

## REVITALIZING RURAL LIFE: ZHAOQING'S PUBLIC SPACES REIMAGINED

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### Article Info

**Keywords:** Rural revitalization, Public space, Rural development, Traditional spatial structure, Rural culture.

### Abstract

**Abstract:** The rural revitalization strategy, first introduced during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and reaffirmed during the subsequent two sessions in 2021, has emerged as a pivotal and historic initiative in the comprehensive development of a modern socialist nation. This underscores the government's commitment to the holistic rejuvenation and progress of rural regions. In this context, various policy interventions, including urbanization, the development of characteristic towns, and the rural revitalization program, have instigated profound transformations in the economic landscape, social fabric, and architectural structure of rural areas. Consequently, these changes have led to the abandonment of production-oriented public spaces, dispersion of life-oriented public spaces, ecological degradation, and an impact on traditional rural spatial structures and cultural characteristics, resulting in a gradual decline in rural public spaces.

This study employs Jiaoyuan Village in Zhaoqing City as a case study to explore the academic rationale behind rural revitalization and rural public spaces. It delves into the reconstruction of rural public spaces, focusing on aspects such as their value, function, and layout. By examining the transformation of Jiaoyuan Village, this research offers insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with rural revitalization efforts and highlights the significance of revitalizing rural public spaces as a means to promote sustainable development in China's countryside

### 1. Introduction

From the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy was first proposed. By 2021, the two sessions re-emphasized that the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy is an overall and historic task related to the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country, indicating that the state attaches importance to the comprehensive revitalization and

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development of rural areas [1]. With the deepening of policies such as urbanization, characteristic towns and rural revitalization, profound changes have taken place in the economic structure, social ecology and architectural pattern of villages. The production-oriented public space is abandoned, the life-oriented public space tends to be dispersed, the ecological space is destroyed, the rural traditional spatial structure and cultural characteristics are impacted, and the rural public space is gradually declining [2]. Taking Jiaoyuan Village in Zhaoqing City as an example, this paper starts with the academic rationality of rural revitalization and rural public space, and discusses the reconstruction path from the aspects of public space value, function and layout.

## **2. The Dynamic Factors of Rural Public Space Reconstruction**

The significance of reconstructing rural public space is to improve the overall beauty of the countryside and the quality of life of residents. Here are some important reasons:

**Protect and inherit rural culture:** Rural public space is a window to show rural traditional culture and history. By reconstructing rural public space, repairing and transforming traditional buildings and historical sites, the history and culture of the countryside can be inherited and developed, and the unique charm of the countryside can be enhanced. This is to protect and inherit the unique cultural heritage of the countryside. It also helps to enhance the cultural appeal of the countryside and attract more tourists and investors.

**Improve the ecological environment:** Since the construction of beautiful countryside, with the implementation of key tasks in different stages such as rural clean movement, domestic waste treatment, toilet revolution and domestic sewage treatment, the improvement of rural living environment has achieved remarkable results [3]. The continuation of rural revitalization makes the reconstruction of rural public space crucial, focusing on ecological construction and ecological protection, such as increasing green coverage, restoring wetlands, and protecting water resources. This not only helps to improve the ecological environment of the countryside, but also provides residents with better natural environment and air quality.

**Provide convenient and comfortable service facilities:** Reconstructing rural public space can strengthen infrastructure construction and provide better transportation, education, medical care, entertainment and other service facilities. For example, in terms of transportation, the reconstruction of public space in Jiaoyuan Village can improve transportation and improve the convenience and efficiency of rural transportation. Building or improving infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and transportation hubs can provide better traffic conditions, facilitate logistics transportation, and improve residents' travel conditions [4]. As for public services, the reconstruction of public space in Jiaoyuan Village can provide better public service facilities. For example, the construction or transformation of schools, hospitals, post offices, public libraries and other facilities, to provide education, health care, culture and other public services, to facilitate the residents of Jiaoyuan Village access to various resources and services. As for public services, the reconstruction of public space in Jiaoyuan Village can provide better public service facilities. For example, the construction or transformation of schools, hospitals, post offices, public libraries and other facilities, to provide education, health care, culture and other public services, to facilitate the residents of Jiaoyuan Village access to various resources and services.

**Promoting employment and economic development:** By reconstructing rural public space, employment opportunities can be created and the level of rural economic development can be improved. For example, the construction of tourist attractions, farmhouses, handicraft workshops and so on. In terms of employment, the reconstruction of rural public space usually requires a series of construction projects, including planning, design, construction and maintenance. This will create a large number of related jobs and provide employment opportunities for local residents. For example, construction workers, designers, engineers and so on will find employment opportunities in the reconstruction project of rural public space. Reconstructing rural public space

can also enhance the beauty and attractiveness of the countryside and further promote the development of rural tourism. This will create many tourism-related jobs, such as tour guides, hotel attendants, tour operators and so on. In terms of economic development, the reconstruction of rural public space can provide development opportunities for entrepreneurs and small and micro enterprises. For example, the construction of leisure farms, farmhouses, handicraft workshops, etc., has created more places for entrepreneurship and operation, and provided more development space for rural entrepreneurs. The reconstruction of rural public space can also improve the quality of life and consumption demand of rural residents. Improving public spaces such as parks and commercial streets will attract more people to come and consume, promote the development of rural consumer markets, and thus promote local economic growth. All in all, the reconstruction of rural public space is of positive significance for promoting employment and economic development. It creates employment opportunities, promotes agricultural development, promotes rural tourism, promotes rural entrepreneurship and the development of small and micro enterprises, and also increases consumer demand and contributes to the prosperity of the rural economy [5].

Enhancing community cohesion: the reconstruction of rural public space can promote the communication and interaction between community residents. By setting up public places, community centers, etc., community participation can be encouraged and community cohesion and centripetal force can be enhanced.

In general, the reconstruction of rural public space helps to enhance the overall image and attractiveness of the countryside, improve the quality of life of residents, and promote the sustainable development of the countryside. This is a comprehensive consideration of cultural, ecological, economic and social aspects of the work.

### **3. From Value Basis to Spatial Layout: the Content of Rural Public Space Reconstruction**

Some scholars divide public space into two ideal types: formal public space and informal public space. The former relies on external administrative forces to build, through planning and design, public places with clear functions and uses. These premises are usually managed and maintained by the Government or by organizations created for public purposes. For example, parks, squares, libraries, museums, etc. are formal public spaces. These spaces often have a standardized architectural and landscape layout that offers a variety of services to meet the needs of the public; The latter is generated by internal traditions, habits, public spaces spontaneously created and used by the public, often without formal planning and design [6]. These spaces are often formed in urban communities and streets, such as streets, lanes, cafes, open-air markets, etc. The informal public space is flexible and changeable, full of the possibility of social interaction and cultural activities. They can meet the needs of individuals and groups, and promote the development of community cohesion and creativity. This classification method of distinguishing exogenous and endogenous driving forces of rural development accurately grasps the impact of the switching of practical subjects on the development and change of rural public space [7].

This paper divides the “endogenous public space” of Jiaoyuan Village into “traditional endogenous public space” and “new endogenous public space”. According to this classification, ten years ago, the government's intervention in rural areas was reduced. In the social change of the village, the evolution of the village public space shows the overall trend of shrinking formal public space and increasingly prominent informal public space. Since then, external administrative forces have been highly involved in rural development and quickly built a large number of formal public spaces, but the vitality is insufficient. The root cause is the neglect of internal traditions, habits and realistic needs. Based on this judgment, the reconstruction of rural public space in this paper is carried out from three aspects: value system, function and spatial layout.

### 3.1 Reconstruction of the Value System of Rural Public Space

In the process of rural revitalization and beautiful rural construction, the intervention of external administrative forces (government), capital and urban elites will indeed have a certain impact on the subjective status of villagers in rural development. However, the dominance of rural development should return to the villagers themselves, who are the main participants and beneficiaries of rural development. The dominant power of rural development should respect and stimulate the villagers' endogenous motivation and creativity. They know their own land, culture and resources, and have rich rural knowledge and experience. Therefore, in the process of value system reconstruction, we should fully listen to and respect the opinions and needs of the villagers, and encourage them to participate in the decision-making and planning process. At the same time, the intervention of external forces also has a positive effect, such as the government can provide policy support and legal protection, capital can provide investment and innovation resources, urban elites can bring professional knowledge and technology [8]. These forces can be a useful complement to rural development, but should not replace the dominant position of the villagers, but work together with the villagers to achieve sustainable rural development goals. In order to maintain the characteristics and sustainable development of the village, the reconstruction of the value system should be based on the maintenance of the rural ecological environment, the inheritance of local culture and the protection of the well-being of the villagers. By creating a good public space and community service, improving the quality of life and satisfaction of villagers, and paying attention to the self-development and endogenous motivation of the countryside, the sustainable development and prosperity of the countryside can be realized [9].

### 3.2 Functional Reconstruction of Rural Public Space

The modernization of rural production and life has led to the gradual rise of new endogenous public space. The traditional endogenous public space in rural areas originates from the spontaneous practice of villagers rooted in life, production needs and cultural traditions. These endogenous public spaces are often created and maintained spontaneously by villagers to meet their daily needs and interactions. The endogenous public space of traditional Jiaoyuan Village includes bazaars, villagers' squares, temples, and under the trees of the village entrance. These spaces not only serve as gatherings, exchanges and trading venues for rural residents, but also carry important activities and rituals of rural society and culture. In these spaces, villagers display agricultural products, exchange experience, inherit culture, hold temple fairs and fairs, etc., to meet their production, life and social needs. However, with the modernization and urbanization of rural areas, the traditional endogenous public space is gradually facing transformation and challenges. With the popularization of modern science and technology and the development of rural economy, new endogenous public space is gradually emerging. These new endogenous public spaces are often supported by technology and innovation to meet the needs of modern farmers' production, life and communication [10]. For example, new endogenous public spaces such as farmer cooperatives, rural e-commerce service stations, and smart agriculture demonstration zones have redefined the functions and forms of rural communities. They provide more entrepreneurial opportunities, support agricultural product sales and logistics services, promote rural economic development and increase farmers' income. At the same time, these spaces also promote communication and cooperation and technological innovation among rural residents, and promote the modernization process of rural communities. At the same time, these spaces also promote communication and cooperation among rural residents and technological innovation [11], and promote the modernization of rural communities.

The construction of new endogenous public space to accommodate modern rural life and supply cultural public goods, to meet the villagers' yearning for urban life, but also to provide the possibility of the public to enjoy rural life. The change of villagers' lifestyle has brought about the change of rural public space demand. Under the

background of the change of rural lifestyle, the construction of new endogenous public space can meet the villagers ' yearning for modern rural life and urbanization facilities, and create the possibility for the public to enjoy rural life. Such public space can undertake a variety of functions to meet the changing needs of rural residents. The following are some measures that can be considered to build a new endogenous public space:

**Facility innovation and modernization:** In order to meet the needs of villagers for modern facilities, various public facilities can be introduced in the countryside, such as modern sanitation facilities, fast network connections, entertainment facilities, cultural activity venues, etc., to provide quality services and experiences. Such facilities can improve the quality of rural life, attract young people to stay in the countryside and promote urban-rural interaction.

**Cultural and artistic space:** in order to meet the needs of villagers for cultural activities and artistic expression, special cultural and artistic spaces can be established, such as art studios, music theatres, libraries, etc. These spaces can promote the inheritance and innovation of rural culture and provide opportunities for rural residents to learn, perform and appreciate art.

**Entrepreneurship and employment support:** In order to meet the needs of villagers for employment and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial incubation bases, agricultural product processing plants, etc.can be set up to provide employment opportunities and entrepreneurial support for rural residents. This can promote the diversified development of the villagers ' economy and improve the quality of life.

**Environmental protection and sustainable development:** In the process of building a new endogenous public space, we need to pay attention to environmental protection and sustainable development. Build green public spaces, farmland parks, ecological reserves, etc., to provide sustainable agricultural and eco-tourism opportunities and protect the natural environment and ecosystems of villages [12].

In the construction of new endogenous public space, it is necessary to fully consider the needs and wishes of rural residents, respect the history and culture of the countryside, and cooperate with local communities and stakeholders. The government, community organizations, enterprises and residents can jointly invest resources and participate in planning and management.

### **3.3 The Layout Reconstruction of Rural Public Space**

The strategy of rural public space layout reconstruction can be considered from the two aspects of rural public space system structure and rural [13] traditional endogenous public space, so as to realize the fair allocation of public space resources and the protection of villagers ' rights and interests. From the perspective of the structure of rural public space system, the following are some reconstruction strategies:

**Breaking the urban-rural dual structure:** eliminating the gap between urban and rural areas and promoting the organic integration of urban and rural public space. Through policy guidance and capital investment, urban resources will be tilted to the countryside, and the quality and service level of rural public space will be improved. At the same time, we should strengthen the traffic and information connection between urban and rural areas, break the space barriers, and promote the two-way flow of resources and personnel. At the village level, with the interaction of urban and rural population flow and factor restructuring under rapid urbanization, the rural spatial structure and land resource utilization methods are also undergoing tremendous changes, and public space is also an important carrier for connecting rural " production, living and ecological " space. Therefore, in the reconstruction and optimization of the structure of the rural public space system, it is necessary to integrate the use of land resources and promote a reasonable and efficient land use model [14]. We can optimize the allocation of land resources and improve the efficiency of land use by planning land intensive use and rural land trusteeship system.



Strengthening the leading role of rural traditional endogenous public space in the structure of rural public space system is still the core issue of the layout reconstruction of rural public space. The following are specific ideas and strategies:

According to the different types and forms of the traditional endogenous public space in Jiaoyuan Village and its importance in culture and function, it is embedded in the form of axis, node, boundary and region. Axis layout: According to the position and importance of traditional endogenous public space, the main axis layout is constructed. Through the planning and design of linear elements such as main streets and back streets, the traditional endogenous public space is connected in series to form the main guidance and connection lines, so that it plays a guiding role in the whole rural public space system [15]. Node setting: In the rural public space system, reasonable setting and strengthening are carried out for the important nodes of the traditional endogenous public space. This includes important traditional node spaces such as village squares, fairs, and temples. Through planning and design, the node space forms specific functions, vitality and attraction, and becomes the core and gathering point of the rural public space system. Boundary definition: The traditional endogenous public space should have clear boundaries and boundaries in the rural public space system to ensure its uniqueness and protect its characteristics [16]. Through planning and design, define the boundary between the traditional endogenous public space and the surrounding environment, maintain its overall and local consistency, and form a stable and clear interface. Regional planning: regional planning and layout according to different types and functions of traditional endogenous public space. For example, planning Jiaoyuan Village cultural and artistic area, commercial exhibition area, leisure activity area, etc., classifying and centralizing traditional endogenous public spaces with different functions to achieve more efficient resource allocation and better functional performance [17].

#### **4. Conclusion**

The reconstruction of rural public space is not a unilateral planning problem. It needs to take into account the changes and interactions of rural society, industry and spatial structure. First of all, the reconstruction of rural public space should consider the needs and characteristics of rural society. Compared with urban society, rural society may have more dispersed population distribution and closer social relations, so it is necessary to pay more attention to community participation and social integration. In planning, extensive communication and cooperation with local residents, villagers' organizations and community groups should be carried out, and their needs and opinions should be fully considered, so as to ensure that the design of public space can meet their daily life and social needs. Secondly, the reconstruction of rural public space also needs to be combined with the development of rural industry. The industrial structure and economic characteristics of rural areas are often different from those of cities, and they may be more dependent on agriculture, rural tourism and other fields. Therefore, when planning rural public space, it is necessary to consider how to promote each other with rural industries and create a good spatial environment for industrial development. Finally, the reconstruction of rural public space also needs to take into account the characteristics of rural spatial structure. The rural area is vast and the spatial layout may be relatively scattered. Therefore, it is necessary to rationally plan and organize the public space so that it can radiate and serve the surrounding rural residents.

If taking the intervention of rural external forces as the normal state of rural public space practice, it is necessary to establish a cognitive premise of 'subject balance', which means that in the practice of rural public space, villagers need to have enough influence to maintain endogenous demand and power source. The reconstruction of value system, function and layout is the result of comprehensive thinking based on this cognition, in which value reconstruction is the premise, function reconstruction is the path and guarantee, and layout reconstruction

is the system and framework. The three are not isolated from each other, but multiple synergy and organic integration, which together constitute the theoretical explanation of the optimization and reorganization method of rural public space.

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