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Rural Space Aesthetics and Rural Construction Paths from the Perspective of the Montage: The Cases of Seven Villages in Guangdong, China

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Abstract: In the rural areas of China, construction is growing vigorously, and the question of how to realize the creative inheritance and development of these areas in the regional context, as well as the exploration of new construction methods and paths, are important problems. Nowadays, there are two developing trends in terms of research methods. Firstly, the boundaries between various disciplines are becoming increasingly blurred, and interdisciplinary theoretical reference has become an effective means of realizing innovation in this field. The other trend relates to the great development of digital technology, such as parameterization and spatial information technology. This technological innovation sheds new light on rural image construction. This study aims to draw on the montage art concept and organization techniques and to integrate the new technical language into the construction of new aesthetic orientations and context-related inheritance paths of rural historical places in China. Based on the aesthetic relevance of montage aesthetics to rural regional characteristics, the aesthetic cognition of the rural area in Guangdong is analyzed and demonstrated. Then, the strategies and methods used for the construction of rural area are established based on four layers, i.e., the narrative clues, base site pattern, spatial interfaces and monomer construction. The present research expands on the perspectives and methods of rural reconstruction, provides new ideas for the current rural practice, and is conducive to promoting the systematic study of rural construction theory.

Keywords: rural aesthetics; spatial narrative; montage context; rural construction; rural landscape



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1. Introduction

In the long-term spontaneous construction process of rural areas, many construction forms with regional characteristics are produced under the dual influences of the spatial inheritance of a “historical stage” and its shape after experiencing “differentiation and integration” and “screening and regeneration”. The derivation process and image of the construction of villages always overcome the limitations of traditional aesthetics, displaying unique aesthetic characteristics and the wisdom of construction. For instance, [1] once pointed out: “many inventions in recent years are commonly seen as technical processes in local architecture, such as prefabricated and standardized components of building and flexible movable structures”, and “As the carrier of the philosophy and design skills for nameless builders, they provide the people in the age of industrial times with the most abundant source of architectural inspiration which is to be further developed”.

Since 2004, the Chinese government has regularly issued the No. 1 Central Document, with the theme of “Agriculture, rural areas and farmers” highly emphasizing the important position of rural, farming and agricultural issues in the development of modern society [2]. In 2018, the No. 1 Central Document [3] proposed the rural revitalization strategy and

encouraged people from all walks of life to invest in rural construction. China has entered a comprehensive period of rural construction.

With the growing rural construction in China, the question of how to realize the creative inheritance and development of rural areas in the regional context has become an important problem in the academic circles. A great number of researchers have proposed new paths of rural reconstruction from different perspectives, such as [4], who redefined the concept of the “ecological museum”, which enables the rural area to become a joint construction and operation object of the authorities and local residents. However, this new path is more appropriate for well-preserved villages with a rich cultural heritage. Moreover, the concept of authenticity also provides a steady-state renewal path for exploring the inheritance of rural areas in a historical context from an authentic perspective [5]. The research focuses on the construction of a network of different connected levels of authentic historical environments and control elements and the formation of sequential steps for the renewal of a steady state [6]. In addition, there is also a new, updated path based on the “scattered integration of historical elements” [7,8], which acknowledges the present status of the large number of villages under the trend of urbanization and builds a multi-point series transformation mode with multiple historical nodes as the core [9].

In general, the present ideas regarding rural construction focus on regional repair, transformation and the review of rural historical heritage zones, with the purpose of realizing the ordered renewal of traditional scenes, and the renewal paths mainly obey the linear model of heritage protection and historical landscape repair.

However, in recent years, the development of montage theory, as a film-editing language, has offered new ideas for rural space and architecture design. The article ‘Montage and Architecture’, published in the 1940s, was the first to theorize montage as a method of architecture design [10]. The author focused especially on the role of composition in sequence, or montage, in reference to the field of architecture. Zhou Shiyan is an expert who studied montage architectural design early on in his career in China, and he developed the dynamic image analysis method of architecture creation based on image logic, including virtual and real entities, lenses and viewpoints, moving mirrors and paths, montages and hyperlinks in the spatial sequence [11]. In this research, the “class link” transformation mode for rural villages was enlightened. Charlotte Bundgaard constructed a dialogue on the architectural potential of montage. The author introduced the concept of montage to engender a new industrial conception of architecture and created architectural dialogues between new and old, industrial and traditional. This research provides inspiration for transformation of old and new local architecture [12]. Özten (2019) discussed the role of the montage as a design input and as a means of alienation through organizing special multi-layered complex experiences in the design of private and public spaces by preventing easy consumption [13]. Wu and Lian (2020) analyzed the characteristics of montage architecture transformation, taking the transformation old buildings in Guangzhou Wenheyu as an example, and proposed a matrix model of montage narratives, investigating the transformation of a space from a static scene to narrative dynamic space [14]. Although this research focuses more on the interior spaces of architecture, its construction method of immersive space lays a foundation for the investigation of rural space experiences.

Chen(2017) proposed the concept of motif-refining and reconstruction for the transformation of traditional villages, and his view that “historical fragments collage to deepen historical context and modernity” is consistent with the montage technique [15]. Gu (2021) analyzed the internal causes of the decline of traditional rural cultural spaces against the background of new media and the changes in their characteristics, and then summarized the key points regarding the use of new media to reconstruct and revive rural public spaces of cultural significance [16]. The author described the processes of cultivating village democratic consciousness, maintaining the traditional cultural “memory field”, and so on. This study explored how to integrate new media into reconstruction and enable it to coexist with complete inheritance.

In addition, many scholars have explored paths to rural renewal from other perspectives. For example, Tang(2020) interpreted the symbiotic connotations of rural environmental from the “symbiosis” perspective and built a rural symbiotic system [17]. Based on the perspective of “communication”, the author(2019) analyzed the requirements for rural building transformation applying the technical aspects of traditional media, online media and web media [18]. Li et al. (2016) studied the landscape classification methods of traditional villages in Fujian Province using the K-modes method and proposed strategies and methods for protecting and utilizing the traditional village landscape [19]. These studies either focused on rural ecological design or on rural tourism publicity, but they provided no obvious concept innovation in terms of aesthetic research and transformation skills.

The abovementioned research shows that the montage is an evolving array of techniques and offers a new, exciting direction for studies of rural transformation. However, this research still has the following shortcomings. On the one hand, the rural construction method is one-dimensional due to the limitation of its research perspective. Rural aesthetics follows the more traditional aesthetic mode and does not account for the aesthetic exploration of spaces from the new perspective. On the other hand, rural studies adopting the perspective of montage are scattered and focus on the field of architectural design, and there is a lack of more targeted systematic studies focusing on the overall rural transformation.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore a new path regarding the transformation of local inheritance over time from the perspective of montage. This paper aims to reinterpret the aesthetic characteristics of the rural area and to explore the new path to the transformation of inheritance in the native context over time from the perspective of montage. Specifically, two research questions are proposed in order to achieve this goal.

RQ1: What are the aesthetic characteristics of the rural space in the context of montage?

RQ2: How can we construct the rural space from the perspective of montage?

2. Related Theory of Aesthetics in the Montage Context

Montage is a term from the language of the film industry which conveys information about the clipping and editing of different shots, scenes and paragraphs [20]. Its principle is to create connections and conflicts in information through the specific combination of movie elements, and finally to achieve the connotative expression and aesthetic effect beyond the individual frames. With respect to the concepts of cinematic montage, as Aumont notes, ‘critics and biographers are all agreed on this one point: Eisenstein equals montage’ [21]. Eisenstein (1898–1948) was the first to create and codify a formal code of aesthetics for cinema.

In the early 20th century, through the exploration of movie theories during various periods, the montage gradually developed from an editing technique into a film lens combination theory. The new theory aims to deconstruct the phenomenon itself and reassemble it into a new quality, and through the expression of the concept and attitude of the new quality, it realizes the high generalization of film aesthetics and even the space–time artistic creation methods, enabling the high generalization of movie aesthetics and even the methods of space–time art creation [22].

The concept of montage involves multiple levels of aesthetic images, narrative methods and expression skills, which can be classified into two categories, i.e., the narrative montage and expressive montage [23]. The narrative montage is a splicing method of movie editing, which narrates and demonstrates the plots through the connection of different lenses based on the development law, internal connections and the time sequence of things, including continuous montage, parallel montage and cross montage (Table 1). Montage usually entails the combination and construction of montage lenses by means of metaphor, contrast and repetition. The reflection of the narrative montage in the spatial design mainly presents as the construction of different narrative clues in space and creates different situational images according to changes in the spatial sequence arrangement. The techniques of lens composition used to express montage, such as contrast, metaphor and narration, have

evolved into the techniques of contrast and coupling, used for individual buildings or the construction of inner spaces (Table 1).

Table 1. Montage and spatial construction.

Methods of Narrative Montage	Spatial Narrative Mode	Montage Expression	Spatial Design
Continuous montage	Single linear narrative	Rhythmic narration following a main line in accordance with the order of time development.	
Parallel montage	Double juxtaposition narration	The juxtaposition of two or more narrative clues in different times and spaces to reveal a unified theme or plot.	Superposition, jumper connection, narration interspersed with flashbacks, flashback, fade-in, fade-out, metaphor, contrast
Cross montage	Multi-dimensional mixed narrative	The integration and unconventional expression of multiple different clues of spatiotemporal narration.	Repetition, extension collage, reconstruction, strength, contrast, superposition, embedment

In short, our discussion of the aesthetic characteristics of montage can be concluded with two points, as follows:

- (1) The formation of the characteristics of spatial pluralism, homogeneity and motion through the deconstruction of central order theory. The central order is the core principle of the inner logical structure of objects in the traditional expression of aesthetics. The essence of montage is a kind of structural method, and in this method, as a viewpoint for selecting and dealing with realistic methods, blends and juxtaposes irrelevant opposite elements [24]. These elements are irrelevant to one another but are combined to generate the synchronic presentation of a multidimensional composition or the narration of things. Thus, in this way, the subversion and reconstruction of the original “centre-typed” pattern is formed [11], and the interface order is used to display the aesthetic image, with the characteristics of spatial pluralism, homogeneity and motion (Figure 1, Table 1).
- (2) The phenomenon of hyperlinks and anti-transcendental aesthetic images. The movie montage includes hyperlink phenomena transcending time and space, and through the connection of the past with the future, and of time with space, super sequence space and nonlinear space are produced [25]. Additionally, based on the creative thinking of “the synthesis of various conflicting differences” [26], the reconstruction techniques of “collage and dislocation”, “contradiction and decomposition” and “narration and flashback” are derived (Figure 2), and the aesthetic images, such as “fragments and completion”, “grotesqueness and detachment” and “chaos and ambiguity”, are presented. In addition, montage focuses on the display of ideas in human consciousness and the overlap between historical environments and scenes. The movie theorist Eisenstein believed that “the display of two lens is doomed to be connected into a new representation, which is an image produced as a new quality, no matter what they are” [27]. Montage integrates the metaphor and lyricism of an intertwined image with respect to the elements of pictures, music, etc., as well as the elaboration of the psychological subconscious. Thus, the associations, suspense and stream of consciousness beyond pictures are produced, and this is reflected in the exploration of the ambiguous aesthetic feeling between objective reality and collective consciousness.

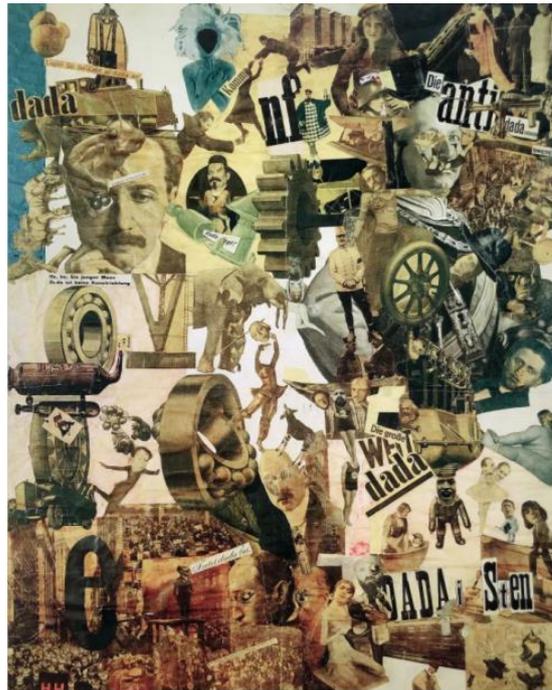


Figure 1. Image montage (source: [28]).



Figure 2. Scene montage (source: [29]).

3. Research Methodology

This paper aims to reinterpret the aesthetic characteristics of the rural area and to explore a new path for the transformation of the inheritance of a native context over time from the perspective of montage. In this section, the case studies, data collection and analysis used to obtain the results are introduced.

The present study employed a diversified qualitative research method [30–32]. The case study was used to understand the rural space aesthetics and rural construction path in a montage context. In this work, seven villages in the Guangfu area, Guangdong Province, China, were selected, namely, the Danjia villages (four villages) in Haiou Island, as well as Xiantang Village, Qiangang Village and Shawan Town, as the study cases used to achieve the research goal. These seven villages were selected because they have typical rural aesthetics and are famous for their characteristics in Guangdong Province (Figure 3). Furthermore, these villages are accessible to researchers, and it is also easy to collect data at these sites.

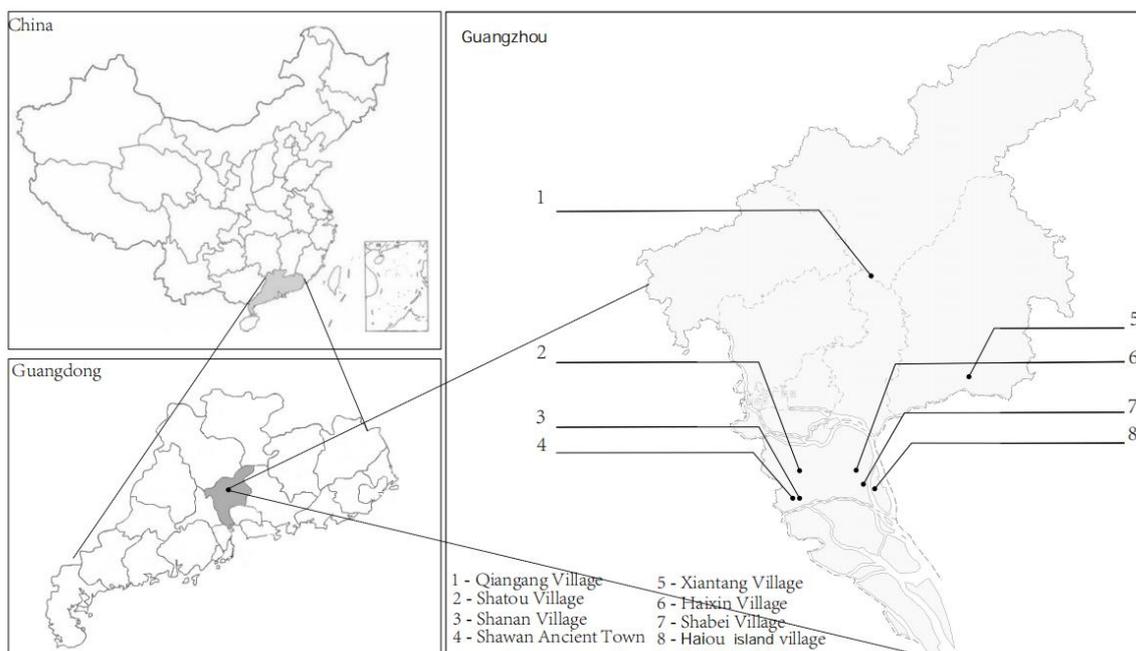


Figure 3. Investigated villages in Guangzhou (source: the authors).

3.1. Study Cases

Among these seven villages, the four Danjia villages in Haiou Island and Xiantang Village were the main cases used for the data collection.

(1) Danjia Villages in Haiou Island

The Danjia villages are mainly distributed along the coasts of Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Hainan Provinces. Historically, the Danjia people had a low social status and no land and lived in boats, making their living by fishing. Due to sand and mud deposition, there are many “Shatan” in the lower reaches of the Pearl River, and people began to compete with the sea for land at a very early date. “The floating sand beach was enclosed to prevent it from being washed away by the water. Artificial silting promotion by rippling stones and planting grass accelerated the silting growth and expansion in Sha Tin” [33].

The Haiou Island is located in the eastern suburbs of Shilou Town, Panyu District, Guangzhou City. It is surrounded by the main channel of the Pearl River and the Lianhua Waterway, and it is a typical inland river island formed by river alluvium in the Pearl River Delta. Because of the perennial alluvial accumulation of the tributaries of the Dongjiang River and the Lion River, tidal flats and sandbanks are gradually formed at their confluence, of which Haiou Island is the largest sandbank (Figure 4). The island covers a total area of about 36 square kilometers, with a coastline length of 37.96 km, and is composed of four villages: the Haixin Village, Jiangou Village, Shabei Village and Shannan Village. Although these villages differ in size, they share similar traits and environments and are alike in form. The villages are separated by a large field foundation, of which approximately one meter is reserved as the buffer zone for each critical surface. There are two “lek” on the island: the Jiangou lek and Huangi lek. The narrowest part of the two leks is as wide as 300 m, and the north and south ends connect the Lion River and Lianhuashan Waterway. There are no industrial enterprises on Haiou Island, and traditional agricultural farming is the main source of the villagers’ income, mainly including farming, farmland leasing and breeding. The river network in the village is staggered, the small bridges are crisscrossed and the fishpond is connected with the river network, so that the island appears like green jade within the Pearl River estuary.



Figure 4. The layout of Haiou Island in Panyu District, Guangzhou (source: the authors).

(2) Xiantang Village

Xiantang Village is located at the center of the new downtown area of Shitan Town, and it borders the Zengjiang River in the east, Guwu Village in the south, Hengling Village in the west and Tangtou Village and the Zengtan Road in the north. The village covers a total area of 315.56 hectares and is composed of residents surnamed Zhang and Feng. It is composed of 9 cooperatives, with about 243 households and 1250 people. Xiantang Village was built in the era of the Ming Dynasty, and before 1949, it was named Shantang Village, and after that it was renamed as Xiantang Village. In this village, there is a Wong Tai Sin courtyard and two gun towers, which are well preserved and contribute to the beautiful scenery of the village. The yam farming and fishpond culture are the pillars of industry in Xiantang Village, which is well-known far and wide as “Xiantang Big Yam”. The convenient transportation conditions have attracted many manufacturers desiring to invest and build factories, which has effectively solved the problem of the surplus rural labor force and increased the collective economic income. In the areas close to Xiantang Village, there are many tourist attractions, such as Chen Zongnan’s former residence, the Shitan Weiling tomb group, Zengcheng Baishui Village, Zengjiang Gallery and the Xiaolou Family. Additionally, there are special products, such as the pipi soup, whole-cow banquet, late vegetable heart, Zengcheng silk, Miao rice and “Zengcheng Hanging green” lychee.

3.2. Data Collection

In this study, a qualitative method of observation was used to collect the data relating to the rural spaces in the case studies. We can obtain the basic information on the village using this observation method more directly, as the image data are more authentic, through observation, recording and photography. Furthermore, through natural observation, we can obtain vivid individual experiences. In particular, in the process of aesthetic research on villages, using the observation method can help us to grasp the spatial characteristics of the villages more intuitively, experience the cultural accumulation based on the appearance of the village’s material form and efficiently achieve personal aesthetic discovery and experience. The observation was conducted from March to August 2022. More than

210 photos were taken so as to capture the significant scenes of the rural aesthetics in those villages.

3.3. Data Analysis

In order to obtain high-quality data, in this paper we used purposive sampling to select the photos for further analysis. Only the photos directly related to the study aspects, including rural patterns, rural fabrics and spatial interfaces, were considered, and 60 photos were finally selected.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the selected photos. The NVivo software was used to code the photos according to their displayed content. Through the coding process, catalogues were obtained, and the results are disclosed in Section 4.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Rural Space Aesthetics in the Montage Context

The aesthetician Du Dongzhi once described the rural areas as old, simple and even strange and dangerous, and he stated that they have actually turned out to be the secret places and treasured lands through which people escape urban civilization and move beyond mundane ideals [34]. In fact, this description elaborates on the aesthetic image and aesthetic experience, which are unique to rural spaces. In fact, the scenery's spatial composition, derivative process, aesthetic psychological experience and construction methods have internal aesthetic similarities with montage (Table 2).

Table 2. Montage aesthetics and rural aesthetics.

	Name	Rural Aesthetics	Montage Aesthetics
Perspective			
	Derivation	Multi-vector, spontaneous	Anti-programming
	Element composition	Coexistence of multiple historical elements	Multiple juxtaposition
	Psychological experience	Motion and scene change	Multi-viewpoint impression synthesis
	Construction skills	Alien transmutation	Hybrid reconstruction

4.1.1. Montage Characteristics of the Rural Derivative Type

In this section, the Danjia Village in Haiou Island, Guangdong, is taken as an example to demonstrate the montage characteristics of the rural derivative type. The composition of the Danjia community is complex, without considering genealogy and clan relations [35]. The layout of villages is mostly based on the random use of terrain, and there are no defined ancestral halls, temples and core areas that can be focused on for reference. Under the influence of a multi-vector-derived order, there is no preference pattern regarding the rule of the sequence of inheritance of the natural village space. In addition, there is no defined entrance and starting point, with multiple roads available to those wishing to access the village. Most villages propagate randomly along the main tunnel of rivers, encountering and being in harmony with the restrictions and constraints of surrounding environment. Therefore, the shoreline boundary forms a random concave and, accordingly, a convex interface, producing a certain forward and backward spatial interaction with the outer areas of the surrounding paddy fields and fishponds (Figure 5). On the micro level, the local fabric differs in terms of the size, spacing and orientation of individual buildings, existing in a certain kind of random disorder. However, in the disorder, a balanced state is formed through the characteristics of separation, since they run in advance of and retreat from each other (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The fabric of Danjia Village (source: the authors).

From the analysis of the developmental processes of the abovementioned villages, it can be seen that under the self-organized state of the village subjects, rural technical systems and spatial patterns are generated through the pattern of “mode adaptation or variation” [36]. Under the limited conditions, the villagers constantly transgress the rules and boundaries to create new possibilities using the original geo-engineering method. Under the influence of historical inheritance, many regional forms produce places where multiple elements and spaces converge. As Jackson said, “mobility and transmutation are the core features of the local landscape . . . It happens endlessly and patiently to adapt to the environment” [37]. Therefore, the village derivation process has the same anti-program characteristics as the montage aesthetic.

4.1.2. Montage Characteristics of the Rural Space Images

The book *Buildings and Images* discusses the logic of montage architecture: “montage-typed architectural decoration demonstrates different life plots in the same space or realizes the superposition of plots in different historical stages using spatial overlap and multi-scene layout through the connective relationships of different scenes” [11]. This kind of “staged plot superposition” is observed as the phenomenon of “the coexistence of architectural phenomena in a variety of historical periods” [38] and in local streets and lanes. It not only includes the multi-structure compounds formed by different monomers, but also relates to abnormal spaces caused by the dislocation of a single orientation. At the main rural street interface of Xiantang Village, shown in Figure 6, there are porcelain-white-brick houses and red-brick houses, lime-yellow sand houses and houses made of both red bricks and green bricks, moving from the left side to the right side. However, the similar components of the guardrails, wooden doors and windows, including cement windows, of the houses, among other aspects, help us to realize the harmony. The differences and identities in the forms of shape and structure reflect the evolutionary process from the green-brick house, red-brick house and lime-colored sand house to the rock ballast house. When expounding the concept of order, the aesthetician Gombrich proposed the “continuity” theory: “The viewers would master a special law in the process of observing certain pattern, and conduct repetitive

imagination over this law" [39]. If "discontinuity" occurs in one or several stages during the continuity process, the viewer's attention is stimulated. The accident or deviation brings visual pleasure to the viewers. The jumping connection formed by the combination of new and old materials leads to various kinds of "accidents" in the traditional interface, which continuously awakens the viewer's aesthetic awareness and exposes them to a sense of montage beauty in a similar interface.



Figure 6. Spatial interface of Xiantang Village, Guangzhou City (source: the authors).

The montage projects certain time nodes of the past or future into the current time in a welcoming manner, forming the narration through the remains of, and flashbacks to, the space scenes. There is always a strong comparison between these flashbacks to scenes and the current environment, creating suspense and unknown emotional experiences. For instance, historical relics are accompanied by the memory of the site, such as residual bridges, fragmented walls, gatehouses and archways, which usually weaken the flashback to "history", as historical fragments, and they become sites of visual focus, drawing forth more in-depth themes of space. For example, with regard to the ancestral temple door that remains in Qiantang Village, Conghua Town (Figure 7), we can observe that its upright-standing form produces a similar feeling to the static reservation and application of a montage lens. Thus, the historical image has the ability to create a flashback to the space, in reality, freezing the information of the memory of the historical space and time and endowing the space with special situational experiences in the meanwhile. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Gestalt psychology, there is a global Gestalt effect of the people's experiential cognition of the environment, which is result of the superposition of the experiences of several individual spaces and various perceptual elements. For example, the experience of people in villages is a changing process of experiencing spatial changes, which is compounded by the multi-viewpoint impression of a landscape, related to motion and speed. Therefore, people experience a montage psychological process in the aesthetic process of a village.



Figure 7. Spatial interface of Qiangang Village (source: the authors).

4.1.3. The Montage Characteristics of Rural Spatial Experience

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Gestalt psychology, there is a global Gestalt effect of the people's experiential cognition of the environment, which is result of the superposition of the experiences of several individual spaces and various perceptual elements. For example, the experience of people in villages is a changing process of experiencing spatial changes, which is compounded by the multi-viewpoint impression of a landscape, related to motion and speed [40].

The rural pattern of Guangfu takes the form of mountains, water, fields, forests and houses as the core elements of the landscape. The villages are all located in the zone surrounded by mountains and rivers, forming spaces covering both the natural and cultural landscapes. The main building layout of the village either focuses on hierarchy or is based on the terrain and water veins. The streets and alleys are spaces that connect multiple landscape nodes, such as the village entrance, residential houses, courtyards and ponds, and the main streets and secondary streets are interlinked to form a network similar to a road system. The inner space between the streets mainly adopts an enclosed and open-space form due to the dense building layout, which induces people to shift their view toward alternate changes in contraction or extension, increasing the use of the imagination to envisage unknown spaces due to the obstacles to people's sight. Additionally, the drop, step, slope and other factors accompanying the terrain enhance the motion rhythm and speed in the streets, which triggers viewing experience with time, sequence and visibility. This is aesthetically related to the montage experience of "A combination of stored mental images and impressions perceived through ocular/bodily movement" [41].

4.1.4. The Montage Characteristics of the Spontaneous Construction Technique

Işıl Sencar once argued that: "Montage can be defined as the act of creating a new totality, meaning, entity from a collection of elements by forming different kinds of relations between them [42]". While the architectural relics of different times, the public sites with different uses, the different styles of construction and the abundant rustic elements in a rural space, together, form a polysemic place integrating historical traces, the modern spirit and natural creation. Therefore, the formation of the rural landscape and the spontaneous construction techniques have the complex and hybrid characteristics of montage. Professor Lu once pointed out the four major characteristics of Ling-nan Culture: compatibility, practicality, secularity and innovation [43]. All these characteristics are understood as practical concepts that do not observe conventional rules and surpass the established standards and norms. Thus, the production of morphological characteristics that are different from the conventional aesthetic principles is inevitable.

(1) Proliferated variation: functional expansion of spaces

Proliferated variation refers to the new derivative form created by function addition. On one hand, it refers to the spatial proliferation induced by the directional growth of the local functions of structures. As for the buildings in the rural areas in the regions of the Greater Pearl River Delta and western Guangdong, their lighting mainly relies on the natural light from the courtyards in the north-south direction, but the balcony spaces stretch out to obtain the "light transmission" through the streets and lanes of Shawan, a town with a long history (Figure 8). With these balconies stretching out at different heights and in different areas at certain angles, the houses can not only obtain daylighting, but also create useable areas at the same time, forming a "weird" space proliferation in the streets and lanes. On the other hand, proliferated variation refers to the variation in the overall shape of the building caused by the deviation in the structural sequence of individual architectural forms. For instance, a steel ladder has been added outside the original building in Figure 9, which increases the external traffic channels outside, at the same time stretching out the outdoor viewing space. The abovementioned cases reflect the phenomenon of the expansion of the local functions of buildings, and there is no

intervention between the new and old sections, forming a multi-dimensional sequence of construction through juxtaposition.



Figure 8. A balcony stretching over the laneway (source: the authors).



Figure 9. Additional steel ladder (source: the authors).

(2) Function superposition: composite functions of a component

The juxtaposition created by superposition is expressed in the composite functional pattern formed by the superposition of new and old functional components. As shown in Figure 10, a low, iron, hollow door is appended to the gate. When the wooden gate opens, the steel gate is designed to close so as to facilitate ventilation without obstructing the road. There are multiple locks on the wooden gates of many folk houses, which are

not only equipped with modern steel gate pins but also retain the traditional rotary locks, external padlocks and wire locks (Figure 11), creating the superposition and juxtaposition of traditional functions and modern functions. The abovementioned cases reflect the compounding phenomena of local buildings functions, and there is no interference between different components. The former ones are not destroyed because of the emergence of new ones. The richness of the components is the result of lifetimes of accumulation.



Figure 10. External folding steel gate (source: the authors).

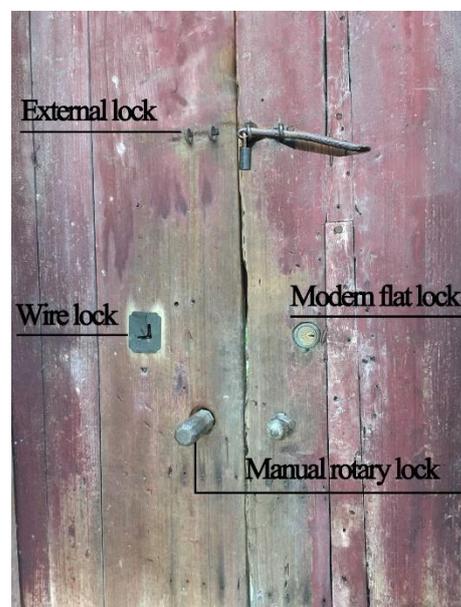


Figure 11. Juxtaposed gate locks (source: the authors).

(3) Heterogeneous isomorphism: compromised vocabulary expression

Heterogeneous isomorphism refers to the building methods formed through the observation of established rules according to elements of different types and attributes. As shown in Figure 12, the settlement environment, on the one hand, can be deemed as the heterogeneity manifested by the mismatch of different building shapes and volumes.

For example, a thatched shed is built on the second floor of a red-brick house, producing the mixed heterogeneity of old and new. The simple combination of the two different construction languages interrupts the original shape and structure of the construction of the red-brick house, forming a fully grotesque characteristic. On the other hand, the heterogeneity is reflected in the mixed integration of different materials on the surfaces of folk houses. The lack of detailed functions of the parts of the local building is repaired by “patches” of various materials and sizes. As shown in Figure 13, this house is patched by many materials, including red bricks, rock ballast and stone, providing the individual building with a distinct narrative tendency. As for historical buildings, they obtain a sense of harmony in the case of individual buildings, due to the similarity in the building materials. In addition, a mixed change in local construction is created by differences in the processes of matching and conversion.



Figure 12. Wood mould in the making (Source: The authors).



Figure 13. Material mixture (source: the authors).

(4) Alien evolution: immature and grotesque forms of structures

Local elements compose the overall strange and grotesque form through exaggerated proportions or unconventional combinations. As shown in Figure 14, the proportions of the door and windows of the watchtower in Kaiping Village are strange, and there is even a colonnade, as well as a dome, on the platform of the third floor. The combination of building blocks and western-style roofs form the unique style of the regional architecture. As shown in Figure 15, the red-brick house is located at the intersection of the roadway,

and the building forms a polygon block to fit the road. Although the abovementioned cases appear underdeveloped, they reveal the active traits of native buildings created under the conditions of limited materials. These kinds of non-professional activities of construction transgress the limitations of norms and represent a vivid, grass-roots aesthetic taste.



Figure 14. Grottesque form (source: the authors).



Figure 15. Special construction (source: the authors).

4.2. Construction Strategy: A New Path to Rural Construction in the Context of Montage

From the emphasis on the native spatial form in the montage context, it can be seen that, behind this form, there is a hidden, constantly expanding possibility for new aesthetics: the random coupling of heterogeneous spaces, the integration and collage of various materials and the juxtaposition of different forms of images with different styles. With the passage of time, the building fragments from different periods integrate in the settlement of heterogeneous elements, and deviation and dislocation are introduced into the traditional order [44]. In contrast to the classical aesthetic principles of “harmony, balance, and unity”, these features represent the montage characteristics of “grotesque,

fragment, and mixture". On this basis, rural renewal can satisfy and grasp the logic and aesthetic trend of construction and integrate the characteristics of the "strangeness and difference" of the original messy space into a new language of techniques. Furthermore, they can be sublimated into "newness and strangeness", and a non-linear "chain-like" construction path can be explored (Figure 16).

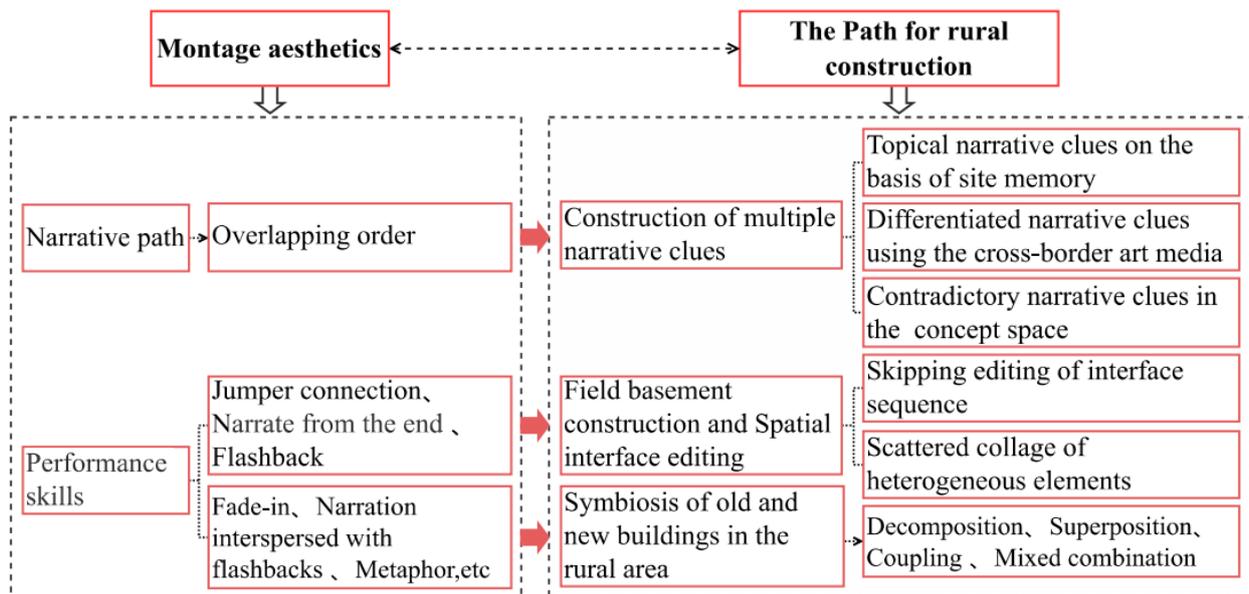


Figure 16. Montage aesthetics and rural construction path (source: the authors).

4.2.1. Extraction of Context Motifs and Construction of Multiple Clues

On the basis of the superimposed narrative technique adopted by montage, the expression modes regarding the juxtaposition of multiple narrative clues are integrated into the area of a village.

(1) Topical narrative clues based on site memory.

The continuous montage reflects a linear narrative mode of rhythmic narration, which centers on a main line and progresses in chronological order [45]. Taking the historical memory of a village as the narrative blueprint, its transformation extracts contextual motifs and explores the site of memory, with the historical lenses as the key nodes. Through corridors and paths, the multi-layer relationships between multiple core groups are connected, forming a spatial narrative subject structure, with the historical and temporal development as the clue. On the micro level, with a single old house as the theme of the story, the narrative substructure in the context of the village is built around the demolition or restoration process of the old house.

(2) Differentiating narrative clues using cross-border art media.

The rural situation can be interpreted from the multiple perspectives of modern art, with regional cultural elements as the performance materials, by integrating modern art media into the environment of an old village and through the construction of the viewing order. For example, before their placement in the streets, docks and squares, a series of themed works, such as landscape installations and colored graffiti, are introduced to form a synchronic narrative expression based on different discourses and concepts of art and architecture (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Narrative of place memory (Source: [46]).

(3) Contradictory narrative clues in the new concept space.

Based on the structure of the original village, a new spatial sequence intersected by the original pattern can be reconstructed. New forms with native connotations are available in the derived series, such as the mirror space, contradictory space and interactive space. Through the montage expression techniques of movies and television, a complete narrative scene can be constructed in the spatial structure, which brings in unprecedented appeal to the scene and a strong spatial-temporal illusion [14]. Finally, the joint relationships between multiple novel points, beyond the original site dimension, can be constructed in order to realize the idea that “no individual element wholly belongs to a specific entity with a clear definition” [47] and accomplish the expression of the anti-transcendental image of the rural narrative. The memory clue of the site is regarded as the main line for the inheritance of the history of the village in the modern context. The clues of the cross-border art media focus on the integration of modern artistic media and rural areas, while the narratives of new ideas present the characteristics of the fuzziness and transcendence of montage based on the characteristics of the scene. Multiple narrative clues form narrative structures that intersect and converge with each other, and they jointly construct the multiple narrative context of the rural area in a complex way (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Graffiti in Shawan Town (Source: The authors).

4.2.2. Field Basement Construction and Local Texture Integration

In view of the current status of the fragmentary existence and complexity of the original spaces of villages, firstly, the damaged sites with historical value should be restored as residential building protection units. Concerning the spatial core of historical heritage construction, the old buildings in the area can be combined to form several module integration areas, and one can further classify the building reconstruction level of each module, such as demolition, decoration and repair. Then, through the demolition

and decoration of the run-down buildings inside the module and by setting limitations to the radiation areas, the originally narrow spaces between the streets and in the public areas can be organically extended so as to realize the integration and rebirth of the local structure of the settlement. Additionally, the metaphorical and lyrical montage effects should be highlighted in the local space. For example, on the horizontal level, through the combination of the guidance of the straight-line ritual path, full of a sense of ceremony, and the guidance of the zigzagged, deep-lane courtyard, a lyrical and metaphorical situational experience can be created. On the vertical level, surreal feelings can be highlighted either by the conscious expansion of local roads, such as changes in their ups and downs, or the corresponding relationship between the spatial points of the old village can be blurred by reversing the figure-ground relationship between buildings in local area so as to finally realize the organic integration of the base of the field.

4.2.3. Spatial Interface Editing and Reconstruction of the Sequence

(1) Skipping the editing of the interface sequence.

Herein, the montage techniques of flashbacks and interlocution are represented, and interfaces are intersected by the spaces of exhibition, greening and leisure, which break the monotony of the original interface. At the same time, parts of the ruins in the village can be transformed into distinctive landscapes by taking advantage of their actual situations. Moreover, the disharmonious houses or messy spaces can be selectively transformed, and new construction patterns can be embedded into the original interface through the application of “strong contrast and weak contrast” in turn. Furthermore, the rich and unified interfaces should be adjusted, and “the aesthetics should be conducted using sequence views and spatiotemporal gradients, so as to achieve the effective sequence reading of the field landscape” [48] (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Interface modification (source: [49]).

(2) Scattered collage of heterogeneous elements.

Combined with the blending of the methods of montage of image information, new information can be merged into the rural context through scattered collage and constructing the supplements of the characteristics of different things, as well as the updated iterations of their internal logic. Through the scattered collage of symbolic components, multi-point tandem relationships can be constructed. For instance, taking the elements of a sloped roof, wood frame and inlay as examples of jumping and scattered identification construction, the montage image with the characteristics of coherence, contrast and suspense can be created. Additionally, in the paving interface or local regions, one can reconstruct the site texture

using old and irregular ground patterns or supplement the original group with new, iconic materials to create artistic consistency between the plane and the facade. With regard to the scattered collage of heterogeneous elements, it is a style of constructing the hidden integrity of the scattered elements and continuously expanding the aesthetic boundary, in which free space is created through the practice of “tidying up fragments as incoherent beauty”.

4.2.4. Symbiosis of Old and New Buildings in the Rural Area

In the montage context, the reconstruction of individual buildings in the rural area entails the integration and nesting of old and new languages, with a view to the future, while montage generates new experiences through hyperlinking the dislocation of time and space and creates the possibility for space construction. The space is organized through methods including interleaving and nesting, decomposition and reorganization, and editing and coupling, which are similar to the methods of fade-in and fade-out, as well as cross-fade and superimposition, which offer up the space of old materials, enabling the iteration and inheritance of the function of the historical dimension and aesthetic transformation (Figure 20).

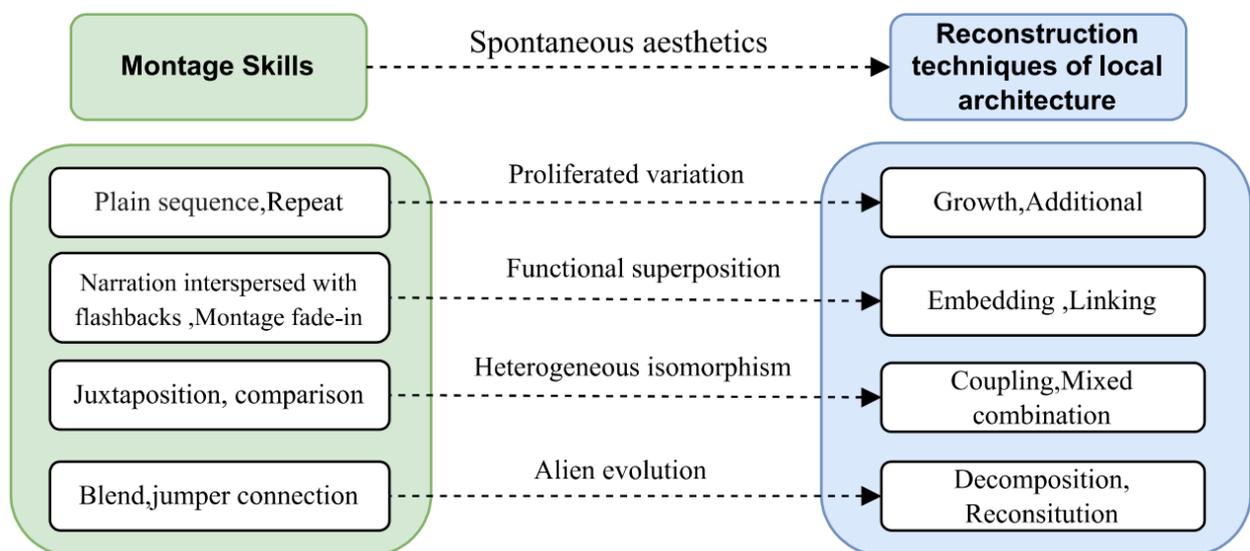


Figure 20. Montage skills and vernacular architecture renovation (source: the authors).

(1) Superposition and additional

The narrative techniques of flashback and interspersed flashback in montage are used to interpret the means of expression presented by the dislocation of order. Through the superposition and addition of new and old forms, the reconstruction of local architecture is realized. Superposition tends to refer to horizontal or vertical structure extension and spatial expansion, and the derivation of old buildings is usually achieved through expansion, adding stories and other measures. For instance, a designer extended a glass block similar to the original sloped roof at the position of gable wall in the old house in Xucun Village. In terms of function, the indoor space of the balcony and lighting surface is increased, forming a strong contrast between the glass and grey-brick houses (Figure 21). Embedding refers to the addition of a new structural system to the old building, with the aim of forming an interaction between the old and the new. For instance, in the reconstruction of Xianfeng Library in the rural area of Pingnan, Fujian Province, the new concrete structure is embedded in the old site of the gable made of rammed earth, constructing the derived form through the mutual maintenance of the old and the new (Figure 22).



Figure 21. Reconstruction of Xucun Village in Shanxi Province (source: [50]).



Figure 22. Avant-Garde Ruralization Library (source: [8]).

The library was designed by Lei, Zhang and his team in 2015. It is located in Tonglu, Zhejiang, China, and has become a center of public life among the villagers and foreign readers with the spreading and cultural ideas and the unique regional landscape.

The narration and fading techniques of montage are used to interpret the style of the expression of misplaced order and realize the embedding and linking of old and new forms and systems in the transformation of vernacular architecture. The new structure system is embedded in the old building so as to constitute an inclusive and built-in interaction between the old and the new. For example, during the reconstruction of Xianfeng Library in Pingnan, Fujian Province, a new concrete structure was embedded in the old site of the rammed earth gable, forming a derived form of the mutual maintenance of the old and the new (Figures 23 and 24). The processes of embedding and linking both rely on the grafting of different styles of images to transform the new buildings into derivative parts of the old buildings, highlighting the aesthetic significance of updating the old and the new while following the time sequence.

This building is located on the north side of Xiadi Village, Pingnan, Fujian, China, and was designed by Hua, Li and his team in 2019. It is surrounded by paddy fields. It was built on the site of a long-abandoned local residence with three rammed walls and a dilapidated courtyard. The building created a dialogue between the contemporary and the traditional in the rural area.



Figure 23. The Paddy Bookstore before transformation (source: [51]).



Figure 24. The transformed Paddy Bookstore (source: [51]).

(2) Coupling and mixed combination

Based on the juxtaposition and contrast techniques of montage, the elements of new materials can be added to old local buildings to reshape their aesthetic images. From the reconstruction of the house at the former site in Figure 25, it can be seen that the designer preserved the brick wall of the old house and the damaged morphological traces. With the modern glass curtain wall embedded in the original fracture surface, a strong contrast between the roughness and smoothness and between the damage and elegance is formed between the old and the new, displaying a montage image which blends the original roughness with modern formal beauty. In Figure 26, we can observe the reconstruction of a stone house using the patching technique, which preserved the original stone wall and patched it with a new plastered surface. Harmony is realized through the similar colors of the materials, achieving a unique beauty embodied by the originally damaged house and based on the new order of the surface.



Figure 25. Comparison of the new and the old (source: [52]).



Figure 26. Repair construction (source: [53]).

(3) Decomposition and recombination

Based on the mixing and jumping techniques of montage, the traditional forms of rural buildings are deconstructed and reconstructed to create new rural context using modern design techniques. For instance, in the design of the cover for the conference proceedings *Research by Design* (Figure 27), the buildings climb up along the hillside, showing the shape that moves upward layer by layer in the visual line, and the traditional courtyard pattern is reconstructed by geometry to form a new meaning expression mode of the three-dimensional space, and the different fragments form a new, complete relationship through organic connections. As the English imagist poet Thomas Hume once stated, “the combination of two visible images can become a visual chord, and their combination allows people to obtain an image which is different from the two”. For instance, as shown in Figure 28, a new building in the rural area was created through the double contrast of

“form and material” through the grafting of the debris fragments and regular weathering of the steel blocks.



Figure 27. The cover for the conference proceedings Research by Design (source: [54]).



Figure 28. Vernacular landscape structures (source: [52]).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

In the long term, the reconstruction of a village mainly relies on the renewal mode, with the “restoration and protection of historical space” as the main theme. The construction techniques mainly follow the inheritance of traditional constructional styles using the methods of symbol series so as to maintain the continuity and integrity of the spatial interface, thus forming a harmonious, orderly and unified image based on weak contrast and coordination.

As Professor Li stated in the past, the rural areas of China are open fields offering various possibilities and opportunities. The continuous evolution of, and variations in, rural spaces against the background of the times has a realistic inevitability. The transformation and construction of rural areas need to be based on the exploration of more diversified construction paths and language paradigms: “Its transformation and construction require traditional language symbols, but it should establish its own grammar and vocabulary by forgetting the former language symbols again” [55]. However, in the face of the status quo of the villages, where there are messy styles and increasingly declining environments, how can we generate new paths for reconstruction by matching the regional characteristics of the village more appropriately? The authors believe that the “old” aesthetic interpretation of the rural area is the soil in which “new” design is produced. Concerning the rural area,

its aesthetic characteristics have a natural similarity with the montage aesthetics, whether in regard to the texture composition, construction characteristics or derivation methods. By conforming to the aesthetic characteristics, the narrative plot can be superposed on the place and space by referring to new narrative ideas and skills before realizing the collection, connection, collage and reconstruction of the site-related vocabulary. This goes beyond the conventional construction method of “homogeneity and isomorphism” and transforms miscellaneous spaces into a series of multi-defined places, with the anti-transcendental aesthetic implications of the interface shaped by means of “homogeneity and heterogeneity” and “heterogeneous isomerism”. This renewal concept corresponds to the aesthetic significance and appeal of “diversity and mixing” in the settlement space and explores a more multi-dimensional path to the shaping of the inheritance context of the countryside with current chaotic styles and features.

5.2. Conclusions

Rural transformation, based on the montage perspective, integrates the characteristics of new media and technology in the context of the multimedia. Therefore, to some extent, this construction mode is universal, but the intensity of its application is different for different villages. For example, for some villages with a certain historical and cultural value, the application is on the more micro level of the transformation of the local space of the village, which reflects the scene innovation of the local space with the aim of maintaining the integrity of the original rural appearance. For ordinary villages with a low historical and cultural value, the application is stronger. From the rural landscape pattern to the reconstruction of micro interfaces, we can delve deep into exploration. However, no matter the kind of village, this process is based on the regional construction characteristics of the village, aiming to create a new landscape image appropriately. Therefore, this research method is not applicable to modern villages subjected to severe urbanization.

This study has established a new research perspective on the current process of rural transformation in China, explored a new aesthetic cognition of rural space, and proposed new ideas regarding transformation and construction methods and filled the gap in this field. It can be used as a reference for the various social groups currently involved in rural transformation, as well as the government, in order to consider the effectiveness of rural transformation and create adaptive policy principles.

Finally, there exist three trends in the development of rural construction in the future. Firstly, we observe that the static protection and repair of the traditional types are transforming with the aim of the “the realization of inheritance and innovation in the process of dynamic updates relying on the techniques of the times”. Secondly, that the single path of construction performance is transforming to realize “the diversified performance paths intervened by the aesthetics of cross-border art media”. Thirdly, that the path of homogeneity and isomorphism in the constructed vernacular language of the traditional type is transforming to achieve the “new-paradigm exploration of the ‘homogeneity and heterogeneity’ and ‘heterogeneity and isomorphism’ of new vernacular languages in modern times”.

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