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# Environmental Improvement Problems of Village in Town and Countermeasures

Can ZHANG<sup>1</sup>, Hui LIN<sup>2\*</sup>

1. School of Fine Art, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, China; 2. School of Urban Construction, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, China

**Abstract** The improvement of urbanization level in China and long-term development of economy in vast rural areas commonly impel rapid development of urbanization in China by "stronghold type" of small town and "radiation type" of big town. Urbanization road with Chinese characteristics impels urbanization and industrialization development, which needs relying on the development of small town. Due to the impact of town, space environment of "village in town" changes, and rural memory weakens. The state of "non city and non township" deeply affects rural development. Meanwhile, due to limited by urban-rural dualism, top-down planning of "village in town" is obviously unworkable. In this paper, analysis and interpretation on the problems of "village in town" are conducted, the cause is found, and effective channel of solving problem is obtained.

**Key words** Small town, Village in town, Environmental improvement

## 1 Introduction

In 30 years since the reform and opening up, urbanization of China rapidly develops, and a large number of people transfer from the countryside to the city, which is rare in the history of the world. With fast development of urbanization in China, it continuously enlarges toward village, causing low use rate of rural land, destroyed eco-environment and a large number of "villages in town"<sup>[1]</sup>. Due to the restriction by urban-rural dual structure in China, "village in town" is difficult to merge with town in short term, thereby forming the social structure of non city and non township with poor traffic, fewer public facilities and worse living environment. Scholars of academic circles pay more attention to the traditional "village in city", but make less inquiry on "village in town" in the county. Although "village in town" and "village in city" have some same problems, such as disordered building construction, worse environmental health, destroyed eco-environment and low land use rate, there is an essential difference in land ownership system, household registration system and future development direction. Theoretic research on "village in city" could not respond to the problems of "village in town"<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, environmental problems of "village in town" and its coping strategies are discussed in this paper to get everyone's attention.

Some scholars think that "village in town indicates rural community still maintaining and conducting rural collective ownership and rural management system in urban overall planning area". In urbanization process, village in town closely connects with the town, and some has been contained in town range but still implements rural land management system, rural household registration management system, and rural social management system, and

maintains traditional village social relation network dominated by consanguinity and geopolitical position<sup>[3]</sup>. With the relationship evolution of village and town, problems and contradictions of "village in town" have been already shown due to history and management system; overall planning confusion, architectural style going off course, lack of infrastructure and bad environmental hygiene, which is urgent to be solved.

## 2 Characteristics of "village in town"

Compared with "village in city", there are common and different points. "Village in city" has changed traditional life style and space form, and life style, space form and structural texture of "village in town" are partial to village, especially distinct in space form, natural environment, public service facilities and social humanities<sup>[4]</sup>.

**2.1 Space form characteristics** In space scale of village, building distribution of "village in town" shows loose, disordered and free state, and architectural form is free and changeable, dominant by local architecture adapting to villagers' life. Compared with "village in city", spatial configuration of "village in town" is single and more depends on natural eco-environment, and street space tends to spread along the natural terrain. But in some regions, due to the impact of "house construction hot", villagers build new houses and try to expand the area. Due to limited by homestead area, expansion firstly selects street space of the village. With the urbanization development, traditional structure, treatment manner and elders' rights of village gradually disappear, what follows is the disappearance of the villagers' restraints. Therefore, the occupation on public street of village is more intense, street becomes narrow, and upper air is covered, causing a lot of "hand in hand" and "cheek to cheek" buildings<sup>[5]</sup>. It causes that village street becomes narrow and dark, and space scale proportion is imbalance. The space is narrow and oppressive, and

the building intervention on both sides of the street is too strong. There are very few villagers staying here, and its function gradually becomes monotonous. If it is not treated, street culture and its living function will completely disappear.

**2.2 Natural environment characteristics** At natural environment aspect, hard pavement coverage of "village in town" is not large, most space is still original ecological land, woodland or family plot, and old trees and vegetation are also left in some villages, with better eco-environment. Some villages have better water eco-environment and clean water body, waterfront environment basically shows primitive rough state, and there is less environment for people to have fun and play. Some villages connect with mountain and commonly enjoy natural small climate brought by mountain with surrounding villages<sup>[6]</sup>. "Village in town" closely connects with town, and natural environment is also affected by town. As some enterprises with low efficacy enter into town, natural environment of village is also affected to a certain degree.

**2.3 Public facilities characteristics** For villagers in "village in town", public service facilities in center town district are in acceptable distance, and villagers using public service facilities must rely on town, which laterally affects the construction of public facilities in "village in town". Public facilities and activity place in "village in town" appear extreme deficiency, and basically rely on town, which affects life quality of villagers. There is little public place in the village, it lacks public reading room for children, the old man has no leisure room, and the daily recreational activities are monotonous. The material life of the village is improving, but spiritual and cultural life seriously lacks, which is worse than town.

**2.4 Social and humanistic characteristics** Village is an acquaintances society which is composed of "acquaintances network" and affected by geopolitical position and blood relationship. Under fast economy development, village space is deconstructed, "acquaintances society" is broken, and rural society faces restructuring situation. The ancestral hall in village gradually decays, traditional farming festival is gradually forgotten, and social and humanistic environment in the village becomes that "it is a city and a non city" and "a village and a non village". Even if the rural society maintained by consanguinity is gradually collapsing due to the impact of town life, human relations in village are still in harmony, and the social relations of the villagers are simple, making that public order of "village in town" is relatively stable.

### 3 Current environmental problems of "village in town"

**3.1 Low land use rate** Land use rate of "village in town" is always very low. Town development and expansion drive rural development, and public space servicing for the villagers and migrant population is gradually formed in the village. In general, the region with higher land use rate is distributed in main streets of village in town, and it generally lacks public activity place and recreational facilities in the village. Some villages in town have

the cultural and educational land, but its scale is not large, and other functions mainly rely on town.

**3.2 Incomplete transportation planning** The young labor forces in "village in town" are mostly out of work, and children and old people are left. Most villages are hollow, and transportation planning is neglected. Some villages are established around mountain, with larger height difference, and difficulty of climbing road is large. Roads in the village mostly come out of people and cars, which lacks rational planning and has not adapted to routine life of modern people. Road system is weak in village, a lot of dead-end roads exist in residential district, and there are often wagons and trucks in and out of some sections of the road.

**3.3 Lack of public facilities** The lack of public facilities in "village of town" has been normal, and villagers could not enjoy public activity in the village, which basically depend on town. Traditional residential building space in the village is relatively closed and mostly shows door to door arrangement<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, it causes that "village in town" lacks open space node settlement, and there is not public green land and square for people to gather. Although internal natural environment in village is superior, it lacks systematic planning and renovation, and interpersonal activity place and recreational venue with local rural life atmosphere are not formed.

**3.4 Disordered rural residential buildings** Rural residential building form in village is disordered. Some rural residential buildings are constructed by rammed earth, and building form is better, with local feature. Some old-fashioned architectures are ruined and only leave broken walls due to poor maintenance. Some are "European" style of multi-storey small buildings, which seems incompatible in the village. The architecture of "village in town" is a combination of China and the West and the coexistence of new and old, lacks overall unity and local features.

### 4 Cause analysis on current environmental problems of "village in town"

**4.1 Government intervention, causing slow village updating** Compared with traditional village, the background of "village in town" is complex, with special position. Town and village governments are more cautious on internal material space construction and update of village. When some regions have tourism development demand, government wants to maintain original characteristics of the village but lacks suitable whole planning and design strategy. Therefore, independent renewal and construction activities by villagers in village are paused, and long-term stagnation and "site type" of protection make space environment in village ruined and loose activity.

**4.2 Economy development, causing crude resource use** To promote development, each township government actively invites and attracts investment, and even "turns on the green light" for some enterprises, and the following is some inefficient enterprises. The development model of local urbanization directly causes that some towns blindly enlarge and swallow a lot of villages, and the

phenomenon of land changing into factory workshop is common. Space form change of the town and crude land use bring the destruction of eco-environment.

**4.3 Management system, causing disordered village management** "Village in town" is in the region with prominent urban-rural dualistic structure system in China. Seen from landscape aspect, village buildings and town have formed a larger settlement, but urban-rural management system commonly exists in administrative division, and there is large difference between village committee and neighborhood committee<sup>[8]</sup>. Manager of "village in town" is often village committee, who is generally generated by villager election, could combine with traditional patriarchal clan concept, and has certain cohesive force in village, while administrative interference on village by town government is limited. In urbanization process, co-existence of two kinds of management systems could not respond to some problems, and there is the phenomenon of management disorder.

**4.4 Lack of collective memory of villagers, causing local feature loss** The concept of modern urban life deeply affects village, and rural life is gradually "getting out", and even the phenomenon of "collective amnesia" appears. Compared with the developed urban economy and rich urban society, rural living environment is worse, economy is laggard, and life is in poverty. Farmers are conscious of "inferior" than urban people, and they are more willing to erase this memory and follow urban life. In urbanization process, they very lack local culture self-confidence. As a result of this, a large number of young workers in the village come to work in the city, a small number of old people and children are left, and the village looks cold and cheerless. The vague rural collective memory and the unconfidence of the local culture gradually cause that villagers no longer adhere to local characteristics but follow various urban "foreign houses". Meanwhile, it is also the cause of government not trusting villagers building a house independently, and vicious circle is formed that village space environment and collective memory of local culture mutually affect and increasingly decline.

**5 Response strategies for environmental improvement of "village in town"** In exploration process of environmental improvement of "village in town", it must suit one's measures to local conditions and respect local situation, and "homesickness" construction could be merged in whole planning. In planning and regulation process, it should directly view urban-rural dualistic structure system and emphasize that villagers join in environmental improvement of "village in town" as a participant. It could effectively solve the existing problems in the village and mobilize the enthusiasm of the villagers, thereby exploring a road from bottom to top, which is really suitable for the environment renovation and design of "village in town".

**5.1 Regain collective memory and build a local memory corridor** Collective memory is also called population memory, which is proposed by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, and

it is defined as that "the members from a specific social group share processes and results of the past events, and the condition of guaranteeing collective memory inheritance is that social interaction and group consciousness need extracting the continuity of the memory". In "village in town", most are all the original villagers, and these villagers have a deep attachment to the local environment, with very strong dependence on village. In urbanization of rapid development, planner could not overthrow it all, but should try to reshape the memory of the villagers and build a collective memory that belongs to them. This kind of memory is not still and going back to the past, but is dynamic and developed, that is to say, there is the past and perception and experience on present life scene. With the spring tide of era, regulation and design of rural environment only relying on debris type of thing in the village are not enough, but it should merge local elements when could meet present living demand, reshape whole cognition on village, properly handle the relationship between new and old things, and perfect village's function and its activity place. It should wake villagers' memory, promote villagers' local culture self-confidence, build rural place filled with local flavor, accent and "nostalgia", thereby giving people a new experience.

**5.2 General planning and combing, and optimize space form** It is meaningless to simply return to the past, but should construct the present by conforming to the trend of the times. For current environmental problems of "village in town" and its future development direction, they are sufficiently interpreted by combining superordinate planning. It should sufficiently consider environmental improvement design of space, deeply excavate natural environmental resources and combine local historical culture, optimize and update road traffic, public service facilities, landscape node and building facade. Additionally, village renovation planning should sufficiently consider space form feature and maintain original street system in the village. According to villagers' demand, it could improve the layout of traditional residential courtyard, build harmonious neighbourhood in the countryside, elaborately construct harmonious rural community with local feature, traditional life custom and corresponding with living demand of modern people. In whole planning, it should consider the problem of space scale, the proportion of building and road should be moderate, and space scale should be comfortable. It should restore to original street function and maintain street culture. In planning and construction, it should strictly protect farmland surrounding the village and beautify "village in town" by green water and mountain according to the principle of less occupying farmland and using original vacant ground in the village.

**5.3 Perfect road system and enrich villagers' life** Based on master road planning, by combining overall layout of "village in town", road status, system and architectural composition, road system is further combed, and each level of road is perfected. Based on respecting village status, road connects each other, broken-head road should be decreased, and it should connect with road network system in town. It should dredge road traffic in road,

build perfect street system, try to provide a perfect and convenient traffic system for villagers which could meet the demand of fire engine access in village. Additionally, public facilities should contain village infrastructure, public service facilities and modern living facilities. In environmental improvement design of "village in town", omni-directional basic work should be done well, and it should guarantee that each infrastructure is complete. Village infrastructure should have corresponding water supply and drainage, waste, rainwater and sewage treatment. It should improve internal and external environment of the village, and transform communication, fire-fighting and river in village. Supporting public service facilities should be same as the city, and it should possess medical treatment, education and library, and then it could stay someone. Villagers should enjoy modern life mode and its consumption mode, and a simple village should carry out the result of modern civilization. Meanwhile, the improvement planning of "village in town" can not be separated from the town. "Village in town" could not separate from the town district as a single individual, it should consider realizing function maximization in limited village region, resource sharing and advantage complementation should be conducted with center town, and it should provide public infrastructure facilities for villagers to the maximum extent.

**5.4 Promote landscape quality and construct rural living environment** Greening landscape planning and design of village should be people-oriented. Comprehensively considering planning and construction region of "village in town" and its surrounding natural environment, it should combine with present natural landscape and create specific landscape ecological core of village. A group of woodlands and green lands are formed around present buildings, and greening system of scene on the point, shade on the line and forest on the surface is formed. Landscape green land is merged around the residence, forming a set of complete landscape system. Additionally, based on village status, architectures in the village are renovated by retaining, perfecting and dismantling. The architecture which coordinates with rural style and has complete main structure is retained, while the architecture that main structure is obviously broken and seriously destroys local rural style is dismantled. In transformation and updating process of rural living building, below principles should be followed: not destroy original terrain of village and its natural environment, not simply repeatedly simulate traditional building, consider modern life demand, and architectural style is simple and highlights local culture feature. The newly built architecture should correspond with whole

style of village, and it should provide guide of building style for villagers, guide farmers to newly build rural living architecture, and promote whole quality of living environment of villagers in "village in town".

## 6 Conclusions

In urbanization construction process, as the transition region, "village in town" is historical development rule of society change, which is special and complex. Due to different dynamic mechanism and future development direction, treatment system of "village in city" could not be applied in "village in town". We should highly value the problems in "village in town", thereby avoiding to develop into "village in city". The treatment of environmental problems in "village in town" could not copy the original top-down governance model, and it could not compel villagers return to traditional rural life. But it should explore a correct road which truly corresponds with environment improvement of "village in town" by combining modern life demand according to actual situation.

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(From page 28)

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