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Cultural Landscape Development Integrated with Rural Revitalization: A Case Study of Songkou Ancient Town

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Abstract: As a form of World Heritage, cultural landscapes have evolved linked with production systems and living space and have become an important topic of rural studies worldwide. This paper attempts to examine the development experiences of local revitalization combined with the cultural landscape in Songkou ancient town, China. Firstly, the rural livelihood-based landscape characteristics of mixing natural and man-made environments are the resources of cultural landscape development. Secondly, community action forms the cultural landscape through a spatial identification process involving place, identity, and heritage. Thirdly, “experience grafting” is a coordinated action for industrial development that has allowed the experience of community revitalization in Taiwan to make an effective contribution to the cultural landscape development of Songkou ancient town. The main findings are as follows: (1) The close connection between man and nature is confirmed from the perspective of landscape cognition and provides farmers with a means of earning a living. Hence, agricultural activities meet the principles of sustainable and organic agriculture by using natural resources responsibly. (2) By considering ecological orchards as cultural landscapes, community actions promote a consensus of local values and an effective way of making a livelihood.



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Keywords: ancient town; cultural landscape; rural revitalization; Songkou

1. Introduction

With the influence of globalization and the notion of sustainable development, cultural landscapes have received more and more attention. Urban–rural dualization has led to abandoned farmlands, vacant houses, and abandoned landscapes in rural areas, which obviously changes the landscape structures, patterns, and functions while accelerating the degradation of local cultural landscapes and production activities which they contain [1]. As early as 1925, Saul stated that the cultural landscape is shaped from the natural landscape by a cultural group [2]. Until 1992, through the World Heritage Initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the cultural landscape was included as a category of World Heritage [3]. Its core value lies in the close connection between natural protection and the development of social values such as environmental equity and poverty alleviation [4]. In addition, it brings economic benefits to local development and provides an important means and motivation for people to pay attention to the preservation of their heritage [5]. In 2000, the European Landscape Convention (ELC) defined “landscape” as an area perceived by people, whose characteristics are the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. Landscape plays an important public interest role in the fields of culture, ecology, environment, and society, and contributes to resources that are conducive to economic activities. Its protection, management, and planning can help create employment opportunities [6].

Cultural landscapes have the value and characteristics of the continuity of organic evolution. The Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in-

indicated that an organically evolved sustainable landscape is closely linked with traditional lifestyles and plays an active role in modern society, an evolutionary process that continues to develop [7]. From a macro perspective, in some cases, extreme climate fluctuations trigger cultural spectacles and important historical events, such as social or dynastic changes or even collapse [8]. Furthermore, as a cultural dimension, culture is the agent, nature is the medium, and cultural landscape is the result [2]. The postmodern view of cultural landscapes is that culture has specific political, economic, and ideological dimensions [9]. As a social dimension, a cultural landscape is a local environment that can only be maintained through the dynamic interaction between sociocultural folk customs and nature, such as rice terraces and village forests [10]. The cultural landscape is a new category and a new value, which becomes the forefront of democracy [11]. In the dimensions of space and time, the process of establishing a cultural landscape is extended to the experiential aspect of sensory perception, integrating people, land, time, events, and things [12,13]. The agricultural landscape-related issues have been the focus of development studies. For example, in 1992, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development emphasized the interpretation of landscape in terms of the relationship between nature conservation, human habitation, animal husbandry, agriculture, forestry, industrial activities, etc. At the session of the World Heritage Committee in 1984, the rural landscape was put on the agenda, recognizing the cultural values represented by the terraces in Asia, the tableland in the Mediterranean, and the vineyards in Europe [14]. The above understanding of cultural landscape values and characteristics can help us to understand the different emphases and stakeholders that may cooperate or conflict with each other in practice.

Cultural landscapes are not merely to be preserved but should be recognized as a heritage that needs to gain added value through community action. Local development is a universal paradigm, and its purpose is to initiate the process of social and economic progress in peripheral areas to deal with production adjustments and economic crises [15]. Different methods describe the concept of “rural” as the integration of natural, economic, and social components [16]. As a heritage, the cultural landscape adapts to various needs and purposes, such as research, assessment, and the recording and awakening of traditions, and can help individuals, groups, nations, and transnational communities develop and strengthen social identity, raise awareness, and enrich tourism content [17]. Cultural landscapes depend on the dynamic properties of cultural development in terms of production and lifestyle, and landscape management must be carried out through communities [18]. Volunteer groups in the network of community action, including cooperative action involving local people and experts, are regarded as one of the important and effective channels for rural landscape protection [19]. Cultural landscapes coexist with communities through their associative values, including (1) working with the community to ensure the sustainability of production and lifestyle; (2) maintaining the associative value of the landscape and involving the local inhabitants, who are the guardians of the cultural values expressed in the landscape; and (3) helping maintain traditional activities (such as tourists viewing traditional festivals) to maintain traditional ties and give the area outstanding universal value [20]. Despite the strong support of the government for such activities, this form of tourism has limitations in terms of employment and income [15]. In the aspect of value-added heritage operation, the commercial utilization and market-oriented operation of heritage resources in the heritage industry are based in the present but rely on past cultural production modes [21]. Therefore, cultural landscapes are vitally located at the intersection between nature and culture, tangible and intangible heritage, and biological and cultural diversity. They represent a closely connected network of relationships, quintessential culture, and people’s identity. They symbolize people’s growing awareness of the basic connection between local communities and their heritage, and humans with their natural environment [22]. The dynamic process of evolution of cultural landscapes will continue to be explored and perfected in the practice of conserving the heritage of production methods and lifestyle.

Cultural landscape development is related to policy, technical support, and industrial development initiatives. Recognizing landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage and a foundation of their identity allows them to be incorporated within an area's town planning policies and its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social, and economic policies as well as other policies that may directly or indirectly affect the landscape [6]. At the policy development level, the salient features of the cultural landscape are usually expressed through a large number of identical collective elements. Therefore, important elements in the cultural landscape should be protected through necessary legislation [23]. The management authority should plan control rights, involve farmers and landowners in management, and formulate policies that help them benefit from sustainable management [20]. At the level of the development model, an endogenous model is proposed to build an organization that can balance the interests of all parties, formulate a planning blueprint and resource regulation mechanism that can meet the needs of local residents, and promote the participation of local people [24]. Keitumetse [25] proposed that a successful model of community participation in heritage site management and development requires a sound participation mechanism, abundant financial support, and active input from community residents and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). At the level of industrial development, tourism, as an emerging industry, has relatively little impact on the cultural landscape but contributes to the transition of communities to a more complex and diversified economic base leading to benefits that must be reinvested into the local community [20]. At the technical support level, there could be home improvements, one-time capital grants for infrastructure, new skills training, the recording of oral history, and/or unemployment benefits. For example, in terms of authentic technological restoration, authenticity can be maintained in materials, design, craftsmanship, and settings to prolong the integrity of the cultural landscape [20]. These initiatives to achieve cultural landscape development and policy, technical support, and industrial development help in understanding the different emphases and factors that may work together in specific practices.

Songkou is a famous historical and cultural town in China and an experimental base for rural tourism in the Fujian-Taiwan kinship. It is a leading case of rural revitalization in China that promotes the bottom-up protection of the cultural landscape of the ancient town [26]. However, little research has been conducted into its actual performance and its broader impact on rural revitalization in China. As Liu and Tian (2019) [27] indicate, research in the related fields of cultural landscape development and revitalization is still needed. At present, few studies have explored the social benefits of developing cultural landscape preservation in the process of local revitalization. Therefore, this study raises the following questions: (1) Under what circumstances is a cultural landscape considered valuable? (2) How should the preservation and development of the cultural landscape be integrated? (3) How should cultural activities be developed to strengthen partnerships among societies, conduct informal learning among the population, and enhance the capacity to challenge contemporary development? Therefore, this qualitative research focuses on the specific case of Songkou and examines the experience of rural revitalization from the perspective of cultural landscapes. Its significance is to provide a case study for the cultural landscape combined with local revitalization in a heritage site. Below, this paper reviews the development of cultural landscape in China, explains the methods of data collection and analysis, investigates the implementation process of local revitalization in Songkou, discusses how to develop the cultural landscape combined with the revitalization of ancient towns, and develops conclusions.

2. Cultural Landscape and the Development of Ancient Towns in China

2.1. The International Practice of Cultural Landscape

The three major advisory bodies for world heritage work together on issues affecting cultural landscapes. In the International Union for Conservation of Nature protected area system for the protection of land/marine landscapes, social values, such as environmental

equity and poverty alleviation, are closely linked with nature conservation and regional economic development, with significant progress being achieved [4]. In 1993, Tongariro, New Zealand, became the first world heritage cultural landscape, and the cultural and religious–spiritual value of natural mountains to the Maori was recognized [11].

As direct beneficiaries, residents of heritage sites will be more actively involved in their sustainable development, including environmental protection and cultural inheritance, when they truly feel a mutual and symbiotic relationship with the site. Taking the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland (a World Heritage Site) in Sweden as an example, in 1986, the Swedish government successively introduced measures to promote the recovery and use of valuable land. Combined with community participation, it successfully alleviated the dilemma of the gradual disappearance of traditional agricultural culture. In 2000, the agricultural landscape was included in the World Heritage List of Cultural Landscapes. The management team of the agricultural landscape is composed of NGOs and government staff. The ratio of local farmers to government staff is 3/2. The development model of deep participation maximizes the enthusiasm of residents [28]. Taking the region as the main body, the community has been revitalized through the active use of various regional resources, such as nature, culture, history, industry, and talents. In tourism development, regional revitalization is integrated to form a tourism community. Thus, the different values and methodologies of cultural landscapes around the world present the development trends and challenges of cultural landscapes.

2.2. Chinese Cultural Landscapes and Ancient Towns and Villages

The concept of the universal value of heritage promotes the process of World Heritage through UNESCO and has gradually spread into a new vision of local heritage [29]. China officially joined the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage on 12 December 1985. The total number of World Heritage sites in China has reached 55, including five cultural landscape sites. China has diverse natural conditions, a long history, and numerous scenic spots. In China, the human landscape has a special value; the natural view of “harmony between man and nature” imbues Chinese cultural philosophy and way of life [8]. Each component of landscape heritage is of high value, showing prominent Oriental regionality, the representation of Asian regions, or global universal significance [30]. The cultural landscape has become a hot topic in the management of Chinese heritage in recent years.

China has made good progress socially, economically, and ecologically in cultivating its cultural landscape, but there is still room for improvement. For example, community-led, bottom-up cultural landscape practices cannot maintain growth, and the spatial and practical nature of heritage cannot reveal the full picture of its meaning [31]. The diversity of cultural landscape development is insufficient, and there are some deficiencies in helping the World Heritage Organization to understand the unique Asian cultural landscape ideas and the value of Chinese cultural landscapes [32]. It shows that promoting cultural landscape development remains one of the challenges facing rural heritage experts.

In terms of rural development, Western scholars carried out extensive research on the form and connotation of rural settlements in the 1950s and 1960s, but relevant research in China has gradually risen in the 21st Century [33]. In the past, town and village protection in China generally focused on the restoration of physical appearance and landscape and the improvement of infrastructure. There was a lack of planning for local revitalization, long-term industrial guidance, and community participation [26]. The “urban–rural dual structure” has led to a widening gap between the urban and rural populations. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, at the end of 2019, the country’s permanent urban population was 848.43 million, accounting for 60.60% of the total population (resident population urbanization rate), and the urbanization rate exceeded the 60% mark for the first time [34], leading to a sharp decrease in the number of villages and a reduction in their characteristics. From 1985 to 2001, in less than 20 years, the number of villages in China decreased from 940,617 to 709,257 [35]. Tourism development modes

for historical and cultural towns and villages usually lack their own characteristics [36]. The protection system of traditional towns and villages needs to be further improved. In 2003, in response to the destruction of many historical and cultural towns and villages, the Ministry of Construction and the National Cultural Heritage Administration jointly established the system of “Famous Historical and Cultural Towns of China” and “Famous Historical and Cultural Villages of China” to improve the concept of historical and cultural towns and villages further [37].

At present, most ancient towns and villages have lost their original agricultural functions [36], while new ones have become places for ecosystem services or landscape services, many of which have been especially commercialized [38]. This ancient legacy in the modern town landscape is at risk. In addition to the fragmentation of the cultural landscape under the influence of natural disasters, the rural structure has also changed [39].

Some towns and villages have gradually given up their original way of life, social order, and traditional culture, so much so that they cannot be recognized even by local residents [40]. This makes that the development of a cultural landscape, combined with orchard production, an increasingly important issue in Songkou ancient town. Through a qualitative case study, this paper aims to discuss the experience of Songkou—transforming an ancient town into a cultural landscape resource and the implementation of rural revitalization through the orchard project.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Area

Songkou ancient town is situated in the central part of Fujian Province, at the eastern foot of the Daiyun Mountains. It is located at the confluence of Dazhang and Changqing Creeks. Dazhang Creek, the largest tributary of the lower reaches of Minjiang River, runs through the whole area which covers 257.6 square kilometers and has a population of 32,600. There are many historic sites, including more than 100 well-preserved ancient residential buildings built in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Songkou includes a large number of scattered traditional agricultural areas and ancient buildings (Figures 1 and 2). Songkou ancient town was developed along the banks of Dazhang Creek with an organic form connecting mountains and rivers. The rural settlement is constantly evolving and its “living relics” meet the characteristics and conservation requirements of continuous landscapes within organic and evolving cultural landscapes [41].

There are several reasons for choosing Songkou as the research subject. First, there are more than 100 well-preserved ancient residential buildings from the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Songkou. In 2008, Songkou was named a “Famous Historical and Cultural Town of China” by the National Cultural Heritage Administration. It uses sustainable methods of production and is blessed with rich resources. Second, the development of agriculture and forestry in hilly areas has formed the basic landscape appearance, the agricultural and economic model, and the characteristics of the settlement, which have provided a wealth of cultural landscape resources. Third, Songkou is an experimental base for rural tourism in the Fujian-Taiwan kinship. It is widely regarded as the first coordinated area of “experience grafting” Taiwan’s community revitalization, which plays an important role in the redevelopment of ancient towns in China and is a key model that allows the Fujian-Taiwan kinship process to explore new ways of rural revitalization in China.

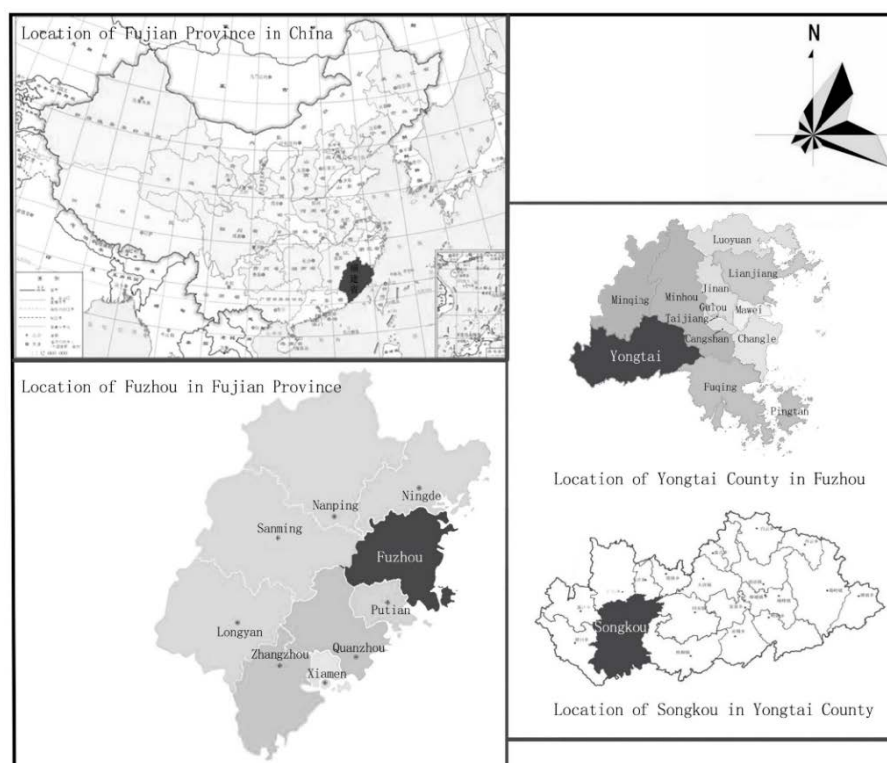


Figure 1. Location of Songkou ancient town.

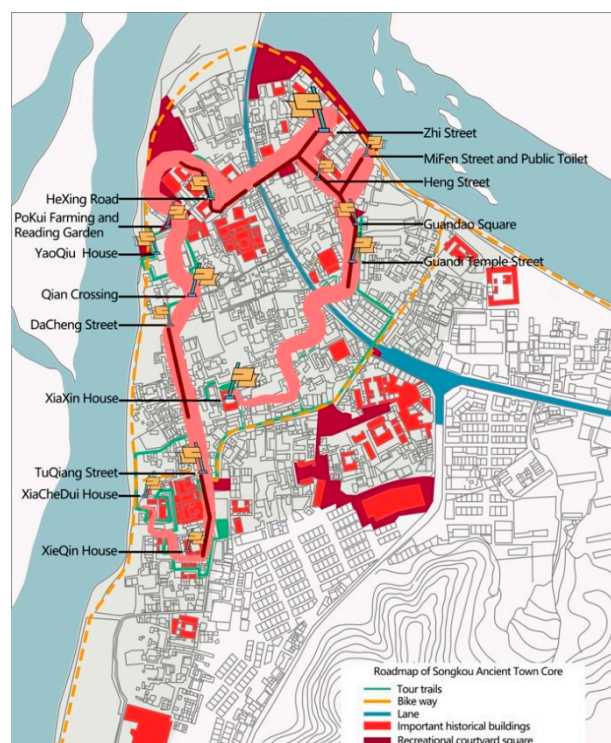


Figure 2. Map of Songkou ancient town core area.

The case planning of this study is based on the urban and rural planning law of the People's Republic of China (revised in 2015); regulations on the implementation of the cultural relics protection law of the People's Republic of China (revised in 2016); regulations on the protection of famous historical and cultural cities, towns, and villages (2008); and

guidelines for the protection and renovation of famous historical and cultural towns and villages in Fujian Province (Trial) (2014) as well as other relevant planning laws and regulations, policies, and technical specifications. The hierarchical structure of planning legislative power is the basis for planning Songkou's local revitalization.

Led by the Taiwan University Studio, the Local Learning Group is a committed local grassroots organization whose primary role is to promote local sustainability and community well-being in a proactive and participatory manner. It generally includes (1) community workers, (2) clan elders, (3) farmers, (4) voluntary associations (such as Songyang Poetry Society and the ancient music band), and (5) college student volunteers. It also introduced volunteer clubs, Rural construction student work team, and other public welfare organizations. Therefore, the local revitalization action plan was formulated, and the concept of co-creation of the network society was formed. Through the management system, the work related to the Local Learning Group (such as maintenance, management, and implementation) in Songkou ancient town is supported by local enterprises and some short-term government funds (such as the rural revitalization plan).

3.2. Data Collection

This study was conducted from August 2018 to July 2019, using data from in-depth interviews, field studies, and participant observations. To enhance the credibility and rigor of the research results, the selected interviewees had characteristics related to the research topic [42]. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the interviewees to ensure that their backgrounds were diversified but included long-term direct participation in local community affairs. Thus, the inclusion criteria are as follows: (1) he/she has been actively involved in community affairs for at least three years and (2) he/she has played an influential role in promoting the integration of cultural landscape and rural revitalization. The central questions asked in each interview were (1) what is the relationship between rural revitalization and the development of cultural landscape based on the ecological orchard?, (2) what are the effective ways to develop cultural landscape to promote local characteristics and livelihoods?, (3) what do you think about the cultural landscape related to production, life, and livelihood?, and (4) from the perspective of the implementation of cultural landscape development, have external agencies encountered any difficulties or problems? How do you think they can be overcome? Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report findings within the interview data. A total of 8 in-depth interviews were conducted, and the response rate was 100% (Table 1), which include (1) IV1, the leader of the Taiwan OU Studio team, who promotes ancient town restoration, environmental sustainability, and public participation; (2) IV2, a senior local government official, who is a policy maker involved in promoting community revitalization based on the cultural landscape; (3) IV3, a local scholar and the head of the Local Learning Group, who is retired, and engaged in coordination, communication, and management; (4) IV4, the industry leader of the Local Learning Group, and a middle-aged person who has returned to Songkou from outside and helped the local orchard landscape and its surrounding areas to become a cultural landscape and a site for environmental education (such as the implementation of agricultural tourism programs); (5) IV5, an environmental protection worker, who is engaged in ecological protection and tour guide work; (6) IV6, a public service worker, who is a retired teacher, participating in the community counseling of children; (7) IV7, a B&B operator, who is a college student returning to Songkou; and (8) IV8, a carpenter, who participates in the restoration of ancient buildings. It should be noted that, as the champions of community development, these interviewees have transformed a traditional ancient town into a rural cultural landscape resource using start-up, development, and entrepreneurial stages. Some of these champions are retired people who are not paid to participate in community affairs.

Table 1. List of interviewees.

| ID Code | Type | Age | Role | Participation Time | Occupation |
|---------|----------|-------|---|--------------------|---|
| IV1 | Culture | 40–45 | Promoting ancient town restoration, environmental sustainability, and public participation. | 4 years | Leader of the Taiwan OU Studio team |
| IV2 | Culture | 50–55 | A policy maker involved in promoting community revitalization based on the cultural landscape. | 6 years | Local senior official |
| IV3 | Talent | 60–65 | A local scholar, engaged in coordination, communication, and management. | 8 years | Head of the Local Learning Group |
| IV4 | Industry | 45–50 | Managing the local orchard landscape and its surrounding areas for agricultural tourism programs. | 5 years | The industry leader of the Local Learning Group |
| IV5 | Industry | 30–35 | Engaged in ecological protection and tour guide work. | 4 years | Tour guide |
| IV6 | Culture | 60–65 | Engaged in public welfare affairs, participating in community children counseling. | 7 years | Public service worker |
| IV7 | Talent | 25–30 | A college student returning to Songkou. | 3 years | B&B operator |
| IV8 | Talent | 55–60 | A craftsman participating in the restoration of ancient buildings. | 20 years | Carpenter |

4. Results

4.1. Perception of the Landscape as Providing a Livelihood

Being close to nature is a favorable factor for the development of the cultural landscape in Songkou. The sloping land of Songkou ancient town is located along the banks of Dazhang Creek, forming a beautiful natural link connecting mountains and rivers. Taohua Creek, a tributary of Dazhang Creek, makes a big bend in the town with its moon-shaped flow separated by a sandbar. The hidden value of Songkou's natural landscape, such as streams, sandbanks, shrubs, orchards, and woodlands is also part of its heritage. Watered by Dazhang Creek, the farmland and orchards produce grain and fruit. The green network based on settlements provides a variety of areas including natural, semi-natural, and man-made spaces, creating interrelated spatial resources. Orchard farmers who have lived and worked in this environment have a very different and deeper experience than visitors who visit for only a short time. For the local people, this landscape should be understood as a complex sensory interrelationship, and therefore, only those who live in this environment can understand what a real cultural landscape is. IV4, the orchard operator, said:

For me, the orchard is a place where I interact with my friends. We harvest plum fruits in a traditional way taught by my ancestors or old farmers, and feel the hot summer sun and taste plum fruits. Therefore, the cultural landscape of the orchard is not just for leisure, nor is it just a discounted travel package purchased on the website . . . it's a childhood memory.

Traditional rural landscapes are usually managed according to their productivity. Given that landscape productivity is the foundation of rural livelihoods, a functional appreciation of the landscape is understandable. The significance of landscape as a source of livelihood is evident in the overwhelming preference for the local plum fruit landscape, which has proved to be the main or only source of income for most families in Songkou. Another link within the orchard landscape is the collective heritage (rural woodland) and the personal or family heritage (the plum fruit landscape). However, there is an overlap between the two. For instance, plum fruit landscape is also considered part of the family heritage. IV4, the orchard operator, said:

The plum fruit has sentimental value, which is our heritage. The land that my father and grandfather gave me provides alternative jobs that [are] different from traditional rural livelihoods. The planting area of plum fruit is 20,000 hectares. It is the production base of plum fruit in the county. Those who could not afford

to go out could live on it. Everyone has different ways of attachment to the landscape of plum fruit, olives, and persimmon orchards. The mountains and rivers in Songkou are beautiful, but the plum orchard is more valuable to people.

The usefulness of landscape assessment is not limited to agricultural landscapes and also applies to the assessment of nonagricultural landscapes, such as the assessment of village forest land. The contribution of the nonagricultural public landscape, such as the water from the stream, confirms its value as a function of the landscape. For example, the ancient ferry area is an iconic sight of the town, and as the starting point of the walking experience route, it is understandable that the expert team considered the value of water to agricultural livelihoods. IV3, a local scholar, said:

The waterfront renovation project was unanimously approved by members of the Local Learning Group and benefited the people who fish for a living around Dazhang Creek. In this project, the residents around the waterfront were not actively involved . . . The ancient ferry area (100 m long) used to be the starting point of the route from Dazhang Creek to Fuzhou Port, and it was the key to the prosperity of Songkou ancient town. With the changes of the times, the once prosperous waterfront commerce and lifestyle have disappeared. Increasingly, the introduction of projects has influenced local people's identity with water, as the landscape character of the water highlights the uniqueness of the town compared with the surrounding towns and villages.

Obviously, through the transformation and development, Songkou has distinctive landscape characteristics. Along with urbanization and rapid economic development, the plum fruit landscape shows us how to rejuvenate an important cultural landscape by connecting people, nature, and agriculture. It is the first example in this area. By restoring public space, people recall the good old days and re-experience the lifestyle and environment of a rural community. IV5, an environmental protection worker and tour guide, said:

All these rural landscapes are precious to me. After Songkou became a rural tourist destination, the woodland of the town was transformed into an orchard conservation area. I like them more. At present, the tourist route is a walking experience line, including an ancient banyan square, an ancient ferry area, a flood defense waterfront [and] a landscape dam, connecting the main natural, historical, and cultural landscapes of the ancient town.

It is worth noting that it is important to maintain traditional plum processing to provide sustainability and resources. This contrasts with industrial methods that do not consider the preservation and recognition of the complex value of the local produce. In the case of the Taiwan team, combining plum processing and the traditional plum harvesting method is as important as town revitalization. IV4, the orchard operator who has been processing plums for years, describes the importance of the traditional methods:

We continue our traditional plum fruit production, which obviously enhances the local cultural heritage. The harvesting methods we use are not as harmful to the environment as industrial methods. However, the preservation and enhancement of these values depend primarily on local cooperation. Therefore, different projects should be undertaken to raise awareness and attention to these important resources

To sum up, the significance of landscape as a source of livelihood is conducive to the preservation of the cultural landscape in Songkou. These features include the connection between people and nature, the agricultural cultural landscape, and the evaluation of the rural landscape by local residents in terms of its productivity. This paper's cultural landscape preservation focuses on the revival of agriculture, including many natural features such as water, streams, sandbanks, shrubs, orchards, and fresh smells. Thus, local identification with the landscape is closely related to the usefulness of a particular

landscape, that is, its contribution to the livelihood of an individual or community. The plum fruit landscape provides local people with the opportunity to relax in an outdoor environment, a further response to the multifunctionality of the cultural landscape.

4.2. Heritage as a Spatial Identification Factor

“Landscape,” “place,” and “heritage” can be regarded as features of spatial recognition. The relationship between these three is obvious when considering the preservation of important local landscapes through traditional practices to perpetuate local traditions. As an expression of cultural identity, the spatial identification of the landscape has been associated with local and regional identities. The ways in which Songkou’s identity has been transformed confirms the essence of spatial recognition. Particularly important has been the special role played by the Local Learning Group of Songkou in the development of “landscape,” “place,” and “heritage,” especially its ability to embrace dissent in the process whilst protecting individual rights and upholding democratic behavior, including its support for bottom-up discussions of place and identity in the cultural landscape. In the early stages of building the “place,” members of the Local Learning Group provided arguments to support the participants in the discussion of the topic. Further interviews can be conducted with local people to clarify the unknown contents, for example, the historical origin and legends of Straight Street, the old Banyan Square, Crane-shaped Road, and Rice Noodle Street (Figure 3). The knowledge of the production and lifestyle of a specific area formed in the discussion constitutes the consciousness of a sustainable cultural landscape, thus influencing the planning, discussion, and decision making. IV3, a local village scholar, said:

The Banyan Square based on the banyan tree is the memory of the residents of the ancient town in the past 100 years. But in recent years, the changes of nearby facilities make the landmark fall into an awkward situation. The folk museum shows the history of the rural way of life. They should be seen as a unified entity, one that is permissible and acceptable for internal differences between group members and between associations. New things don’t need to [be disguised] as old things. Old things can be reused. We should guide the “new value” to get the power from the “old” value and achieve the coexistence of the new and the old. The concept of village heritage was refreshing to us. For example, the Film Temple, as a shared heritage, was negotiated on an equal footing, representing the inclusion of Songkou [in] history. The folk societies, such as the Songyang Poetry Society and the ancient music band, are therefore regarded as the local public heritage.

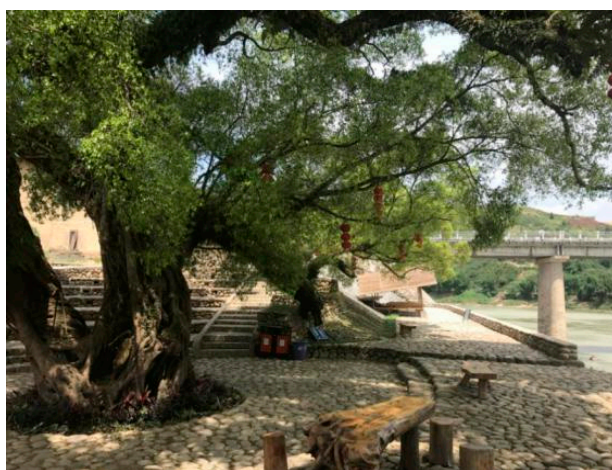


Figure 3. The Banyan Square.

The implementation of experiential activities obviously helps to improve the spatial identification of the town's cultural landscape. The implementation of the "Songkou sightseeing" series can help people better understand the daily life of Songkou and their deep relationship with the natural environment. This shows everyone the interrelationship between values worth keeping and intentions. The development of the cultural landscape in Songkou can reveal the relationship and course generated by the interaction between humans and the environment for the relationship between society, cultural network, and environment. The Taiwan OU Studio and the Local Learning Group conducted in-depth interviews on community cultural characteristics, community resources, development themes, community industry, and community memorabilia. They outlined the operation of the concept of local heritage in daily life and sorted out the cultural landscape based on the development history of Songkou. IV2, the local senior official, said:

In 2014, the work team for the "Songkou Traditional Culture and Architectural Space Plan" was formed by Taiwan OU Studio, the Local Learning Group, experts from community associations and universities, and scholars to connect the main natural landscape and [the] historical and cultural landscape of the ancient town based on the ancient ferry waterfront area. Through the collection of old photos, [the] parent-child nostalgic sketch competition, [and the] community newspaper [are] other ways to build local consensus. Taiwan OU Studio led everyone to understand Songkou and made great changes in the ancient town.

"Heritage" and "identity" are recurring themes in the process of revitalizing Songkou ancient town. Town identity and rural heritage need to be respected in the face of new changes and the alternation of "old" and "new" values. Heritage and local identities are directly linked to agricultural landscapes, natural landscapes (e.g., woodland and bushes), and culture. IV6, a public service worker engaged in public welfare affairs, said:

The public library has [put] Songkou in the spotlight once again. In 1910, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions established the Kranji Primary School in Songkou. On 22 April 2017, the Songkou Community Public Library was officially opened on the original site of Kranji Primary School. I planned the picture book reading club and film salon with Mr. Yan in the public library. Local children took an active part in the daily management of the library. Universities and non-profit groups from Fuzhou [use] the library as a practice base.

The "landscape" and "place" are constructed with ancient methods and local materials. Its "authenticity" is an important value of spatial identification. Field studies of traditional settlements showed how the Taiwanese team dealt with old towns, new buildings, and the surrounding environment, trying to promote a value of authenticity. The maintenance and improvement of its value mainly depend on the cooperation within the Local Learning Group. The group used traditional tools and ancient methods to practice rammed earth techniques and carry out different projects (Figure 4) in order to increase awareness of these important resources. These values are at the heart of the cultural landscape heritage of old towns. Local craftsmen gave great praise to this cultural restoration. IV8, a carpenter, said:

Straight Street and the adjacent bystreets were the most prosperous and lively old streets in the river-transport trade era. Now the business is deserted and the landscape is broken. In order to achieve the restoration of the original buildings, local craftsmen and young people formed a construction team. With the assistance of the residents along Crane Road, they used traditional tools and ancient methods to practice the ramming technology with local materials. After more than three months of effort, the attempt to restore the local architectural style was successful. Without their work, our old house would have been torn down like any other woodland. The transformed landscape of the public library establishes the character of the town and influences the local people, especially guiding young people to understand our historical traditions.



Figure 4. Rammed earth method [26].

The implementation of landscape construction of important places in Songkou is helpful to improve the overall value of the cultural landscape of the ancient town. The spatial identification of heritage helps better understand the daily life of local people and their deep relationship with the natural environment. This shows everyone the interrelationship between values worth keeping and intentions. In addition, the selection of important heritage spaces such as the Film Temple, public library, and Banyan Square as subjects within the discussion on the heritage of Songkou demonstrates the diverse significances of heritage and illuminates the spirit of the place by forming a landscape that is not limited to the tangible. Traditional cultural customs and social customs also reveal how heritage becomes the local cognitive framework and symbol carrier.

4.3. “Experience Grafting” and Collaborative Action

The case of Songkou presents the process of establishing the cultural landscape of a rural settlement and constructs a collaborative social network. Local practice demonstrates that heritage practice and informal learning make rural development policies more understandable. Diversification, innovation, and cooperation were EU Rural Development Plan overall goals from 1991 to 2006 [43] and were inspired by its methods [44–46], which contributed to Songkou’s cultural revival plan. From 2014 to 2017, the Taiwan OU Studio built an organizational structure in the ancient town and, with the assistance of the government, it mainly directed the Local Learning Group, councils, foundations, and various forms of social organizations using the theme of “linking-opening the business model demonstration camp in Songkou,” and guided the Local Learning Group to investigate local resources, participate in community communication, restore ancient villages, and connect industrial resources. In order to involve local actors in the design of sustainable, multi-sectoral, and inclusive development strategies, all these rural plans are based on a bottom-up approach, in which tourism is seen as a fundamental aspect of rural economic diversification [15].

Through purposeful experiential learning, building community work for the Local Learning Group has strong social significance. It enables people to understand how to use professional knowledge to guide, select, and accumulate social work experience in the context of “social group work” in which various professional and local groups communicate and share experiences (Figure 5). The Local Learning Group helps everyone deal effectively with individual, group, and community issues, considering that sustainable tourism is a factor in local development and has created synergies with other economic sectors [15] while guiding and demonstrating operational solutions. The Taiwanese team’s experience

of “preserving and activating local resources” plays a key role in the development of the cultural landscape. IV1, the leader of the Taiwan OU Studio team, said:

The four-year rural construction of Taiwan OU Studio has contributed to the revival of Songkou’s production and life. The development experience of Taiwan’s old towns and villages in recent years mainly lies in the preservation and activation of local resources. This action follows the “80/20 Rule”: 20% of new things and 80% of existing resources. This is not only the inevitable choice of adhering to the principle of respecting nature and history in the reconstruction of ancient towns but also a pragmatic measure to achieve maximum activation with minimum investment. The two sides’ different systems have led to the adaptation of their experience. Our approach is in line with Taiwan’s accumulated experience of trial and error over the past two or three decades. The increasing operational experience of Taiwan’s rural tourism product system has helped to bridge the gap in Fujian.

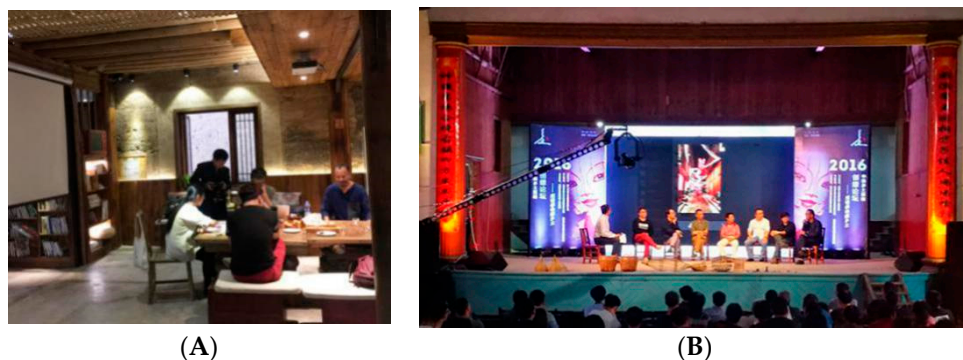


Figure 5. (A) Demonstration of operating the Relax Inn. (B) An experience exchange workshop.

The case of Songkou shows that activating internal elements and linking external elements are crucial to the development of the cultural landscape. The development strategy for this area is to combine an assessment of cultural landscape resources by the Local Learning Group and professional teams with the development of the ancient town to encourage the preservation of economic production methods with traditional characteristics. For example, the pilot action of “internal + external innovation grafting” launched in Songkou has turned the historical cultural landscape of Songkou into characteristic resources so as to preserve those resources and encourage industrial development. IV1, the leader of the Taiwan OU Studio team, said:

The practice of the ancient town taught the Local Learning Group members to use “internal innovation grafting” to design and promote localization of the construction method, and to use “external innovation grafting” with local cultural resources (traditional engineering, craftsmen, skills, the local material supply chain, local student courses). For example, we built the “Fujian, Taiwan, and overseas exchange station for Songkou ancient town,” and made good use of local skills and neighborhood manpower based on the experience of Taiwanese operational experts, so as to attract foreign talents to cooperate with local people.

The practice emphasizes the development of resources within the town, such as the natural environment, with festival tourism activities. This process requires the economic value of culture, a productive lifestyle, and the experience gained by participants. IV1 said:

The old rice noodle street and the market can be used for sightseeing, the Film Temple is a popular scene for festival tourism, and residences can be used for the B&B industry, which [allows] the economic value of traditional culture and ways of production and life to support the inheritance of tradition and environmental protection, and enrich the external interaction between towns, villages, and

communities. The “bright spot plan” of “Songkou country fair + Songkou light port” promotes local tourism. We are very happy to work together and have a good cooperation.

The business model demonstration operation in Songkou is an example of local tourism practice in the development of the cultural landscape. In practice, local resources and local participation should be emphasized, and experiential sightseeing activities should be developed in combination with local culture and ecological resources, which is beneficial to the continuous development of guided demonstration operations, mutual learning, and experience sharing in the future. IV7, a B&B operator, said:

Industry experts’ guidance for local residents to start and operate [a] business, and planning and organizing local cultural highlight activities, can drive us towards active participation. For example, as the Relax Inn, the flower planting plan, and manual workshop were established, the local residents actively and beneficially participated. This inn is the epitome of B&B that has been [practiced] in Taiwan for 30 years. It is a cultural product for sightseeing. Now the locals have stopped tearing down old houses and are learning how to reuse them, which is exactly what we want.

In short, the results show that the development of the cultural landscape stimulates the cooperation of various organizations under the action of internal and external forces and the active participation and mentoring role of local residents, thereby making town-based cooperation, mutual learning, and experience sharing possible. From the point of view of local tourism construction, the ancient ferry area of Songkou presents a pastoral landscape, characteristic B&B, endangered aquatic plants, and other diversified ecology. These rich tourism resources develop natural and humanistic characteristics. This case shows that the good results of cultural landscape development need to ensure the economic viability of the operation in order to maintain the value of the cultural landscape. Generating revenue in a culturally sensitive way that does not conflict with heritage preservation is a management challenge. Local tourism construction can serve a dual function—one is collaborative sharing and the other is an important means of protecting the entire site.

5. Discussion: The Function of Cultural Landscape Development in the Revitalization of Ancient Towns

Much of the international literature has examined the various roles, functions, and benefits of cultural landscapes. In view of the traditional relationship between nature and culture in the East, one may ask whether the term “cultural landscape” has brought problems to these cultures. For example, the term “cultural landscape” in China has a specific meaning [47]. “Asia has great cultural landscape with outstanding universal values . . . China is a typical representative of Asian countries” [48]. The natural view of “the unity of man and nature” would be the most significant philosophical feature that distinguishes between Chinese and Western cultures [49]. In 2003, the IUCN World Park Conference in Durban, South Africa, proposed that the values of aboriginal people and ecological wisdom in nature are different from those of Western cultural landscapes [50]. However, ways to address the social, economic, and ecological challenges of rural revitalization have been neglected in China and rarely received the same attention as other development approaches. Taking Songkou as an example, the investigation of cultural landscape resources is the main work of the Local Learning Group. After completing the list/report of cultural landscapes, the information forms the basis for making and implementing management decisions at a later stage [51]. This paper aimed to explore the influence of cultural landscape resources on the revitalization of Songkou. The findings suggest that a cultural landscape’s appearance does more than just establish a reputation. From the perspective of economic value, for example, landscapes with a different perception of the environment are the source of livelihood, and the landscape is the product of the co-evolution of humans and the environment. A tangible product and an intangible process link the surrounding environment through common meanings and values, increasing the diversity of cumulative

meanings associated with the landscape. It proves that the diversification of rural livelihoods in China is also a strategy to deal with the challenges of regional revitalization, and its main purpose is to reduce the vulnerability of livelihoods [52]. Therefore, various economic activities, technology and innovation [53], multifunctional agricultural activities [54], agrotourism [55], and the investment portfolios of public–private partnerships [56] are important components. On the social level, a cultural landscape based on the production of plum orchards demonstrates the resilience of residents while enhancing social cohesion and locally-based rural revitalization. Various forms of social organizations such as local study groups, councils, foundations, etc., function as cooperatives and provide an adaptive governance method [57] that includes the diversity of values and interests, promotes the resolution of conflicts [58], and establishes a community spirit [59] and a sense of belonging and identity [60]. Cooperatives also help to promote women’s employment on an equal basis with men [16]. Since the European Landscape Convention (ELC) believes that landscape is a key element of personal and social well-being, its protection, management, and planning involve everyone’s rights and responsibilities [6]. Overall, Songkou has developed a cohesive social network that includes agricultural life, crop production, the ecological environment, and community care.

In Songkou, today’s agricultural landscape is a combination of natural features and human interventions (such as facilities, orchards, and agricultural activities). Since the landscape itself is dynamic, change is inevitable; it requires a program of continuous protection and maintenance activities to secure its long-term maintenance [51]. This practice, based on an ancient town surrounded by plum orchards, establishes the landscape characteristics of the countryside and guides characteristic development. Songkou’s plum orchard production and waterfront landscapes lie at the heart of the perception of landscape value. Farmers engaged in plum fruit production have a deep connection to the natural environment, which stimulates their sense and perception of the landscape. As Ingold, T. (1993) [61] mentioned, “By living in it, the landscape becomes a part of it.” The ancient ferry waterfront is regarded as one of the core heritage projects, representing human activities in harmony with the natural environment, a relationship that is mutual. In the process of contact with their environment, organisms construct their own “ecological niche” [62]. The results show that the close relationship between man and nature is confirmed from the perspective of landscape cognition and provides a livelihood for farmers, whereby agricultural activities meet the principles of sustainable and organic agriculture by using natural resources responsibly [63]. From the perspective of territorial planning, there is a close connection between the proper protection of heritage resources and the sustainability of cultural landscapes [51,64,65]. Heritage resources are usually established under stable climatic conditions [66], and therefore, an interdisciplinary framework is needed to effectively address the complex interactions among climate, physical, social, and ecological systems [67], which is another reason for the construction of the cultural landscape.

As an expression of cultural identity, the spatial recognition of landscape is very important for the association with local and regional identities, thereby strengthening the development of “landscape,” “place,” and “heritage”.

In the revitalization of Songkou, heritage, as a solution for spatial identification, provides a dynamic interaction process between natural and social–cultural lifestyles to build a cultural landscape that creates the form and characteristics of physical space and provides different, nonproductive activities and facilities related to people’s quality of life. As Ellen (1996) [68] pointed out, cultural landscape infiltrates into economic, social, ecological, and geographical factors, thereby showing that landscape is dynamic and evolving continuously. The results show that the cultural landscape based on the ferry waterfront and old settlement enables the process of spatial identification, including the design, development, and construction or restoration of various places, which are used for agriculture, leisure, social interaction, environmental education, and ecological services. The cultural landscape presented has the characteristics of dynamic and continuous evolution. The reason is that heritage cannot be completely maintained in a certain historical stage to present the

original state. It records the life scene of the people at that time and shows the unique cultural landscape through collective memory and common life experience. Therefore, we should consider the historical context of the settlement, including the complex relationship between administrative divisions, ethnic relations, regional politics, community identity, etc. so as to form a complete spatial identification and clarify the spatial correspondence and locality of heritage. Therefore, the landscape is regarded as a “unique cultural concept,” which is an analytical concept closely related to the concepts of location, identity, and heritage. It means that, over time, the collective shaping of nature and mankind reflects the common beliefs and common social practices of mankind [69]. Its expected effect is to build a sustainable, unique, and well-maintained unified environment that meets people’s needs and improves their health and well-being.

The case study shows that experience grafting has developed into a public and collaborative social space, allowing residents to interact. The implementation process of the cultural landscape is characterized by cooperation, mutual learning, and experience sharing. Through partnership and long-term cooperation among various social actors, it can support rural revitalization. In the cultural landscape, heritage resources can recall historical identities and enhance social cohesion [70]. In Italy, heritage resources play an important role in social cohesion and have become a driving factor for the national economy [71]. For example, with the help of the government, the Taiwanese team and the Local Learning Group are the main forces of social organization in the ancient town, which is characterized by an internal and external cohesion mechanism. First, local people are the main body of development. As Garofoli (1999) [72] mentioned, internal factors are very important. Taking local people as the main body of development can improve the capacity of local development, protect the environment and cultural diversity, and establish an organization that can reflect the will of local people. At its core is an emphasis on a self-sustaining process with local resources. Second is the grafting of internal and external resources and public participation, such as repositioning local development, preserving ultimate control within the area as far as possible, and making full use of internal and external markets, institutions, and networks [73]. In addition, a durable social structure is fundamental to ensuring the success of any rural revival plan that requires people outside the village to overcome demographic challenges. Strong social capital contributes to inclusiveness and public participation in rural areas [74] while cooperation between different participants and departments is strengthened [75]. Local communities are therefore a suitable research environment to better understand the cultural landscape, nature, people, and well-being, and how to develop these resources and places in order to create a more sustainable environment.

This study finds that cultural landscapes are closely linked to nature, culture, and community collaboration, which means that living environments have the potential to promote human lifestyles and well-being. It shows that the experience of cultural landscape development based on the orchard and ferry waterfront allows us to understand the interaction between local people and the environment, and the physical landscape, human experience, and social relationships. This study takes Songkou as the object and category for heritage discussion, illustrating the different considerations of heritage as a kind of spatial recognition. In addition, it has been demonstrated that tourism as an industry has a positive impact on the cultural landscape when developing rural heritage and tourism, and helps the community to transition to a more complex and diversified economic base, exploring the relationship between environment and economy [20]. For example, according to the Italian National Bureau of Statistics, tourists spent approximately 421 million nights in tourist accommodation in 2017, an increase of 4.4% compared to the previous year [76]. Tourism and agricultural production are the economic sectors most vulnerable to climate change in central Italy [77]; therefore, the long-term sustainability of heritage resources requires a strong protection framework to enhance the region’s adaptive capacity [71].

In addition, the massive influx of people into cities and the subsequent economic recession in rural areas have triggered the emergence of a variety of rural development

strategies and projects driven by public institutions. These strategies and projects hardly consider social participation and the integration of sustainable development goals. To bridge this gap, this research combines participatory processes [16] so that community building, as the core concept of the Taiwan OU Studio, has been an important social transformation movement in Taiwan over the past 20 years and has been deepened into a common social experience. It is introduced into the traditional settlement preservation and folk activities, which helps realize the sustainable development of Songkou ancient town, enhance the power of rural people, realize social innovation, and develop a competitive local economy. The case study shows that the case of settlement preservation in Songkou is similar to the protection framework of the European Landscape Convention. The Convention takes a regional approach to cultural heritage, which is completely different from UNESCO's vision since it takes the overall and social landscapes into consideration, while UNESCO's approach focuses on regional and local issues. Combining the European Landscape Convention with national land planning can also promote communication between different departments and stakeholders [71].

6. Conclusions

Sauer (1925) coined the term and basic concept of "cultural landscape" almost a century ago, and Friedrich Ratzel's vision is to advocate the existence of a coordinated relationship between man and the earth. He realized that, due to the existence of human factors, environmental control is limited [78]. The case of Songkou presents significance and diversity under the interaction of culture and nature, especially from China's rural development history. On the one hand, new values are created in the development of these places through activities related to the discovery of local history, restoration of rituals, and preservation of traditional knowledge by local communities or associations. On the other hand, heritage activities play an important role in developing innovative local economies, creative communities, and achieving sustainable development. As proposed in the European Landscape Convention, its legitimacy is justified by its natural form and/or the heritage value produced by human activities [63]. For example, in southern Sweden, a team composed of NGOs and government workers maintained an authorized pasture landscape, which is an example of successful community participation in the development of a cultural landscape heritage [28].

In this study, the qualitative research is based on data from a specific location (Songkou ancient town) and a specific period (August 2018 to July 2019). To achieve the research purpose better, this study used interview evidence, rather than statistical data, to draw conclusions. Therefore, although the interviewees have different personal backgrounds, they are all influential figures who have actively participated in local community affairs for a long time and played a role in the process of promoting the combination of cultural landscape development and rural revitalization. This research responds to three research questions: (1) Is the unique promotion of local culture, ecological value, and livelihood based on cultural landscapes considered valuable? (2) Can engaging in community heritage action guide the overall development of local industries based on the knowledge of cultural landscape resources and thereby shape the local cultural landscape? (3) Should we encourage "experience grafting" and strengthen the partnership between societies? In order to enhance the transferability of qualitative results, this study attempts to elaborate on the research details. The study had a limited number of respondents. To be applicable to a wider group, the study should include more participants from different levels or backgrounds. Therefore, in the future, it is suggested that more participants in the cultural landscape should be interviewed and that Songkou should be compared with other types of cultural heritage in China.

The main findings are as follows:

1. Based on the perception of landscape productivity as rural livelihood, the different landscape characteristics of the natural surroundings and people are connected to

- recognize the development resources of the rural cultural landscape, making the cultural landscape of Songkou distinctive;
2. The cultural landscape has a dynamic process of evolution and is also a process of spatial identification of place, identity, and heritage. Through community action, the local cultural landscape is shaped;
3. With “experience grafting” as the coordinating action, the Local Learning Group and local residents are guided to participate in the development of local industries actively, accumulate experience, and help build the cooperation between Fujian and Taiwan to explore the development of Chinese ancient towns and villages and create a new model;
4. The rural revitalization of Songkou has developed collaborative community action that includes the recognition of rural cultural landscape resources and the spatial identification of heritage.

By exploring the development experience of Songkou, this paper aims to identify the development of different forms of cultural landscapes and explore the potential of cultural landscapes for rural revitalization from an indigenous Chinese perspective. Moreover, Taiwan’s accumulated endogenous development experience and international resources and methods can be grafted into local cultural landscape practice in Fujian. Both endogenous and exogenous development aim to protect the ecology and inherited culture while building a reasonable and fair social order, expanding the concept of cultural landscape heritage preservation, and finally achieving local coordination and sustainable development.

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