

# Art Intervention and Rural Population Mobility: Research on Hongjiang Art Village in Guizhou

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## Abstract

Since the 21st century, with the acceleration of urbanization, the transformation of rural areas to postproductivism, and the prospect of rural revitalization, art intervention has become important for reshaping rural space and adjusting the structure of the rural population. Taking Hongjiang International Art Village in Guizhou as a typical case, this paper performs a systematic analysis of art intervention and rural population flow from three perspectives—space production, field reconstruction and life-world change—by introducing Lefebvre’s space production theory, Bourdieu’s field theory and the life-world perspective. It is concluded that there is a two-way system mechanism between art intervention and rural population flow. Specifically, art intervention creates a new rural space form through physical space reconstruction, symbolic space reconstruction and social space reorganization. In this space, foreign artists and local villagers are in different field positions, and they take advantage of capital conversion to achieve limited but real social integration by means of habitus adjustment. More importantly, art intervention has essentially changed the life world of aborigines and formed a new local ballet of moving, staying and meeting. The actual effect of art’s mediation of population mobility depends on the coupling of the three mechanisms of spatial openness, field autonomy and life-world continuity. Therefore, this paper provides a complete and solid theoretical framework for art-driven rural transformation, which has positive implications for rural revitalization policy.

## Keywords

art rural construction, population mobility, space production, rural revitalization, Hongjiang village

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## 1. Introduction

Owing to the acceleration of urbanization, the phenomenon of migrant workers is very common. The large flow of urban and rural areas has led to the increasing hollowing out of rural areas, a large loss of the labor force, and weak endogenous development momentum. Moreover, as the transformation of rural areas to postproductivism has intensified, the function of rural areas has shifted from production to consumption, ecology and leisure, and the sustainable development of rural areas has received comprehensive attention. As an emerging rural development model, art provides an innovative idea for rural revitalization.

The literature provides a solid and hierarchical interdisciplinary discussion on art rural construction. The human geography scholar Lefebvre analyses the reconstruction of rural space from the perspective of art intervention and proposes a triple model of rural space to examine the reshaping of rural locality,

representation and daily life. Sociological research introduces Bourdieu's field theory, performs an excellent analysis of the social integration process of artists and other creative class immigrants and the original villagers, and clarifies the characteristics of multifield penetration and multigroup stratification. Phenomenological geography also involves a detailed analysis of the influence of art on villagers' lives, especially the root of the phenomenon of local ballet. However, the current research on the relationship between art intervention and population mobility focuses mostly on a single discipline and lacks attempts to systematically examine them in an integrated theoretical framework. How does art affect the inflow and outflow of different types of population? What is the mode of interaction between foreign artists and local villagers in rural space? How does art intervention reshape the daily life of indigenous people? On this basis, in this paper, a three-dimensional analysis framework for the "space-field-life world" is constructed, and the deep mechanism of art intervention and rural population mobility is deeply examined.

## **2. Space Production: The Reconstruction of Rural Space Under the Intervention of Art**

### **2.1 Space and the Countryside**

French philosopher Lefebvre uses space as a perspective to explain society in the production of space, creating a unique theory of space production, which answers the question about what space is and how space is produced. Space is not only a material carrier of social interaction but also an existence with rich social connotations, which are produced by various ideologies, power relations and social forces. The dialectical relationship of space production is divided into three levels: perception level, cognitive level and experience level. If the countryside is regarded as space, it corresponds to the region, representation and life construction [1] of the countryside. Rural area refers to rural material space, which originates from relatively unique spatial practices. Rural representation refers to the formal representation of the village, such as government policies, planning documents and economic interests, emphasizing how the village is commercialized in the capital framework. Rural life includes personal and sociocultural factors [2] that involve understanding and identifying with rural life.

### **2.2 Rural Space Reconstruction**

#### **2.2.1 Physical Space Reconstruction: From Idle to Activation**

The spatial reconstruction of Hongjiang Village is based on the transformation of idle rural houses. The logic of the artist's adoption of the idle rural house model proposed by the village task force and the village's two committees in 2017 is obvious. The village collective first negotiated with the villagers to collect and store idle farm houses and supporting land, paid the villagers a storage fee of 8–12 yuan per square meter per year, and then used it at the artist's expense. By 2024, there were 45 transactions of idle homesteads in the whole village, with a transaction amount of 6.3578 million yuan, and the land premium rate had reached 23%.

The artist's transformation strictly follows the four principles: the reinforcement of the original structure, the reuse of raw materials, the resurrection of the original process, and the upgrading of the original functions. The contemporary artist Li Xiangming invested 3 million yuan in transforming Tuyu Nanju. He skillfully arranged the abandoned farm tools, old pottery jars, and old wooden boards of the villagers on the mottled old wall, transforming the dilapidated old house into an artistic space for creation, exhibition, and communication. A good echo of this is the Yanxi Academy built by the poet Yanxi, which added a book reading room and a poetry sharing room on the basis of the pattern of a walking horse corner. The transformation method not only retains the material form of traditional architecture but also naturally implants modern art functions, which can be called the third spatialization of material space.

Spatial practice and spatial representation are actually dialectical unity. The artist's transformation of the old house is a specific spatial practice, and the proposal of the Four Principles is a symbolic representation of the practice. They produce a new representation space, which is not only the physical residence and the field of art but also the common historical memory carrier of the community.

## **2.2.2 Symbolic Space Reconstruction: From Hollow Villages to Art Villages**

Before 2016, because young people left work, the old house collapsed, and the culture was depressed; thus, the village was a typical hollow and poor village. After the intervention of art, Hongjiang village quickly transformed into an international art village, and its symbol reconstruction involved various mechanisms of progressive layers. The first is the media narrative. From the local media to the national media, the reports on Hongjiang Village take “art awakens the countryside” and “old house freshmen” as the clear themes, thus naturally and effectively constructing the transformation narrative. The second is art production. The number of paintings, poems and photographic works created by artists with Hongjiang as the theme has reached more than 3,000. Among them, the two pieces of “Hongjiang Old House” and “Buyi Batik Notes” won awards in the national art exhibition, after which Hongjiang was truly brought into the cognitive map of the art circle. The third is event marketing. In 2023, Hongjiang Village hosted the China Libo Hongjiang International Art Festival, inviting domestic and foreign artists, critics and curators to gather in Hongjiang. The brand awareness of Art Village has been fully strengthened.

Since the reconstruction of symbolic space clearly affects the population flow of Hongjiang Village, it naturally demonstrates Hafakri’s view that rural representation is both a reflection of reality and an inevitable reaction to reality. After Hongjiang Village is symbolized as an art village, it attracts potential migrants who identify with this symbol, for example, the creative class, such as artists, designers, and the urban middle class.

## **2.2.3 Reconstruction of Social Space: Space Use, Competition and Negotiation Between New and Old Villagers**

Space is not only a physical container but also a product and medium of social relations. A new social space is formed after the intervention of Hongjiang Village art, in which new and old villagers engage in interest competition [3] on the use of space. There are significant differences between the new and old villagers’ space practices. Artists use transformed studios, exhibition spaces and art squares. All spaces have been artistically transformed and have a clear aesthetic orientation. The aborigines use mainly ancestral halls, old people’s clubs, commissary and newly emerging parking lots, squares and other traditional and emerging spaces. Undoubtedly, the intersection of the two types of spaces is minimal, and their spatial practice modes are isolated from each other.

Space competition occurs naturally in Hongjiang Village. First, there is a dispute over the right to use public space; then, the rules of the procedure of six discussions are properly negotiated, and finally, a temporary compromise plan of exhibition during the day and grain collection in the evening is reached. Therefore, space competition itself is a vivid and clear dynamic manifestation of the reconstruction of social space. Moreover, a phenomenon of spatial isolation was observed by the Taiwanese scholar Huang Jingchao in the study of treasure rocks in Hongjiang Village. The artists are concentrated in the core transformation area, and the aborigines are scattered in the peripheral natural villages. The physical distance between the two is very close, but the intersection of social networks is very small, thus forming a typical spatial pattern of living next to each other but forming a world.

## **3. Field Reconstruction: Social Integration of Artist Immigrants**

### **3.1 Capital Difference, Conversion and Position Competition**

After the intervention of Hongjiang Village art, the original rural field was broken, and a new field gradually formed.

In this process, foreign artists and local villagers enter the field with different levels of capital and occupy different initial positions. Foreign artists carry significant cultural capital and social capital. As a contemporary artist, Li Xiangming’s Tuyu Nanju has become a must-visit place for the art circle to visit Hongjiang. With the identity of a poet, Yanxi organized many poetic recitations, bringing Hongjiang into the vision of the literary circle. These cultural capitals give artists the right to speak in the new rural field, and they define what is good art and what is valuable transformation.

In contrast, because indigenous people mainly own local capital, for example, the possession of land, the mastery of local knowledge and the embedding of community networks, such capital has a very high exchange rate in the traditional rural field, but the exchange rate in the new field changed after the intervention of art. The realization of the new functions of rural folk crafts requires the negotiation of rights between outsiders and locals.

From the perspective of field theory, capital is a dominant weapon through which actors can compete in the field space. The more effective capital in a certain field is, the more it is in the objective dominant relationship between the various positions in the field [4]. Therefore, the process of artists' social integration is essentially the process of transforming their cultural capital into economic capital and social capital. Li Xiangming's artistic reputation attracted a large number of art lovers to visit Hongjiang, which directly promoted the development of local homestays and the catering industry. His transformation of Tuyu Nanju has become a hot spot for tourism, which has a positive spillover effect on cultural capital and makes him truly respected by local villagers.

In addition, local cultural capital is actively and systematically transforming to new field values. Many traditional crafts of the Buyi batik and Tujia brocade have been rediscovered and revalued after the intervention of artists. The batik workshop combines traditional patterns with modern aesthetics naturally, thus developing cultural and creative products such as cloth dolls and notebooks. The annual sales volume has reached 800,000 yuan, which also directly drives the employment of 32 villagers. Traditional knowledge truly becomes a marketable intangible cultural heritage.

Since the two-way capital flow is the economic basis for the interaction between artists and villagers, artists participate in capital exchange with the advantage of cultural capital; thus, capital conversion inevitably results in stratification differences.

## **3.2 Artists' Social Integration: Habitus Adjustment**

Habitus [4] is the viewpoint and experience formed by the actors in the field of practice, which plays a guiding and normative role in the behavior of the actors and is a persistent and transformable intrinsic system. Owing to the differences in position, cognition and environment, the artists and the original villagers must have different habits; thus, conflict is inevitable, which requires the adjustment of habits. In general, the integration process of conflict, negotiation and adaptation presents the following stage characteristics [5]:

### **3.2.1 Admission Period (2017–2019)**

The artist first entered Hongjiang, mainly facing the rural life field. They need to adapt to the material living conditions of the countryside and learn how to deal with the villagers. The degree of integration at this stage is low, and artists are mostly in a state of observation and adaptation.

### **3.2.2 Construction Period (2019–2022)**

Artists began to intervene in the rural cultural field and business field. They gradually developed their position in rural society by opening studios, holding art activities and participating in community affairs. Li Xiangming taught the villagers to draw pictures, Yan Xi discussed life with the villagers, and these interactions gradually accumulated social capital.

### **3.2.3 Fixed Field Period (2022-Present)**

The relationship between artists and villagers tends to be stable, forming a relatively solidified and hierarchical field structure, and there is a phenomenon of multigroup stratification and multifield penetration. The group of artists has both the core layer of long-term residence and active participation in community affairs and the marginal layer of short-term residence and relative alienation. Similarly, both beneficiaries who are directly involved in the art economy and bystanders who are not directly involved. More importantly, the interaction between artists and villagers does not occur in a single field but permeates the life field, cultural field and economic field at the same time, and the degree of penetration of each field clearly varies. Specifically, the economic field has the deepest penetration. The second is the cultural field, which needs to be based on the basic recognition of artistic value between the two sides. The penetration of the life field is the shallowest, and the daily social network is still relatively isolated.

## **4. Life-world Change: Continuity**

### **4.1 Move, Stay, Meet**

Before the artistic transformation, the main nodes of villagers' daily movement were traditional spaces such as farmland, ancestral halls, and commissariats. After the intervention of art, new nodes such as art squares, studios, and exhibition spaces smoothly entered the mobile network. Some of the villagers who were engaged in workshop work or who were directly involved in artistic activities moved to the art district. However, in contrast, the vast majority of elderly villagers still follow the original movement habits; thus, their actual intersection with the new space is still limited. More fundamental changes occur in the structure of rural space: rural space has truly changed from a dual structure to a pluralistic structure. In addition to traditional public spaces such as family private spaces and village squares, semipublic spaces such as art workshops and cultural and creative spaces have been actively introduced, and the two are both work fields. It also provides a place for social interaction, so a new mode of residence naturally arises. As a result, the villagers' encounter network has expanded from a circle of acquaintances to groups of artists, foreign tourists, and research teams. In the changing world, villagers often meet with outsiders as service providers rather than as equal social subjects. Therefore, the new encounters formed must have clear asymmetry.

It is undeniable that changes in the lifeworld promote the transformation of identity. In 2020, the original poems of 11 Hongjiang little poets were published in a magazine titled *Modern Youth*, and the paintings of Hongjiang children were awarded seats in relevant United Nations exhibitions. The villagers of the art village became a new identity label, forming a hybrid and multidimensional identity structure.

### **4.2 Local Ballet**

David Simon suggested that the movement of people's bodies in time and space is the reason for the formation of local meaning and that local meaning is produced through the combination of body ballet and space-time routines. Moreover, the combination of body ballet and space-time routine produces local ballet [6]; in other words, people's continuous activities in time and space and individual body ballet are formed by repeating them with certain places many times. Simply put, local ballet emphasizes how the convergence of individual body ballet in time and space produces a sense of place and determines the meaning of place.

In traditional rural life, villagers' physical practices and rural space have a natural and appropriate rhythm; thus, long-term repeated habitual body movements inevitably accumulate as the basis of the sense of place. After the intervention of art, a new body rhythm is formed. The rhythm of artists' creation, tourists' visits, and the research team's schedule coexist with local rhythms. In some space-time nodes, the two form a new convergence, but in the daily state, they are mostly in a parallel isolation state. Villagers who are deeply involved in the art economy are learning new body ballet. However, for most elderly villagers, the traditional local ballet is still dominant, but there is no doubt that new rhythms have been quietly born in it.

### **4.3 Continuity of Life**

The most distinctive and worthy of analysis of the Hongjiang case is its well-designed institutional arrangements. First, the reform of the separation of the three rights of the homestead protected the basic rights and interests of the villagers well. It is clear that the ownership belongs to the collective, the qualification right belongs to the villagers, and the right to use can be transferred. Therefore, villagers do not lose the qualifications of the homestead after they obtain rental income, thus avoiding the risk of losing the land and the house, which truly provides a reliable guarantee for the continuity of the villagers' lives. Second, the six deliberation rules of procedure construct a governance pattern of multiple participation and mutual consultation. Artists, as new villagers, directly participate in community affairs. Major changes have been democratically negotiated, so the suddenness and destructiveness of external shocks have been greatly reduced. Third, the design of various forms of intangible cultural heritage workshops and research bases is a green channel through which villagers can participate. Thirty-two people are employed in workshops, and 15 people are research tutors. The villagers have always been in the main position in the change, not simply being transformed by external forces.

The continuity of life world [7] focuses on maintaining the subjectivity of villagers and empowering people as the center. Its fundamental goal is to activate local cultural genes, enhance endogenous motivation,

promote the construction of rural cultural communities [8], and ultimately achieve sustainable development. The so-called art-living symbiosis is not that art is above the community but that art participates in and serves the countryside. Hongjiang's system design is the exploration of the symbiotic path.

## 5. Conclusion

In other words, the effect of art mediation on population mobility is analysed by the coupling of three mechanisms: spatial openness determines whether material space can be shared by multiple groups, field autonomy determines whether local capital can maintain and increase its value in the new field, and the continuity of life determines whether aborigines can maintain their dominant position in the change. Therefore, when the three are well coupled, artistic intervention is conducive not only to attracting external population inflows but also to avoiding the crowding out effect on aboriginal people. The institutional innovation in the Hongjiang case is to systematically and prudently promote art-driven rural transformation by enhancing the openness of space, maintaining the autonomy of the field, and ensuring the continuity of the life world.

This paper makes a clear theoretical contribution to the existing research on art rural construction. First, it organically combines space production theory, field theory and the life-world perspective, which overcomes the limitations of the single-discipline perspective and provides a powerful analytical tool for art-driven rural transformation. Second, it clarifies the triple mechanism of art's mediation of population mobility and its coupling conditions; that is, the difference in the social consequences of art intervention essentially stems from the different combinations of elements such as spatial openness, field autonomy, and life-world continuity. Third, it directly responds to the classic controversy of whether the construction of art villages inevitably leads to gentrification. The gentrification is by no means the inevitable result of the intervention of art but the product of the absence of system. Fourth, this paper highlights the specific application path of interdisciplinary theory integration in rural research and presents a replicable and transferable analysis paradigm, which has demonstrated significance for future related research. Art-driven rural development needs the joint efforts of value embodiment, subject coordination and the organizational system. Only when art is truly integrated into the countryside can artists truly become new villagers, and the system truly guarantees diversified participation and can art truly become an effective catalyst to activate the endogenous power of the countryside. In this paper, an in-depth analysis of a single case is performed as the starting point; thus, the universality of the conclusions should be verified by a multicase comparison. The success of the Hongjiang model is based on the local institutional environment, resource endowments, and actor characteristics. Can it be replicated in other situations? Art-driven rural transformation is a process of dynamic evolution. Will short-term and long-term effects be disturbed by other factors? In the future, it is necessary to carry out a horizontal comparative study of different intervention models on rural construction.

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