



Research on the Mix-and-Match Aesthetics of Rural Self-built Houses

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Abstract. Under the influence of globalization and urbanization, China's economy has developed rapidly. Due to stronger action called to build a "beautiful countryside" in China, returning to the countryside to build houses has become a wish of many people who "go out" in the reform and opening up. Through field research, author found that homeowners put together elements such as different styles and materials according to their personal preferences. This article summarizes three mixed aesthetic characteristics of rural self-built houses, namely, the coexistence of the old and the new, the integration of Chinese and Western style, and the urban-rural symbiosis. This article explores the reasons for the mixed aesthetic of rural self-built houses, as well as the reflection of people's life attitude and family concept.

Keywords: Mix-And-Match · Aesthetic · Rural · Self-Built Houses

1 Introduction

The beauty of countryside has become a beautiful imagination like a home in the hearts of modern people [5]. Therefore, when people who have worked hard for many years are getting older, they will return to the countryside to build houses and live with the memory of their hometown. However, contemporary local aesthetics is a contradiction, which shows both opposition to tradition and recognition of traditional culture. It wants to get rid of rural aesthetics but return to nostalgia [1]. In modern rural self-built houses, such contradiction is reflected in a mixed aesthetic of different styles.

2 Rural Self-Built Houses and Mix-And-Match Aesthetic Phenomena

2.1 Rural Self-built Houses

Self-built houses generally refer to the houses and buildings built by units and individuals on their own land in the way of organizing and hiring others [7]. Self-built houses are one of the traditional construction methods in China. Especially at the rural areas, almost all residents live in their self-built houses. The characteristics of self-built houses determine that the owner has great autonomy in the construction of the house. Consequently, the self-built houses present different preferences.

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Fig. 1. Survey of rural self-built houses

2.2 Mix-And-Match Aesthetic Phenomena

“Mix-and-match” refers to a new combination of different styles or elements with individual characteristics that have traditionally appeared due to geographical conditions, cultural background and other factors [6]. The term “mix-and-match” first appeared in the fashion industry, and has been generally applied to the fields of architecture, decoration, design and so on. “Mix-and-match” can be understood as the fusion of different design styles, and the pursuit of harmonious matching of home space, materials and styles of decoration in interior design [4].

2.3 Mix-And-Match Aesthetic of Rural Self-built Houses

In recent years, researches on rural self-built houses are mostly from the aspect of modeling. Scholars Junhan Lam and Sony Devabhaktuni studied the different forms of 20 self-built houses in Rural China [3]. In terms of aesthetics, it mainly starts from the rural aesthetics of Liang Shuming and Fei Xiaotong [8]. The mix-and-match aesthetics of self-built rural houses is the external manifestation of the rural aesthetic characteristics. On the one hand, the owners try to achieve a different rural aesthetic from the traditional one by copying the various decorative styles, such as Roman columns and the new Chinese decorating style. On the other hand, they want to return to the countryside by maintaining a rural way of life, like using old-fashioned tools and farm implements. In terms of design, we often emphasize that the unity of style is the balance of beauty, but in the countryside, self-built houses mixed with different styles and lifestyles present a unique rural aesthetic.

3 Survey of Rural Self-Built Houses and Reasons for the Mix-And-Match Aesthetics

Through field visits and investigations in Lingshui Village, Baiguan Town, Zhuzhou City, Hunan Province. The author surveyed more than 30 rural self-built houses, and selected 5 representative households for in-depth research. (shown in Fig. 1) Based on the field investigation, this paper analyzes and discusses the aesthetic reasons for the mix and match of rural self-built houses from three aspects, namely, personal aesthetic, rural lifestyle, and other social factors (Fig. 2).

3.1 Personal Aesthetic

During the survey, it was found that the builders of self-built houses were around 50 years old. Most of them have experienced the life in the countryside before the reform and



Fig. 2. Deeply researched houses

opening up. They have also directly experienced the entire process of reform and opening up. With great enthusiasm, they devote themselves into urbanization and witness the whole process, absorbing a lot of “foreign culture”. Their aesthetics of architecture are influenced by various European-style communities, hotel decoration, new Chinese-style decoration, traditional buildings in the scenic spots and other factors in the city. They borrow from each part, making the rural self-built houses the epitome of these buildings.

3.2 Rural Lifestyle

It was found that most of the people living in self-built houses in the countryside are a large family, and the construction of self-built houses should meet the needs of different people. Most of the utensils and design in self-built houses serve the purpose of convenient life, which makes their demand for practicality higher than aesthetics. Another feature of the rural lifestyle is that the villages live together. The house built by one family will also have a certain reference value for other self-built houses in terms of aesthetics.

3.3 Other Social Factors

With regard to economic factors, homeowners of self-built houses in rural areas have certain economic foundation, but under the constraints of budget, homeowners need to make choices about their own housing needs instead of pursuing perfect effects.

From the perspective of social-industrial factors, industrial products become popular in the field of construction. Various building components and decorative patterns that used to be manually carved are now directly molded by machines. Such molded components are pasted on the facade of the building for modification, which sometimes may look like a steal. Even if people want the customizing products, economic factors should be taken into consideration.

Another limitation lies in the construction ability. The construction teams of self-built houses in rural areas are mostly self-employed workers. The uneven construction level causes the buildings to be less refined or difficult to achieve the desired effect.

3.3.1 Mix-and-Match Aesthetic Characteristics of Rural Self-built Houses

According to the survey, red or blue tiles are often used on the roofs of rural self-built houses. The color and patterns of the wall tiles are of varieties, mostly white, gray, red, and usually more than two kinds of exterior wall tiles are used for decoration. The gates

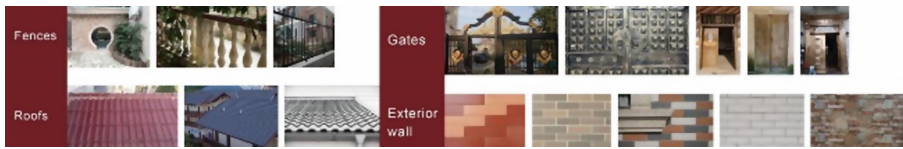


Fig. 3. Architectural decoration features of self-built houses in the countryside.

of the courtyard are mostly European-style iron gates, while the doors are usually new aluminum alloy doors and wooden doors which show a creative blend of practicality and aesthetics. Most of the fences are modern craft fences, while some are imitated antique fences. (shown in Fig. 3).

Among them, the Chinese, western and pastoral style dominates the decoration of self-built houses. Common elements in Chinese style include the eaves form of traditional architecture, the moon gate in traditional Chinese gardens, and the use of Chinese paintings, screens, porcelain and other elements for interior decoration. The most typical western style features the Roman column decoration on the facade of the building, which is often borrowed from the Victorian and Cape Cote houses. For the pastoral style, a yard usually consists of vegetable gardens and pens for the livestock. In summary, it can be regarded as a mix of the old and the new, Chinese and Western styles, and an integration of downtown and countryside, forming a new aesthetic featuring coexistence of different elements.

3.4 The Coexistence of the Old and the New

Those who live in self-built houses are mostly older people, or three or four generations. Such as the No.3 house, the main designers of the house are a 54-year-old couple who live in the house with their parents, children and grandchildren. The old, middle and young have different lifestyles and aesthetic characteristics. The elderly mainly care about the comfort level and practicality with nostalgic aesthetic, while the young people prefer modern and fashionable elements. The middle-aged people should consider both the lifestyle preferences of the elderly and the suggestions of young people on the aesthetics. The conflicts between the new and the old is basically displayed in the coexistence of old house and new house, mix-and-match kitchen and the mash-ups of furniture.

Coexistence of old house and new house. Not all rural houses are built by bulldozing the old, which will increase construction costs and is usually opposed by the elderly. In most cases, people rebuild houses on the basis of the old one. In this way, new building usually stands in front of the old one and the latter is often used as a utility house or livestock house. New houses tend to have ornate exteriors, with multicoloured brick walls and richly decorated doors, while the old hidden behind are more modest, with old-fashioned wooden doors and tiles. (shown in Fig. 4).

“Mix-and-match kitchen” is one of the characteristics of the country self-built house. There are two kitchens in the self-built house: One kitchen has all the trappings of a modern kitchen, like a natural gas stove, a range hood, a marble top, a disinfection cabinet while the other keeps the original equipment: a boiler with the briquettes, wood stoves, and large pots. (shown in Fig. 5) In the family gatherings, the mixed use of the



Fig. 4. The old and the new house.



Fig. 5. Mix-and-match kitchen.



Fig. 6. The new and old furniture.

two kitchens not only improves the efficiency but also restores the taste and cooks special farmhouse meals.

The new and old furniture and utensils in the rural self-built house are mixed and used everywhere. Traditional Chinese-style round chairs and old-fashioned wooden chairs and bamboo chairs often appear in the same room when everyone is chatting together; In daily cleaning, bamboo brooms are used to clean the dust and dirt in the courtyard, and plastic brooms and palm brooms are often used indoors. (shown in Fig. 6).

3.5 The Mix of Chinese and Western Style

The homeowners of self-built houses once strove for a living in an unfamiliar city. When they devote themselves to urbanization, their aesthetics are also affected in many ways. Designers from learning western design to carry forward Chinese characteristics of culture, and the aesthetic in the consumer market has also changed from European style to new Chinese style. The owner of House No. 5 is in the building materials business, and they are closely connected to the decoration industry. “In the process of designing the house, the country called for Chinese culture, and the new Chinese style was popular



Fig. 7. Architectural exteriors.



Fig. 8. Fabric decoration.

in the consumer market,” they said. Under the influence of designers, consumer market and national policies, self-built houses reflect the combination of Chinese and Western styles.

The most common and conspicuous mix-and-match of Chinese and Western style in self-built houses is the building exterior decoration. Among them, the Roman column decoration on the outer wall and the Chinese-style cornice account for the majority. (shown in Fig. 7). And Chinese-style cornices are often decorated on the gate. During the investigation, a homeowner also used the traditional tenon-and-mortise structure as the beam.

Fabric decoration is an important decorative element to create an overall indoor atmosphere. The mix-and-match of Chinese and Western is reflected in the fabric decoration, usually in the form of European-style beds and single sofa chairs with bohemian-style bed sheets and Chinese-style ink painting curtains. (shown in Fig. 8) The other is the common large peony quilt in the southern countryside with curtains in the style of European palace heavy industry. This kind of combination is very common in rural self-built houses.

Lamps are an important part of interior decoration. Modern decoration is not only pursuing its lighting function, but will seriously go to the market to select lamps with decorative effects. Rural self-built houses generally have larger areas and more rooms, which require more lamps. In the same house, we can see Chinese-style lamps that combine wood and porcelain, as well as retro European-style and modern European-style lamps. (shown in Fig. 9).

3.6 The Integration of Downtown and Countryside

The unique feature of rural self-built houses is that they show a unique style of blending industrialized products and natural local products. Industrialized products in the city



Fig. 9. Mix-and-match Lamps.



Fig. 10. Well water and Pressurized water.



Fig. 11. Building materials and plants.

and local products in the countryside, such as faucets and heaters, are combined with wells and charcoal fires in the countryside, breaking the divide between the city and the countryside. During the research process, the author observed that in the countryside, the items that people put outdoors and natural plants slowly merge into one. The unintentional act brings some vitality to the yard.

The way of life has an important influence on the construction and decoration of self-built houses. The integration of the rural way of life and the modern urban way of life can be seen in the living utensils. In rural self-built houses, there is a small yard where people will use well water and pressurized water, but in the house, they will use convenient and fast tap water. (shown in Fig. 10) People living in the countryside are more willing to do their original housework, such as chopping vegetables, drying vegetables and grains in their own courtyards when the weather is fine.

The building materials discarded in the process of building houses, and the pots that were used up in daily life were piled up by the walls. The older people who were reluctant to discard them did not use them for other purposes. The unrestricted flowers and plants in the countryside soon occupied them. (shown in Fig. 11) Such a combination is different from the orderly city and the nature of the countryside, but the integration of industry and nature in the countryside has a unique beauty of ruins [2].

4 Conclusion

The existence of rural self-built houses has its unique aesthetic value. On the one hand, the self-built house in the countryside gives the owner a high degree of freedom in self-decoration, so it is a concentrated expression of public aesthetics. On the other hand, through the aesthetic exploration of the mix and match of self-built houses in the countryside, we find more possibilities for the construction of “beautiful villages”, which can develop the characteristics of villages. It has reached the realm of “seeing Nanshan leisurely” in the description of rural life proposed by Fei Xiaotong.

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