

Article

Strategies of Landscape Planning in Peri-Urban Rural Tourism: A Comparison between Two Villages in China

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Abstract: Landscapes have multiple functions relating to natural preservation and cultural inheritance, which are fundamental factors for tourist development. Particularly in villages, rural tourism is primarily based on the rural landscape. However, peri-urban villages face complex conflicts of urbanization and ruralism, in which landscapes are dynamic and need synergistic plans and management. Thus, this research contributes to a better understanding of comprehensive landscape planning integrating natural and cultural dimensions in peri-urban villages. Taking as a comparison studies in two peri-urban villages, Heshu village and Pu'an village in the Yangtze River Delta in China, the research mainly adopted qualitative methods of document analysis, in-depth interviews and field observation. We found that local features and interactions with nature are both stressed in the village landscape plans but with different strategies. Firstly, Heshu village's landscape plan intends to reproduce eight scenes described in famous local poetry, while Pu'an village's plan intends to develop local traditional customs of bulrush craft. Secondly, the detailed landscape design of green-way and blue-way systems in Heshu village is people-oriented, while landscape design in Pu'an village is experience-oriented in relation to creative tourism. Finally, it is essential to consider both the interests of local villagers and tourists in the process of identifying, preserving and enhancing the locality of rural landscapes.

Keywords: landscape design; synergistic plans; multiple functions; sustainability; peri-urban village



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1. Introduction

Landscape, constructed by both the natural environment and human actions, has always been a fundamental factor for tourist development [1,2]. Particularly in villages, rural tourism is primarily based on the rural landscape, whether in terms of idyllic or wild natural environment, authentic agricultural activities, and unique traditions and customs or lifestyles [3,4]. However, peri-urban villages are special kinds of villages facing complex conflicts of urbanization and ruralism [5–8]. The landscapes in peri-urban villages are dynamic and need comprehensive plans and management [9–11].

In China, tourism-induced landscape change has become a widespread phenomenon for peri-urban villages, which has induced both positive and negative effects [12–14]. On one hand, rural landscapes in peri-urban villages are transforming into sites of leisure with high-quality rural roads and living conditions. On the other hand, to meet the needs of the tourist market, rural landscapes are quickly changing to commercial land use and their unique cultural characters are gradually being lost. In addition, with the guidelines of the new urbanization policy proposed by the central government stating that “with green hills and blue waters in sight, bear the image of your homeland in mind”, the unique local features of rural villages have been stressed in rural development. Peri-urban villages are

facing problems trying to make a proper landscape plan to promote local features of villages in rural areas and reduce negative effects from urban tourism balancing different interests.

Existing research has revealed that different aims and forms of governance in landscape related to tourist development have had different results [15,16]. Some, from tourists' perspective, point out that the diversity of rural culture can transform to consumption-based policy as place branding for tourist development [17]. Large infrastructure is demanded as a result of an influx of tourists [18]. In contrast, a neglected environment and crowded roads cause unpleasant impressions [19]. Others, from locals' perspective, emphasize the participation of rural communities in rural tourism. The relations of locals and tourists could be rebalanced as locals are not servants for tourists, but teachers representing their own culture [20]. In the increasing commodification of rural tourism, culture-led policy should be more embedded in rural tradition and heritage [21]. Actually, the management of rural landscape needs to combine these two sides towards multiple functions which not only promote villagers' income and revive rural communities, but also protect authentic rural environments and increase acknowledgement of rural culture and identity [22,23]. Faced with the demands of rural tourism, synergistic strategies incorporating both natural and cultural dimensions in landscape planning to realize multiple functions should be discussed further [24]. Moreover, strategies of landscape planning belong to rural planning, which is considered as a special planning in the Chinese spatial planning system of "five levels and three categories" [25]. Transmitting the comprehensive development goals from township plans, rural planning aims to develop and enhance production, improve standards of living and rural civilization, create a clean and tidy environment, and promote democratic management. As a part of rural planning, the landscape plan should encompass multiple dimensions and multiple objectives according to local conditions.

Thus, our objective is to contribute to a better understanding of landscape planning integrating natural and cultural resources and to provide practical references for the implementation of rural planning in peri-urban villages comparing two cases in China. These two peri-urban villages are located near Changzhou city, a central area of the Yangtze River Delta, which have experienced a process of urbanization and industrial transformation. They chose different strategies to construct a beautiful village and succeeded in developing rural tourism without losing local identity, becoming models for nearby villages.

This paper is structured as follows. We first provide an overview of two villages as case studies and the methodology. Then, we compare the landscape plans in two cases and present the differences in the results section. Though both plans strengthen the locality of the landscape and interaction between humans and nature, they adopted different strategies based on their unique conditions. Last but not the least, the conclusions and limitations of this study are summarized.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Areas: Two Peri-Urban Villages

We investigated and compared the landscape plans in Heshu village and Pu'an village, both in Lijia town. These two villages have many similarities in terms of geographical conditions for tourist development. However, they adopted different strategies to construct beautiful villages as leisure and tourist resorts. Heshu village aims to develop an idyllic wetland environment, while Pu'an village aims to develop a creative cultural environment.

Firstly, the two villages are both peri-urban villages, located in the north of Lijia town and close to Changzhou city, a central city in the Yangtze River Delta (Figure 1). They have relative advantages in terms of location and transportation. It takes less than 30 min of driving to reach Changzhou city, with many county-level and village-level roadways. The city has strong consumption tendencies for tourism. Secondly, these two villages have similar requirements for protecting ecological environments as their major land use is non-construction, consisting of agriculture and forestry (Figure 2). As Table 1 shows, Heshu village occupies 3.66 km² and Pu'an village occupies 4.14 km², of which respectively 89.48%

and 72.29% are non-construction areas. It is suggested by township planning that these two villages should build beautiful villages in unique rural landscapes [26]. Thirdly, they are faced with a series of challenges to comprehensive development against a background of rural revitalization. For example, locals have complained of the poor living environment in the villages because of low-efficiency industrial land use, poor environmental awareness of tourists and locals, and insufficient sanitation facilities [27,28]. There are 573 households and 1973 people in Heshu village, while there are 984 households and 3435 people in Pu'an village. In Pu'an village, northwestern areas occupied by factories have attracted large population inflows while deserted villages have appeared in eastern rural areas of Pu'an (Figure 2).

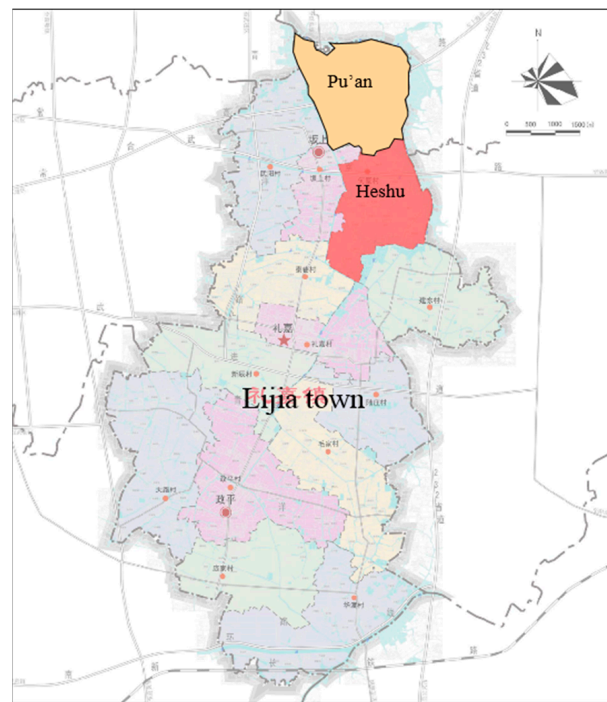


Figure 1. Location of Heshu village and Pu'an village in Lijia town.

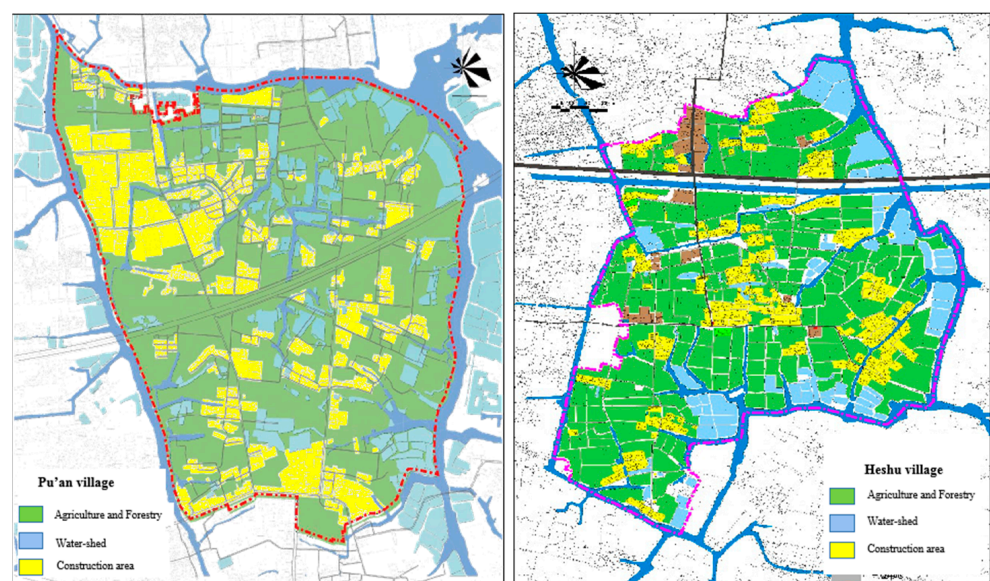


Figure 2. Land use in Heshu village and Pu'an village.

Table 1. Land use in Heshu village and Pu'an village in 2016.

Land Use Type	Pu'an Village		Heshu Village	
	Land Area (ha.)	Proportion of Urban and Rural Land (%)	Land Area (ha.)	Proportion of Urban and Rural Land (%)
Construction land	114.74	27.71	38.87	10.52
Non-construction land	299.26	72.29	330.79	89.48
Watershed	77.28	18.67	126.99	34.35
Agriculture and forestry	221.98	53.62	203.8	55.13
Other non- construction land	0		0	
Total	414		369.66	

Though the two cases have similarities, they have distinct differences, which seem more important in landscape plans. First, their industrial structures are different and imbalanced though they have both struggled in rural tourism development. Heshu village is an agriculture-dominated village with a large scale of farmland planting including rice, peaches, plums, grapes and other crops. As it used to be wetland, it is not easy to transform the farmland for industrial land use, so the non-agricultural economy is underdeveloped. Its output value of agriculture placed it fourth out of 14 villages in Lijia town, whereas on output of manufacturing it placed last in the year 2016. In contrast, Pu'an village is a manufacturing-dominant village and it is one of the largest production bases for suitcase fabric and refrigeration equipment with an output value of manufacturing placing it fifth in the town. It also has a large area of green fields of farmland, forestry, and wild grass. Nevertheless, the land in greenfield areas is not suitable for producing food. Instead, local villagers choose to plant bulrushes. The bulrush is a typical aquatic plant in rivers and ponds and can be used in food production, medicine and handicrafts. Pu'an village has the potential to develop an advanced industry processing bulrushes, but it is weak in non-industrial sectors encompassing the service industry.

Second, the rural cultural landscapes and heritage values are varied. Heshu village has a long history of more than 1400 years. It was a key node of waterway transportation in ancient times. Many poets passed by and left famous poems describing the beautiful scenery. One of the famous poets is Mr. He Shutang, who settled down in this village after his retirement and had a great influence there. Unfortunately, some historic landscapes and relics such as five old bridges described in poems have not been well protected, and some are missing. In contrast, Pu'an village has maintained the intangible heritage of the bulrush craft well as local villagers have carried on the tradition and struggled to sustain it. However, affected by industrialization, the attitude of acceptance towards local culture and history is weak, especially among young people. The local appreciation of rural culture and customs needs to be strengthened.

Third, the natural landscapes are different. In Heshu village, farmlands are divided by the river network into small pieces, which look like islands. Various kinds of crops are planted, which form a diversified farming landscape. In Pu'an village, small ponds are distributed among scattered rural settlements and this rich biological source of bulrushes forms a large area of the geo-landscape.

2.2. Methodology

This research mainly applied qualitative methods. Primary data were collected through document analysis, in-depth interviews and field observation.

We firstly analyzed a series of documents including planning policies and historical books and records. A series of planning policies, including landscape plans, land-use plans, and rural plans in the two villages helped us understand the development conditions of villages in Lijia town. As there is no specific tourism plan in the villages, we combined the framework and goals of industrial development plans in rural plans with the policies of landscape planning. In addition, historical books and records improved our understanding

of the villages' history and local culture. Some historical relics have already disappeared or been destroyed. We could assess the policies in landscape planning of restoring meaningful historic sites according to historical documents.

Secondly, we made four fieldwork assessments, including mapping and taking photos in 2016 in these two villages, to investigate designed landscapes with seasonal features. In Heshu village, we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews in April 2016 with representative interviewees in terms of local villagers, leaders of collective groups, and immigrants. In Pu'an village, we conducted 37 interviews in August 2016 (Table 2). The main questions were as follows: (1) What do you think of the current environment or landscape in the village? (2) What do you expect to change concerning the rural landscape with tourist development? (3) What do you know about your village's history? (4) Are you satisfied with the landscape plan in the village? Appendix A. Each interview lasted approximately 120 min. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis with a manual identification of key words.

Table 2. The structure of interviews in Heshu village and Pu'an village.

Interviewers	Leaders of Collective Groups	Villagers	Immigrants	Total
Heshu village	5	20	15	40
Pu'an village	4	20	13	37

3. Results

3.1. Strengthen the Locality of Landscape Design from Different Perspectives

Preserving and caring for the environment is the priority for rural development. In Heshu and Pu'an villages, environmental improvement and river cleaning are emphasized in the plans. However, policies to strengthen the locality of the landscape are different: Heshu village is planting special plants to revive the cultural landscape mentioned by famous local poems, whereas Pu'an village is developing traditional bulrush craft to revive local customs originating from a culture of cultivation.

In Heshu village, there is one famous poem named "Eight scenes in Heshu village" describing beautiful scenery with eight different plants. This poem was preserved in Heshi Temple's stone, which has attracted many tourists. The landscape plan in Heshu investigated the restoration of eight scenes in interpreting the poetry to revive the rural community. Combined with the natural conditions, different types of plants were chosen to reflect and refresh the eight new scenes in response to the famous local poem (Figure 3).

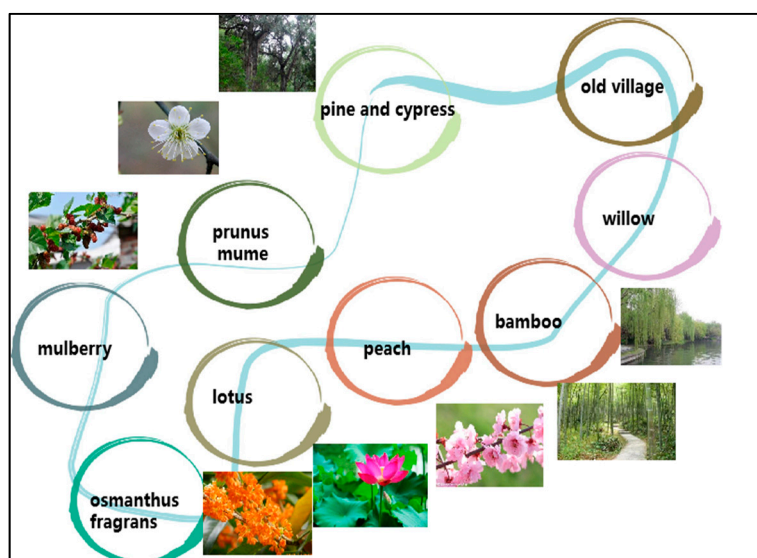


Figure 3. Design of eight scenes with typical plants in Heshu village.

For example, the first sentence in the famous local poem says that the peach and plum trees in the garden are very beautiful and their flowers are blooming in competition; the bridges connecting the gardens seem to be covered by trees and flowers. Inspired by this sentence of the poem, peach was selected as a representative plant for the village. In the meantime, local villages are planting peaches as agri-products. One villager, Mr. He, said, “I never heard about the story from the poem and never knew the tradition of planting peaches in the village could be traced back to 1000 years ago. Now I am quite proud of planting and selling peaches in the village and will expand my planting area to create the landscape of peach flowers in full bloom in spring, like the poem described”. Therefore, peaches in spring, lotuses in summer, sweet-scented osmanthus in autumn, plum blossom in winter, and other four evergreen plants including pine and cypress, bamboo, willow and mulberry trees were chosen to plant in special areas of the village to reflect the famous local poem. In each special area, an explanation of the poetry will be illustrated to help tourists understand the spiritual meaning of the landscape. A deputation of elders from Heshu village said, “The original poem was carved in stone preserved in the temple. It used to be famous and attracted other poets to come. Local elder villagers are all familiar with this poem as they were requested to recite it when they were children. Unfortunately, as time passed by, scenery changed and the current landscape is quite different from what the poem described. Some younger generations in the village do not know the local poem at all. Therefore, it is necessary to revive the cultural landscape based on this local poem to strengthen our sense of place”. It is very interesting to review the key elements of plants originally described in local Chinese poems and add them to the landscape design to revive rural culture in villages.

In Pu'an village, the major plant is the bulrush, which is an aquatic plant with multiple functions in terms of economy, society and culture. The name of the village relates to the bulrush as it used to be a wetland covered by bulrushes. Therefore, there is a long history of local villagers using bulrushes in making shoes, fans, cushions, baskets and other practical handicrafts. The bulrush craft is a precious intangible part of the local heritage, which attracts tourists as an experience.

The landscape plan aims to revive these cultural customs by encouraging planting of bulrushes. The plan has designed three types of bulrush landscapes in Pu'an as Figure 4 shown. The first type is bulrushes with traditional architecture to reproduce earlier lives in the village, as traditional architecture was built along rivers or ponds suitable for planting bulrushes. Tourists can choose to stay in these renovated old houses to experience the past rural life. The second type is bulrushes in creative agricultural farmland, integrating with bulrush farming. Although farming is common in rural villages, the experience of farming is a special experience for urban tourists. Tourists can learn the technology of planting bulrushes and experience the hardship of life in the past. A local villager said, “agro-tourism with bulrushes helps increase our profits from agriculture. We are not only farmers in the rural landscape, but also teachers spreading the rural culture of bulrushes”. The third type is theme parks designed with bulrushes to utilize local existing water systems and networks to create landscapes attracting animals. This type of park can be a scenic base for wedding photography and tourist sightseeing. All these plantings are related to the bulrush industry including bulrush craft, processing and creative industries, which respond to the local culture.

An entrepreneur who invested in Pu'an village, Mr. Zhang, said, “Pu'an village has a solid foundation to develop a bulrush processing industry as local villagers have the tradition of planting and using bulrushes. I was attracted by lush bulrushes and the twisting river, as it shows that the raw material of the bulrush industry is rich in the village. With the help of advanced technology in the processing industry, the tradition of bulrush craft will be upgraded and develop further”. The leader of a collective group, Mrs. Xu, showed a positive attitude to these three types of bulrush landscape. She said, “Diversified landscapes with diversified activities provide tourists various options to experience our intangible heritage of bulrushes in different ways. These types of creative

tourism make up for our shortages in agriculture and make full use of advantages in manufacturing development”.

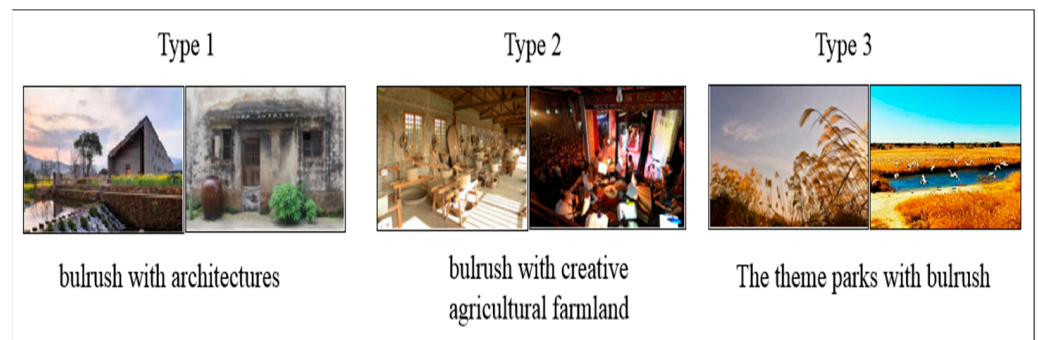


Figure 4. Design of bulrush landscape in Pu'an village.

The approach of strengthening the locality of the landscape reflects local villagers' attitudes and understandings towards local natural and cultural resources. Only with unique local landscapes can rural tourism in villages have a special attraction to compete in the wider tourist industry.

3.2. Strengthen the Interaction of People and Landscape with Different Approaches

Inspired by the concept of “creative tourism” [29–31], the two landscape plans in Heshu and Pu'an villages both stressed the interactions of people and landscape, which not only considered interests of tourists, but also the well-being of local villagers. One “green” way with non-motorized systems and one “blue” with yachts and boats were designed in these two plans, as Figures 5 and 6 show. The difference was the detailed design of landscape along the two ways. In Heshu village, an interactive landscape required more functions in the design of a plank road and platform, while in Pu'an village, an interactive museum and activities were required along the way.

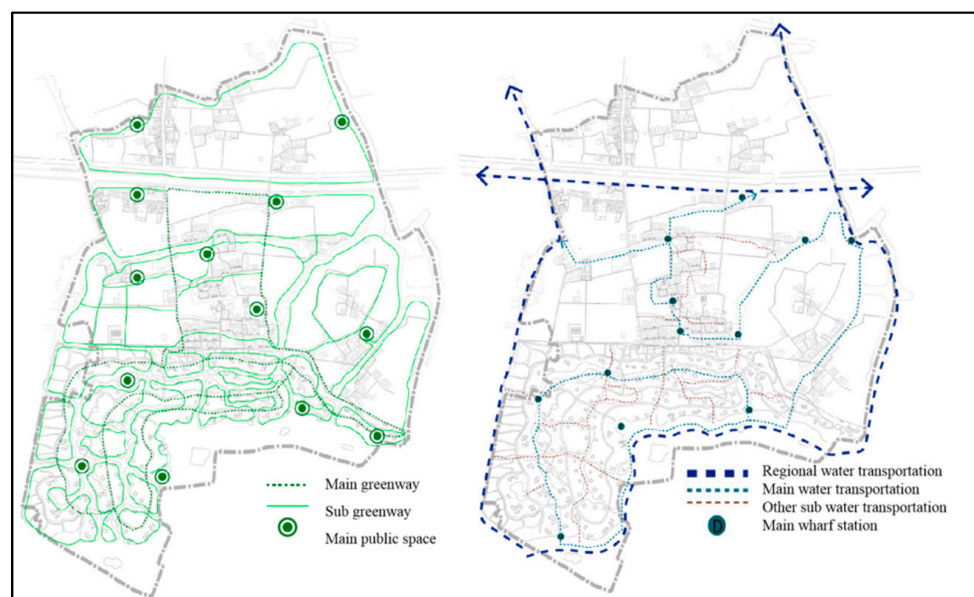


Figure 5. Plans of green-way and blue-way systems in Heshu village.

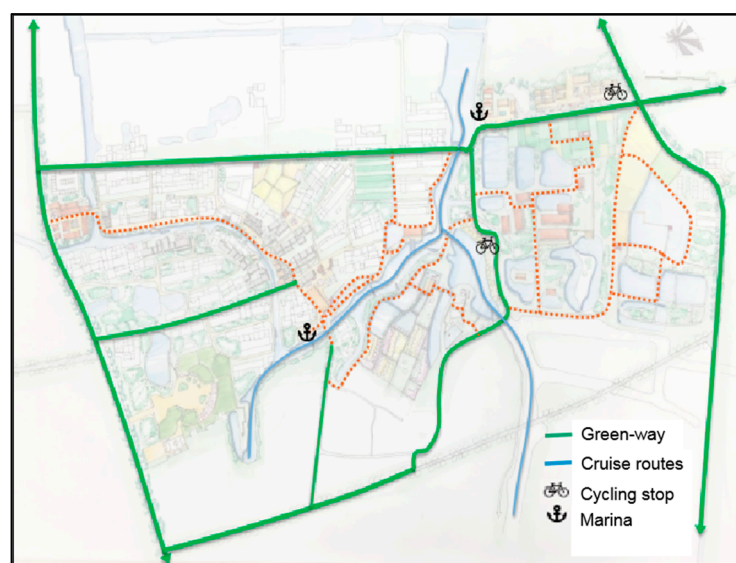


Figure 6. Plans of green-way and blue-way systems in Pu'an village.

First, in the design of the shoreline in Heshu village, the basic concept was people-oriented, which meant the waterfront should be convenient for serving people. As Figure 7 shows, the design of the shoreline followed the natural form and tried to keep the original without breaking the natural rules. Then under the premise of considering ecology and safety, artificial transformation, for example, a concave or convex geometric design, could be added to increase fun. In addition, a concave water shoreline created a hydrophilic feeling of being surrounded by water, which lets people have a sense of freedom. Villagers and tourists have more chances to access the water, transforming it from a passive to an active experience. One villager in Heshu highly praised this design that was more convenient for her to look after her children playing in the water. Tourists can enjoy scenery with special perspectives along the rivers, recalling the famous local poem.

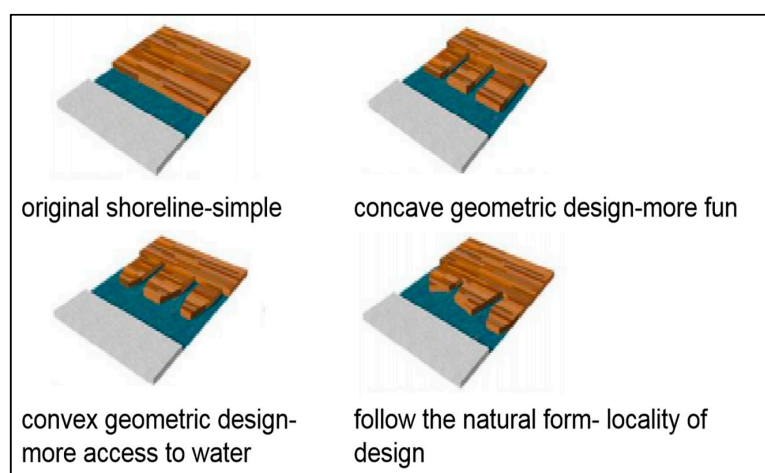


Figure 7. Changes of shoreline design in Heshu village.

Second, in the design of the waterfront in Pu'an village, the starting point was to increase human activities with a landscape of bulrushes, as a kind of experience-oriented attraction. The plan design included a swimming wharf, open water bank, overhanging plank road and pond in the bank to allow people close to bulrushes in rivers and ponds (Figures 8 and 9). Along the waterfront, experiential activities like planting bulrushes, picking bulrushes, eating bulrushes and weaving bulrushes are organized. Tourists can participate, transforming the experience from tangible heritage sightseeing towards greater

involvement with intangible cultural experiences (it is not allowed to pick bulrushes at will along the waterfront). One immigrant in Pu'an, Miss Lin, enjoyed joining the creative activities along the road and said, "I moved to work in Pu'an village and had no time to rush to central town to play. Now the new entertainment equipment is set up, I can relax at weekends just walking on the sightseeing road of bulrushes. Sometimes, I invite my friends from my hometown to visit me and make some new friends with tourists. I feel happy living in the village".

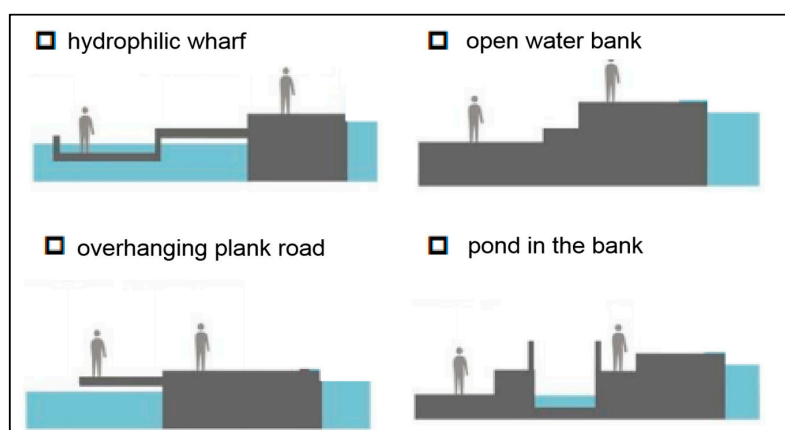


Figure 8. Design of waterfront in Pu'an village.

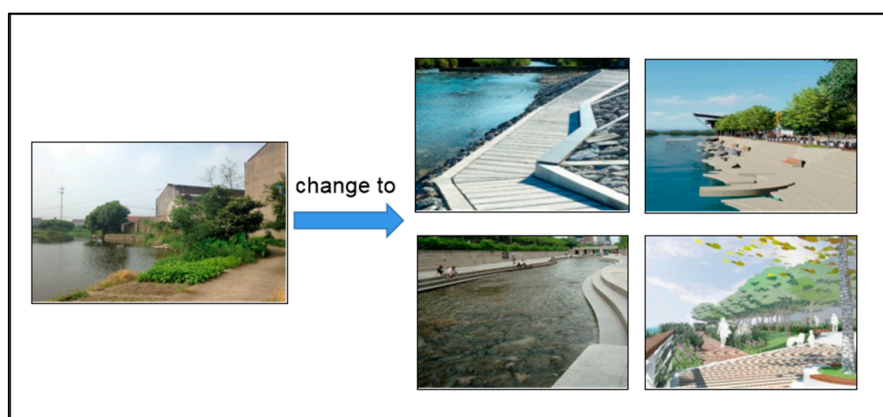


Figure 9. Example of design in terms of waterfront changes in Pu'an village.

Third, in the design of the green way, the planner in Heshu preferred to locate the cycling stops near gardens or nursery gardens, while the planner in Pu'an preferred to guide people to rest in museums, activity centers or restaurants. Both local governments tried to construct a green-way system to encourage people to be close to nature and to experience rural culture and customs. When tourists walk or cycle on the green way, they enjoy the beauty of the nature and relax instead of glancing over the landscape hurriedly. Local villagers can also take exercise on the green ways, which can be considered as public space in the villages. One villager in Heshu, Mr. Zhu, said that, "Before the design of the green way, the road systems in the village were bad as many roads were not accessible and not friendly to pedestrians. The green-way system is beneficial for creating public space".

4. Discussions

Many countries have implemented landscape plans and management for peri-urban tourist development, and some by standardization [32]. However, landscape plans differ based on the different national, regional and local context. This paper has addressed the importance of locality in landscape design by comparing implementation strategies in

two peri-urban villages in China. Our analysis highlights that the locality of landscape is inherent in the natural and cultural characteristics, which need to be integrated. Against the background of comprehensive development goals in rural planning, we suggest landscape plans should have synergistic effects among economic development, cultural transmission and environmental protection.

In addition, landscape design with creative tourism has become increasingly popular as a strategy of place making in rural tourism [33,34]. Rural cultural resources include literary and artistic assets, myths and legends, traditional festivals and crafts, architecture and heritage [35–38]. Studies of Heshu and Pu'an villages have revealed the possibility of hybrid use of cultural resources encompassing local poems and customs in landscape design.

Finally, this finding complements the specialized case study on the rural clusters of landscape and tourism, and provides comprehensive policy references for other villages, which consider both the interests of tourist and locals towards multiple functions [39,40]. Landscape in peri-urban villages not only serves local residents, but also serves urban tourists [41,42]. Therefore, there are also some places for interaction between tourists and local residents [12,43]. The design and management of these landscapes should consider the features of private and public place and the possibility of the transformation from a private place to a public space or vice versa. For example, some villagers will renovate and transform their house as a folk inn for tourists in peak season. They can still keep some original decorations of rural customs to create authentic experiences for tourists, and even add some special cultural elements, such as bulrush decoration in Pu'an village or poetry decoration in Heshu village to emphasize the local identity of the house. After peak tourist season, when villagers go back to the house, these cultural elements will please them and promote a sense of collective belonging.

However, the discussed landscape plans were designed to guide the villages over the period from years 2016 to year 2021, and the assessment valuing the impact for rural tourist development deserves further investigation. This shortcoming could be addressed by incorporating a time frame and the concept of multi-functionality to evaluate the effects [1,44,45]. Concerning the process of implementation of strategies, the corporations of different stakeholders were discussed insufficiently in this study, as in China, village-level plans are mainly guided by township governments, which brings together experts and planners and local villagers to form a special plan. From our interviews in the two cases, we found dynamic stakeholders were involved during the process of policymaking [26]. The bottom-up initiatives of self-organized actions led by strong leaders in the collective groups play an important role in implementing the government policy. A collaborative approach among governments, residents, tourists and firms in landscape planning is an interesting area to explore further [46].

5. Conclusions

Our research provides a comparative study of two peri-urban villages in China to discuss the comprehensive strategies integrating natural and cultural elements to form distinctive landscapes with local characters for tourist development.

The results firstly show that the unique locality of landscapes could be strengthened from different perspectives in the landscape plans. The plan in Heshu village revived the cultural landscape related to famous local poetry, while the plan in Pu'an village related to the local traditional customs concerning bulrushes. Different dimensions of local cultural resources were chosen due to different local conditions. As Heshu village is agriculture-dominated, the landscape plan tries to combine the natural features and the spiritual dimension of local poems to design eight new scenes for different seasons. In contrast, Pu'an village is manufacturing-dominated and has a large scale of bulrush planting, so the landscape plan tries to upgrade local traditional crafts with creative agriculture and a processing industry.

Secondly, the two landscape plans stress the interactions of people and landscape with the concept of creative tourism. The plan in Heshu village adopted a people-oriented

design to create accessible chances to experience nature, while the plan in Pu'an village applied experience-oriented design with creative activities.

Considering interests of tourists and locals, the landscape plans highlight that the creativity in cultural landscapes needs more research relating to local poetry and the traditional intangible heritage of bulrush craft. For other villages, we suggest that each village has its unique culture and rural resources. It is essential to identify, preserve and enhance the locality of landscape in tourism in both natural and cultural dimensions. Moreover, the process of place making in design needs to consider multiple objectives based on local unique conditions in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations and weaknesses in the study. For example, the study revealed the results based on the qualitative analysis of historical, cultural and natural conditions. A multivariate assessment of landscape dynamics and impacts of tourism in terms of quantitative approaches could be strengthened in the future. Furthermore, the process of policymaking requires an in-depth study to discuss the governance mode. The comparison improved our understanding of locality in landscape, and each case deserves a more detailed analysis of its landscape transformations and collaborative initiatives.

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

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

Appendix A

Table A1. Main interview questions.

No.	Interview Outline for Villagers
1	How many years have you been in the village? Do you like the current development status?
2	What do you expect to change concerning the rural landscapes with tourist development?
3	What do you think of the landscape planning for your village?
4	Which policy impressed you most? Or what changes of landscape impressed you most?
5	What do you know about your village's history?
6	Are you influenced by the implementation of the planning policy (in terms of tourist development)?
	If yes, describe in detailed please.
7	What do you expect for future development guided by the landscape planning?
No.	Interview Outline for Leaders of Collective Group
1	Do you like the current development status of the village?
2	What do you expect to change concerning the rural landscapes with tourist development?
3	What do you think of the landscape planning for your village?
4	How do you participate in the process of the policymaking?
5	What progress has been made guided by the planning policy? Describe in detail please.
No.	Interview Outline for Immigrants
1	How many years have you been in the village? Do you like the current development status?
2	What do you expect to change concerning the rural landscapes with tourist development?
3	Are you influenced by the landscape plan (in terms of tourist development and daily life)? If yes, describe in detail please.
4	Which policy impressed you most? Or what changes of landscape impressed you most?
5	What do you expect for future development guided by the landscape planning?

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