

# A Study of Participatory Art Interventions Based on The Context of Rural Revitalisation

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**Abstract:** The Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022) clearly puts forward that "rural revitalization" is a key initiative to realize "beautiful China", and rural landscape is a microscopic complex bearing material and spirituality, which is the top priority of rural revitalization. At present, the urbanisation of rural landscape, the homogenisation of architectural forms, the single use of artistic elements, the marginalisation of regional characteristics and the inadequate use of artistic resources are the main problems in upgrading and renovating rural landscape. Taking the village of Yantianzi in Hong Kong as an example, we explore the role and value significance of participating in artistic interventions in the village, and at the same time propose strategies to revitalise the village with art in Yantianzi, Hong Kong, in order to add to the revitalisation of Yantianzi's village sustainable construction.

**Keywords:** Rural landscape, Artistic intervention, Rural revitalisation of Hong Kong, Yantianzi village.

## 1. Introduction

At the 2017 National People's Congress, the Communist Party of China proposed the "implementation of the rural revitalisation strategy". What is the future direction of the countryside? Firstly, The character of the countryside as a relatively independent and specific settlement should be distinguished from that of the city; secondly, the mode of revitalisation of the countryside must not only be recognised by social groups, but also rely on its own strength to generate its own blood. For the traditional, conservative countryside, artistic intervention is a new vitality that can serve as a support point for rural revitalisation and form a kind of cultural industry in the local area to promote the development of rural revitalisation.

## 2. Rural Art Intervention

Artistic intervention is a way and a means of building the village, which cannot simply turn the village into a creative vehicle for artists, nor can it be limited to the appearance of the village and the mere transformation of the village space; rather, it should allow for collective participation, including the participation of several organisations. The intervention of village art is a way for artists to use the methods of the art in question to carry out various architectural activities in the countryside, attempting to rejuvenate villages that are gradually disappearing due to urbanisation through the special means of artistic intervention, thus preserving the villages and their cultural traditions that are on the verge of destruction.

Before the intervention of art, the transformation of China's villages could be divided into two types: the first was a common feature of village construction projects: one in which the government invested heavily to transform the face of the village and improve the surrounding environment; the second was a booming boom in rural tourism, based on the development of industry, with ecological culture and tourism as a selling point.

## 3. The Value of Artistic Interventions in Rural Landscapes

### 3.1. Highlighting the Physical Features of The Countryside

The physical landscape of the countryside includes natural landscapes, residential buildings and historical relics, reflecting the evolution of the countryside's economy, society and history and culture, and also is a living carrier of excellent traditional culture. The transformation of art can create an inspiring, growing and continuous landscape, and art is the unique point of force of rural material features, which plays a role in promoting rural transformation. Art can promote the healthy development of rural production, life and ecology, so that the various elements of the countryside balance, complement and echo each other, reflecting a common pursuit of values.

### 3.2. Creating the Spirit of The Villagers

The arts have an aesthetic educational role. Liang Shuming advocated the rural construction movement, which advocated "to fundamentally cultivate and support people's noble quality, and its specific measures are only in rites and music", while Yan Yangchu advocated to cultivate people's knowledge through literature and art education. Both of them believe that the education carried by art is consistent with the function of rebuilding the rural etiquette order. Both believed that the edification carried by the arts was consistent with the function of rebuilding the ritual order of the village. The shaping of the villagers' spirituality was an important way of sustaining the survival of the village and achieving the peasants' identification with the medium of art. The rapid development of society has had a number of effects on the village, such as the hollowing out of the countryside as young people go out to work, and the gradual disappearance of new foreign cultures. However, the current rural construction pays attention to the shaping of the material level, but neglects the improvement of the artistic aesthetics of the spiritual level of

the villagers. The simple festivals and singing and dancing activities cannot meet the psychological needs of the villagers. Art can make up for the gap of science and culture, improve the aesthetic and artistic quality of villagers with art landscape, create a beautiful artistic environment, make the spirit of villagers happy, and then optimize the spiritual style, promote the villagers to actively maintain the rural environment, and promote the positive interaction between villagers and rural spiritual style.

### 3.3. Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture

The inheritance and development of outstanding traditional villages is essential to the prosperity of a nation. In recent years, the state has repeatedly emphasised the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, and has made the countryside a central part of traditional Chinese culture in the construction of villages. Traditional culture is formed through changes in history and environment. It is not about abandoning tradition, but absorbing it, recasting it and allowing for the rational development of outstanding traditional cultural resources through artistic integration. The healthy development of rural habitat cannot be separated from the inheritance of traditional culture by mankind. The traditional culture of rural people is integrated into rural scenery and activities, and some artistic means are added to carry on the inheritance and promotion, such as building the auditorium, improving the stage, forming the rural song and dance troupe, and enriching rural life through the promotion of singing, dancing and opera. The combination of traditional festival elements and drama performances can stimulate the inner power of rural life, make people realize the significance of traditional culture, so as to stimulate people's emotional resonance to the greatest extent, and continue to inherit the traditional rural culture in a subtle way.

## 4. Strategies for Artistic Intervention in the Yantianzi Village, Hong Kong

More than 300 years ago, a couple surnamed Chen crossed the sea from Yantian in Shenzhen, where they reclaimed the land and developed their own industry, and established their own village of Yantianzhi here. The inhabitants lived on salt drying, fishing and rice growing, with over 400 people living here in its heyday. Salt Tin Tsz was one of the five major salt fields in Hong Kong in the 19th century, and its salt output was sufficient for the daily life of the people of Sai Kung. Since 2010, the indigenous people of the village have been working to restore the village with a view to improving the condition of the deserted island.

How can there be no salt paddy in Saltanzi? Thanks to the joint efforts of all villagers and volunteers, the restoration was completed in 2015. The next year, the first barrel of salt was produced. In 2018, a workshop on making salt was held. At present, the salt farm can produce about ten tons of sea salt every year, and its quality meets the national food safety standards and is safe. The name of Yantian Zi is not only taken from the island's Yantian, but also to commemorate the hometown of Shenzhen Yantian left 300 years ago. The "zi" in Yantian Zi has the meaning of nostalgia for hometown.

### 4.1. Shaping the Physical Appearance of The Building

Architecture is an important carrier of rural characteristics.

The form, color and totem of architecture show strong regional and national characteristics.

For example, the restoration of Yantian Zi began with the chapel of St. Joseph, whose reconstruction promoted local cultural and ecological tourism. In 2005, the Hong Kong UNESCO restoration project of St. Joseph's Chapel won the Asia Pacific Award for Outstanding Cultural Heritage Conservation. In 2011, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government upgraded St. Joseph's Chapel to a Grade II historic building.



Figure 1. St Joseph's Chapel

The Roman building, selected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1890, was designed by missionaries from outside the Chan clan and is dedicated to the patron saint of Yantianzi.

### 4.2. Tapping Into Artistic Elements

Art is a kind of thought, with various forms of material, it is the artist's deep understanding of everything and the reflection of feelings. In the material and spiritual appearance of the countryside, artistic expressions, participation forms and carrier expressions; the material appearance is expressed in elements such as rural farmland, mountains and forests, architecture and agricultural packaging design, while the spiritual appearance is expressed through elements such as photographic works, earth art and cultural art festivals, and then, using the aesthetic and artistic techniques of artists, the wisdom of villagers and modern technology, the charm of the countryside is displayed to We then use artists' aesthetic and artistic techniques, villagers' wisdom and modern technology to showcase the charm of the countryside and express its regional culture through artistic means, injecting vitality into the countryside to enhance its physical and spiritual appearance.

In the exhibition hall near St Joseph's Chapel, you can enjoy a glimpse of Hakka culture. Here, the long history of Saltash's hometown is distilled into a display of ceramic objects and household items from the past, as well as stories unique to the countryside.



Figure 2. Hakka Culture



**Figure 3.** Art installation 'The Salt and Light Place'

The installation, titled 'The Place of Salt and Light', is a laboratory that uses salt as a creative medium, showcasing the shape of salt crystals and a series of works about the relationship between people and salt, which also includes a 3D stereoscopic printer that uses seawater as raw material to make salt sculptures.

### 4.3. Activating Rural Spirituality

Each region has its unique historical and cultural background, forming characteristics and styles different from other regions. Different villages should have their own local and regional characteristics, and local customs and traditions should be respected in the construction of villages. The penetration of rural culture in modern life, the integration of modern design and traditional craft, the integration, inheritance and innovative development of rural intangible culture are of great strategic significance for rural revitalization.



**Figure 4.** Salt Flats

Salt Tinzi got its name because the salt industry was once the mainstay of the island's economy. Nowadays, the former saltworks are only used for demonstration purposes, Today, the former salt farm is only used for demonstration purposes, but finished products can still be bought home as souvenirs.

## 5. Strategic Suggestions on Art Revitalization of Zi Village in Yantianz, Hong Kong

### 5.1. Combining the Restoration of Rural Buildings with The Creation of Wall Painting Art

The art of wall painting is widely used as a form of public art that can be easily accepted, understood and appreciated by the public. Combined with the unique human geographical environment of Yantianzi Village in Hong Kong, in the practice of artistic revitalization of Yantianzi village, the creation of wall painting art can be integrated to promote the inheritance and innovation of the characteristic culture of Yantianzi village in Hong Kong, and the sustainable

development of tourism industry, which is also conducive to improving the public participation in rural reconstruction.

Firstly, in terms of the theme and content of the wall painting art, professional wall painting artists can be invited to draw a clear theme based on the current situation of the Yantianzi village environment: around the unique Catholic religious culture of Yantianzi, the Hakka culture of ethnic minorities, the customs and folklore of Yantianzi village, the natural scenery of Yantianzi and the characteristic flora and fauna.

Secondly, in the diversification of the main body of wall painting artworks, professional wall painting artists are invited while local villagers are actively encouraged to join in the creation of wall painting art. This can be done by drawing portraits of outstanding villagers and creating collective works of art by the villagers to enrich the content of Yantianzi's wall paintings. At the same time, visitors to Yantianzi can be invited to join in the creation of wall art, so that they can have a unique travel experience and travel memories.

Finally, it is also possible to develop the art of Yantianzi wall painting into the Yantianzi Graffiti Art Festival and to develop more special tourism projects related to wall painting in Yantianzi.

The development of wall art in Yantianzi will have the following positive implications.

The development of Yantian Zi wall painting art will bring the following positive significance:

1) It provides artists with opportunities and platforms for wall painting art creation, and stimulates the vitality and passion of artists in creation. Also encouraged more art college students, volunteers, tourists to join the team of art revitalization of Yantian Zi village.

2) Villagers' participation in wall painting creation stimulates the enthusiasm of villagers to participate in art to revitalize Yantian Zi, and enhances the centripetal force of Yantian Zi rural culture and the cohesion of the people. While fully demonstrating the unique cultural charm of Yantianzi, it also improves the participation of the public and promotes the active development of the conservation work of Yantianzi village.

3) Attract tourists with different cultural backgrounds for artistic creation, and make different artistic cultures collide, balance, coordinate and integrate in Yantian Zi, which is conducive to creating a new and highly inclusive characteristic culture of Yantian Zi.

### 5.2. Organise the Yantianzi Film Festival and Encourage the Production of Documentaries and Films on The Theme of Yantianzi

In recent years, a large number of excellent films reflecting the revitalisation of the countryside in the new era have emerged, with *Sherlock on the Plain* (2019), *A Little Bit to Go Home* and *My Hometown and I* (2020) being well received by the general public and gaining popularity at the box office. The invitation to directors to make films on the theme of the development of Yantianzi and the organisation of the Yantianzi Film Festival are of positive significance in promoting the unique history and culture of Yantianzi, its unique geographical landscape and the sustainable development of tourism in Yantianzi.

Firstly, film artists, local villagers and tourists could be encouraged to film their own vision of Yantianzi. This can be

in the form of photos, documentaries, microfilms, vlogs, etc.

Secondly, professional film directors can combine the unique historical and cultural story of Yantianzi with the natural landscape to create a film, using a variety of forms such as realistic narrative, romantic narrative and legendary narrative to tell the story of Yantianzi through the camera.

Finally, we will collect photographs of Yantianzi and organise events such as the Yantianzi Film Festival and the Yantianzi Photography and Culture Festival.

Using various forms of video works such as movies to tell the story of Yantianzi has the following positive significance:

1) To attract more excellent film directors to discover the uniqueness of Yantianzi and stimulate their creative enthusiasm by holding film festivals, and to shoot more excellent Yantianzi themed films and documentaries, which is also of positive significance for spreading Yantianzi culture and promoting Yantianzi tourism resources.

2) Record the history of economic and cultural development of Yantianzi village through film narration, stimulate local residents' strong feelings of nostalgia and cultural pride, and stimulate the young people who have left Yantianzi and other villagers to return home and jointly build Yantianzi. To alleviate the excessive outflow of population, caused by the shortage of labor force, serious aging of the population and other social problems.

3) Show and spread the characteristic history and culture of Yantianzi through films and documentaries, attract tourists, help develop the tourism industry of Yantianzi, and drive the economic development of Yantianzi village.

4) The presentation of the unique process techniques and the introduction of the special nutritional value of Yantian Zi salt in the film and documentary are conducive to the promotion and sales of the bottled salt products of Yantian Zi, a specialty of Yantian Zi, and promote the development of the rural salt industry in Yantian Zi.

## 6. Summary

Art is an important content and constituent element of culture, and building a village construction with artistic intervention as a carrier is an inevitable choice of the times and a soul project for national rejuvenation. Therefore, we should be rooted in the countryside, based on the real needs of the countryside, analyse the objective habitat of the countryside, and actively explore the expression and innovative methods of art in the revitalisation of the countryside, which will help the countryside develop in a positive direction. When art intervenes in the creation of the rural landscape, it should not only stay in the material form, but also stimulate villagers' creative enthusiasm from the spiritual level, enhance their aesthetic ability, create the spirit of place in the habitat environment and reshape the rural

culture. In this way, we can promote the prosperity of the countryside, make the form and soul of the countryside reach a high degree of unity, and then achieve harmony between material and spiritual civilisation, thus promoting the revitalisation and development of the countryside. In the practice of the strategy of revitalising the countryside through art, the positive effects of various art forms should also be given full play. It can not only inherit the history and culture of rural areas and improve the construction of rural landscape by adopting the wall painting art form popular with the people, but also give play to the powerful appeal and communication power of film narration, so as to enhance the cohesion and centripetal force of rural culture.

## 7. Author Contributions

This paper was jointly completed by Mu Sizhu, Chen Xiqian. Both of them have made equal efforts in the research of this topic and their contribution to the paper is average. It is hereby explained.

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