

Cultural Staking: Transition of the Core Public Space of Rural Settlements

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Abstract: Abundant culture have been accumulated in the historical evolution of rural settlements in China, with organic corresponding relationships among cultural, social and spatial attributes. In these certain relationships, the most significant cultural spirit and social relationships are usually presented as the core public space. However, accompanied with the transition of the rural traditional social structure and cultural life, the core public space of rural settlements has been gradually forgotten and its physical environment has been abandoned by degrees because of the change of productivity and production relations. This research points out that with the approach called cultural staking, starting from the core public space of rural settlements as an acupoint can be an effective way to the village revitalization planning. Combined with the author's practice experience in Shatan Village, Yutou Township, Huangyan District, Zhejiang Province, this research shows the effect of a creative spatial restoration and regeneration of the core public space with the cultural staking approach as a key.

Keywords: cultural staking; rural communities; core public space; transition

1. Introduction

There are a large number of rural settlements in China that carry the excellent Chinese traditional culture accumulated over thousands of years. Because rural settlements are formed in different historical and geographical conditions, the rural culture contained in them is therefore diverse and with regional characteristic.

With rapid economic development of China in recent years, rural society has undergone tremendous changes. With the change of productivity and production relations, the collapse of traditional social structure and the decline of space is common in rural settlements. The core public space once was committed to the core function and has important social connotations and cultural value in the traditional rural settlements. Nowadays, most is gradually ruined and dismantled because it is difficult to adapt to the new needs of the rural society in the new era. Besides, rural planning and construction lacking local cultural characteristics is also a universal phenomenon, and there is even “constructive destruction” caused by limited theoretical understanding and improper planning strategies. The local cultural diversity contained in Chinese rural settlements is rapidly disappearing in the rapidly changing socio-economic process.

The Chinese government proposed to implement the rural revitalization strategy in 2018, in which cultural revitalization is the soul. Then, national strategic planning documents also propose to flourish rural culture. Hoping to pass on the great traditional culture of rural settlements through protection and reutilization, theoretical research and practical explorations on rural revitalization has been

carried out in China recently. On the whole, theoretical research needs to be further explored, and the practical paradigm needs to be summarized. So, how to know the relationship within the cultural, social and spatial aspects of rural settlements? How to understand the cultural and social evolution characteristics of the core public space in rural settlements? How to adapt to the new rural social changes through the planning and transformation of the core public space with the soul of cultural revitalization, in order to achieve rural revitalization? This paper will study the above problems theoretically, and discuss the practical results of the method of cultural staking in combination with the rural revitalization practice in Huangyan District, Zhejiang Province. It is hoped that this study will provide theoretical guidance for similar planning practices.

2. The organic relationships among cultural, social and spatial attributes in rural settlements

2.1 The cultural characteristics and contemporary significance of rural settlements

The formation and evolution of rural settlements were influenced by many factors such as politics, economy, culture and military defense in different periods. With low level of productivity, “depending on the sky” reflects the dependence on nature and the fear of natural disasters. This creates awe and worship of nature, so worships and blesses become the spiritual pillar of the original people (SUN Dazhang, 2004). Nature worship has gradually become an important component of the cultural content of rural settlements. In order to resist the threat of natural disasters, aggression and war, people need to be closely united and support each other in a settlement. With the advocacy of the clan system in feudal society, villages are usually inhabited by consanguinity. Collective identity in these rural settlements is stronger. On the one hand, it is due to the resource allocation within consanguineal network, on the other hand, it comes from the inner respect for the ancestors and the goodwill of the ethnic groups (LIU Senlin, 2011).

Nowadays, productivity and production relations has undergone tremendous changes. The traditional rural social structure has been replaced by urban-rural dual social structure. A large amount of labors and other resources in rural area have flowed out to cities. The population in villages, especially the young and middle-aged population, has rapidly decreased. Many “hollow villages” are springing up. The agrarian society and the rural social structure formed under the agricultural economy are gradually disintegrated under the influence of the modern market economic system. As a result, the traditional cultural characteristics of rural settlements are losing.

The rural settlements with the goal of survival and reproduction have formed rich culture in the process of evolution, such as family culture, local belief culture, folk culture and physical culture. Traditional culture still plays an important role in promoting rural civilization and maintaining social harmony and stability. The cultural characteristics formed during the evolution of rural settlements are diverse and special. They are valuable to the reconstruction of rural social relations that are in transition. Therefore, the contemporary creative transformation and innovative development of the cultural characteristics of rural settlements has become an important mission of rural revitalization.

2.2 The relationship among cultural, social and spatial attributes of rural settlements

The culture of rural settlements does not exist in isolation. According to study of cultural connotations, social structures and spatial forms in rural settlements, it is found that cultural, social and spatial attributes of rural settlements have an organic correspondence (Figure 1). Rural settlements develop

from the background of survival and reproduction to the goal of the clan developing. This process is accompanied by continuous construction of the organic relationship among the three parts. Changes in rural social structure affect villagers' way of producing and living. Production and lifestyle also play a role in the formation of culture, which in turn will change the structure of society. The relationship between culture and society is presented through space, which in turn consolidates the culture and social structure of rural settlements.

The spatial form of villages and the interior layout of buildings are generally determined by social structure. The correspondence between social structure and spatial structure is also the basis for social culture and architectural culture. According to the family culture, the space presenting the concept of clan is the ancestral temple in the settlement or the ancestral hall in the residence. It is a place for ancestor worship, family council and family activities. The scale of the residences is determined by the way in which the family live. The distribution of the ancestral hall as well as residences in the settlement and the symmetrical interior layout of the residence reflect the family hierarchical concept. The Ho Family residence in Nanhai Village is a typical reflection of the feudal society living together (Figure 2), fully demonstrating the hierarchical order of the Ho Family. The ritual promoted in the family culture can be reflected through the memorial arches to commemorate the people who made outstanding contributions. For example, according to “Loyalty, Filial Piety, Propriety and Justice”, seven memorial arches stand in line at the entrance to Tangyue Village in Yi County, Anhui Province. The Wenchang Pavilion, Wenfeng Tower or other religious buildings, as well as the traditional academy and the Cultural Temple, are the products of the idea of “the one who excels in study can follow an official career” (SUN Dazhang, 2004). It demonstrates the advocacy of culture education. These spaces reflecting social relationships and public values are usually core public spaces in villages or residential buildings.

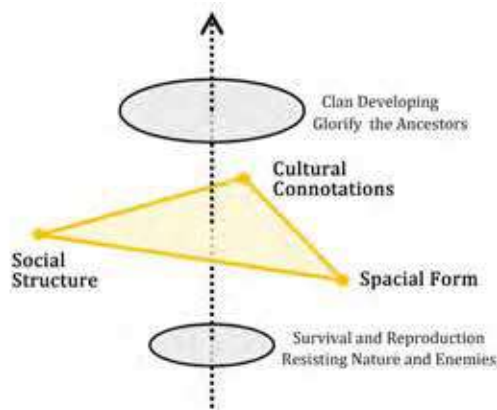


Figure 1. The Relationship within Cultural, Social and Spatial Aspects of Rural Settlements

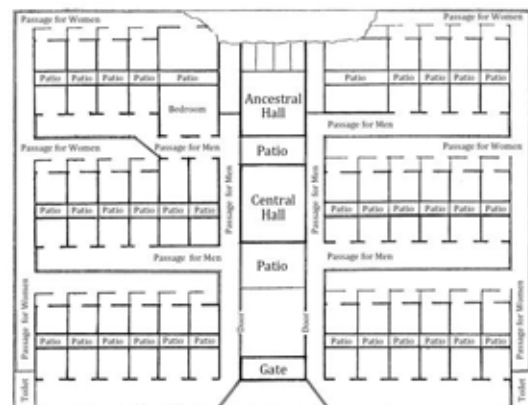


Figure 2. Floor Plan of the Ho Family Residence in Nanhai Village, Guangdong Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)

The local belief culture of rural settlements can be represented by some buildings such as temples, bell towers and Buddhist temples. The bell tower, the altar, the land temple and so on are the symbols of reverence for nature. The Guangong Temple and the Guanyin Temple are the places to pray for blessing from the mythical figures. There are also some miscellaneous temples, dedicated to the local sages. The local belief place reflects the local belief culture by carrying belief activities, mainly providing space for worship during daily life and festivals. The spatial type and distribution of local

belief buildings are related to their functions and service scope. For example, large-scale yard-typed or single-temple belief buildings is usually dedicated to gods who pray people in wide range, and these buildings are mostly located in the center of the protection range; The small-scale free-style belief place is for the gods with a small range of protection. It may be a small house or an altar embedded in building wall, which is closer to living place of the residents (HE Shaoying *et al.* 2016). These local belief places are also important public spaces in the rural settlements.

Folk culture is usually derived from family culture and local belief culture. Spatial presentation is mainly public space carrying folk activities. Architectural culture is manifested on the one hand by ordinary dwellings, and on the other hand by public buildings or structures that reflect core values and social structures in rural settlements. It can be seen from the above that the social structure and cultural spirit in rural settlements are interdependent and are stored in the physical space together, with public space as the main carrier (Figure 3, Figure 4).

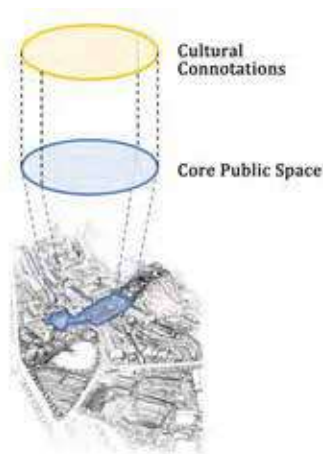


Figure 3. Cultural Manifestation of the Core Public Space in Rural Settlements



Figure 4. The Core Public Space in Shatan Village, Zhejiang Province, China (Provided by Li Shuaijun)

3. The evolution of cultural and social attributes of the core public space in rural settlements

The public space reflects social and political relations in rural settlements, and also contains cultural meanings (MEI Ceying, 2008). The core public space reflects the main characteristics of social relations, represents the core public spirit of the society, carries important cultural connotations. It is the main spatial expression of the social and cultural attributes of rural settlements.

3.1 Physical presentation of core public space

As an important part of the overall spatial structure, the core public space is usually in an important position, such as the geometric center of the rural settlement, or the edge of the settlement with higher altitude. The buildings there are usually larger or higher than others, usually with a large square. Therefore, the core public space is highly recognizable. At the same time, as the layout center of settlement, the core public space has high accessibility which is important to public activity.

Following are the typical cases. In most instances, the core public space of the Dai village in Yunnan is the Buddhist temple with surroundings located in the center of village. However, there are some exceptions. One is that the Buddhist temple is built on the edge of the village (Figure 5) or on the hill

to be the commanding height of the whole village (Figure 6) when the village is located in the mountainous areas. Or some is built at the entrance to the village for easy identification in the distance. Similarly, the Drum Tower with its surroundings in the Dai village is the core public space of the village. The other residences are built around it. The Drum Tower is also located in the center of the village (Figure 7), and the height is definitely higher than the surrounding houses. The core public space with particularities in terms of location, spatial volume and layout has obvious centrality and leading position in space.



Figure 5. Plan of Manting Village in Ganlan Dam, Yunnan Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)



Figure 6. Aerial View of Jinghong Dai Village in Yunnan Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)

3.2 Cultural and social attributes of the core public space

The particularity of the spatial layout of the core public space corresponds to its dominant and controlling role in the society and culture of the field. The identification of the core public space in the rural settlement embodies the core value of social control (YANG Guiqing, 2014), and is the concentrated expression of the social structure, public value and spirit of the settlement. The core public space is usually based on buildings that have profound significations, such as ancestral hall, temple and drum tower. There may be square, opera stage or other affiliated facilities around. It is a psychological cognitive place in the daily life of the villagers.

The core public space with ancestral temple as the main body reflects the family community with kinship as the link, focusing on the strength and honor of the collective. Tulous or Weiwus are defense-oriented residential buildings built after the settlement of some war immigrants in history. Usually there is just one family group in Tulou or Weiwu. From the overall layout of the village, there is no obvious central space, but the central public places enclosed is the core public spaces for the information exchange and public activities. The location reflects the importance of uniting the family and jointly resisting external violations to ensure that the family can survive and develop. (Figure 8)



Figure 7. Aerial View of Congjiang Dong Village in Guizhou Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)



Figure 8. Plan of Tianluokeng Village in Nanjing County, Fujian Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)

Belief place as the core public space in rural settlements, is an important "acupoint" of traditional culture and spiritual life in areas where local beliefs and culture flourish. For example, the Dai people believe in Southern Buddhism, so Buddhist temples are the center of the spiritual and cultural life for villagers. Its remarkable spatial layout also confirms the prominent position of Buddhism in the spirit of the Dai villagers. The Drum Towers in the Dong villages are mostly public buildings for collective use funded by the same region or family name. It is an important place for villagers to step on the temple, worship the ancestors, gather, discuss, and entertain, combined with the surrounding ground for drying grain (SUN Dazhang, 2004). The Drum Tower also has the function of preaching ethical codes to build a harmonious society with moral principles. It can be seen that the Drum Tower has a leading position in the social and cultural aspects of rural settlements, and is also organically corresponding to its central location in physical space.

In some areas where the family concept or the local belief culture is relatively weak, the core public space of the settlement is mostly adapted to the actual needs of the villagers. For example, the core public space of ancient commercial town Luocheng Town in Sichuan Province is the main street with shape similar to the boat. The boat-shaped main street symbolizes "crossing a river in the same boat", which means pulling together in times of trouble. Although the residents are mostly Cantonese immigrants, and the family culture or religious culture is not strong, the boat-shaped street reflects the homesickness culture indirectly (SUN Dazhang, 2004). Except cultural connotations, the main street also meet usage need. It is a commercial street with a stage, a memorial hall and a step-like theater space in the center. It can be seen that the function of the core public space of the settlement is mainly commercial and leisure, with a focus on practicality. The Lingguan Temple at the end of the main street is relatively high but with weaker centrality, reflecting that religious culture does not occupy the dominant place in the settlement (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Aerial View (a), Plan (b), Profile (c) of Core Public Space in Luocheng Town, Sichuan Province, China (SUN Dazhang, 2004)

Therefore, the cultural, social and spatial attributes of rural settlements correspond organically. The inheritance and development of cultural traits cannot be separated from the social structure and spatial form. In the spatial form, the core public space is the physical space carrier of the main social structure and the core spiritual culture. The rural cultural revitalization should use the core public space as the catalyst to carry out the creative transformation and innovative development of culture.

3.3 Dialectical views on the transition of the core public space in rural settlements

The cultural and social attributes of the core public space is not static, but is constantly changing with the development. For example, in the long-term agricultural civilization era, the core public space is mostly a place that symbolizes the family spirit or the local belief culture. In the period of China's planned economy in the last century, it was the collective production space such as the supply-marketing cooperatives and the drying field. After the reform and opening up, the centrality of the traditional core public space in rural settlements was weakened and replaced by administrative cultural place. Nowadays, the commercial and entertainment activity squares are the main form. The core public space in different periods adapted to the economic system, social structure, production methods and life style at that time, reflecting the cultural and social attributes of a particular period.

The development requires that we should treat the cultural value of the core public space during different periods in a dialectical way. Take the essence, throw its dregs. Protect, pass on and update the culture that adapts to contemporary development. Nowadays, the production methods and social relations have changed. The reshaping of the core public space should adapt to the new production relations, social background and development prospects, rather than the simple restoration and reconstruction of the traditional core public space. On the one hand, we respect the diversity of the rural culture developing types, and at the same time adopt the advancing and suitable methods to inherit and develop. For instance, the design for regeneration of Lai clan settlement fully considered three different civilizations of Changhe Ancient Town during three development periods. This design advocated that the primary goal of regenerative design is to integrate the old and new spatial elements of the settlement under the premise of maintaining the recognizability of different civilizations. Thereby, maintain the continuity of the local civilization and integrate it into the process of modern urban life evolution (CHANG Qing, 2016). Therefore, the cultural characteristics of rural settlements are changing with the historical evolution. The inheritance of culture should adapt to the contemporary rural life and derive the rural culture with the contemporary characteristics.

4. Cultural staking with the core public space as the "acupoint" in rural revitalization

In the context of implementing the rural revitalization strategy, many parties are exploring the revitalization of the countryside . The practice of rural revitalization in Huangyan District, Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province has obtained some achievements. Recently, the experience of the practice is summarized in the “Working Methods for Rural Revitalization” (WU Liang *et al.* 2018), in which cultural staking takes the first place. Cultural staking means take culture as the priority to stake the village revitalization. The reconstruction and reuse of the core public space is the implementation of the method cultural staking in rural settlements.

4.1 Cultural staking

The Shatan village is located in Yutou Township, Huangyan District. It is a provincial historical and cultural village with profound cultural heritage, such as, Taoist culture represented by Taiwei Temple, the Confucian culture represented by Rouchuan Academy, the farming culture, the traditional Chinese medicine culture and the modern architectural culture. However, it is remarkable that cultural revitalization is not a simple excavation and protection, but a protective use of cultural elements in the context of productivity and production relations transitioning. In this way, the new needs of villagers and tourists can be meet. Because the cultural, social and spatial attributes of rural settlements is inseparable, cultural staking should be organically combined with industry, society and space to implement a function of "hematopoiesis".

Cultural revitalization should be carried out regionally, taking full account of the difference in diverse regional ranges. Which village should be revitalized and how to revitalize should be determined on the base of the systematical plan. In this case, new villages and towns are built on the east side of the old Shatan village. The new township government and commercial facilities are added in the new village, while buildings and street in the old village gradually declined due to their inadaptability to new needs (Figure 10). Therefore, the old village of the Shatan should be considered with the township, that is, regarding it as the cultural block in the township master planning based on its rich cultural elements.

After the direction is clear, a series of methods can be used to revitalize culture, including: First, finding the cultural identification of the villagers, such as the ancestral temples, ancestral halls, customs, traditional crafts, etc. Second, repairing, reconstructing or building the cultural identification recognized by local villagers. Third, planning and constructing different cultural facilities combined with local customs. Fourth, building a public cultural architecture, publicizing culture and morality in the new era. In the Shatan village, there are two major cultural buildings, named Taiwei Temple and Rouchuan Academy, as well as public buildings built during the period of the People's Commune, such as township office, veterinary station, health center and grain stations (Figure 10). These are cultural identifications of villagers in different periods. However, most of them has been abandoned because it cannot meet the new needs of villagers. To releasing the contradiction between supply and demand of public service facilities, the historical cultural identifications were repaired and transformed. Finally, the protection and reconstruction of the buildings with cultural connotations in the old village is realized, and the adaptive function transformation is carried out in combination with the needs of living and travelling (Figure 11). Thus, the cultural context of the old village is continuing and the cultural atmosphere of the Shatan village is restoring. For instance, the Rouchuan

Academy has been returned to an excellent traditional cultural education base, and at the same time the Rural Revitalization Institute. Some other buildings of the People's Commune period are adaptively transformed into information center, cultural activity center, and homestays according to their location and interior space.



Figure 10. Present Land Use and Distribution of Public Facilities in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)



Figure 11. Land Use Planning and Distribution of Public Facilities in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)

4.2 Practice of core public space

Cultural staking is first aimed at the declining buildings and space environment in rural settlements, especially the core public spaces with cultural connotations. The core public space generally has a good physical space foundation carrying the traditional culture of the settlement, and also is the cultural identification of the villagers. Therefore, it is an important and primary “acupoint” for cultural revitalization, also rural revitalization. Focusing on the core public space to implement cultural staking, it is easy to put the village planning into effect under limited capital conditions, in other words, it has strong operability. The overall village planning can be promoted from the most important “acupoint”, that is, core public space. The combination of cultural staking and starting from acupoint is suitable for rural areas with limited financial and labor conditions to promote cultural revitalization.

The planning and construction of the Shatan village originated from the excavation of the unique cultural connotations of the village, and finally positioned on the Taiwei Temple with the southern opera square. The Taiwei Temple has a history of more than 800 years. The origin of its construction is to commemorate the local villager Huang Xidan who died of saving the people from fire. He was honored by emperor and esteemed by villagers and generations. So far, the temple has a strong incense. The villagers still express their respect for the ancestor by organizing social activities. “Respecting heroes” and “cultivating virtue” are the roots of the culture of the Shatan village and the cornerstone of the cultural revitalization. The Taiwei Temple is the cultural identification of the villagers.

After the excavation of the culture of the Shatan village, the core public space is planned and designed. The original Taiwei Temple was damaged, and the space in front of it was messy. In order to improve the condition of ancestor worship and promote the culture of the Shatan village, a series of planning and construction have been adopted, such as removing latrines and garbage in front of the temple, instead setting up a clean public toilet, building the opera stage and the corridors and so on. All of these make up a core public space with the Taiwei Temple as the center, composed of the opera stage,

the opera square and supporting facilities. So, the core public space, as the cultural identification of the villagers, is reshaped (Figure 12 to 15).

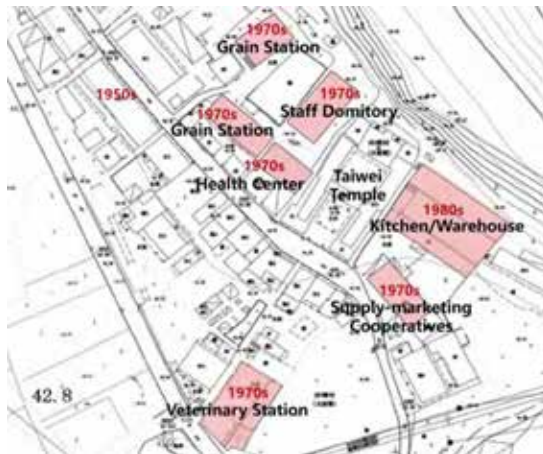


Figure 12. Present Layout of Core District in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)

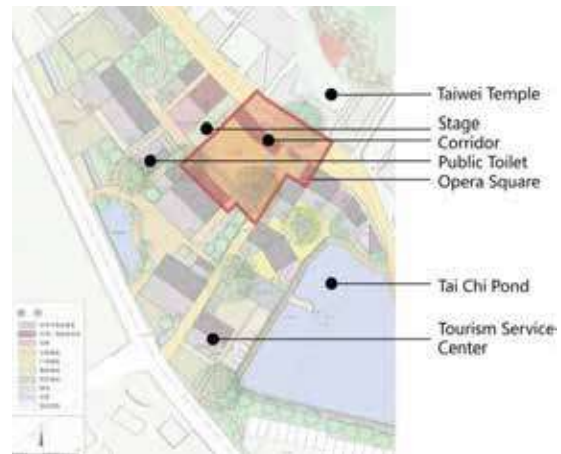


Figure 13. Planning of Core District in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)



Figure 14. Planning of Core Public Space in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)



Figure 15. Model of Core Public Space in Shatan Village (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2015)

The space is meaningful owing to its being used. As the old physical space of the village, the core public space needs to adapt to new social structure and redefine new functions, so that the physical environment can gain new development connotations and motivation (YANG Guiqing *et al.* 2016). The core public space of the Shatan village is not only the local belief space all the time, but also the venue for the family activities. At the same time, it can meet the new spatial needs of villagers for rest, communication, entertainment and exercise (Figure 16 to 19). The construction of the core public space has promoted the creative transformation and innovative development of other public space nearby. The repair and reconstruction of the old Shatan village centered on the core public space will be gradually promoted on the basis of respecting traditional culture.



Figure 16. Square Dance in Shatan Village



Figure 17. Tai Chi Performance in Shatan Village (Provided by Ningxi Township Government)



Figure 18. Village Opera Performance in Shatan Village (Provided by Ningxi Township Government)



Figure 19. Huang Clan Celebration in Shatan Village (Provided by Ningxi Township Government)

The construction of the core public space in Shatan village provides a place for the Huang clan worshipping activities and local belief activities, which not only contributes to the inheritance of the traditional family culture and local belief culture, but also enhances the villagers' sense of identity and pride on local culture. Moreover, it also satisfies the needs of locals. Further, helps to build a new type of rural social structure, and enhances social harmony and stability. In addition, in the context of urban-rural factors flowing, the core public space is also a place for tourists and villagers to interact, so that it promotes the integration of urban and rural areas.

5 Conclusion

With the constant changes in productivity and production relations, the social structure of rural settlements in China is also changing. In the process, the cultural characteristics of rural settlements have gradually formed, especially family culture and local belief culture. Nowadays, these traditional cultures are losing due to the inability to adapt to current society, but they still have social significance in contemporary rural settlements and should be passed down.

Culture has an organic correspondence with social structure and space. The organic correspondence among social structure, cultural connotations and spatial forms of different settlements is similar. Therefore, the cultural revitalization in rural revitalization should fully consider the changes in social relations and spiritual culture, and plan to create suitable spaces to carry. The core public space is the

main carrier of the core of the social and cultural connotations of the rural settlement, so it is chosen as a catalyst for cultural staking. Based on the organic correspondence among the three attributes, integrate all the actors and make the transition of the core public space. It is not only the inheritance of traditional culture, but also the spatial embodiment of rural culture and local civilization in the new era.

In the context of new era, with cultural revitalization as the soul, creative transformation and innovative development of the core public space will eventually realize rural revitalization. The theory and working methods of cultural staking have universal guiding significance for protecting and reutilizing historical and cultural traditional villages. However, localities should carry out cultural revitalization according to their own conditions, that is, respecting and protecting rural cultural diversity and local characteristics.

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