

Exploring the Cultural Development Path of Chinese Ancient Village under the Perspective of Rural Revitalization: Taking Zhujiayu as an Example

Jinrui Zhao*

Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou 730030, Gansu Province, China

*Corresponding author: Jinrui Zhao, 329967366@163.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The ancient village culture contains rich social and psychological accumulation. The revitalization of culture is the core and driving force of rural revitalization, especially for the traditional settlements where people live together for generations, and where material and spiritual cultural values cannot be ignored. Cultural development can be achieved through a variety of ways. As a typical northern-style village in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and a 4A-level scenic spot for the early development of ancient village tourism, Zhujiayu in Zhangqiu, Shandong Province, has undergone a variety of cultural revitalization forms in the process of cultural and tourism integration.

Keywords: Rural revitalization; Ancient village; Zhujiayu; Traditional settlement; Rural tourism

Online publication: February 26, 2024

1. Introduction

Villages are not only sites for human habitat but are also physical carriers and materialized cultures of human ideology in different periods and regions. In terms of the cultural field, the site selection, layout, and style of traditional villages all reflect the cultural landscape of a region. At present, the researches on traditional villages, both local and abroad mainly focus on morphology, settlement, typology, vernacular architecture, heritage protection, tourism development, and so on. On the basis of summarizing the previous research results, this paper analyzes the contemporary development path of ancient villages from the perspective of cultural revitalization under the background of “rural revitalization.”

Zhujiayu is a typical village in northern China, located in Zhangqiu District, Jinan City, Shandong Province. According to unearthed cultural relics, there were ancestors living there during the Xia and Shang Dynasties. The current architectural complex has basically preserved the architectural pattern of more than 600 years since the early Ming Dynasty, and it is known as “the first ancient village in Shandong and the exhibit of Settlement on the north of the Yangtze River”. The influence of Confucian culture that emphasizes education

since ancient times in the Zhujiayu area is apparent, as there are more than 20 school buildings in the village. In 2005, the Ministry of Housing and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage selected it as the “Chinese historical and cultural village”; while in 2009, it was named “Shandong’s top ten film and television shooting base.” Entering the new era, Zhujiayu integrates its culture into all aspects of rural revitalization based on its own cultural heritage and adopts a variety of measures to transform culture into economic benefits, which not only improves the economic income and living standards of the villagers of the ancient villages, and creates employment opportunities for the young people to return to their hometowns, but also serves as an example to display the traditional villages and cultural identity of China’s agrarian civilization.

2. The necessity of revitalizing ancient village culture

“Rural revitalization” is a major strategic deployment put forward by the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and an inevitable requirement for agricultural and rural development in the new era. Since the reform, China’s farmers’ income has continued to increase, and the construction of new rural areas has achieved remarkable results under a series of policies to benefit agriculture. On November 23, 2020, all 832 poverty-stricken counties in China identified by the Poverty Alleviation Office of The State Council were lifted out of poverty, and the national poverty alleviation target was completed. However, there are still the problems of hollowing out, marginalization, and aging in rural areas, which is also a phenomenon observed in some developed countries and many developing countries. Therefore, in the face of this global challenge, the implementation of the “rural revitalization” strategy is particularly important.

In rural revitalization, cultural revitalization is its root driving force, as China is an ancient agricultural civilization, that even as early as 7000 years ago, Chinese ancestors began their agricultural lifestyle. The fields formed by the village architecture and its spatial structure are infused with the identity of Chinese culture. On November 24, 2021, the Central Committee deliberately adopted the “Implementation Opinions on Revitalizing Cultural Relics and Expanding the International Influence of Chinese Culture,” proposing ideas and measures for the protection of cultural relics, such as maintaining the historical authenticity, integrity of cultural relics, and cultural continuity^[1].

So far, the earliest village found in China is the village of Banpo Site which is dated about 7000 years ago, with an area of about 50,000 square meters, which is the prototype of ancient Chinese architecture. According to the production needs and living requirements at that time, it was divided into residential areas, pottery kiln areas, and burial areas. Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, productivity improvement has caused people to pay more attention to landscape aesthetics and site selection, with the spatial layout of villages being close to natural landscapes. The village has become the material and cultural carrier that sustains people’s aesthetic ideals, spirituality, and other ideologies.

In the process of modernization, ancient villages with profound historical and cultural depths transformed under the progress of rural revitalization. Hence, the excavation, development, and dissemination of spiritual culture rooted in the living state of ancient villages and hidden spiritual culture under the carrier of materialized culture deserve special attention. Therefore, the overall layout and field of architectural design, carving decoration, and other physical carriers of ancient villages bearing the ancestors’ ideology, aesthetic ideal, and good wishes for life formed by them have the symbolic characteristic of representing Chinese farming civilization. In terms of spiritual culture, first of all, people’s aesthetic and spiritual ideals are hidden in the site selection, layout, and architectural style of the village. Secondly, Confucianism occupies a dominant position in China’s feudal society, which consists of traditional concepts such as respecting teachers and the old, and

cherishing the young, is not only the cultural identity of the Chinese nation but is also the norms and behaviors advocated by Chinese society today. The village still embodies the admirable virtues and resilient spirit of perseverance.

3. Overview of Zhujiayu

3.1. Natural environment

Zhujiayu is located in Zhangqiu District, east of Jinan City, Shandong Province, the south bank of the lower Yellow River, the junction of Taishan Mountain and North China Plain, and the northeast of Hu Mountain. It is surrounded by mountains on three sides, Zhujiayu has lush vegetation and abundant spring water, which is suitable for farming and matches the ideal living environment of the “landscape and countryside” of the ancients. Shandong region in the Warring States period put forward the idea of utilizing materials based on the local situation in “Kao Gong Ji”. Zhujiayu architecture fully utilizes the local rock resources according to local conditions, with 600 years of building houses, ancestral halls, temples, schools, bluestone roads, overpasses, steps, and other links along both the high and low scattered mountains, forming a typical northern mountain village-style ancient village.

3.2. Historical background

According to the unearthed cultural relics research, there were ancient people living in the Zhujiayu area since at least 3800 years ago. Zhujiayu was formerly known as “Chengjiao Yu” and “Fushan Yu” and was later renamed “Zhujiayu” in the early Ming Dynasty, as the architectural pattern in Zhujiayu existed since the Ming Dynasty. After entering the Republic of China, Zhujiayu, which adopted a strong Confucianism ideology that emphasizes culture and education since ancient times, began a new type of education earlier, as shown by the Zhu Jia Girls’ School founded by Zhu Lianba and Zhu Liandi in 1932, which was the earliest girls’ school in rural areas of China after Zhujiayu built Shanyin Primary School (**Figure 1**) following the school gate of the Huangpu Military Academy. There is a Kuixing Tower on the Wenfeng Mountain at the south of the village, which was built in the 19th year of Qing Daoguang (1839), while a Wenchang Pavilion, built in the 18th year of Qing Daoguang (1838), is located at the north of the village. The Kuixing Tower and Wenchang Pavilion are at the opposite ends of the village, both related to the theme of reading and education, which can be seen as Zhujiayu’s emphasis on literature and education.



Figure 1. Photo of Shanyin Primary School in Zhujiayu, taken in February 2017

4. Zhujiayu's rural cultural revitalization path

4.1. "Northern Yangtze River settlement exhibits" tour

Architecture is the concrete expression of human culture, which not only contains human craft and technology but also embodies human ideology in a certain period. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the customs, religious, social, and aesthetic concepts from the perspective of anthropology, which are embodied in the overall structure, architectural forms, and decorative arts of the village.

From the perspective of overall characteristics, Zhujiayu is located at the junction of mountains and plains. It is surrounded by mountains on the east, south, and west, while the north is low land. There are meandering streams and springs to provide farmers with water for farming and living. The village is situated along the concave axis line of the north and south mountains, forming a village layout with a long north-south length and a short east-west width, with a total area of three square kilometers. The houses and roads made of local materials and stone barriers are organically integrated into the landscape. Such an environment not only allows a humid climate with warm winter and cool summer conditions but is also able to prevent wind and flood while blocking external intrusion, which is an important factor in the site selection of the ancients.

In terms of functional layout, Zhujiayu's public buildings and residential buildings are distinguished by the differing architectural styles that spread outwards with the axis as the center which can be distinguished as primary and secondary. For example, Shandong Ancient Architecture stated that "ancient villages use important public buildings (such as Wenchang Pavilion, Zhu family temple, ancient opera stage, etc.) to form several control nodes, dotted with ancient bridges, ancient springs, ancient wells, ancient trees, etc., strung together by roads and trenches, and organized into a very organic village pattern network" [2].



Figure 2. Zhujiayu's "double-track ancient road" built in the Ming Dynasty

In the design of the road, a stone slab main road runs through the north and south of the whole village to form the main axis, of which four main roads are divided, all of which are paved with blue stones. The road in Zhujiayu is divided into car lanes and sidewalks. The car lane runs through the north-south traffic, and the sidewalk facilitates the neighborhood. The two lanes are differentiated by a height difference, climbing street, crossroads, or overpasses (**Figure 2**). Because of the mountain region, the road is built as such to form a changeable network traffic structure of winding paths that lead to all directions, which run through the ancestral

temples, schools, and every household in the village.

As a living exhibit of ancient Chinese villages, Zhujiayu attracts a large number of both local and foreign tourists, including scholars. The development of tourism not only enables people to experience the traditional settlement lifestyle of China but also brings more employment opportunities for Zhujiayu villagers.

4.2. Folk culture display and sales of agricultural and handmade goods

With the development of Zhujiayu's tourism industry, the display of folk culture has also become a part of its tourism industry. For example, the establishment of exhibition halls enables tourists to not only visit and experience the layout and architecture of the village but also learn more about the unique history, culture, and spirit of the ancient village.

In addition to the exhibition hall display, the view of the villagers' daily lives, and the sale of their agricultural and handmade products in the ancient village also exhibit a folk culture atmosphere. Through many visits to Zhujiayu in recent years, this paper's author found that the change in the main management body there has been particularly significant in the past two years. In 2019 and beyond, the village has seen a growing young and middle-aged crowd in the merchandising business, the emergence of home-listed, home-based businesses, bed and breakfasts, and catering. It can be seen that the rural tourism craze in recent years has injected new vitality into this ancient village to a certain extent, attracting young people to return to their hometown for employment, thus improving the problem of aging and hollowing out there.

4.3. Homestay and catering industry

The catering business of Zhujiayu is primarily run by local villagers, with iconic farmyard dishes playing a significant role in driving tourism development to some extent. With the recent widespread popularity of short video platforms, videos showcasing Zhujiayu's characteristic farmyard restaurants have been dubbed "big steamed buns of Internet celebrities," attracting a broader range of consumer. This aims to achieve two-way interaction, from "travel" to "food," and "food" to "travel."

The development of the homestay industry not only enables a way for local villagers to increase their income but also provides a more intimate and leisurely way for those who want a deeper understanding of the history, culture, customs, and local life of ancient villages, by integrating themselves into the ancient villages like a local.

4.4. Film and television shooting and the generation of new cultural values

In addition to the development of tourism, Zhujiayu is also loved by the film and television industry because of its complex buildings with northern characteristics. The development of the film and television industry has given Zhujiayu new cultural symbol value, which is most represented by the television series "Chuang Guandong". This new cultural value has further promoted the tourism industry and brought cultural and economic benefits to the ancient village.

With the shooting of the show "Chuang Guandong" in Zhangqiu, Zhujiayu in 2006 and its subsequent popular broadcast on China Central Television in 2008, Zhujiayu has become the iconic setting of the show. Actor Li Youbin who played the male lead role in the show, "Zhu Kaishan," said that he is from Zhangqiu, Zhujiayu, which also rapidly increased the popularity of Zhujiayu. The scenic area has attracted skilled design teams to build the Guanto spiritual education base, which became a popular destination for primary and secondary school students. In addition, the 3000-meter squared "Guanto Memorial Hall" was constructed to show the origin of Guanto and Zhujiayu, the history and culture of Guanto, and the shooting of the movie and television drama "Guanto."

How can fictional art generate real emotions that keep visitors from all over the country after 2008? It can be said that "Chuang Guandong" itself is a part of the spirit of Zhangqiu culture. Chuang Guandong is a tragic historical event of immigration and struggle that happened from the early Qing Dynasty to the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to Roland Barthes' semiotics, the symbols of film, television, and images are closer to the daily objects that the audience comes into contact with than the symbols of words, and their direct representation resonates better with the audience ^[3].

The English writer and critic Samuel Johnson once answered the question "Why does drama move people when it is not believable?" and gave an answer in the same vein as Aristotle: drama is the way life is. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why tourists have real emotions that stimulate economic consumerism because of fictional films and television works.

4.5. Art inspiration and cultural creative industry

With its distinctive architectural style, Zhujiayu has become a popular art inspiration for surrounding universities, schools, painting training institutions, individual or group artists, and painting enthusiasts. From architectural art to painting art, this not only acts as a cultural influence but more importantly, the transmission of cultural value into excellent painting works.

The symbol of a "century-old village," in addition to attracting film crews and painters, has also spawned a series of other artistic symbolic products, such as cultural and creative products. The cultural and creative industry has founded the "Yu See" series of cultural and creative products based on the Zhujiayu scenic area with its profound cultural heritage, the combination of agricultural products, and the Guandong culture and its healthy lifestyle. Cultural and creative products that meet the needs of the new era, in the form of cultural goods that can be brought away, have become a bright business opportunity of ancient village tourism, and are highly representative in the context of rural revitalization.

5. Conclusion

As a traditional village with intangible material cultural heritage, the cultural connotation of Zhujiayu is constantly being generated and changed with the influence of the new cultural and artistic context. In the process of cultural revitalization in the new era, many experiences can be used for reference. Zhujiayu's future development goal is to create an original ecological mountain ancient village in Shandong with the four functions of nostalgic experience, film and television shooting, painting inspiration, and cultural research in one of the important influences in the country ^[4].

In the process of tourism development, and economic and cultural revitalization of ancient villages, ancient villages should be viewed as a living field, in which the happiness of native villagers is an important indicator of the living culture of folk village architecture, just like the "landscape garden" deeply hoped for by the ancient people at the beginning of the construction of villages, in which the presence of people is crucial. Therefore, scenic location developers, investors, and local governments should pay detailed attention to how to maintain the balance between cultural and economic revitalization while maintaining the lasting happiness of villagers in their living fields.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Hong Se He Bei, 2021, The Central Committee Reviewed and Approved the “Implementation Opinions on Revitalizing Cultural Relics and Expanding the International Influence of Chinese Culture”, viewed December 1, 2022, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GPM0JU2I0521TES6.html>
- [2] Liu S, Gao YS, 2015, Shandong Ancient Architecture. China Construction Industry Press, 2015: 33.
- [3] Zhang J, 2013, On Roland Barthes Semiotics and Visual Communication Theory. *Journal of Humanities*, 2013(9): 70–74.
- [4] Huanqiu.com, 2020, “The First Ancient Village in Qilu” Zhujiayu Scenic Area, viewed September 15, 2020, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1663561447712356567>

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.