


## Article

# Analysis on the Satisfaction of Public Cultural Service by Township Residents: A Qualitative Perspective

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**Abstract:** The intense development of urban–rural integration has brought about a constant increase in people’s demand for public culture. In particular, as the equalization of public cultural services is promoted, narrowing the gap between the services offered in urban and rural settings has gradually become the dominant orientation to promote urban–rural integration and enhance the rights and interests of the people. Starting from the principles of the new public service, this research conducted field interviews in Xuling Town, Anhui Province, China. The Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) was used to analyze the interview content, and five inferences about the construction of township public culture were drawn: (1) cultural facilities have a significant impact on township public cultural construction; (2) the role of cultural talents is essential but lack of talent is normal in townships; (3) carrying out cultural activities is the top priority of township public cultural construction; (4) cultural management is an indispensable auxiliary link but the management level is insufficient; (5) and the cultural activities of traditional festivals are particularly important. Moreover, on the basis of these five inferences, the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) method was used to analyze the survey data and verify the underlying problems around public cultural service effectiveness as well as resource allocation in township areas. Finally, countermeasures are proposed on how to narrow the gap, which are of reference significance for improving the quality of township public cultural services in the context of urban–rural integration and meeting the cultural needs of residents.

**Keywords:** public cultural service; township; urban–rural integration; urban–rural gap



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## 1. Introduction

Since 1978, China’s reform and opening up, its domestic market economy has flourished, and economic growth has prompted the rapid expansion of urbanization. As of 2022, the urbanization rate of China’s permanent population had reached 65.22%, showing an increase of 0.5% over the previous year. In contrast to the upward trend of the urban resident population, the rural population has decreased by 7.31 million [1]. Rapid urbanization has accelerated the flow of population, capital, technology, and other resources to cities [2,3], accompanied by population urbanization, spatial urbanization, and other characteristics. In China, the township is the basic administrative and economic unit, including town, countryside, and rural areas. Although township areas offer a relatively broad space for development, the unbalanced development model of urban bias has historically dominated [4]; hence, the urban–rural dual system has become a historic issue in China’s township construction. Due to the long-term impact of this system, inequality between urban and rural areas still exists [5–7]. In order to solve the imbalance between urban and rural development and other problems, the Chinese government has been implementing the provisions of the “No. 1 Central Document” since 1982 to plan the development of townships at national level. In addition to industrial development, environmental governance, and other matters, the significance of public service equalization and cultural

construction has been increasingly emphasized in policies in recent years as a means to meet the challenges raised by social changes to the governance of rural areas [8].

Public cultural services, an essential measure to ensure the cultural well-being of people's daily lives, are public cultural facilities, cultural products, cultural activities, and related services led by the government and participated in by private citizens for the purpose of meeting the basic cultural needs of citizens [9,10], and belong to the category of public services. As an administrative institution, the government should, when formulating public cultural policies, not only weigh cultural and economic values [11], but also provide public cultural services for the entire population and ensure they are evenly distributed [12]. The level of public cultural services has become a vital index for judging urban construction; however, it is still largely ignored in townships [13].

With the changes in social structure caused by rapid urbanization, township culture has been affected by rights and capital from the outside world. The influence of subjective social status and perceived inequality [14,15] has triggered an identity crisis among farmers, and rapid economic development has increased and accelerated the cultural needs of residents. However, due to differences in income, age, gender, available space, and other factors, participation in cultural activities is socially stratified [16]. To be specific, vulnerable people, such as those on low incomes, are still on the edge of public cultural service objects [17], which is an extremely unfavorable situation for some relatively backward townships [18]. In the process of urban–rural integration, township governments should pay attention to the construction of public culture in order to ensure that public cultural services are diverse and equally available to all. Nevertheless, few studies focus on the development of public cultural services in rural areas in the context of urban and rural change. However, the right of township residents to access public services is eroded by other external factors, and large population loss in township areas leads to less access to public services and resources [19]. It is essential to know whether township residents adapt to and are satisfied with the current public cultural services to promote the equal rights of residents.

Based on the above discussion and taking Xuling Town, Anhui Province, China as an example, our study aims to answer two points: (1) the deep perceptions of township residents about the current situation of public cultural services in the specific context of urban–rural integration; (2) the specific directions needed to enhance the satisfaction of township residents with public cultural rights and interests.

Section 2 reviews the related literature, and Section 3 describes the materials and methods used in this study. In Section 4, ZMET is used to analyze the public cultural construction of Xuling Town. The fsQCA method is applied to verify the research results in Section 5. Sections 6 and 7 present a discussion and conclusion, respectively. Finally, the limitations of the present study and directions for future research are expounded in Section 8.

## 2. Literature Review

In the past few decades, a series of major reforms has been launched in the public sectors of various countries, collectively referred to as “new public management” (NPM) [20]. In this context, the new public service (NPS) proposed by Denhardt et al. advocates that the government should play a leading role in public management rather than have direct control of it [21,22]. In other words, the government should leave aside its former role of manager and become a coordinator, actively assume social responsibilities, solve problems for citizens or organizations, and meet the individual needs of residents [23,24]. At the same time, the public nature of the government should be highlighted in the running of public services to safeguard the public interest rather than satisfy the interests of a small number of people [25].

NPS provides useful theoretical inspiration for public service practice and underlines that the main goal of public managers is to create public value and to focus on the efficiency of resource utilization in the pursuit of value [26,27]. Although there is cur-

rently no clear definition of public value in academia, the degree of public satisfaction is undoubtedly an important indicator for its assessment [28–31]. It is worth noting, however, that “the public” is a complex and diverse group. Public services cannot be simply defined as meeting the needs of the public but must be adjusted according to different circumstances [32,33]. In the urban environment, government departments could use internet technology, information disclosure, and other tools to improve public value and citizens’ political participation [34–37], thus easily shaping and enhancing its own credibility and creating an image of itself as service-oriented [38].

In recent years, the concept of NPS has gradually penetrated township research. In the context of China’s vigorous rural revitalization process, the value of developing public cultural services has been explored in detail. Valuable aspects of NPS include the dissemination of local culture, broadening sources of income, strengthening community unity, and meeting the needs of spiritual civilization [39–41]. In the process of China’s modernization, spiritual civilization emphasizes that spiritual well-being should not be neglected in the pursuit of economic prosperity. Nevertheless, subject to economic, environmental, and other conditions, urban and rural residents perceive the operational efficiency of public services differently, as principally reflected in perceptions of basic and auxiliary services [42]. By promoting the equalization of public services, the cognitive gap caused by urban–rural differences can be bridged effectively, and the equalization of regional income and consumption can be promoted [43,44]. It should be pointed out that to improve the efficiency of public services in rural areas, it is necessary not only to ensure the rational use of basic resources such as public policies, but also to implement a modern rural governance model with the participation of multiple entities [45,46].

According to a review of the literature, the utility and significance of public services vary under different circumstances. As a result, greater focus is needed on the current cognition of public cultural services by township residents within the context of the integration of urban and rural areas, as well the influencing factors implied in the formation of that cognition, so as to determine the status quo and breakthrough direction of public cultural services in township areas.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Study Area

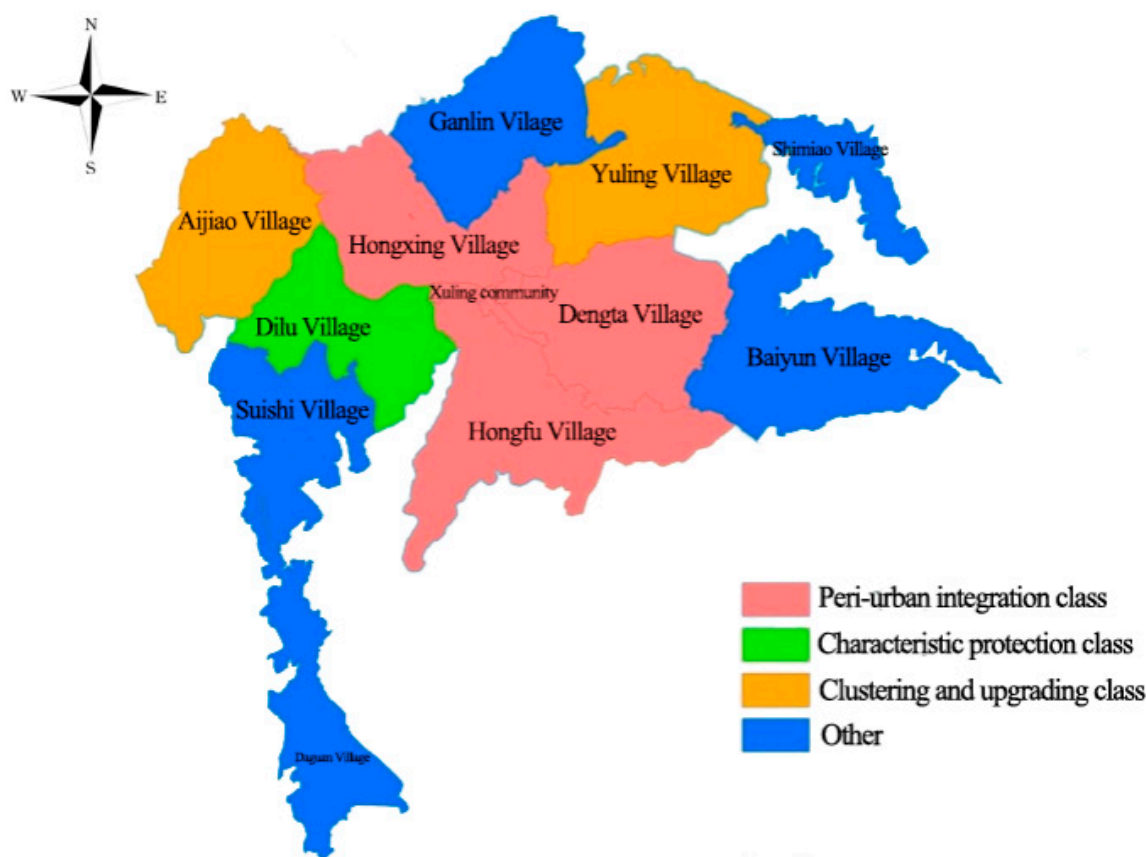
Xuling Town is a small town in the eastern part of Susong County, Anhui Province, about 25 km from the county seat. Eleven administrative villages, with about 400 village groups, fall under its jurisdiction. In the early period of reform and opening up, residents had been settled in the countryside for generations and established a profound foundation of agricultural culture. Under rapid urbanization, and in the context of the country’s vigorous rural revitalization, this township has actively promoted the construction of public culture. Cultural squares and cultural walls have been created in the administrative villages under its jurisdiction (cultural squares are culturally rich venues that provide public spaces for public recreation and cultural activities, and cultural walls are decorative walls that showcase local culture). Some cultural facilities have been created from scratch. To a certain extent, the construction trajectory of its public services is consistent with the development of most townships in China. Figure 1 shows the map of village classification layout plan of Xuling Town.

#### 3.2. Methods

This research used the ZMET method to explore the state of public cultural service construction in Xuling and was validated using fsQCA.

ZMET is a qualitative research method proposed by Zaltman [47]. Initially, the ZMET research method was used in the field of tourism, after which it was progressively extended to psychology, communication, marketing, and other fields [48–50]. ZMET aims to learn about a respondent’s unconscious thinking through interview-style dialogue [51], thus revealing their deep cognition and grasping their real thoughts. ZMET has no strict

requirements for the number of interview subjects; rather, it principally focuses on the depth of the interview. Thus, this method is applicable to early-stage qualitative research of small and medium-sized samples. Freeing itself of the shackles of traditional inquiry-style interviews, ZMET adopts the form of a combination of pictures and interviews. By laddering probing theory to ask questions, it enables the respondent's hidden views to be explored. Furthermore, ZMET's complete interview process (storytelling, missing picture descriptions, the most representative pictures, opposite pictures, summary images, consensus maps, etc.) enables emotional, cognitive, and other psychological structures to be explained. In contrast, traditional qualitative interview methods, being in some respects superficial, are prone to ignore the potential views of the respondent [52]. In this study, we use ZMET to find changes in residents' perceptions of urban–rural integration and obtain their potential views on the public cultural services available to township residents.



**Figure 1.** Map of village classification layout plan of Xuling Town, source: “<https://www.susong.gov.cn/public/2000004041/2025095521.html> (accessed on 19 January 2023)”.

FsQCA is a type of comparison method derived from qualitative comparative analysis. Instead of focusing on a single variable, fsQCA aims to study multiple factors affecting a certain result and is committed to generalizing general principles from cases. Its dual functions of data analysis and verification theory enable highly complex backgrounds and theories to be captured [53,54]. It is not necessary to collect research data from a large sample in this method. However, there is a high requirement for sample quality [55]. In this study, due to a complex multi-level relationship between culture and national well-being [56], fsQCA can be used to clarify the association between the combination of each public cultural service dimension and the satisfaction of township residents. It is adopted to verify whether the perception of public cultural services by township residents is consistent with the extracted content.

## 4. ZMET Process

### 4.1. Involvement Analysis

In order to ensure the credibility and validity of the research, the personal involvement scale (RPII) proposed by Zaichkowsky was mainly used for measurement [57]. In this study, RPII was partially adjusted, and 10 questions on the theme of township public cultural construction were set in the form of a seven-point scale. Self-relevance and expectation were covered by the design, as shown in Appendix A, Table A1.

Respondents scored all questions based on their feelings. The higher the score, the higher the degree of involvement; thus, 10 to 27 points was classified as low involvement, 28 to 45 as medium involvement, and 46 to 70 as high involvement. As part of the survey a total of 20 questionnaires was distributed, and 11 high-involvement questionnaires were ultimately obtained.

### 4.2. Interview Procedure

First, the recruited respondents were pre-interviewed and told about the relevant procedures of metaphor extraction technology, ensuring they had a preliminary understanding of the research. For follow-up, after the pre-interview was over, the respondents were asked to provide no more than six pictures for later interview within three to five days and to be able to tell stories related to the township's public cultural constructions through the chosen pictures.

In this study, ZMET focused on exchanges around fixed topics. However, after repeated interviews on a fixed topic, the resulting structure was repeated many times or no new concepts were generated. When the respondent no longer proposed a new concept, the interview was approaching saturation and could be ended. Ultimately, 11 people were interviewed. From the perspective of involvement, the scores of these 11 respondents' involvement were relatively high and thus sufficient to be a valid sample for the research. In concept extraction, some concepts with the same meaning were merged. For instance, "migrant moneymakers" and "migrant workers" were collectively referred to as "migrant workers". In addition, some content and pictures in the question were streamlined. Some of the interview results are related below.

#### 4.2.1. Storytelling

Respondents told stories related to the pictures they provided. Then, the researchers interviewed the respondents to uncover the information implied in the story. For example:

*"After dinner, I usually go to the cultural square for a walk, exercise, and to move my muscles and bones, which is good for my health. Besides, most middle-aged people have gone away to work, and only the two of us have stayed behind, deserted and lonely. The square is lively at night. Like this photo (Figure 2). Going out to chat with friends lifts us when we are depressed. Actually, it is not only us, but the children nearby are also passionate about playing basketball and other outdoor sports in the cultural square."*

(Respondent A)

Concept extraction: after dinner, cultural square, exercise, health, young people, gone out to work, elderly, deserted, suitable for all ages, lively, cultural activities.

*"We used to live on these acres of fields before. In the early morning, we did farm work together, and in the evening, we got together to relax. Although the material conditions were relatively poor, the family was reunited. Unfortunately, nowadays, even during traditional festivals, few relatives visit each other. Even at traditional festivals such as the Mid-Autumn Festival, not everyone visits, resulting in isolation and loneliness."*

(Respondent B)

Concept extraction: before, farm work, after dinner, relaxation, poverty alleviation, reunion, lively, festivals, visits, festival customs, festival atmosphere.





**Figure 2.** The lively cultural square.

*“This is a photo of a group of elderly people was playing cards in the Chess and Card Room (Figure 3). Sometimes they argued over the game, and sometimes they quarreled because their luck was too good or too bad. When playing cards, it was easy for the elderly to find satisfaction, and winning a few dollars could give you a sense of happiness for a whole day. The reason for choosing this picture was that, as far as I am concerned, the hottest and most popular entertainment activity in the village should be playing cards.”*  
(Respondent C)

Concept extraction: elderly, playing cards, chess and card room, lively, popular, a capacity crowd.



**Figure 3.** The chess and card room.

#### 4.2.2. Missing Pictures

The content of the missing picture could be a specific real scene, a virtual background on the internet, or other works of art. This step ensured that the description attached to the missing image extended the respondents’ thought and excluded the possibility of missing constructs due to the respondent’s inability to obtain access to a specific image [58]. For example:

*“One morning, a grandfather accompanied the children for a walk on the street. While walking, he taught the children to recite ancient poems and explained the content of the poems to the children. The children studied quite seriously and took the initiative to ask Grandpa for advice from time to time. All of this has drawn a landscape of the countryside.”*  
(Respondent C)

Concept extraction: early morning, walking, students studying, lack of culture, talents lacunae, restricted cultural activities.

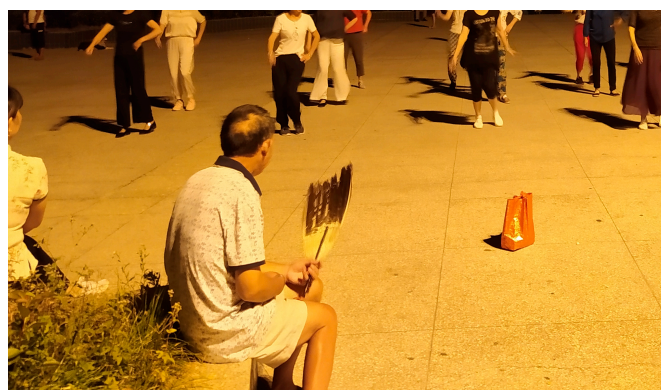
The reason one respondent chose this picture was that this scene symbolized the growth of a new generation in the countryside and that learning was something we should

respect. The catch was that his grandfather's teaching ability was limited: some pronunciation was not standard, and some words were interpreted incorrectly. If there were more highly educated people, it would be easier for the village to organize cultural activities.

#### 4.2.3. Representative Pictures

Respondents were asked to select the picture that could best represent the township public cultural construction and explain their choice. Relevant metaphors were then extracted.

Among a variety of pictures, one picture of the square dancing event was the most representative, as it represented a kind of spiritual style of the countryside to some extent. The activity level of the countryside, the situation of the permanent population, and the well-being of the residents could be roughly observed in the activities of the square. As a growing force, square activities still had great potential for progress, such as determining the norms for the use of cultural squares and arranging cultural and recreational activities during traditional festivals. As shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Square dance on the cultural square.

Concept extraction: cultural square, crowd mass, healthy, enriching activities.

#### 4.2.4. Opposite Pictures

The respondents described pictures that were opposite to the reality of the township, thus further explaining the real public cultural construction of the township.

*In the town, there were many high-rise buildings, and public facilities such as exercise equipment and sports fields were distributed on the main streets, making it extremely easy for residents to travel. Not far from the residential area, there were high-level cultural facilities, such as parks, village museums, and universities for the elderly, which could be used by various other groups as well. The young population gradually returned to the towns and villages to start businesses and find employment in the countryside. In the countryside, there were fewer middle-aged and elderly men playing cards. In their spare time, they had the opportunity to go to universities for basic education and go to art museums to enjoy art exhibitions. In short, banishing the backwardness of the past, township development has achieved a qualitative leap.*

#### 4.2.5. Summary Images

Through in-depth analysis of the pictures provided by the interviewees, a picture that can summarize the content of the interview was formed, and a summary was compiled to explain it. The summary image could be one particular picture or a combination of multiple pictures.

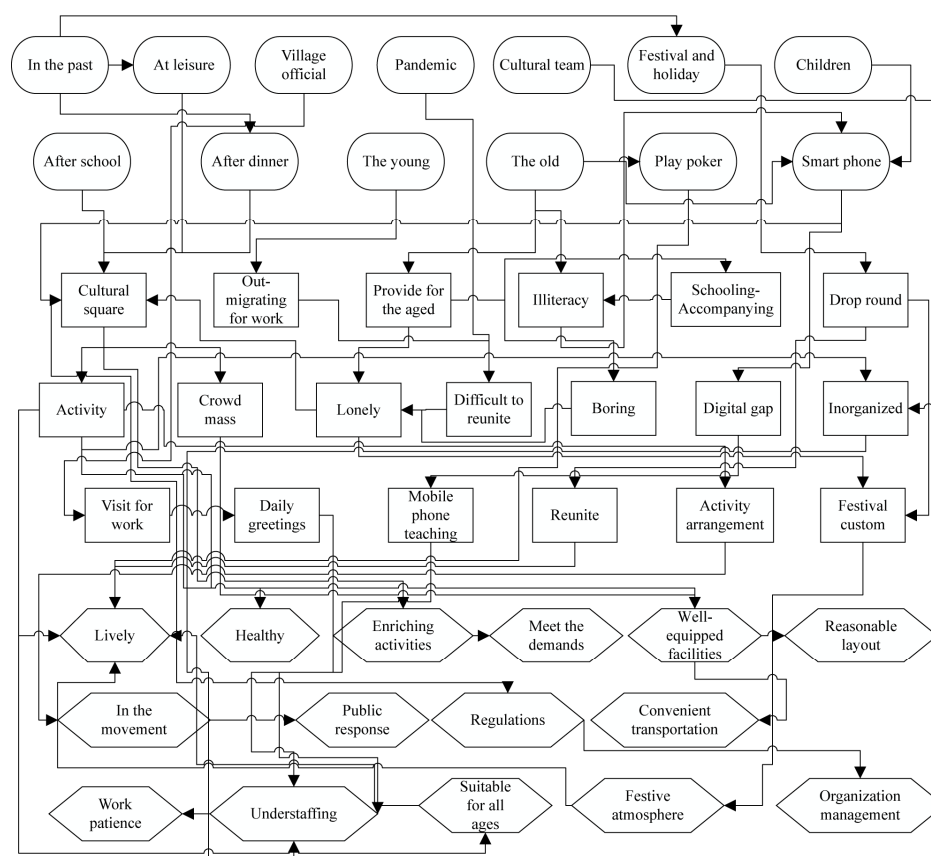
*In the evening, the masses took the initiative to come to the cultural square in the center of the township to exercise. Children were playing games in a special children's playground, and middle-aged and elderly people were dancing to the music. The bustling crowd*

*brought business opportunities, and some vendors set up stalls on the side of the road. Probably, this is the liveliest place in the township, but there are few young people.*

#### 4.2.6. Consensus Map

In order to study the views implied in the interview materials more effectively, the materials generated by each interviewee were processed and refined normally to develop key concepts and establish connections; subsequently, consensus was reached. As a combination of all interview information on each interviewee, the consensus map was considered to be a crucial basis for drawing interview inferences. Moreover, the researchers visited the scenes highlighted by some respondents (for example, cultural squares in the township) to experience the true feeling of a public cultural activity. After repeated discussions, 47 constructs were ultimately drawn; namely, 13 initial concepts, 19 associated concepts, and 15 final concepts.

The consensus map is shown in Figure 5. Oval frames represent initial concepts, rectangular frames represent associated concepts, and hexagonal frames represent final concepts.



**Figure 5.** Consensus map.

#### 4.3. Metaphor Extraction Inference

The classification of these cultural concepts and routes indicates that they were highly similar to the content of cultural facility construction, cultural talent status, cultural activities, cultural management work, and traditional festivals, respectively. After in-depth research on these routes, the following inferences were drawn.

##### 4.3.1. Cultural Facilities

First, the construction of cultural facilities has a huge impact on a township's public cultural construction. During the interview process, it was observed that well-established public cultural facilities were an incentive for Xuling residents to participate in public cultural activities. The facilities in the cultural square were critical to promotion of public



participation in cultural activities, as residents would take the initiative to participate in fitness exercises and leisure and other activities there.

Secondly, the diversity of cultural facilities was the principal element in attracting Xuling residents. In the past, most traditional cultural squares merely built simple fitness facilities such as horizontal bars to complete tasks of the superior government departments, which did not interest or meet the diverse needs of residents. After the renovation, a variety of sports equipment, such as basketball courts and table tennis tables, was added, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of residents using them. Therefore, cultural squares with more comprehensive functions and facilities are more likely to be favored by the masses.

Thirdly, the layout of cultural facilities is another vital factor for consideration. The layout of cultural facilities in some cultural squares has been irrational. For instance, the basketball court was built close to the table tennis table and other facilities; thus, players of the various sports interfered with each other's games. In contrast, today's relatively large cultural square has a more reasonable layout due to its large scale.

Furthermore, the location of cultural facilities is crucial, and convenient transportation is a key point to consider. In particular, a village-level cultural square is greatly affected by its geographical location, and it is more practical to build a cultural square in the center of a village. In Village D, one of the villages under investigation, the location of the cultural square was not properly thought through; thus, it was built in a remote part of the village center and, as it was inconvenient for the villagers to travel back and forth, the square is currently largely abandoned.

#### 4.3.2. Cultural Talents

Although talent plays an important role in the construction of public culture in townships, a talent shortage has become the norm there [59]. In Xuling Town, only government agencies at or above township level have complete departmental institutions. At the village level, cultural work is generally performed part-time by other staff members who are not in the professional cultural cadre. Besides, both township government and village committees mainly focused their work on economic construction, which has led to limited investment in culture.

Moreover, in the context of the fact that most young people in towns and villages go away to work, the elderly population in villages and towns is large, and spiritual life is relatively scarce; thus, if public culture is not constructed, the lives of local villagers are seriously negatively affected. As mentioned in the previous section, the phenomenon of the elderly becoming addicted to gathering together to gamble is a manifestation of the spiritual emptiness of the left-behind elderly.

#### 4.3.3. Cultural Activities

Carrying out cultural activities is the key point of public cultural construction in townships. In the survey, residents generally welcomed cultural activities. Even if cultural activities were not organized in the town or village, villagers would spontaneously organize or participate in them. Most of the villagers are left-behind elderly people; thus, those in the cultural square are peers, with a small intergenerational gap. In terms of geographical location, Village A is close to the town; therefore, most of its people go to the town to participate in various activities during their free time.

Ensuring a diversity of cultural activities is a principal element in making them popular. In the past, the disadvantage of cultural activities carried out in the township was their excessive monotony. A single opera toured various villages, and the repeated performances caused aesthetic fatigue among the masses. Generally speaking, in terms of the diversity of cultural activities, the cultural square of the town is superior to that of the village, as the town's cultural square has more extensive facilities, richer cultural and sports activities, and a larger audience.

#### 4.3.4. Cultural Management

According to the extracted content, the management level of the township needs to be improved. First of all, cultural management is principally reflected in the rules and regulations related to cultural construction. According to exchanges with villagers, in terms of public cultural construction, the guiding role of public cultural services policy in Xuling Town and the villages under its jurisdiction has not been effectively exercised. Besides, some problems have arisen due to the construction of public facilities funded by the government and the weak public awareness of some villagers. For example, the cultural facilities of Village B have been damaged. Without sound rules and regulations and supervision plans, it is difficult to manage these types of problems.

In addition, the residents argued that the timing of cultural activities in the village is unreasonable, and most of the activities are provisional. On the other hand, related institutional staff felt that the residents were not sufficiently positive about cooperating; for example, the residents did not attend cultural activities on time. This kind of misalignment in management could provoke arguments if not resolved properly.

#### 4.3.5. Traditional Festivals

As a rule, township areas have fixed festival customs, which are expressed in specific cultural activities. The local traditional festival atmosphere is extremely strong. The festivals not only carry cultural memory, but also have a special communicative function. In terms of rural mass relations, during major traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, relatively few village-level conflicts had to be mediated by the village cadre committee as festival customs have tended to smooth relations, and individuals and groups put aside their differences at these times.

In a manner of speaking, festive cultural activities used to have special significance in the countryside. However, as times have changed, some festival cultural activities have gradually died out. Some villagers said that in the past, Zongzi (traditional Chinese Dragon Boat Festival food) and other festival items needed to be prepared for the Dragon Boat Festival on the 5th of the fifth lunar month. However, in the process of urbanization, some festival activities have become superficial, lacking the traditional sense of ceremony, resulting in a dull atmosphere. This phenomenon is mainly due to the fact that young adults go away to work as migrant workers, which has caused a serious loss of population in townships, an imbalanced population structure, and interruption in some festival customs in rural areas.

### 5. Results of FsQCA

Based on the inferences presented in regard to the five aspects outlined above, this study expanded the sample scope, produced questionnaires, and quantified various indicators through a seven-point scale. The scale was composed of six parts, the first five of which were causal variables. The first part focused on investigating the construction of cultural facilities and comprised four questions based on the rationality of the layout of such facilities and the convenience of transportation as specific indicators. The second part addressed the situation of cultural staff through a total of four issues. The third part highlighted public cultural activities through a total of four issues, and the fourth part focused on the situation of cultural management mechanisms through a further four issues. In the fifth part, four questions addressed traditional rural festivals and cultural activities, and the sixth part was the result variable. Taking the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consistency of residents as specific indicators, villagers' satisfaction with public cultural construction was measured, as shown in Appendix B, Table A2.

In Xuling Town, a total of 300 questionnaires was distributed, and 247 valid questionnaires were recovered. The Cronbach coefficient value of the questionnaire was 0.964, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value was 0.952, which ensured excellent reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

### 5.1. Data Processing

In the data calibration stage, data were directly calibrated as follows: the data samples were submitted to experts in the field, and the Delphi method was used for scoring. After repeated research, the calibration threshold value was determined as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Threshold calibration.

Variable	Calibration Points		
	Full Affiliation Point	Crossover Point	Full Non-Affiliation Point
Cultural facilities (F1)	5.75	4	1.75
Cultural talents (F2)	4.75	3.75	1.75
Cultural activities (F3)	5.75	4	1.75
Management mechanisms (F4)	5.25	3.75	1.75
Traditional festivals (F5)	6	4	1.75
Satisfaction levels (F6)	6	4	1.33

In Table 1, F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, and F6 refer respectively to cultural facilities, cultural talents, cultural activities, management mechanisms, traditional festivals, and satisfaction indicators.

### 5.2. Necessity Condition Analysis

A necessity condition analysis refers to the degree of membership of the result variable as a subset of the condition variable. In fsQCA, consistency criteria are used to measure the degree to which result variables are a subset of condition variables. If the consistency is higher than 0.9, the condition variable is considered to be a necessary condition for the occurrence of the result variable [60]. The necessity analysis results are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Analysis of necessary conditions.

Variable	Variable Definitions	Consistency	Satisfaction Levels		Coverage
			High (F6)	Low (~F6)	
F1	Cultural facilities in good condition	0.901330	0.835880	0.458872	0.427346
~F1	Cultural facilities in poor condition	0.382505	0.413110	0.823773	0.893436
F2	Sufficient cultural talents	0.729876	0.720119	0.510424	0.505724
~F2	Lack of cultural talents	0.499026	0.503727	0.717518	0.727332
F3	Good condition of cultural activities	0.907091	0.900154	0.399079	0.397698
~F3	Poor condition of cultural activities	0.393054	0.394430	0.899807	0.906766
F4	Mature management mechanism	0.734745	0.742700	0.525695	0.533629
~F4	Poor management mechanism	0.538624	0.530700	0.746526	0.738647
F5	Good condition of festival culture	0.938494	0.938190	0.370233	0.371675
~F5	Poor condition of festival culture	0.371470	0.370029	0.938430	0.938732

Note: ~, absence.

As can be clearly observed from Table 2, in the high satisfaction of cultural construction the consistency of F1, F3, and F5 was higher than 0.9. In other words, these three variables had a strong explanatory power for high satisfaction with township public cultural construction. When satisfaction with cultural construction was low, the consistency of ~F3 and ~F5 was higher than 0.9, which indicated that these two variables had a strong explanatory power for low satisfaction with township public cultural construction. Configuration research was also required on the high-satisfaction and low-satisfaction paths generated by multivariate combinations.

### 5.3. Analysis of Sufficiency for High Satisfaction

The purpose of configuration research is to analyze the adequacy of the configuration of multivariate composition to produce high-satisfaction results; that is, to study the degree of membership of the configuration of multivariate composition as a subset of the result variables. When configuring the operation, the case frequency and consistency threshold should be set. When studying small samples, the frequency of cases is set to 1 and the consistency threshold to 0.75 [61]. Taking into account the large number in the sample in this case, the frequency of cases had to be greater than 1 and was finally set at 3. Referring to previous research by scholars, the consistency threshold was set to 0.8 [62]. Four multivariate configurations that produced high satisfaction, results were obtained. The consistency indicators of configurations H1, H2, H3, and H4 were 0.839718, 0.802481, 0.942149, and 0.962808, respectively. High consistency means strong adequacy. Furthermore, the coverage of the high-satisfaction configuration solution was 0.937601, which indicated that the three configurations could explain 94% of the cases and could effectively explain the reasons for the high satisfaction. The item-by-item analysis of the three configurations is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** High-satisfaction configuration path.

Variable	High-Satisfaction Configuration			
	H1	H2	H3	H4
Cultural facility (F1)	●			●
Cultural talent (F2)	●	●	●	
Cultural activity (F3)				●
Management mechanism (F4)		●		
Traditional Festival (F5)			●	●
Raw coverage	0.67591	0.66658	0.69376	0.84022
Unique coverage	0.00446	0.00624	0.03172	0.20975
Consistency	0.83971	0.80248	0.94214	0.96280
Solution coverage			0.93760	
Solution consistency			0.81782	

Note: ● indicates the presence of core conditions. ● indicates the presence of peripheral conditions. Spaces in the table indicate the variable does not affect the final result.

In order to explore the pathways to achieve residents' high satisfaction with the public cultural services, the analysis results of the combination of examined factors generated the following four configurations.

Configuration H1: F1\*F2 ("\*" is the connector of adjacent variables, referring to "and"), indicating that regardless of whether cultural activities, management mechanisms, and traditional festivals are in a healthy state, as long as cultural facilities are in place and cultural talents are sufficient, it is possible to generate high satisfaction with the results of public cultural construction among residents. Cultural facilities are the basic tools for the masses to participate in public cultural activities. Only when cultural facilities are sufficient to meet the daily needs of residents can high satisfaction be generated. Moreover, when better cultural talents and cultural construction are available to the township, the well-being of residents will naturally improve, resulting in an increase of satisfaction with cultural construction.

Configuration H2: F2\*F4, implying that regardless of the state of cultural facilities, cultural activities, and traditional festivals, as long as cultural talents and management mechanisms are in place, high satisfaction with public cultural construction can be produced. Having adequate talents and proper management will benefit the construction of public culture at the grassroots level and ensure greater convenience. In other words, adequate talent could contribute to the improvement of the local public cultural service system.

Configuration H3: F2\*F5, showing that even without cultural facilities, cultural activities, and management mechanisms, a sufficient number of cultural talents and a properly functioning festival culture can generate high public satisfaction with cultural construction. The state of festival culture itself has a strong explanatory power in achieving high satisfaction. As long as sufficient talents are available, high satisfaction can be achieved easily. In addition, in this configuration, cultural talents and festival cultural status are the core elements, showing that these are the two key factors to achieve high satisfaction of public cultural services. At the practical level, the residents often attach great importance to traditional festivals. In areas where traditional festival activities are thriving, residents are more likely to have a sense of well-being.

Configuration H4: F1\*F3\*F5, implying that regardless of the existence of cultural talents and management mechanisms, high satisfaction can still be achieved when the cultural facilities, activities, and festivals are well supported. F1, F3, and F5 were all core elements and necessary conditions for the production of results. Configuration H4 was the critical path to explain high satisfaction. Under the premise of good cultural facilities, if the space for entertainment activities is sufficient and the cultural activities and festivals are excellent, the public's evaluation of public cultural construction is naturally higher. Compared with other configurations, this configuration had the highest original coverage, and thus, the largest number of samples was covered. That is, most of the samples achieved high-satisfaction results through this configuration.

Village B, as an example, is far from the town center and less exposed to its cultural radiation. Moreover, there is no professional cultural department or talent staffing in village-level organizations. Most cultural construction tasks are completed by temporarily mobilizing talents from other positions. However, the villagers gave a high evaluation of public cultural construction. In terms of cultural facilities, the village-level cultural square in the village is well equipped, and the village committee has specially hired management personnel. In addition, the frequency of self-organized activities among villagers is higher than in other villages. From the perspective of festivals, the village attaches importance to traditional festivals, and some traditional festival customs have been preserved completely.

#### 5.4. Analysis of Sufficiency for Low Satisfaction

In order to better understand the reasons for high satisfaction with public cultural construction, a configuration analysis of low satisfaction with such construction was carried out. After the fsQCA configuration analysis, the five configurations and results shown in Table 4 were obtained.

**Table 4.** Low-satisfaction configuration path.

Variable	Low-Satisfaction Configuration				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Cultural facilities (F1)	○		○	●	●
Cultural talents (F2)		●	●	●	●
Cultural activities (F3)	⊗	⊗	⊗		⊗
Management mechanism (F4)			○	●	●
Traditional festivals (F5)	⊗	⊗		⊗	
Raw coverage	0.79104	0.41055	0.29056	0.35641	0.32635
Unique coverage	0.45006	0.01179	0.00032	0.04621	0.01486
Consistency	0.97471	0.97937	0.90831	0.95891	0.94171
Solution coverage			0.92332		
Solution consistency			0.92279		

Note: ● indicates the presence of peripheral conditions; ⊗ indicates the absence of core conditions; ○ indicates the absence of peripheral conditions. Spaces in the table indicate the variable does not affect the final result.



The consistency indicators of configuration M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5 were 0.974711, 0.979375, 0.90831, 0.958913, and 0.941711. Higher consistency meant stronger adequacy. At the same time, the coverage of the low-satisfaction configuration solution was 0.92332; accordingly, the reason for low satisfaction can be explained.

Configuration M1:  $\sim F1^* \sim F3^* \sim F5$ , suggesting that regardless of whether the talents are sufficient and the management mechanism is sound, if public cultural facilities are lacking and the status of cultural activities and festivals is unsatisfactory, there will be low public satisfaction with cultural construction. The lack of public facilities makes it difficult for cultural activities to be carried out, and the basic public cultural needs of residents cannot be met. As the sense of festive rituals gradually disappears, villagers will be even more dissatisfied with the natural construction of rural public culture. Compared with the other four configurations, the original coverage of this configuration was 0.79, which was representative to a certain extent. For example, Village D is closer to the town center and has convenient transportation. Normally, villagers which experience greater exchanges with town centers show higher satisfaction with cultural construction. Nevertheless, the villagers' satisfaction of cultural construction was quite low. In terms of cultural facilities, the construction of this village's cultural square started late; the village also had a high rate of damage to public cultural facilities due to lack of daily maintenance. The cultural square was left unused, while the villagers also struggled to find a fixed place where they can participate in public activities. In addition, during traditional festivals, the village committee rarely organizes related activities, so festivals tend to have a weak cultural atmosphere.

Configuration M2:  $F2^* \sim F3^* \sim F5$ , indicating that when cultural activities and festivals are unsatisfying and rural cultural talents are sufficient, regardless of whether the countryside has complete cultural facilities and a sound management mechanism, public satisfaction with cultural construction will be low.

Configuration M3:  $\sim F1^* F2^* \sim F3^* \sim F4$ , showing that when there is sufficient cultural talent but cultural facilities, cultural activities, and management mechanisms are lacking, a festival being satisfactory will not affect the result of low public satisfaction with cultural construction. In other words, even when there are sufficient talents, if supporting cultural facilities, organization, and management of public cultural construction and active cultural activities are lacking, villagers' dissatisfaction with public cultural construction will increase.

Configuration M4:  $F1^* F2^* F4^* \sim F5$ , indicating that when cultural facilities are fully equipped, there are enough cultural talents, and the management mechanism is sound, but the festival is in poor condition, so regardless of the development of cultural activities there will be low public satisfaction with cultural construction.

Configuration M5:  $F1^* F2^* \sim F3^* F4$ , implying that even if cultural facilities are fully equipped, there are enough cultural talents, and the management mechanism is sound, if the cultural activities are in poor condition, then, regardless of the festival situation, there will be low public satisfaction with cultural construction.

## 6. Discussion

In the context of urban–rural integration, the potential cognition of township residents of public cultural services was investigated in this research. ZMET and fsQCA were used to reveal the deep-seated value judgments of township villagers about local public cultural services. To a certain extent, the conclusions of the metaphorical extraction were verified by the fsQCA results. Specifically, in the high-satisfaction configuration, cultural facilities, cultural activities, and festivals were the core elements, while the core factors that contributed to the production of high-satisfaction and low-satisfaction results also showed a high degree of similarity. Based on the above analysis, the cognition of Xuling Town's residents focused on three points, which are as follows.

There is a mismatch and imbalance in the allocation and utilization of public resources in the region. Through the images provided by the respondents and the ZMET analysis

process, the respondents expounded on the population loss, population aging, layout of public cultural resources being unreasonable, and factors that may affect the efficiency of public cultural services were inferred. As Andrews and Entwistle (2013) noted, among the four dimensions of public service efficiency, allocation efficiency is related to the match between service demand and service supply, while distribution efficiency focuses on whether the government can provide correct public services. Citizens' satisfaction with government public services can be measured through surveys [63]. The misallocation of public resources may lead to a reduction in service efficiency [64], which in turn affects the sustainability of public cultural service development in rural areas. It is clear that not all cultural resources are fully utilized in Xuling Town. The low coordination of resources across regions reflects the still large gap in the development of regional public cultural services.

In the township, traditional festivals are given unique meanings, reinforcing the collective consciousness [65]. According to Li et al., the essential feature of traditional Chinese festivals is their social attributes [66]. This study reconfirms the cohesive effect of traditional festivals and mass cultural activities as well as their high connection with people-oriented ethics in public cultural services [67,68].

Furthermore, as the analysis results proved, cultural talents and management mechanisms are also significant factors affecting rural cultural services. It is undeniable that a small amount of human capital and an aging population are characteristics of the township system [69,70]. Optimizing the allocation of township resources requires the introduction of a series of advanced resources, such as talents, technologies, systems, and management to activate the rural innovation system [45].

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. Theoretical Contribution

The primary goal of this study was to examine in depth the deeper developments behind township public cultural services and to try to understand the perceptions, emotions, and feelings of residents. This research provides two theoretical meanings in the development of public services in township areas from the perspective of new public services.

Our study extends the application of NPS theory to the study of public cultural services in township areas. Previous studies on public services in rural areas have focused on supply performance and regional economic links [71–73]. Although resident participation is the endogenous driving force behind the efficient operation of the public cultural service system [74], there is a lack of adequate understanding about how to achieve resident satisfaction with public services. Wang et al. and Xu et al. pointed out the internal vitality mechanism and practical path in the construction of the township public cultural service system [42,75]. Our study builds on this foundation to identify the dilemmas and opportunities faced by the sustainable development of public cultural services in townships, and the construction path of public cultural services from the residents' perspective.

In terms of method, combining ZEMT and fsQCA expands the scope of research methods applied to public cultural services with the aim of more comprehensively revealing the cognitive state of township residents in regard to such services, and reveals the intrinsic mechanism from different combinations of resident satisfaction factors.

### 7.2. Practical Contributions

The rapid urbanization process in China brought about a series of imbalances such as spatial distribution, welfare gaps, and economic gaps [76,77]. The Chinese government began to turn to the exploration of the urban–rural integration model, and culture is known to be a vital dimension for understanding the results of this integration [78]. As the main aspects of rural public cultural construction, factors such as the construction of cultural facilities, cultural activities, and festivals have played a leading role in improving the overall public cultural construction of the countryside and the cultural satisfaction of the

masses. Cultural talents and cultural management mechanisms are the sub-level aspects of public cultural construction in townships and play an important auxiliary role.

Due to social changes, the individual psychological well-being of township residents has been greatly diminished [79]. It is necessary for the government to clarify the needs of the masses, strengthen the construction of local cultural facilities, meet the needs of various groups, highlight the benign functions of talent, improve rural cultural construction, ensure proper cultural management in accordance with the situation of rural talents, and give full play to the autonomous role of villagers. More importantly, cultural activities and festival customs are the main factors that contribute to high satisfaction with public cultural construction. Festivals and customs are closely related to cultural activities. It is recommended that townships try to hold special activities during traditional festivals so as to promote the construction of rural public culture.

## 8. Research Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations. First, there are certain limitations in the sample of this study, as it is medium-sized. To obtain more accurate results, further research with a larger sample size is required for verification. Second, during the course of the research it was found that groups with higher incomes were more willing to participate in the construction of public culture. The specific influence mechanism of income, as a demographic characteristic, on public cultural services still needs further in-depth research by scholars. Last but not least, our findings are only for the Chinese township regions' cultural context. Future research could try to introduce this research model to other cultural contexts.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data are not publicly available due to the privacy of research participants.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Questionnaire items in regard to degree of involvement.

Items	
Gender	Male
	Female
Age	Below 20
	20–30
	30–40
	40–50
	Over 50

Table A1. Cont.

Items	
Educational status	Below primary level
	Primary school level
	Junior high school level
	High school level
	Junior college level
	Bachelor's degree or above
Employment status	Farmer
	Worker
	Students
	Self-employed
	Other
Degree of involvement items (7-point numerical scale, where 1 is lowest and 7 is highest)	
I think it is important to construct public culture in the township.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of township public culture is closely related to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of public culture has improved our living space.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I hope to actively carry out township public culture construction.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of public culture makes the township more beautiful.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of public culture makes the township's human landscapes more attractive.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of public culture makes the township more harmonious.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the construction of public culture can boost the vitality of the township.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the project of public culture construction in the township is very meaningful.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can support the construction of rural public culture through my actions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## Appendix B

Table A2. Questionnaire items in regard to the perception of rural cultural construction.

Items	
Gender	Male
	Female
Nationality	Han nationality
	Minority nationality
Age	Below 20
	20–30
	30–40
	40–50
	Over 50
Educational status	Below primary level
	Primary school level
	Junior high school level
	High school level
	Junior college level
	Bachelor's degree or above
Political status	Communist Party of China
	Communist Youth League of China
	The masses
	Democratic parties

Table A2. Cont.

Items	
Frequently used cultural facilities at home	TV
	Smartphone
	Computer
	Sports goods
	Other
Affiliated village	Baiyun Village
	Dengta Village
	Aijiao Village
	Dilu Village
	Other
Job	Farmer
	Worker
	Village cadre
	Students
	Self-employed
	Staff at public institution
Monthly income (in RMB/yuan)	Freelancer
	Below 1000
	1000–2000
	2000–3000
	3000–4000
	4000–5000
	5000–6000
Permanent residence	Over 6000
	City
	Town
	Village
Items investigating degree of perception (7-point numerical scale, where 1 is lowest and 7 is highest)	
Status of cultural facility	
I think the village basketball court, fitness equipment and other facilities can meet my recreational requirements.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I often go to the cultural square for exercise and leisure.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the layout of the village's cultural equipment and other facilities is reasonable.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
It is convenient for me to go to the cultural square and station.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Status of cultural talent staff	
The village cadres are concerned about my mental state of life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Village cadres often teach me how to use cultural facilities.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Village cadres have a good service attitude in cultural construction.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think there are enough talents in cultural construction.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Status of cultural activities	
I think that public cultural activities can improve my life on many occasions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the cultural performances in the village are to my taste.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the cultural performances in the village are rich in content.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the cultural performances in the village can reflect local characteristics.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7



**Table A2.** *Cont.*

Items	
Cultural management mechanism	
I think the rules and regulations of public cultural construction in the village are relatively sound.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I know when and where cultural activities are being held in the village.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the cultural construction in the village is up to date.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I feel that the cultural activities in the village are generally well received.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Status of traditional festival culture	
I will prepare the appropriate items before the festival.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I still observe some traditional festival customs in my village.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I think the village has a strong festive atmosphere during the festival holidays.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I will visit friends and relatives during the festival.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Overall satisfaction with public culture construction	
I think the villagers' collective activities are arranged in an orderly manner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I like the public cultural activities in the village, such as square dances, movies, and meetings.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I am willing to actively participate in public cultural activities in the village.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
What suggestions do you have for the village council to improve the cultural life of the residents? _____	

## Appendix C

**Table A3.** Demographic characteristics data in regard to the involvement questionnaire.

Items		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	9	45%
	Female	11	55%
Age	Below 20	2	10%
	20–30	1	5%
	30–40	6	30%
	40–50	6	30%
	Over 50	5	25%
Educational status	Below primary level	3	15%
	Primary school level	6	30%
	Junior high school level	7	35%
	High school level	2	10%
	Junior college level	1	5%
	Bachelor's degree or above	1	5%
Employment status	Farmer	10	50%
	Worker	6	30%
	Students	2	10%
	Self-employed	1	5%
	Other	1	5%

## Appendix D

**Table A4.** Demographic characteristics data in regard to the perception of rural cultural construction.

Items		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	77	31%
	Female	170	69%
Nationality	Han nationality	244	99%
	Minority nationality	3	1%

Table A4. Cont.

	Items	Frequency	%
Age	Below 20	15	6%
	20–30	8	3%
	30–40	33	13%
	40–50	86	35%
	Over 50	105	43%
Educational status	Below primary level	54	22%
	Primary school level	117	47%
	Junior high school level	49	20%
	High school level	14	6%
	Junior college level	9	4%
	Bachelor's degree or above	4	2%
Political status	Communist Party of China	8	3%
	Communist Youth League of China	15	6%
	The masses	224	91%
	Democratic parties	0	0%
Frequently used cultural facilities at home	TV	118	48%
	Smartphone	68	28%
	Computer	15	6%
	Sports goods	42	17%
	Other	4	2%
Affiliated village	Baiyun Village	93	38%
	Dengta Village	54	22%
	Aijiao Village	35	14%
	Dilu Village	40	16%
	Other	25	10%
Job	Farmer	113	46%
	Worker	56	23%
	Village cadre	5	2%
	Students	17	7%
	Self-employed	31	13%
	Staff at public institution	9	4%
	Freelancer	16	6%
Monthly income (in RMB/yuan)	Below 1000	3	1%
	1000–2000	117	47%
	2000–3000	55	22%
	3000–4000	36	15%
	4000–5000	19	8%
	5000–6000	12	5%
	Over 6000	5	2%
Permanent residence	City	3	1%
	Town	66	27%
	Village	178	72%

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