

Research on the Local Knowledge and Its Cultural Value in Village History Museums: A Case Study of Liugong Village History Museum in Guilin

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Abstract: *This paper employs the theory of local knowledge, taking the Liugong Village History Museum in Guilin as the research object. It classifies the local knowledge in the village history museum into explicit and tacit types. The exertion of this local knowledge is closely related to the dynamic behavior, historical induction, and local context throughout the museum's development process. The cultural value of the village history museum lies in promoting local knowledge. From this perspective, the museum plays a role in localizing rural culture, creating cultural landmarks, and constructing a folk discourse system, thus becoming a "new" coordinate in the context of rural cultural revitalization.*

Keywords: Local Knowledge; Village History Museum; Cultural Value.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural cultural revitalization is a significant aspect of the rural revitalization strategy. It not only provides cultural nourishment and spiritual support for the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas but also serves as an important driving force and source [1]. For a long time, the work of rural cultural construction has been guided by homogenized knowledge. The top-down and urban-to-rural cultural input has achieved remarkable achievements, such as improving rural public cultural infrastructure, promoting the equalization of basic public cultural services between urban and rural areas, and enriching the spiritual and cultural life of farmers. However, this administrative-led and externally introduced homogenized knowledge has also led to unintended consequences such as the marginalization of local culture, homogenization of rural culture, and weakening of the cultural subjectivity of farmers [2]. The academic community believes that local knowledge, originating from local culture and interacting with rural culture, can endogenously reconstruct rural culture and drive its revitalization [3]. Meanwhile, village history museums, as rural public cultural infrastructures guided by endogenous culture, have recorded local humanities, customs, and other distinctive regional characteristics, becoming platforms for the co-construction and sharing of local knowledge. The construction of village history museums can be seen as an effort to bridge the gap between local and homogenized knowledge created by excessive construction of homogenized knowledge. This paper takes the Liugong Village History Museum in Guilin, which was selected as one of "China's Second Batch of Traditional Villages," as the research object. Through field investigations and literature analysis, it focuses on the cultural value of the village history museum, classifies its local knowledge, explores the social logic behind the utilization of local knowledge as a cultural space, and the realization of its cultural value, demonstrating the feasibility of using village history museums to promote rural cultural revitalization through local knowledge.

Rural cultural revitalization is essential for the comprehensive strategy of rural revitalization. It not only offers cultural nourishment and spiritual support for the overall rejuvenation of rural areas but also acts as a crucial momentum and source of vitality. Historically, rural cultural construction efforts have been influenced by uniformity of knowledge, where top-down and urban-to-rural cultural impositions have achieved significant milestones such as enhancing rural public cultural infrastructure, promoting equal access to basic public cultural services across urban and rural areas, and enriching the spiritual and cultural lives of farmers. However, this approach, dominated by administrative directives and external inputs of standardized knowledge, has inadvertently led to the marginalization of local cultures, homogenization of rural cultures, and a diminished sense of cultural agency among farmers. Academia posits that local knowledge, derived from local culture and intertwined with rural culture, can "endogenously reconstruct" rural culture and catalyze its revitalization. Concurrently, village history museums, guided by indigenous cultural principles and serving as rural public

cultural facilities, document the local human history, customs, and other characteristics with distinct regional features, becoming platforms for the collaborative construction and sharing of local knowledge. The establishment of village history museums represents an attempt to reconcile the tensions between local and homogeneous knowledge arising from the excessive focus on standardized knowledge construction. This study selects the Liugong Village History Museum in Guilin, recognized as part of "China's Second Batch of Traditional Villages," as its subject. Through field research and literature review, it examines the cultural values of the village history museum, categorizes its local knowledge, explores the societal logic behind leveraging local knowledge within cultural spaces, and assesses the cultural value realization, thus demonstrating the viability of village history museums in enhancing rural cultural revitalization through the promotion of local knowledge.

2. DEFINITION AND CONNOTATION OF RELEVANT CONCEPTS

"Local Knowledge" is a context-specific concept introduced by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz did not provide a precise definition of "local knowledge," but he mentioned in "Local Knowledge" that: "I have always said that the law... is a form of local knowledge; this type of local knowledge refers not only to locality, time, class, and various issues but also to the ambiance—in the sense that the unfolding of events inherently carries local characteristics and is connected with the local people's imaginative capabilities regarding things." [4] In the realm of law, local knowledge relates to behaviors or practices that are customary among a group of people within a specific spatial and temporal scope. From the external perspective, its specific context is unique, while from the internal perspective, it is consistent. Warren et al. further elucidate local knowledge, defining it as the knowledge held by local inhabitants that is closely related to the local culture [5]. After the concept of "local knowledge" was introduced into China, Chinese scholars further elaborated on it: The living contexts of people in different regions are definite, and relative to other areas, always unique, thus the constructed and argued knowledge is invariably "local." Without a specific context and application, the value and meaning of knowledge cannot be affirmed [6]. After clarifying the relativity, situationality, and experiential nature of Local Knowledge, it can be considered as a kind of "local status", which originated from local culture and is closely related to local knowledge holders [7]. In contrast, homogeneous knowledge, also known as universal knowledge or generalizable knowledge, refers to knowledge and its systems that can be widely disseminated [8]. The outcome of applying this type of knowledge is the promotion of a universally identical or similar pattern across multiple countries or regions, neglecting the richness of cultural diversity and distinctiveness. In the process of rural cultural construction in China, homogeneous knowledge, often propelled by administrative will, tends to dominate, thereby undermining the situationality and experiential nature of local knowledge and leading to its erosion.

The village history museum is a vital cultural space that emerged in the context of rural cultural revitalization. Compared to other cultural venues like farmer's bookstores and archives, it is a rural (community) public cultural facility that displays the history, culture, economy, and social conditions of the village through various media such as text, images, books, physical objects, and multimedia. It performs multiple functions, including collection and exhibition, education and entertainment, and protection and inheritance, with its core value being cultural value[9]. The focus of a village history museum is to present the history of a village to the general public, especially local residents, showcasing the cultural essence of the village. It represents an effort in rural cultural construction towards localization and nativization, where its cultural value is demonstrated through the relative, context, and experiential aspects of local knowledge. Therefore, the cultural value of the village history museum is mainly based on the local knowledge system. Content-wise, the history and conditions of a village constitute a form of local knowledge, distinct from Western culture and urban culture. These contents are a retrospective and representation of a village's culture. Compared to homogeneous knowledge, its emergence and development are spontaneous and endogenous, unlike homogeneous knowledge, which is externally introduced to rural areas, and emotionally, it is more adaptable to meet the cultural psychology of villagers. The village history museum, through various forms, displays and exhibits local customs, historical culture, and other elements, becoming a platform for carrying local knowledge. Local knowledge and rural culture are interwoven, with local knowledge being the core and gene of rural culture, and rural culture being the manifestation and carrier of local knowledge. The cultural value of a village history museum lies in encompassing local knowledge, thereby promoting rural culture, enriching local knowledge in the construction practice, forming a positive cycle, and making the museum a platform for inheriting rural culture and nurturing civilized rural customs.

3. THE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE COMPOSITION OF THE VILLAGE HISTORY MUSEUM

3.1 Overview of the case

Liugong Village is located along the lower reaches of the Li River in Guilin, within Puyi Township of Yangshuo County. It has been designated as part of "China's Second Batch of Traditional Villages." Established in 1465, the village has developed a unique and vibrant culture over centuries. In the context of cultural history, the local Li family in Liugong Village has sustained a lineage through nineteen generations, preserving family doctrines and the 'Four Prohibitions.' Distinguished individuals from the Ming and Qing dynasties, along with notable modern figures such as Sun Yat-sen, have made their mark in this locale. In terms of local customs and folklore, the area is renowned for the legend of the Three-Color Pond, along with traditional festivities of 'October Fragrance', performances of the colorful Guilin opera, and the enduring influences of Buddhist and Taoist beliefs, among others. In terms of architecture, there are a large number of Ming and Qing buildings preserved in the local area. Landmark buildings such as Deyue Building, Leshan Pavilion, Wenchang Pavilion have been renovated and revitalized. In terms of natural landscapes, scenery such as the Three-Color Pond, Dragon Boat Rock, and Yu Nu Picking Water are unique to the local area. The local village history museum, themed 'Yi Juan Qian Qiu Hua Qu Liu', covers the basic overview of Liugong Village through five sections: Preserving the Wisdom of the Virtuous, Sustaining the Fragrance of Customs, Echoing Ancient Harmonies, Celebrating Scenic Verses, and Carrying Forward the Fragrance of the Museum. While documenting and transmitting history, it also transforms the entire village's cultural heritage into tangible, perceivable objects. Within this compact space, it showcases the profound and distinctive culture of Liugong.

3.2 Classification of Local Knowledge in the Village History Museum

Local knowledge is a cognitive concept that is relative, situational, and experiential. Depending on different research perspectives and purposes, knowledge can be classified in different ways. Based on the form of expression, local knowledge within the village history museum can be divided into explicit and tacit local knowledge. Explicit local knowledge in the village history museum is manifested as the Material Cultural Landscape, which includes architectural forms, internal layouts, and exhibition contents. Tacit local knowledge typically refers to the Non-material Cultural Landscape, encompassing village memories, customs, festivals, traditional arts, and skills that are preserved and transmitted by the museum. Non-material cultural landscapes do not have physical forms themselves, but are manifested or transmitted through physical forms such as exhibition content in the village history museum. Therefore, explicit and tacit local knowledge in the village history museum are intertwined and cannot be separated from external physical forms of understanding. The local knowledge in Liugong Village History Museum is mainly manifested through the content of the exhibition boards, and its classification is as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1: Classification of Local Knowledge in Liugong Village History Museum

Section	Content	Explicit local knowledge	Tacit local knowledge
Preserving the Wisdom of the Virtuous	Sages of ancient and modern times (19 in total)	Literature records	Image interpretation and spiritual inheritance
	Li's ancestral and family precepts	Article content	Practical application of ancestral teachings
Sustaining the Fragrance of Customs	"October Fragrance" folk custom	Historical traditions and celebrations	Festive atmosphere and emotional experience
	Buddhist and Taoist culture	Religious belief	Faith experience and spiritual baptism
	Fishery culture	Fishing knowledge and technology	Practice of the concept of ecological civilization
	performances of the colorful Guilin opera,	Performance form of opera	The inheritance of opera culture
Echoing Ancient Harmonies, Celebrating Scenic Verses	Deyue Tower	Historic buildings and geographical layout	Village memory and emotional connection
	Yingqiu Palace		
	Liugong Market		
Leaving the Scenery for Chanting	Three-Color Pond	Natural Landscape and Geographical Features Landscape naming and interpretation	Aesthetic experience of natural landscape
	Liugong Mountain		
	Wuqi Ridge		
	Dragon Boat Rock		
	Yu Nu Picking Water		

Carrying Forward the Fragrance of the Museum	Golden Lion Drinking Water	Historical events and important figures	Local identity
	Eight Immortals Horse		
	The relationship between Sun Yat-sen and Liugong Village		
	Anti-Japanese deeds of Liugong Village Liugong Village Honor Exhibition		

Explicit local knowledge is directly presented content within the museum, while tacit local knowledge, by contrast, is intangible, often manifesting as a intentional or tendency force. Tacit knowledge is individualistic, unsystematic, context, and cultural, emphasizing the intuitive, perceptive, and understanding gained through personal experience and interaction in specific contexts. Thus, the tacit local knowledge within the museum can only be perceived and appreciated through the active engagement and subjectivity of individuals.

The explicit local knowledge in the village history museum is reflected in the direct description of the village profile, while the tacit local knowledge is hidden in the underlying values, emotional systems, and cultural spirits. They contain the local social culture and psychological patterns, and are the potential manifestation modes of local knowledge in the village history museum. These two aspects are collectively reflected in the content of the exhibition panels, interacting and containing each other, making the village history museum a complex with breadth and depth in a specific time and space.

4. THE SOCIOCULTURAL LOGIC BEHIND THE CULTURAL VALUE OF VILLAGE HISTORY MUSEUMS

The cultural value of village history museums is fundamentally tied to the promotion of local knowledge. The intrinsic local knowledge within these museums, alongside the dynamic behaviors, historical summaries, and local contexts observed during their establishment, interlinks closely.

4.1 The Logic of Dynamic Actions

Culture is essentially the product of social activities. Within cultural spaces, the effectiveness of cultural value is significantly influenced by the participation level of the involved parties. For village history museums, the generation of cultural value is affected by various behaviors, including planning and design, exhibition arrangement, and visitation experiences. These behaviors introduce a dynamic action logic, wherein the cultural value of the village history museum is created, shaped, and conveyed.

In the construction of Liugong Village History Museum, planning, exhibition, and operation phases form a continuous action chain that reflects the culture of Liugong Village. The initial stage involves collecting and organizing local cultural materials, categorizing content for later exhibition. This preliminary organization enables a systematic understanding of Liugong Village's local knowledge. During the exhibition and operation phases, through previously planned and scientifically arranged activities, the exhibition's effectiveness is maximized in terms of time and spatial organization.

This action chain involves interactive phases with different stakeholders directly influencing the museum's new perceptions. Thus, under the dynamic action logic, the construction of the village history museum is seen as an ongoing process, where its cultural value continuously evolves and emerges.

4.2 The Logic of Historical Induction

Rural cultural governance should adhere to the principle of historical continuity, treating contemporary governance forms or mechanisms as an extension, transformation, and evolution of history rather than an invention from scratch [10]. As intermediaries in rural cultural governance, village history museums utilize "history" as an entry point to comb through the historical threads of a village. This provides a basis for understanding and recognizing village history and culture while discovering the trends and patterns in cultural development through historical changes, thereby uncovering the distinctive features of local culture. The formation of local knowledge is inseparable from these historical conditions, reflecting local knowledge in the process of historical induction.

Thus, the experience of historical induction in village history museums represents an attempt to promote local knowledge within the realm of rural cultural governance.

In the planning and design phase of Liugong Village History Museum, the local village committee, after reviewing local chronicles and records scattered throughout the village and consulting with village elders, categorized Liugong Village's history into sections such as notable individuals, local customs, natural landscapes, cultural relics, and significant village events. These aspects of village history were summarized and presented in text and images within the museum. By exhibiting explicit local knowledge and spreading tacit local knowledge through visits and exhibitions, traditions like local scholarship and the valorization of the imperial examination system, which are part of the tacit local knowledge, could serve as entry points for rural cultural governance, inspiring villagers through the promotion of these traditional values.

4.3 The Logic of Local Context

Local knowledge, as a knowledge system intimately linked to specific communities, regions, geographic environments, and cultural backgrounds, derives its uniqueness and value from specific contexts. Once removed from these contexts, local knowledge loses its vitality and practicality, becoming abstract and inaccessible. Analyzing the cultural value of village history museums through the lens of "local context" reveals that the construction of such museums must be grounded in local realities, authentically representing local historical conditions rather than resorting to fabricated or superficial expressions. Detached from the "one village, one museum" concept, the uniqueness and localization risk devolving into formality and homogeneity, rendering discussions of local knowledge moot and the cultural value of the village history museum unattainable.

Looking at the local knowledge represented in Liugong Village History Museum, it is evident that this knowledge is deeply intertwined with the village's unique natural and cultural environment. Descriptions of distinct cultural elements of Liugong Village, such as the lore surrounding the "Three-Color Pond," are closely related to its geographical location and historical narratives. For instance, the "Three-Color Pond" is not merely a geographical feature but a landscape imbued with local legends and environmental characteristics. The village boasts three ponds within a 20-meter radius of each other, appearing separate on the surface but interconnected underwater, each displaying distinct colors due to geological and water source differences. Locally, they are whimsically named after house sections: the main house, stable, and kitchen. Without understanding the associated legends, the rationale behind these names might be puzzling. According to lore, a malevolent landlord was punished by the gods, his home sinking to form the ponds, with their clarity used to delineate the sunken areas. Hence, context not only defines the applicability of local knowledge but also is a prerequisite for the village history museum to excavate local knowledge and exert its cultural value.

In sum, the experience of building Liugong Village History Museum illustrates how these three logics—dynamic actions, historical induction, and local context—are interconnected. The foundation of dynamic actions lays the groundwork for cultural value, historical induction provides the method, and local context sets the precondition for its locality. These elements are interdependent, indispensable for the museum's unique role.

5. THE REALIZATION OF CULTURAL VALUE IN VILLAGE HISTORY MUSEUMS

5.1 Localization of Rural Culture

In the context of rural development, "localization" refers to leveraging the unique rationality of rural communities to fully mobilize and utilize local resources. This process aims to reduce information search and transaction costs, decrease external dependencies, and manage risks, thereby fostering indigenous development forces and optimizing resource models. This approach seeks to "localize" in terms of context, resources, and services, encouraging resources to "return to the countryside" from "going to the countryside," optimizing outcomes by reducing mismatches [11]. In the realm of cultural development, the 'localization' of rural culture does not exclude other cultures. It emphasizes optimizing resources and reducing mismatches to achieve the best outcomes, enabling a 'return of the three key elements' to the countryside.

Village history museums embody a wealth of rural cultural memories based on local knowledge, facilitating the localization of rural culture. The construction of Liugong Village History Museum, for instance, didn't simply rely on Western or urban cultural elements but sought inspiration from the village's rich history and cultural

background spanning over 500 years. This blend of historical and contemporary elements has reintegrated local culture, traditions, and values back into the rural fabric, enhancing community cohesion and cultural self-confidence. Following the museum's establishment, an increasing number of villagers have become proactive in learning about their history and utilizing this platform for cultural activities. This engagement has also attracted visitors, further strengthening the villagers' cultural identity and desire to contribute to their community, thereby promoting a flow of resources back to the rural heartlands.

5.2 Creating Cultural Landmarks

Cultural landmarks refer to buildings or structures that have certain cultural connotations and can provide people with spatial orientation identification, which can help promote cultural transmission, improve tourism attraction and build local image [12]. After the establishment of village history museums, they encapsulate the historical narrative of a village, acting as vessels for both explicit and tacit local knowledge, thus becoming symbolic edifices reflecting the cultural essence of the village. Since its inauguration in January 2019, the Liugong Village History Museum has not only attracted neighboring regions to learn from its experience in constructing village history museums but has also integrated the museum into a tourist route that includes other local attractions such as the downstream dock of the Li River and the Three-Color Pond, drawing numerous visitors. The establishment of the museum has effectively amplified the outreach of Liugong culture, positioning the Liugong Village History Museum as a window to the village's past. By incorporating it into the tourism development chain, visitors are offered immersive experiences that convey the beauty of Liugong's natural scenery and its rich cultural heritage, thereby crafting an antique and authentic image of Liugong Village.

5.3 Establishing a Folk Discourse System

The core content of building a folk discourse system relies heavily on local knowledge, which encompasses both traditional cultural elements and the reproduction of contemporary folk knowledge [13]. The foundation for creating such a system lies in the synthesis of past experiences and present constructions, necessitating three elements: materials, credibility, and values. Local knowledge includes stories, customs, and practices deeply rooted in the local context, closely related to the life experiences and observations of the community members, and reflecting their ways of life. Especially, the tacit local knowledge mirrors the emotional attitudes and values that the community has cultivated over time.

By projecting local knowledge onto a collective cultural memory space, the village history museum acts as a venue for summarizing past cultural memories while also facilitating the reproduction of folk knowledge. Components such as exhibit content, photographs, and artifacts in Liugong Village History Museum have been carefully curated through discussions among residents and experts, organized by the village committee, representing a collective recognition and summary of the village's historical and cultural legacy by its current inhabitants. As part of the basic public cultural service system, the museum also serves as a vital space for civil practice activities, jointly managed by the village committee and residents, leveraging the museum for discussions on agriculture, promotion of traditional culture, and other themes during leisure or necessary occasions. Whether in organizing, applying, or creating and disseminating culture, the village history museum maintains the cultural agency of villagers and the communal public nature of the village, aiding the community in shaping its own rural voice and cultural narrative, thus propelling the construction of a folk discourse system.

6. VI.CONCLUDING REMARKS

In recent years, as urbanization and rural construction have accelerated, the focus of village history museum construction has shifted towards preserving rural civilization and promoting rural cultural revitalization. The "14th Five-Year" Cultural Development Plan further emphasizes the importance of protecting and inheriting agricultural culture, supporting the construction of village history museums, compiling village histories and chronicles, and carrying out village-oriented education [14]. This highlights the intrinsic characteristics of village history museum construction. Stepping away from the guidance of homogenized knowledge in rural cultural construction, this paper introduces the theory of local knowledge, positing that the current effectiveness of village history museum construction hinges on its role as a carrier of local knowledge, thereby enriching its cultural value. Of course, realizing this cultural value is contingent upon the path chosen for museum construction, the support of policy systems, and the development of mechanisms for mass participation. How to position and develop local village history museums within the scope of rural governance and tourism development requires further research.

FUNDING

The 2023 National-level Project of University Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program "Research on the Preservation and Inheritance of Local Culture in Village History Museums: A Case Study of Liugong Village History Museum in Yangshuo, Guilin" (202310602065).

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