very beginning, it has been an artistic behavior with both ecological and humanistic missions and has been widely used in the design concept and means of public art design. It offers many ways for people to get along with nature and be in concert with it, that is, to restore the charm of the earth in the form of art. Therefore, a lot of inspiration can be obtained from land art in the new urbanization design today. Only by a comprehensive analysis of the natural factors of historical and cultural villages and towns and the spatial structure of social and cultural ideology can a feasible plan for the construction of public space be formulated and a new atmosphere of rural civilization can be achieved through cultural revitalization.

## II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF LAND ART

Land art is also called "Earth works" or "Earth Art". It evolved from environment Art. The earliest patterns can be traced back to the pyramids in ancient Egypt and the Stonehenge Round Stone Columns in Britain. The materials used in land art are all natural and diverse, such as the earth (including forests, mountains, rivers, gobi and plains), and even stone pillars, walls, buildings and relics, which are often used by artists. Most of these natural materials will maintain the natural essence of their materials, which can be shaped skillfully in techniques, and then arranged in structures and images. Broadly speaking, land art is a kind of environmental art. Land art is a kind of visual art form which is full of artistic holistic situation. The artist uses nature as the medium of creation, and slightly processes or embellishes art and nature organically. Land art works attach great importance to the "sense of place", that is, the organic combination of the work and the environment. The creative method of processing is directly applied in the natural scenery to strengthen or weaken the characteristics of the site itself, such as topography, geology and seasonal changes, so as to guide people to pay more attention to and feel nature.

Land art can be regarded as the concrete practice of Zhuangzi's philosophy of "the unity of man and nature".

Land artists believe that there should be no rigid boundary between art and life, art and nature. In the space of human life, there should be art everywhere. Definition of public space in villages and towns: there have been abundant research achievements in the field of public space in villages and towns. The public space of villages and towns includes temples, courtyards, teahouses, ancestral halls, markets, weddings and funerals, wells, fields and so on, which was divided by Zhang Liang into religious public space, living public space, producing public space, recreational public space, and political public space. The space formed by these images is an important part of the public space of villages and towns.

### III. THE EXPRESSION TECHNIQUES OF LAND ART OF THE PUBLIC SPACE IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS

The core of public space in villages and towns should be the balance and harmony between human and nature. Villages and towns should not be built like cities. Instead, it needs something more close to nature, to explore the equality and infinity of materials and to break the boundaries between art and life. From this perspective, applying the unique design concept of land art to the renovation design of public space in villages and towns, and incorporating regional culture and other factors into the design to create unique and novel design works will bring great impetus to the construction design of the new urbanization.

#### A. *Using old things flexibly to create new values*

Walking into Zishangge Village, Jiangzao Town, Zhuji City, one can see all kinds of "vases" made by painting used tires and shapes of the 12 Chinese zodiac animals made of straw along the road. The artistic transformations of public space in the towns and villages were made by three young "makers" from China Academy of Art. In May 2016, Chen Weijie and two of his friends set up the "Irrelevant Little Play" studio in Zishangge Village. Their selection of material in the public space reconstruction of the towns and villages took example by the land art in using local materials. They adopted straw ropes, used by local villagers to grow seedlings, to form a delightful contrast with flowers and trees. What the villagers used to throw away or use as firewood, bamboo on the mountain, the abandoned pots and pans from villagers' homes and the wood from the old buildings are all materials for artistic creation in their eyes. Even a few dry twigs can be transformed into works of art, which remain in the village. Under their wonderful ideas and skillful hands, these stuffs can become beautiful and interesting works of art. As a result, the villagers of Zishangge continuously witnessed the birth of one creative idea after another that amazed them, and were also influenced to participate in the design and transformation of the public space in their hometown. Today's Zishangge Village has a greatly improved appearance, with a variety of creative emerging in. For example, waste mines that have been idle for many years have been transformed into colorful rice fields. When the rice fields are harvested, Chinese knots, five-pointed stars and other patterns of various shapes are sketched out with

different colors of rice, which are so beautiful that a large number of tourists are attracted to see them.

#### B. *Art excavates regional resources*

Located in the north-central part of Japan's main island, Echigo-Tsumari is one of many mountain villages where the population is ageing, with 30 per cent of the population aged over 65. In 2000, a group of artists from around the world launched the Earth Art Festival (Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale) with the theme of "man belongs to nature", which took the 760 square kilometers of village and forest as the stage to re-examine the relationship between modernity and tradition, city and country. Artists used vacant houses and abandoned schools to renovate and create works. More than 10 abandoned schools were used. Through the hands of artists, architects, these gradually aged and broken things become more attractive than new things. Here, local construction budgets are focused on large-scale cultural events to boost local employment opportunities, and the effect of cultural tourism allows residents to return and reciprocate between urban and rural exchanges. One of the largest art festivals in the world, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale was born here. Over the past 18 years, visitors from all over the world have been coming to visit the festival. The number of visitors has increased from 162,800 per month to about 490,000. This has led to the development of local hotels, restaurants and tourist souvenirs, which has created a large number of job opportunities. The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale has exerted a profound influence on local development, whether in terms of politics, or economy, or culture or environment. After more than ten years of operation, "Earth Art Festival" has become a successful example of land art activating public space in villages and towns.

#### C. *People become participants in art*

In the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale there were many works in the creation of which local people played a part. In the first session, "Throne of the Dragon God Guarding the Field" by Guo'an Xiaochang, was the work of simulacra of the dragon god guarding the rice field, which requires a lot of manpower to build the wood. At first the local old people just looked on coldly from a distance. When Guo'an Xiaochang asked them to try, the old men readily agreed to the invitation, so he led the local villagers completed the magnificent work smoothly! At the end of the 50-day exhibition, no one was willing to dismantle the work; they had made it a part of local life. <sup>1</sup>Miko Takuchi's "Yamakiwa gallery" is a very humorous work, where local residents become the protagonist of the work. In the photos, they were dressed as characters in famous paintings such as Munch, Vermeer, Da Vinci and Miller. These images filled with residents' smiling faces became fond memories of local villagers. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Liang. Decline and Reconstruction of Rural Public Space. Study and Practice, 2013(10): 92.

<sup>2</sup> [Japan] Fram Kitagawa, Trans. Ou Xiaolin. The Power of Local Reinvention — 10 Creative Ideas of the Earth Art Festival, 2015: 114.

#### IV. THE FUNCTION COORDINATION OF LAND ART TO PUBLIC SPACE IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS

How to make the once barren countryside and backward villages and towns into the homeland of memory? In the era of advocating natural ecological design, land art created with natural elements plays an important role in the functional coordination of rural public space. The functions of public space in villages and towns are diverse and complex, which is a very prominent local feature. Different from the simplicity of urban space, in villages and towns, each specific space has many different functions and cultural connotations. It can be a production and living space, a public space, or a belief space. Through the experience of the space, the land art makes the renovation design of the village public space tailored to the local conditions.

##### A. Function of ecological protection

Early works of land art were mostly completed by site operation. In the design of public space in villages and towns, land art aims to protect ecological sustainable development by reducing environmental pollution. In the application of facilities and technologies, land art realizes the "qualitative" change of environmental design, which is firstly reflected in the close combination of material selection and site. When designers choose a desert, forest, farm or industrial ruin as the subject of their design, they also choose the corresponding creative materials, such as sand, stone, wood and grass. There can be means such as modeling through digging holes in the desert, or moving mountains away from the sea, building levees, or splashing paint all over the mountains. Works of land art use the site as a medium, as a background, and enhance its inherent characteristics into the overall environment.

##### B. Function of sightseeing

Nine Color Rose Town of the Jinlong Village, located in Qihe Town of the Old Town of Lijiang, is a scale demonstration site for the immigration in the construction of the "one reservoir with eight stages power stations" of Yunnan Province. The villagers are immigrants from the reservoir areas of Jin'anqiao power station and Longkou power station. The agricultural acreage of villagers has been much decreased after they came to Jinlong Village, thus their income has been much lessened. In 2016, the whole village started the Nine Color Rose Town Project, and the 442 households in Jinlong Village chose the colors for their houses. The color matching among neighboring courtyards is bold, with red matched with green, pink with orange and any with any others in the range of the nine colors. The 442 traditional courtyard houses became full of art. When looked closer, every family keeps the upturned eaves and corners of the residential buildings in Lijiang, which is both traditional and creative. In addition, the village's families have participated in the rose planting. A total of 300 acres of edible roses and more than 300,000 garden roses have been planted. And through deep processing to develop rose products, Jinlong Village became the "No. 1 Rose Village in Lijiang" and established the first tourist attraction themed on

rose love. Villagers in the town sell rose products by growing roses, and they provide at least 100 jobs. The town's shops, supermarkets, farmhouses and snack bars were all run by villagers themselves, which doubles their incomes.

##### C. Cultural and educational function

Dipu Village, Tonglu County, Zhejiang Province, is located in the northwest of Zhejiang Province, in the middle reaches of Qiantang River, 15 kilometers away from Tonglu County seat, 50 kilometers away from Hangzhou, and is called the "east gate" of Tonglu County. As one of the third batch of national-level historical and cultural villages, Dipu village carries heavy historical and cultural accumulation. With a long history, Dipu village has formed the characteristic culture represented by the culture of filial piety and righteousness, the culture of ancient opera, the culture of ancient paper making and the culture of ancient trees. In their inheritance and innovation, the historical and cultural features are protected and developed, and these cultures consciously return to the daily life of villagers in the form of "local urbanization". This contributes to the accumulation of many beneficial experiences in exploring the development of "local urbanization" while allowing traditional cultural genes to be expressed in a modern way. The experience of Dipu village from "hollow village" to a famous tourist and cultural village shows that a village will lack attraction and cohesion if its history is eliminated and absent. The public space design of villages and towns need to abandon the ideas of demolition and reconstruction, and protect the ancient buildings, trees and courtyards. Thus, the ecological model of simple but unique village living environment can be built to let more people know about the long and profound local traditional culture, which is naturally the benign development that serves multiple purposes.<sup>3</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

Urbanization cannot be achieved at the expense of the cultural heritage and surrounding environment of historical villages and towns, nor can it achieve economic growth by contracting or transferring cultural heritage resources of historical villages and towns in a disguised way. At present, in the public space renovation design of villages and towns, designers should not only fully communicate with the local government, but also contact and communicate with the local people with the consciousness of equality and respect the subjectivity of the villagers. Through the experience and exploration of land art to enrich the public space of villages and towns, it can be seen that only by adhering to the protection concept of "being based on the old" and "being people-oriented" rather than the development modes of "old city reconstruction" and "old village reconstruction" can urban and rural residents realize the significance of culture and art to their lives with a more open mind. It is hoped that more insightful people in China can work together to actively promote the cultural construction of public space in villages and towns with a sincere and enthusiastic attitude,

<sup>3</sup> [Japan] Fram Kitagawa, Trans. Ou Xiaolin. The Power of Local Reinvention — 10 Creative Ideas of the Earth Art Festival, 2015: 33.

and the creative vocabulary of public space in villages and towns can be enriched and enliven through land art.

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