

RESEARCH ON THE PATHWAYS BY WHICH RURAL ENVIRONMENTS IN ZHEJIANG ACTIVATE MULTIPLE ASSOCIATIONS WITH URBAN POPULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Addressing the common challenges faced by people during urbanization, such as the disruption of natural connections, alienation from community relationships, and loss of local cultural memory, this study uses rural Zhejiang as its spatial context, focusing on three core healing factors: landscape, lifestyle, and culture. Employing literature review, field observation, and other methods, the study systematically deconstructs the synergistic mechanisms of rural healing elements and their activation pathways for the multiple connections between urban populations and nature, community, and local culture. First, the study identifies and extracts key representations of rural healing elements in Zhejiang; second, it reveals the synergistic driving logic of material carriers, sensory experiences, and value meaning; and third, based on empirical evidence, it extracts three differentiated action pathways and scientifically verifies their intervention effectiveness. The research conclusions provide a scientific basis for decision-making in rural spatial design guided by healing principles, and have significant academic and practical value for promoting environmental health and wellness research within the context of rural revitalization.

Keywords: Rural Zhejiang, Healing Environment, Landscape-Life-Culture Synergy, Multiple Associations, Action Path

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INTRODUCTION

With the high-density built environment and high-pressure lifestyle brought about by rapid urbanization, urban populations are facing widespread psychological anxiety and cognitive fatigue. The underlying issue lies in the systemic rupture of the individual's connection to multidimensional relationships. This includes a lack of connection to nature caused by artificial environments, social alienation resulting from the atomization of lifestyles, and a crisis of rural cultural identity under the impact of modernity. The countryside, as a composite carrier of nature, life, and culture, provides an ideal healing space for reconstructing these connections. (Conradson, 2005)

With its unique landscape, traditional lifestyle, and profound Jiangnan cultural heritage, Zhejiang's rural areas serve as a prime example for exploring the therapeutic function of rural spaces within the Chinese context. (Liu, Zou, & Wang, 2012) These villages are not only repositories of ecological resources but also strategic spaces where urban dwellers seek emotional refuge and stress relief. Selecting Zhejiang's rural areas as a research subject not only provides concrete empirical evidence for landscape micro-transformation but also allows us to verify the universality and specificity of how landscape, lifestyle, and culture activate individual perceptions through their diverse spatial samples.

While existing research has focused on the health-promoting role of rural areas, most studies have been limited to the restoration of natural landscapes alone, lacking a comprehensive approach that systematically explores how the environment activates multidimensional connections among urban populations from a "space-behavior-culture" perspective. Therefore, this study aims to identify core healing elements in the rural environment of Zhejiang, analyze the inherent logic of the synergistic effects of landscape aesthetics, life experiences, and cultural symbolism, and further elucidate the specific activation pathways of the connections between nature, community, and culture. The research results are intended to be translated into actionable healing-oriented rural space design strategies, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for rural business innovation and environmental revitalization.

Research Objectives

This research aims at identifying and exploring the key landscape elements, lifestyles, and cultural practices in rural Zhejiang that have the potential to contribute to the relaxation process for urban populations.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Core Dimensions and Qualitative Research Foundations of Rural Therapeutic Environments

Rural therapeutic environments are not simply physical spaces, but complex fields woven together by a natural foundation, social interaction, and cultural meaning. The healing efficacy of rural environments does not stem from the isolated effect of any single element, but is achieved through the interactive coupling of three core dimensions: landscape perception, life participation, and cultural identity. Its essence is a deep connection between people, space, and meaning.

1) The Healing Connotation of Rural Landscapes

Rural landscapes, as the core carrier of healing experiences, possess the dual attributes of a natural foundation and an artificial environment. Their healing mechanism is mainly achieved through the following two levels:

(1) Healing Mechanism: Based on Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART), rural landscapes guide urban dwellers away from high cognitive loads through Being Away, Soft Fascination, Compatibility, and Extent (Kaplan, 1989). Simultaneously, according to Ulrich's Stress Relief Theory (SRT), visual elements with high aesthetic value, such as terraced fields

and vegetation, can rapidly regulate an individual's physiological state through the autonomic nervous system, alleviating anxiety and fatigue (Ulrich, 1983).

(2) Multi-sensory Embodied Interaction Mechanism: This healing is not simply visual consumption, but rather an embodied connection process encompassing hearing, touch, and smell (Conradson, 2005). In the context of Zhejiang, this landscape therapy exhibits distinct regional differences: the mountainous landscape of eastern Zhejiang provides a sense of visual openness, the plains and farmlands of northern Zhejiang reinforce the rhythm of time, and the bamboo forests of southern Zhejiang create tranquil, immersive scenes. These characteristics collectively constitute the material basis for Zhejiang's rural landscape to activate natural connections.

2) The Social Media Function of Artificial Landscapes

Rural artificial landscapes, through their low barriers to entry and inclusiveness, become interactive media that induce informal interactions. Unlike the clearly defined functional zoning of urban spaces, rural trails, courtyards, and threshing grounds possess multifunctional and composite characteristics, effectively lowering the psychological threshold for social participation (Yan et al., 2020).

(1) Spatial Mechanism: The alley-courtyard fabric of villages, through the transformation between confinement and openness, triggers a social chain of chance encounters, conversations, and interactions; the bridges in water towns serve as composite nodes for transportation and discussion, enhancing visitors' sense of social presence.

(2) Psychological Significance: This space-mediated informal social interaction helps repair the atomization dilemma of urban individuals, enhancing their perceived social support and psychological stability (Kearns & Milligan, 2020).

3) Landscape Authenticity and Regional Specificity

Research shows that the therapeutic value of rural landscapes is positively correlated with their authenticity. Landscapes that have not been over-commercialized and retain connections to production and daily life can generate a warmer psychological resonance.

Zhejiang's rural areas exhibit significant regional differentiation advantages. The landscape of eastern Zhejiang caters to the need for escape and exploration; the pastoral rhythm of northern Zhejiang suits the psychological adjustment of a slower pace of life; and the historical buildings of southern Zhejiang satisfy cultural identity and belonging through historical continuity. This regional characteristic ensures a precise alignment between the rural environment and the psychological needs of urban populations at the cognitive level.

Theoretical Foundations: Environmental Restoration and Social Alienation

Therapeutic environment research primarily builds upon two classic psychological frameworks: Attention Restoration Theory (ART; Kaplan, 1995) and Stress Reduction Theory (SRT; Ulrich et al., 1991). SRT posits that natural visual elements trigger an evolutionary, automatic reduction in physiological arousal and psycho-neuroendocrine stress. Concurrently, ART emphasizes the restorative role of "soft fascination" in natural settings, which allows directed attention mechanisms to recover from mental fatigue. While both theories robustly explain how passive exposure to natural landscapes alleviates individual psychological strain, existing scholarship predominantly treats rural and natural spaces as static, visual restoratives, often overlooking the dynamic socio-cultural and behavioral dimensions embedded within daily rural life.

Complementing environmental psychology, modern sociological critique particularly theories of urban alienation and acceleration (Rosa, 2013) highlights how rapid urbanization fragments human connections. Modern urbanites increasingly experience a "triadic disconnection": a physical severance from natural rhythms, a social dislocation driven by instrumental relationships, and a cultural detachment from local traditions and authentic practices. Although therapeutic geography scholars have extended their focus from pure natural physical features

to "therapeutic landscapes" encompassing socio-cultural settings (Gesler, 1992; Bell et al., 2018), existing literature remains limited in two key aspects:

- Over-emphasis on Physical Attributes: Prior studies tend to isolate natural or physical elements from the lived experiences and active practices of participants.
- Lack of Integrated Frameworks: Few empirical studies systematically articulate how non-visual, practice-based interactions interact with spatial settings to counteract multi-dimensional urban alienation.

Consequently, while prior literature firmly establishes the stress-reducing capacities of natural settings, how rural therapeutic elements function as an integrated, practice-oriented system remains under-theorized. This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining rural Zhejiang to explore the nuanced interplay between landscape, everyday living, and local culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, following the logical framework of element identification, mechanism analysis, and pathway extraction.

Case Selection Criteria

To examine the synergistic mechanisms of spiritual healing across diverse rural contexts, four representative traditional villages in Zhejiang Province were selected: Sandu Ancient Village (Songyang), Lujia Village (Anji), Heling Village (Tonglu), and Nianbadu Ancient Town (Quzhou). The selection of these cases adheres to two core methodological principles:

1) Geographic and Typological Diversity

To prevent geographic bias and ensure spatial variance, the chosen villages span the eastern, southern, northern, central, and western ecological zones of Zhejiang, encapsulating distinct landscape topographies and rural development models:

- Sandu Village (Songyang, Southern/South-Eastern Mountainous Zone): Characterized by mountain terraced landscapes and well-preserved traditional rammed-earth architecture.
- Lujia Village (Anji, Northern Plain and Hilly Zone): Renowned for its tea-and-bamboo industry, modern eco-agricultural tourism, and village-railway integration.
- Heling Village (Tonglu, Central Fuchun River Basin): Exemplifies a waterfront rural ecosystem deeply intertwined with traditional Fuchun landscape aesthetics and homestay hospitality.
- Nianbadu Ancient Town (Quzhou, Western Frontier Historic Zone): Highlights border trade history, diverse migrant folk culture, and historic architecture.

2) Exemplariness and Representativeness

All four villages serve as benchmark demonstrations of Zhejiang's "Green Rural Revival Program" (Million-Village Transformation Project) and national Rural Revitalization initiatives. Each site has successfully leveraged its localized ecological, lifestyle, or cultural assets to activate visitor engagement and rural restoration. This multi-case approach ensures maximum variation while maintaining context-specific relevance for analyzing multidimensional synergy.

Data Sources and Participants

The study uses triangulation to construct a data chain to ensure research reliability:

- Participatory observation: Through multiple rounds of field visits, the landscape characteristics, agricultural rhythms, and social scenes of the case study sites are recorded, accumulating images and field notes.
- Semi-structured interviews: 12 core relevant individuals were interviewed using purposive sampling.

The sample includes: urban visitors (n = 5, focusing on healing perception and reconstructive association), rural residents (n = 5, focusing on authenticity of life and neighborhood interaction), and cultural inheritors (n = 2, focusing on local memories and cultural identity).

Table 1 Number of characters in in-depth interviews

Code	Category	Age/Gender	Occupation / Background	Case Village
UV1-UV5	Urban Visitors	25-61 (3F/2M)	IT, Finance, Teacher, Designer, Retiree	Sandu, Lujia, Heling, Nianbadu
RR1-RR5	Rural Residents	39-58 (2F/3M)	Homestay operator, Tea farmer, B&B staff, Guide	Sandu, Lujia, Heling, Nianbadu
CI1-CI2	Cultural Inheritors	58-67 (1F/1M)	Wood carving master, Tea ceremony practitioner	Nianbadu, Sandu

Although the sample size comprises 12 key informants (5 urban visitors, 5 local villagers, and 2 cultural inheritors), qualitative research emphasizes depth and contextual rich insight over probabilistic sampling. In this study, the determination of sample size was guided by the principle of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest et al., 2006). Data collection and preliminary coding proceeded iteratively. During the analysis of transcripts from the 10th to 12th interviewees, no new conceptual codes, axial categories, or core themes emerged regarding the synergistic mechanism. This indicated that data saturation had been successfully achieved within the scope of the selected representative case villages in Zhejiang.

Methods of Analysis

The study employed a three-level coding technique to process interview data and field notes:

- Open coding: breaking down raw data to identify and label initial concepts related to rural healing.
- Main axis coding: Establish logical connections between categories and deconstruct the collaborative mechanisms of landscape, life, and cultural dimensions.
- Selective coding: core categorization, ultimately extracting the pathways that activate multiple connections among urban populations.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Identification and Characteristics of Core Elements of Rural Healing in Zhejiang

Based on on-site observations and hierarchical coding of interview texts from four typical case villages in Zhejiang, this study identified three core healing dimensions: landscape, lifestyle, and culture. Among these, landscape elements, as the material foundation of the healing experience, have the most direct manifestations and psychological impact.

1) Landscape Healing Elements

The rural landscape of Zhejiang Province exhibits a dual composite of natural foundation and artificial construction, as well as a triple overlap of function, experience, and meaning. Its elemental composition shows significant heterogeneity from standardized urban landscapes and is deeply intertwined with Zhejiang's regional geomorphological characteristics of "seven parts mountains, one part water, and two parts farmland" (National Forestry and Grassland Administration, 2025).

The core of the natural landscape system includes pristine ecology that has not been excessively interfered with. Healing is achieved through multi-sensory stimulation and the embedding of natural rhythms. This includes mountain and water patterns centered on the spatial coupling of mountains, water, and villages, providing a sense of visual openness and detachment (Kaplan, 1989); the layered texture of fields and terraces that change with the seasons, with seasonal color variations forming natural rhythms; hydrological landscapes such as streams, ponds, and ditches, whose flowing sounds and moist air trigger sensory relaxation through hearing and

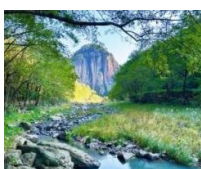
smell; and native vegetation, mainly composed of native trees, cash crops, and native flowers, with concepts such as trees with scents and bamboo that can be touched, embodying the need for embodied interaction. The artificial landscape system encompasses the village fabric, public courtyards, ancient bridges and paths, and walking trails. These elements are not merely traffic routes, but also physical nodes that induce informal social interaction. The village space, as coded, is embodied in concepts such as irregular yet comfortable alleyways where one can wander for a long time, reflecting a rebellion against the grid-like layout of the city and providing a sense of exploration and psychological security. Public interaction spaces lack clearly defined functions; in the coding, people naturally gather in threshing grounds and courtyards to chat and drink tea, confirming their function in inducing informal social interaction. The low-intensity traffic attributes of the transportation connection spaces make walking itself a therapeutic experience; in the coding, walking on the ridges of fields is relaxing, and one can sit and rest by the ancient bridge, embodying healing in motion.

Table 2 Differentiated Expressions of Landscape Therapeutic Elements

Case Name	Core Landscape Elements	Typical Scene Characteristics	Therapeutic Focus	Key Mechanisms
Sandu Ancient Village Cluster, Songyang	Terraced fields at multiple levels, scattered traditional dwellings, mountain streams, ancient camphor tree groves		Visual layering and embodied exploration	Vertical spatial variation provides perceptual novelty and satisfies the extent dimension of Attention Restoration Theory (ART); the productive function of terraced fields endows the landscape with deeper meaning
Lujiacun Village, Anji	Continuous tea plantations, family-farm textures, bamboo pathways, irrigation channels		Rhythmic perception and productive engagement	Linear textures of tea plantations and seasonal rhythms embed natural temporality, alleviating time-related anxiety and strengthening the synergy between landscape and everyday life
Heling Village, Tonglu	Lakeside belts along a tributary of the Fuchun River, flat paddy fields, lakeside walkways, residential forecourts		Tranquil relaxation and social interaction	Gentle spatial configurations and the soft fascination of hydrological landscapes reduce sensory stimulation; the openness of lakeside paths and courtyards facilitates informal social encounters
Nianbadu Ancient Town, Quzhou	Fengxi Ancient Bridge, Ming-Qing dynasty street alleys, riverside docks, ancient tree clusters		Historical perception and emotional resonance	Historic landscape elements activate cultural memory connections, while the inclusive nature of riverside spaces supports flexible transitions between solitude and social interaction

The core characteristics of landscape elements, through the extraction of categories from the interview texts, reveal that the healing characteristics of the landscape dimension mainly focus on the following four points.

Table 3 In-depth Analysis of Core Characteristics of Therapeutic Landscape Elements in Rural Zhejiang

Dimension Synergy Focus	Characteristics	Qualitative Evidence (Interview Excerpts & Coding Source)	Key Theoretical Mechanism
Landscape- Lifestyle Synergy		"I came here overwhelmed by endless corporate emails. Sitting on the terrace looking at the mountain fog while sipping locally grown tea made my heart rate slow down immediately." (UV2, 34-year-old Shanghai Analyst)	Visual-Physiological Calming (SRT): Natural landscape triggers immediate bodily and emotional relaxation.
Lifestyle- Culture Synergy		"We don't just sell tea to visitors; we invite them to pick tea leaves on the hillside with us and learn the roasting technique. They experience our local living wisdom firsthand." (RR2, 46-year-old Tea Farmer, Anji)	Behavioral Integration & Co-creation: Immersive daily activities bridge the cultural gap between hosts and guests.
Landscape- Culture Synergy		"The old wooden doors, river stones, and ancient temples are not dead relics; they carry generations of family memory. Visitors feel a profound temporal tranquility here." (CI1, 67-year-old Wood Carving Master, Quzhou)	Spatial Nostalgia & Meaning Reconstruction (ART): Historic physical environment evokes spiritual resonance and sense of place.
Triadic Holistic Healing		"Walking through the ancient alley, eating fresh bamboo shoots with local villagers, and listening to folk songs at night made me feel emotionally reconnected and completely healed." (UV4, 25-year-old Designer, Nanjing)	Systemic Synergy (Synergetics): Triadic interaction among landscape, lifestyle, and culture achieves deep psychological restoration.

2) Elements of Life Therapy: Dynamic Scenes as Experiential Mediators

Rural lifestyles, by providing heterogeneous temporal rhythms and behavioral patterns, become key mediators connecting physical landscapes with deep psychological healing.

Table 4 Qualitative Coding Hierarchy

Core Category (Selective)	Sub-Category (Axial)	Open Codes	Representative Raw Quote Snippet
Landscape Sensory Activation	Natural Relief / Sensory Calming	Terraced view, mountain mist, stream sound, fresh air	"Looking at the misty mountains removes my work anxiety immediately." (UV1)
Lifestyle Rhythmic Alignment	Slow-paced Living / Agricultural Labor	Unhurried routine, morning tea, picking tea leaves	"In the city, everything is urgent; here, time slows down completely." (UV2)
Cultural & Spiritual Resonance	Nostalgic Belonging / Intangible Heritage	Ancient alleys, woodcarving, tea art rituals	"Learning woodcarving from the master gave me a sense of spiritual peace." (UV4)

Table 5 Typological Identification and Interpretive Analysis of Therapeutic Life Elements in Rural Zhejiang

Type of Life Element	Typical Scene Features	Core Manifestations	Therapeutic Mechanisms & Core Attributes
Productive Life Practices		• Farming and seasonal cultivation • Tea harvesting and roasting • Handicraft production	• Embodied Participation: Physical labor with direct tactile feedback restores bodily awareness. • Flow State & Control: Promotes cognitive immersion, reduces stress-induced rumination, and rebuilds agency.
Social Interaction Practices		• Shared neighborly meals • Reciprocal agricultural assistance • Informal marketplace exchanges	• Non-competitive Sociality: Reciprocal, low-anxiety interactions build organic trust. • Social Compensation: Mitigates urban isolation and fulfills fundamental psychological belonging.
Leisure- oriented Practices		• Slow walking along ancient pathways • Courtyard tea rituals • Self-guided meditation in nature	• Cognitive Decompression: Soft fascination restores directed attention capacity (ART). • Temporal Recalibration: Shifts time perception away from urban haste, enhancing subjective well-being.

Among the elements of life therapy, visitors have the strongest need for embodied participation. Replacing mere visual observation with physical labor allows for a significant entry into a state of "flow," blocking the rumination of urban stress (Craig, A.D, 2009). In everyday life scenarios, the non-performative nature of the scene is emphasized. Authentic, unadorned rural daily life provides the strongest sense of detachment. Regarding low-stress adaptability, the consistency between the rhythm of rural life and the pace of nature allows visitors to switch activities with minimal cognitive load. Finally, in terms of emotional connection, this connection exists not only between people and the land but also manifests in the temporary community contract established through labor.

3) Cultural Healing Elements: Spiritual Support as the Core of Meaning

Cultural elements, through symbolic representation and narrative of meaning, provide a deep spiritual anchor for the rural environment.

Table 6 Typological Identification and Multidimensional Analysis of Therapeutic Cultural Elements in Rural Zhejiang

Type of Cultural Element	Visual Representations	Core Manifestations	Therapeutic Mechanisms / Psychological Meanings
Folk Culture		Temple fairs and festivals, local opera performances, intangible cultural heritage practices	Symbolic enclosure: Constructs non-ordinary experiential settings through intense sensory symbols, alleviating feelings of emptiness and existential fatigue associated with modern life
Vernacular Narratives		Village legends, family memories embedded in historic dwellings, agricultural proverbs, local gazetteer records	Narrative extension: Endows space with temporal depth and provides psychological stability through historical continuity
Ecological Wisdom		Traditional irrigation systems, agricultural philosophies based on the Twenty-Four Solar Terms	Authenticity-based identification: Demonstrates a philosophy of human–nature coexistence, supporting visitors' cognitive reframing and value realignment

The core characteristics of cultural healing elements are:

- 1) Regional uniqueness: Visitors gain a sense of identity by recognizing unique regional symbols. This uniqueness breaks the monotony of urban spaces.
- 2) Continuity of heritage: The long-term vitality displayed in rural culture can soothe the anxiety of urban dwellers about uncertainty.
- 3) Emotional resonance: The healing value of culture lies in its ability to touch an individual's latent memories, achieving a psychological projection that transcends time and space.
- 4) Experiential tangibility: Culture is no longer an abstract concept, but a tangible texture, a folk song that can be sung.

Analysis of the Landscape-Life-Culture Synergy Mechanism

Through linkage analysis of the three-level coding system, this study reveals that the healing efficacy of the rural environment does not stem from the mechanical superposition of elements, but rather from the dynamic synergy among landscape, life, and culture in their roles as carriers, intermediaries, and core elements (Bell et al., 2018).

The core logic of this synergy is a model based on landscape as the spatial carrier, life as the experiential intermediary, and culture as the meaning core. This model reveals how the rural environment transforms physical space into a healing "place" through spatial empowerment, behavioral activation, and meaning sublimation.

The process of synergistic interaction is multidimensional. First, through landscape empowerment, the deterministic support of the spatial carrier provides the basic physical field for life scenes and cultural activities. The multifunctional composite of rural natural and artificial landscapes forms a carrier connection between space, scene, and culture. Second, life activates healing, moving from passive observation to embodied participation. Lifestyle acts as an intermediary, transforming static landscapes and abstract culture into a perceptible flow of experience. Urban visitors, through "embodied intervention," achieve perceptual awakening of the landscape and deep internalization of culture. Ultimately, culture elevates the spiritual connotation, moving from functional experience to meaning construction. Culture, as the core, imbues the landscape with narrative meaning and life with emotional value through "symbolic mechanisms," achieving a sublimation from simple physiological relaxation to profound spiritual resonance.

Extraction of the Activation Path of Multiple Associations

Through logical backtracking of interview texts, the study extracted three differentiated activation paths. These paths collectively follow a three-tiered progression from physical perception to behavioral participation and then to spiritual resonance.

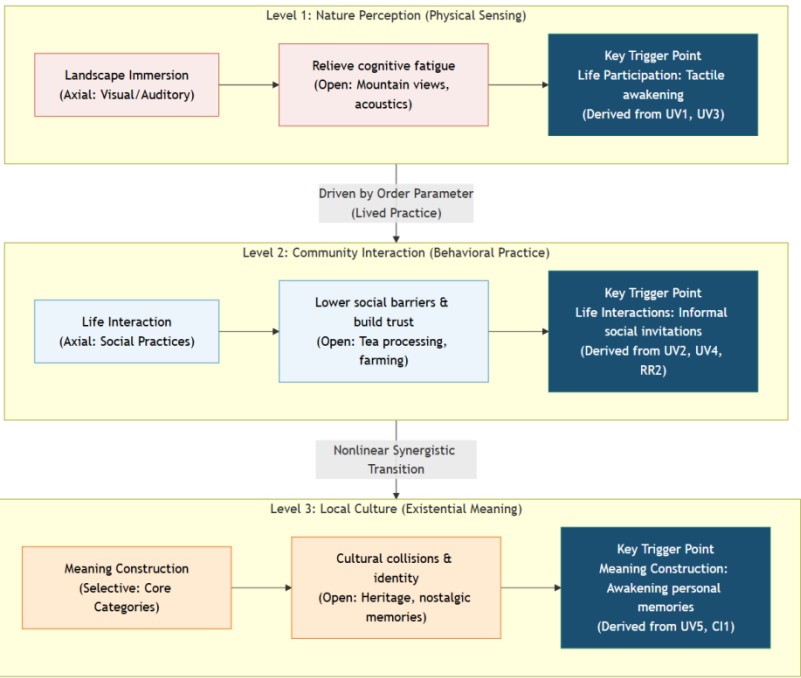


Figure 1 Activation Pathways of Triple Relational Connections in Zhejiang Rural Contexts

Synergistic Dynamics: The Self-Organization of Rural Healing

From the perspective of Synergetics Theory (Haken, 1983), the therapeutic functioning of rural Zhejiang operates as an open, dynamic self-organizing system. Rather than working as isolated triggers, the three dimensions—physical landscape, everyday living, and local culture engage in nonlinear interactions. Physical spatial attributes (e.g., natural vegetation, rural architecture) act as foundational elements that afford initial physical relaxation. However, physical attributes alone remain "fast variables" that provide transient, low-order stress recovery.

Crucially, empirical evidence demonstrates that lived experience functions as the dominant Order Parameter within this therapeutic system. As participants engage in active practices, this order parameter enslaves lower-level physical impressions and mobilizes deep cultural resonance. Through this self-organizing process, the system undergoes a critical phase transition: shifting urban visitors from a state of superficial "physical visual relief" to a high-order state of "existential resonance and spiritual reconnection."

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

- A three-dimensional healing system of space, behavior, and symbol was identified. Rural healing is not a single-dimensional effect, but a systematic process triggered by the perception of the natural foundation, participation in daily agricultural life, and the intention of local cultural symbols.
- This study elucidates the synergistic mechanism of landscape aesthetics, life experience, and meaning transmission. Natural landscapes provide sensory relief, authentic living rebuilds social connections, and cultural identity resolves individual belonging crises by awakening collective memory.
- It extracts activation paths with multiple connections. It constructs a progressive action path from physical environmental perception to social emotional resonance, and then to deep self-identity, providing logical support for healing rural design.

This study, by deconstructing the complex dimensions of the rural environment in Zhejiang, systematically fills the theoretical gap on how the rural environment can synergistically activate the triple connections between urban populations and landscape, lifestyle, and culture. Future research could attempt to transform the activation pathways extracted in this study into concrete, visual design prototypes, and conduct empirical studies in different types of rural settings. Post-hoc evaluations could then verify the actual positive impact of spatial transformation on the therapeutic perceptions of urban populations.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative exploratory study, the findings are derived from 12 key stakeholders across four representative villages in Zhejiang Province. While theoretical saturation was achieved for establishing the qualitative framework, the relatively compact sample size may constrain the statistical generalizability of the findings across diverse socio-cultural regions. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and structural equation modeling (SEM) with larger, randomly selected samples, to empirically test and validate the synergistic relationships among landscape, lifestyle, and cultural dimensions identified in this research.

Discussion

This study significantly differs from empirical research solely focusing on physical stress recovery or cognitive fatigue alleviation through Stress Reduction Theory (SRT; Ulrich et al., 1991) and Attention Restoration Theory (ART; Kaplan, 1995). Its core theoretical departure lies in moving beyond a singular framework of passive, natural visual restoration toward a systematic construction of multi-dimensional interconnectedness. Rather than treating rural spaces as static, visual restoratives, this research proposes a dynamic synergistic mechanism integrating landscape, everyday life, and local culture.

By deepening the application of Synergetics Theory (Haken, 1983), our framework illuminates the self-organizing dynamics underlying this therapeutic transformation. Specifically, empirical evidence reveals that lived experience (everyday practices) functions as the dominant Order Parameter within the rural healing system. While passive exposure to the natural physical environment (such as Zhejiang's mountain-water spatial attributes) provides foundational "fast variables" that afford initial physiological calming, it is active, practice-based lived experience

such as agricultural participation, tea rituals, and authentic social interactions that enslaves lower-level physical impressions and mobilizes deep cultural resonance.

Through these nonlinear interactions, the system undergoes a profound phase transition: elevating passive, single-point "landscape restoration" into an active, high-order "reconstruction of interconnectedness" that counteracts urban alienation (Rosa, 2013). Contextually, delving into the symbiotic relationship between land, life, and heritage in rural Zhejiang demonstrates that the healing function of rural environments lies not merely in physical spatial perception, but in activating meaningful connections between individuals, communities, and local history. This paradigm shift from landscape restoration to practice-driven, interconnected reconstruction offers a novel explanatory path for how rural environments systematically reactivate the multi-dimensional perceptions of urban populations.

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