

**PUBLIC ART AS A TOOL IN ENHANCING
RURAL REVITALIZATION IN CHINA:
CASE STUDY OF THREE TYPES OF
VILLAGES**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2025

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VILLAGES**

by

SONG HAIYOU

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

January 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As I stand at this significant milestone of my academic journey, completing my doctoral studies, I am overwhelmed with a profound sense of gratitude. This dissertation, a culmination of years of perseverance and learning, is not just a reflection of my efforts but a tapestry woven with the support, guidance, and love of many who have been part of this extraordinary voyage.

First and foremost, my deepest reverence and heartfelt thanks go to Assoc. Prof. Muhizam Mustafa, my supervisor and guide. His astute guidance has been the lighthouse in the sometimes tumultuous ocean of research. His patience and wisdom transformed complex challenges into learning experiences, guiding me towards not just academic excellence but personal growth. Prof. Mustafa's unyielding support and invaluable insights have been a beacon of inspiration and strength throughout this journey.

To the quiet heroes of my life, my mother and my wife, I owe an ocean of gratitude. My mother, Song Haiyan, the epitome of sacrifice and resilience, has been my unwavering pillar of strength. Her profound faith in my capabilities and her prayers have been my constant source of motivation. My wife, Chen Shuai, my partner in life's journey, has been my steadfast support. Her sacrifices, understanding, and love have been the sanctuary that nourished my spirit and kept me anchored during the most challenging times.

I extend my sincere thanks to my fellow doctoral candidates, my academic siblings. Our shared path in the pursuit of knowledge has been a journey of mutual support, laughter, and endless learning. The camaraderie within our group, the

brainstorming sessions, the shared moments of triumphs and setbacks, have been integral to my growth. I am fortunate to have been part of such an intellectually stimulating and supportive community.

As I look towards the horizon, filled with aspirations for the future, I carry with me not just the knowledge and skills honed during these years but also the invaluable life lessons learned. This doctoral journey has shaped me in ways beyond academics; it has sculpted my character, my perspectives, and my aspirations.

In conclusion, this acknowledgement would be incomplete without expressing my gratitude to every individual who has touched my life during this journey – for every conversation, every word of encouragement, and every moment of shared experience. My journey to this point has been enriched and made possible by your contributions, big and small.

With a heart brimming with gratitude, I step into the future, ready to contribute, inspire, and make a difference, carrying the legacy of the lessons learned and the love received.

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**KESENIAN AWAM (PUBLIC ART) SEBAGAI ALAT DALAM
MENINGKATKAN PENGHIDUPAN SEMULA LUAR BANDAR DI CHINA:
KAJIAN KES BAGI TIGA JENIS KAMPUNG**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidiki peranan seni awam dalam pemulihan luar bandar di China, dengan fokus kepada bagaimana ia meningkatkan kesejahteraan penduduk luar bandar. Menjawab keperluan kritikal untuk pembangunan luar bandar, kajian ini meneroka potensi seni awam dalam mengukuhkan kohesi komuniti dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk 1) mengenal pasti nilai praktikal dan cabaran seni awam di kawasan luar bandar, 2) meneroka faktor-faktor utama yang mempengaruhi kesejahteraan penduduk, dan 3) mencadangkan strategi berkesan. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif tiga peringkat telah digunakan, termasuk kajian literatur sistematik (Kajian 1), kajian kes pelbagai (Kajian 2), dan temu bual dengan pihak berkepentingan (Kajian 3). Dalam Kajian 1, 44 makalah akademik dianalisis untuk mengenal pasti tujuh nilai (contohnya, penglibatan komuniti, identiti budaya, pembangunan ekonomi) dan tujuh cabaran (contohnya, sumber yang terhad, penglibatan yang rendah, isu kelestarian). Kajian 2 meneliti tiga jenis kampung—kampung budaya tradisional (Xijingyu), kampung pelancongan (Bailixia), dan kampung biasa (Dongtou)—yang mewakili tiga model seni awam: hibrid, dari atas ke bawah, dan dari bawah ke atas. Seramai 24 penduduk tempatan mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual. Kajian 3 melibatkan temu bual dengan sembilan pihak berkepentingan untuk membangunkan strategi merangkumi tujuh dimensi: identiti komuniti, penglibatan, faktor budaya, kelestarian impak, pengurusan, dan kerjasama. Dapatan kajian ini mendedahkan mekanisme bagaimana

seni awam mempengaruhi kesejahteraan penduduk dan menilai keberkesanan strategi ini. Kajian ini mengakhiri dengan cadangan praktikal untuk pengamal dan pembuat dasar, menekankan kepentingan seni awam dalam pemulihan luar bandar serta menyediakan asas untuk penyelidikan dan amalan masa hadapan.

PUBLIC ART AS A TOOL IN ENHANCING RURAL REVITALIZATION IN CHINA: CASE STUDY OF THREE TYPES OF VILLAGES

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the role of public art in China's rural revitalization, focusing on how it enhances the well-being of rural residents. Addressing the critical need for rural development, it explores the potential of public art in fostering community cohesion and improving quality of life. The study aims to 1) identify the practical values and challenges of public art in rural areas, 2) explore its key factors affecting residents' well-being, and 3) propose effective strategies. A three-stage qualitative research design was employed, including a systematic literature review (Study 1), multiple case studies (Study 2), and stakeholder interviews (Study 3). In Study 1, 44 academic papers were analyzed to identify seven values (e.g., community engagement, cultural identity, economic development) and seven challenges (e.g., limited resources, low participation, sustainability issues). Study 2 examined three village types - traditional cultural village (Xijingyu), tourism village (Bailixia), and ordinary village (Dongtou) - representing three public art models: hybrid, top-down, and bottom-up. A total of 24 local residents participated in interviews. Study 3 included interviews with nine stakeholders to develop strategies across seven dimensions: community identity, participation, cultural factors, impact sustainability, management, and collaboration. The findings reveal the mechanisms by which public art influences residents' well-being and assess the effectiveness of these strategies. The study concludes with practical recommendations for practitioners and policymakers, emphasizing the significance of public art in rural revitalization and providing a basis for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research investigates the role and significance of public art in China's rural revitalization during the 21st century. Amid the challenges posed by rapid globalization and urbanization, public art serves as a vital cultural and social intervention, transforming and revitalizing communities. By integrating art into the daily lives of rural residents, the study examines how public art contributes to well-being and supports sustainable rural development.

This chapter presents the study's background, objectives, and significance, outlining its research questions and goals. It explores the evolution of public art in the 21st century, emphasizing its role in rural revitalization and its impact on rural well-being. Additionally, the chapter defines the study's scope, introduces the visual mapping framework, addresses limitations, clarifies key terms, and discusses ethical considerations, establishing a foundation for analyzing public art's multifaceted contributions to rural revitalization.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Transforming Public Art in 21st Century

Public art has transitioned from a static aesthetic object to a dynamic platform for social engagement and interaction. This shift reflects broader societal changes, where art now plays an active role in addressing complex social issues such as urbanization, climate change, and inequality (Eisenberg, 2000; Paz, 2016). This shift has redefined the role of public art in fostering societal development (Kelson et al.,

2017). This evolution is not merely superficial; it represents a deeper reconfiguration of how art interacts with the public and its role in promoting social cohesion and dialogue (Parlakkalay, 2020).

A critical aspect of this transformation is the broadening of artistic themes and mediums. Contemporary public art increasingly addresses pressing societal concerns, such as environmental sustainability, historical preservation, and cultural diversity (Comunian, 2006). For example, artists now use their work as platforms to raise awareness of environmental degradation or to celebrate marginalized cultural narratives, fostering dialogue between communities and encouraging public reflection on these issues (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 “Beijing · Memory” by Wang Zhong in Beijing, China, 2013
Note: Pedestrians interact and share with the city’s culture by scanning the QR codes on the glazed blocks (Source: photos by the author in 2020).

Technological advancements have further enhanced the scope of public art. Digital technologies, including augmented and virtual reality, allow artists to create

more immersive and interactive experiences. These innovations break down the barriers between the audience and the artwork, inviting active participation and deepening public engagement (Hall & Robertson, 2001). The use of these technologies also democratizes access to art, enabling rural communities, often geographically and economically isolated, to engage with cutting-edge artistic expressions (Figure 1.2).

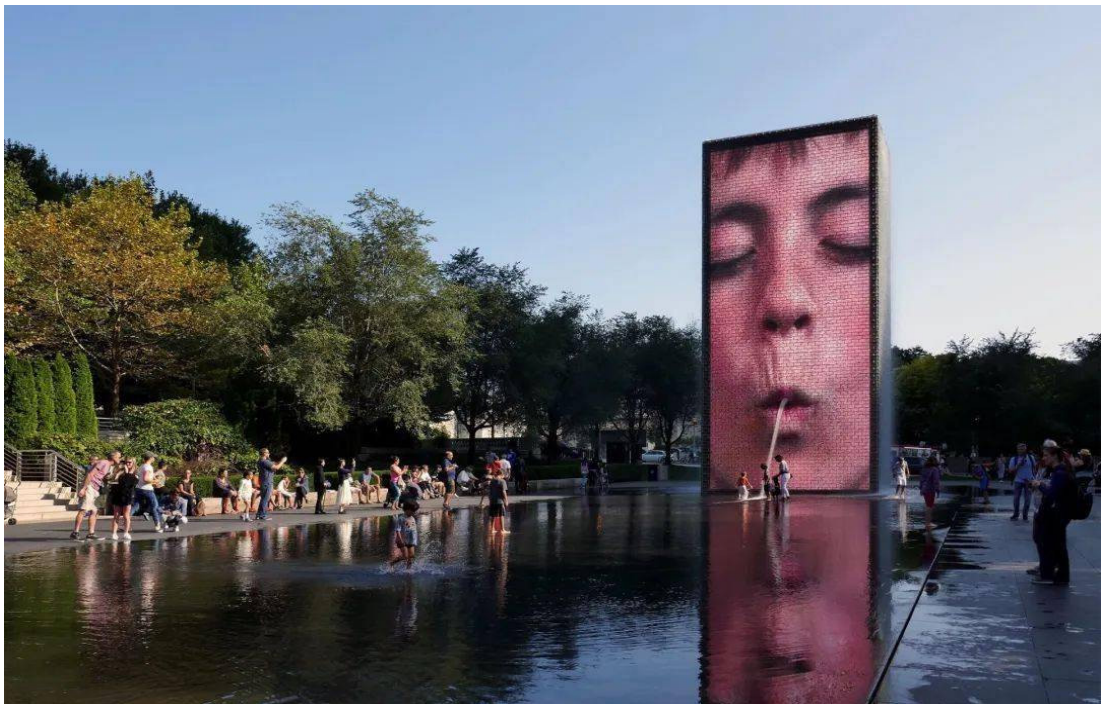


Figure 1.2 “Crown Fountain” by Jaume Plensa in Chicago, USA, 2004
Note: The work records the facial expressions of 1,000 Chicagoans and interacts with the public through computer-controlled LED light colors (Source: retrieved from Sohu.com).

Moreover, public art projects now emphasize community participation as a core component. Art is no longer created in isolation from its audience but involves local communities in the conceptualization, creation, and realization of the artwork. This collaborative process fosters a stronger sense of ownership and identity within the community, turning public art into a tool for collective empowerment (Gao, 2023). Through these projects, residents are not only passive observers but active

contributors, shaping the narrative and visual representation of their community (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3 “Colorful Beginnings” Urban Renewal Event by Dre Urhahn & Jeroen Koolhaas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2010

Note: Artists work with community members to infuse inspiration from their lives into the slums and promote community development (Source: retrieved from BBS.com)

In summary, the transformation of public art in the 21st century reflects broader shifts in how art is perceived and its function in society. Public art has become a catalyst for social engagement, cultural dialogue, and community development, particularly in underrepresented and rural areas, where its impact is most profound.

1.2.2 Public Art in Rural Revitalization

In rural revitalization, public art has emerged as an essential tool for addressing a range of challenges, from economic stagnation to cultural decline. As rural areas strive to maintain their unique identities in the face of rapid urbanization

and globalization, public art provides a means to both preserve local heritage and adapt to modern demands. Art installations, murals, and sculptures reflect the cultural and historical narratives of rural communities, reinforcing local identity and creating a sense of place that distinguishes these areas from urban counterparts (McHenry, 2011b; Yu & Li, 2020).

In addition to its aesthetic contributions, public art stimulates economic activity by attracting tourism and promoting local crafts. The presence of distinctive, culturally significant artworks often transforms rural spaces into tourist destinations, thereby creating new income streams and revitalizing local economies (Shen et al., 2022). For instance, communities that invest in large-scale public art projects often see increased foot traffic from visitors, which benefits local businesses and promotes the sale of regionally produced goods (Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4 “Stepped Field” by Ilya & Emilia Kabakov in the 7th Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Japan, 2018

Note: The artwork combines poems, rice paddy landscapes and sculptures to pay tribute to the hardworking local farming people (Source: retrieved from [Zhihu.com](https://www.zhihu.com)).

Public art also strengthens community cohesion by fostering collaboration and dialogue among residents. Through collective involvement in the creation and maintenance of artworks, rural communities build stronger social bonds, which contribute to a more resilient and cohesive social fabric (Bille & Schulze, 2006; Mair & Duffy, 2018). Such projects enable communities to reflect on their shared history, negotiate their present identity, and collaboratively envision their future, making public art a crucial mechanism for both social and cultural sustainability (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5 “I - Home - Country” Ni Ni, Huo Cheng, Hanxi Village, China, 2021
(Source: the photo by Liu Xinzheng)

Moreover, public art serves as a vehicle for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. In many rural areas, public art projects focus on documenting and celebrating local traditions, crafts, and stories. By embedding these cultural elements in the physical landscape, public art ensures that rural residents, especially younger generations, maintain a connection to their heritage. These projects also provide

educational opportunities for residents and visitors alike, fostering a deeper understanding of the community's historical and cultural significance (Currid, 2009; Markusen, 2007).

Overall, public art in rural revitalization extends beyond aesthetics to serve as a multifaceted tool for cultural preservation, economic development, and community cohesion. It empowers rural communities to take control of their narratives and futures, reinforcing their identity while fostering adaptation to contemporary challenges.

1.2.3 Public Art and Well-being of Rural Residents

The relationship between public art and the well-being of rural residents is both complex and multifaceted. Public art, by enhancing the aesthetic, cultural, and economic dimensions of rural life, plays a vital role in improving residents' overall quality of life. In the context of rural revitalization, public art contributes to well-being by promoting community participation, reinforcing cultural identity, improving the living environment, and stimulating local economies (Fan & Zhong, 2022; McHenry, 2009).

Community participation in public art projects fosters a sense of belonging and social inclusion. By engaging in these projects, residents develop a stronger connection to their community and to one another, which enhances social cohesion and collective well-being (McHenry, 2011a; Scott et al., 2018). This participatory aspect is particularly important in rural areas, where population decline and social isolation are often significant issues (Figure 1.6). Public art provides a shared platform for interaction, discussion, and creative expression, thus fostering a more vibrant and cohesive community life.



Figure 1.6 “Your Art Museum”, Xin Wangjun, Palian Village, China, 2019
 Note: The work, a collaboration between the artist and local villagers, draws on local life and encourages empowering art to the public (Source: retrieved from CCTV.com)

Cultural identity is another crucial aspect of well-being that public art helps to strengthen. Rural areas often possess rich cultural histories, which can be preserved and celebrated through public art. Artworks that reflect local customs, traditions, and histories allow residents to reconnect with their cultural roots, fostering a sense of pride and belonging (Hall & Robertson, 2001; Yue & Khan, 2015). This cultural reinforcement is particularly important in the context of rural revitalization, where the erosion of cultural identity due to modernization and globalization is a common concern.

On an environmental level, public art contributes to creating more pleasant and livable spaces. Art installations enhance the aesthetic appeal of rural areas, creating environments that promote relaxation, leisure, and interaction (Ngosa, 2019; Tartari et al., 2022). This improvement in the physical environment not only makes rural areas more attractive to residents and visitors but also contributes to the

emotional well-being of the community by providing spaces for communal activities and personal reflection (Figure 1.7).



Figure 1.7 “Blossom Tsumari” by Yayoi Kusama in Echigo, Japan, 2003 (Resource retrieved from Zhihu.com).

Economically, public art can serve as a driver of local development. By attracting tourists and promoting local culture, public art initiatives often stimulate the local economy, creating job opportunities and additional sources of income for rural residents (Grodach, 2011; Markusen, 2007). This economic stimulation, in turn, contributes to the financial well-being of the community, helping to reverse patterns of economic decline and out-migration.

In summary, public art’s contribution to the well-being of rural residents extends beyond mere aesthetic pleasure. By promoting social cohesion, reinforcing cultural identity, enhancing the physical environment, and stimulating economic growth, public art plays a key role in improving the quality of life in rural areas. This

understanding is critical for the development of effective rural revitalization policies that prioritize both the material and emotional well-being of rural populations (cf., Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016; Delconte et al., 2016).

1.3 Problem Statement

Public art has gained prominence as a vital tool in rural revitalization, particularly in the 21st century. While the potential of public art to foster cultural, social, and economic benefits has been widely acknowledged in academic discussions, there remains a significant gap between theory and practice, especially in terms of translating this potential into tangible, long-term benefits for rural residents. This disconnect is especially pronounced in the context of China's rural revitalization initiatives, where public art projects often struggle to balance tradition with the pressures of modernization and to address the specific needs of rural communities amidst resource limitations and complex governance structures (see Dai et al., 2023; Lu & Qian, 2023).

The key issue lies in the limited understanding of how public art can effectively function as a tool for enhancing the well-being of rural residents. Despite the increasing prevalence of public art in rural China, there is insufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate its impact on community cohesion, cultural identity, and economic development. Many studies have examined the aesthetic and cultural value of public art (Li et al., 2021; Qu & Cheer, 2021), but few have rigorously explored its practical effects on the daily lives and long-term development of rural communities. Consequently, questions remain regarding the mechanisms through which public art can contribute to sustainable rural revitalization (Li & Liu, 2022; Zhou, 2018).

Moreover, challenges related to the implementation and management of public art projects further complicate their effectiveness. Issues such as inadequate resource allocation, lack of sustainable planning, cultural misalignment, and difficulties in fostering collaboration between artists and local communities have been consistently under-researched (Shen, 2023; Yan, 2022). These challenges often result in superficial, short-term projects that fail to integrate fully with the local context or to provide lasting benefits to residents. As a result, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive research that not only assesses the cultural and aesthetic outcomes of public art but also critically examines its broader socio-economic impact and practical implementation challenges.

This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on how public art can be effectively used to enhance the well-being of rural residents, investigating the practical challenges involved, and proposing strategies to overcome them. The core issue of this research is to identify the mechanisms by which public art can generate long-term, sustainable benefits for rural communities, especially in the context of China's evolving rural revitalization strategy.

1.4 Research Questions

This research seeks to address the following key questions to deepen the understanding of the role and impact of public art in rural revitalization:

- a) What are the values and challenges of public art practice in rural areas?
- b) How does public art impact the well-being of rural residents in practice?
- c) How can public art be used in practice to enhance the well-being of rural residents?

1.5 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore and understand the values, impact, and practical strategies of public art in rural revitalization. Specific goals include:

- a) To identify the practical values and challenges of public art in rural areas.
- b) To investigate the key factors affecting the well-being of rural residents in public art practice.
- c) To propose strategies for public art practice in enhancing the well-being of rural residents.

1.6 Research Significance

The significance of this research is multifaceted, as detailed below:

a) Theoretical Contribution

This study advances the theoretical understanding of the role of public art in rural revitalization by focusing on its unique application in rural settings. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize public art in urban contexts, this research sheds light on how public art can be adapted to serve the distinct social, cultural, and economic needs of rural communities. By exploring the mechanisms through which public art enhances community cohesion, cultural identity, and economic resilience in rural areas, the study provides a new theoretical lens for understanding the multifaceted impacts of public art in underexplored environments, filling a critical gap in the literature.

b) Practical Guidance for Rural Public Art Projects

This research offers concrete, evidence-based guidance for practitioners involved in rural public art projects, such as artists, community planners, and local authorities. By identifying the key factors that influence the success of public art in rural communities - such as community participation, cultural sensitivity, and sustainable management - the study provides a practical framework for designing projects that not only beautify rural spaces but also contribute meaningfully to the well-being and development of rural residents. These insights are particularly relevant in the Chinese context, where rural revitalization is a national priority, yet often lacks the integration of cultural elements like public art.

c) Policy Formulation and Rural Revitalization Strategies

The findings of this study have the potential to influence rural development policies by offering a more nuanced understanding of how public art can be strategically implemented to address specific challenges faced by rural communities, such as economic decline, cultural erosion, and social fragmentation. By linking public art with tangible socio-economic benefits - such as promoting tourism, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering social cohesion - this research provides a robust foundation for policymakers to incorporate public art into rural revitalization policies in a more systematic and impactful way. This is especially critical in regions where public art has not yet been fully recognized as a tool for long-term rural sustainability.

d) Socio-Cultural Impact

This research highlights the critical role of public art in preserving and revitalizing the cultural heritage of rural communities. Public art, as shown in this study, acts as a medium for expressing local histories, values, and traditions, while simultaneously encouraging cultural innovation and adaptation in response to contemporary challenges. The study demonstrates how public art fosters shared identity and belonging among rural residents, strengthening social bonds and enhancing community resilience. It offers a model for leveraging cultural resources in rural areas to promote social cohesion and cultural vitality.

e) Directions for Future Research

By establishing a clear research framework and methodological approach, this study lays the groundwork for future scholars to investigate the role of public art under varying contexts and conditions, such as differing cultural environments or levels of economic development. This research also opens up new avenues for exploring how public art can be scaled and adapted across different rural settings, providing comparative insights that can enrich the global discourse on rural revitalization and public art.

In summary, this research is not only theoretically significant in expanding the academic discourse on public art and rural revitalization but also practically relevant, offering valuable guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and future researchers. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study aims to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of public art initiatives, ensuring that they contribute meaningfully to the long-term development and well-being of rural communities.

1.7 Research Scope

The research scope covers the following key areas:

a) Geographical Scope

This study focuses on rural areas in China, with a particular emphasis on regions that are actively involved in or have plans for rural revitalization and public art projects. To ensure a comprehensive and systematic exploration, the research employs purposive sampling to select three representative villages for a multi-case study: Xijingyu Village, Bailixia Village, and Dongtou Village. These villages were chosen because they exemplify three of the most common types of rural settings where public art interventions are implemented: traditional cultural villages, tourism-driven villages, and ordinary villages.

- Xijingyu Village represents a traditional cultural village, where the preservation and revitalization of local heritage are key objectives. This case allows for an exploration of how public art interacts with and enhances deeply rooted cultural identities and practices, offering insights into its role in sustaining and promoting traditional values in rural communities.
- Bailixia Village, a tourism village, illustrates the relationship between public art and rural economic development through tourism. The focus here is on how public art can attract visitors, enhance the cultural experience of tourists, and generate economic benefits for the local population.
- Dongtou Village, as an ordinary village, represents a setting where public art serves as a tool for improving the everyday environment and well-being of rural residents. This case provides an opportunity to examine the broader impacts of public art in villages that do not have significant cultural or

tourism resources but still benefit from community-building and environmental beautification.

The selection of these three village types is justified by their ability to reflect diverse socio-economic conditions and public art practices. By studying these varied contexts, the research can uncover insights that are not only locally relevant but also applicable to a wider range of rural settings across China. This multi-case approach enables a nuanced understanding of how public art contributes to rural revitalization across different village types, providing a broader perspective on its potential impact.

b) Participant Range

This study includes a diverse range of participants to provide a comprehensive and balanced perspective on public art in rural revitalization. A purposive sampling method was employed to select a total of 33 participants, ensuring that the sample reflects the various stakeholders involved in or affected by public art projects. The participants consist of 24 villagers from the three case villages and 9 key representatives, including villagers, project managers, and designers. The decision to select 33 participants is based on several factors:

- **Representativeness and Depth:** The number 33 was chosen to balance the need for comprehensive representation with the feasibility of conducting in-depth qualitative research. In qualitative studies, sample sizes are typically smaller than in quantitative studies, as the goal is to achieve data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerge from additional participants (Guest et al., 2006). After careful consideration of the research objectives and the diversity of perspectives required, 33 was determined to be a sufficient number to capture a wide range of experiences without compromising depth.

- **Contextual and Practical Engagement:** The 24 villagers were selected to represent the three case villages. These participants were not only chosen to ensure cross-case comparison and capture each village's unique socio-cultural context, but also because they are directly involved in the public art practices in their respective communities. These villagers are active participants in the design, creation, or maintenance of public art projects, providing firsthand insights into how public art interventions impact daily life and community dynamics. By focusing on those who are directly engaged in the artistic processes, the research is able to explore the deeper implications of public art not only as a cultural display but as an active, participatory tool for rural revitalization.
- **Key Stakeholder Involvement:** The inclusion of 9 key representatives - 3 from each village (a project manager, a designer, and a community leader) - is essential for capturing the perspectives of those involved in the planning and execution of public art projects. These representatives provide expert insights into the challenges and considerations in implementing public art, ensuring that the study covers both the community's lived experiences and the managerial and design aspects of the projects.
- **Precedent in Qualitative Research:** The selection of 33 participants is also informed by existing qualitative research standards. Many qualitative studies on community-based interventions or public art projects suggest that sample sizes between 20 and 40 participants are generally sufficient for achieving meaningful insights (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Mason, 2010). By selecting 33 participants, this study aligns with accepted norms for in-depth qualitative research, ensuring both rigor and manageability.

This purposive sampling strategy, with its focus on a diverse yet manageable group of participants, ensures that the study can explore a broad array of perspectives while maintaining the depth necessary for a thorough qualitative analysis. The number 33 was chosen specifically to balance diversity, feasibility, and the need for rich, context-specific insights.

c) Time Span

To ensure relevance and alignment with contemporary practices, this research focuses on public art projects that have been implemented or completed within the past decade, with a particular emphasis on projects initiated after the introduction of China's Rural Revitalization Strategy in 2017. This timeframe is critical, as it corresponds with a significant national push towards rural development, providing a unique opportunity to examine how public art has been integrated into the broader rural revitalization efforts.

Focusing on the post-2017 period allows the research to capture the most recent trends and innovations in public art within rural contexts, as well as assess the short- to medium-term impacts these projects have had on community development, cultural preservation, and economic growth. By concentrating on this era, the study ensures that its findings are directly applicable to ongoing and future public art initiatives within the framework of rural revitalization, offering timely insights that can inform both policy and practice.

1.8 Visual Mapping Framework

Figure 1.8 presents a comprehensive visual framework that organizes the core elements of this research. The framework visually represents the flow and connection

between the key components of the study, including the title, problem statement, research questions, objectives, methodology, key findings, and research gaps. These elements are arranged sequentially from top to bottom, providing a clear and structured overview of how the research is constructed.



Figure 1.8 Visual mapping framework of this research
(Created by the author)

This visual mapping framework clarifies the logical progression of the research. It highlights the alignment between the research questions and objectives, shows how the chosen methodology addresses the research problems, and identifies the research gaps that the study aims to fill. By offering a visual representation, the

framework allows for an easier grasp of the overall structure and flow of the research, facilitating a clear understanding of the study's arguments and findings.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and a unified understanding of key concepts throughout this research, the following terms are defined:

a) Public Art

Public art refers to artistic expressions and interventions created intentionally for public spaces. It includes a diverse array of artistic forms such as sculptures, murals, installations, and performances (Cartiere & Willis, 2008). The primary objectives of public art are multifaceted: it enhances the aesthetic quality of the environment, reflects and celebrates local cultural values, histories, and identities (Miles, 1997), and fosters cultural exchange and social interaction between community members and visitors (Finkelpearl, 2000). This definition emphasizes the participatory nature of public art projects, which often involve collaboration between artists, community members, and other stakeholders, and underscores its role in promoting cultural enrichment, community engagement, and social cohesion, particularly in rural contexts.

b) Rural Area

Rural areas are regions characterized by low population densities and economies primarily based on agriculture. These areas often exhibit expansive landscapes, traditional livelihoods, and distinct local cultures and customs (Sevinç, 2017). Unlike urban areas, rural regions typically possess unique social and economic structures (Wiggins & Proctor, 2001). In this research, rural areas include

peri-urban regions and villages with varying connectivity to urban centers, broadening understanding of rural diversity in China's revitalization efforts.

c) Rural Resident

A rural resident refers to an individual who lives long-term in a rural area. Their lifestyle, cultural background, and economic activities differ significantly from those of urban residents (Kennedy et al., 2009). Rural residents often rely more heavily on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods and typically adhere to more traditional living habits and cultural values compared to their urban counterparts (Freudenburg, 1991). This research recognizes the diversity among rural residents, including farmers, small business owners, and village inhabitants, whose unique experiences shape their perspectives on public art and rural life.

d) Rural Revitalization

Rural revitalization encompasses a range of strategies aimed at fostering holistic development in rural areas. These strategies include not only economic improvements but also efforts to strengthen social cohesion, preserve cultural heritage, and promote environmental sustainability (Liu et al., 2020). Examples include initiatives to improve agricultural productivity, healthcare, and education, protect cultural traditions, and enhance overall living conditions (Zhang et al., 2020). The overarching goal is to create vibrant, resilient rural communities that offer enhanced opportunities and a higher quality of life for residents, while maintaining cultural and environmental sustainability.

e) Well-being

In the context of this research, well-being refers to the overall satisfaction and sense of fulfillment experienced by rural communities as influenced by public art practices. This definition extends beyond material prosperity, encompassing community cohesion, economic development, cultural identity, and individual satisfaction (Diener, 2009; Keyes, 1998). Public art projects can foster a sense of belonging by enhancing community interaction and engagement, thereby strengthening social bonds and shared cultural values. Additionally, these projects can contribute to local economic growth through tourism and creative industries, while also promoting the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage. Well-being in this context is a holistic measure that reflects how public art can improve not only the aesthetic and cultural environment of rural areas but also the quality of life, social connections, and overall happiness of the residents.

f) Tool

In this study, a tool is any tangible or intangible resource, approach, or strategy employed to achieve specific social objectives, particularly in the context of rural revitalization and the enhancement of resident well-being. Public art is conceptualized as a tool used strategically to address social needs and challenges in rural areas (Cheung et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2018). This definition highlights the practical utility of public art in driving social development, fostering cultural exchange, and achieving broader societal goals in rural communities.

1.10 Research Limitations

These limitations are related to methodology, sample selection, time frame, and broader issues such as cultural and regional differences:

a) Methodological Limitations

Thematic analysis, while offering flexibility in understanding participants' perspectives, is inherently subjective. Researchers may unintentionally overlook certain themes or place undue emphasis on others due to their own interpretations. Additionally, the data collected through interviews may be influenced by participants' desire to present socially desirable responses or by their emotions and memory biases, potentially affecting the authenticity and reliability of the findings.

b) Sample Limitations

The purposive sampling of 33 interviewees may not fully represent the broader rural population. Differences among participants - such as age, gender, education, and socio-economic background - might influence the research outcomes, meaning the findings may not reflect general trends or issues across the rural population as a whole. This limits the study's ability to generalize its conclusions to all rural areas in China.

c) Time Constraints

The three-year research period captures only the short-term impacts of public art projects. Long-term effects, which may evolve with changes in community development, policy adjustments, and shifts in residents' attitudes, are not fully observable within this time frame. Consequently, the long-term sustainability and evolving impacts of public art interventions remain unexplored.

d) General Issues

While the research proposes strategies for public art projects in rural areas, these strategies may not fully account for the unique circumstances of individual villages. Variations in historical background, cultural traditions, economic conditions, and resident needs mean that local adaptation of the strategies is necessary for practical application.

e) Cultural Differences

Since the study focuses on rural areas in China, the findings may be influenced by specific cultural contexts and may not be easily transferable to regions with different cultural backgrounds. Variations in values, aesthetic preferences, and social structures across cultures mean that the insights gained from this research may not be directly applicable to other cultural settings.

f) Regional Differences

The study does not provide a detailed comparison of different geographic regions within rural China. Geographic diversity - such as climate, topography, and resource availability - can significantly influence the design, implementation, and reception of public art projects. Without accounting for these regional variations, the study's findings may be less applicable in areas with different geographic conditions.

1.11 Ethical Consideration

This research prioritized ethical principles, ensuring responsible conduct and respect for participants' rights. The decision to forgo formal ethical review was justified by the following considerations: