

# Research on the Theoretical Innovation of Chinese Land Art from the perspective of Internet+

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**ABSTRACT:** At the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, artists used the countryside as a stage for their artworks. The Echigo-Tsumari region has also taken this opportunity to revive its economy and rural culture. And the inspiration from this case is something that cannot be ignored in China today. This article analyzes the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial and some Chinese local arts festivals, go a step further and taking advantage of the advantages of China's Internet in logistics and information dissemination to extend the cultural strategy of combining rural culture with art.

## 1 A new model for activating the village through art

### 1.1 Reasons for organizing the Art Triennial

Echigo-Tsumari is not an administrative name, but rather an area in the southern part of Niigata Prefecture in Japan, where the towns of Tokamachi and Tsuman are located. The area lies deep in the mountains, making transportation difficult, and the climate in winter is harsh with snow up to 2-3 meters thick. Since the 18th century, Japan has shifted its focus of development to the cities along the Pacific coast, where it developed its industries. The cities along the Sea of Japan, including Niigata Prefecture, have continued to put emphasis on agriculture as their main industry. After the recession of the traditional agricultural industry, most young people chose to move to the big cities, and the countryside has become a gathering place for empty nesters, abandoned farmland, and unoccupied houses.



**Figure 1-** Location of prefecture of Niigata within Japan  
(The picture originates from the internet)

In 1994, the Niigata Prefectural Government proposed the “New Millennium Development Plan” as a policy to enhance the vitality of the region, and within two years it raised a “Ten-Year Local Revitalization Fund” and

invited Fram Kitagawa, a famous Japanese curator at that time, to revitalize the decaying villages through art.

Although the Echigo-Tsumari area is deep in the mountains and relatively remote, it is only two hours from the Tokyo metropolitan area by public transportation, which is a great advantage for international art festivals held in the area.

### 1.2 Interaction between residents and the art triennial

The first art triennial was held in 2000, after coordination among the government, curators, the public and sponsors. The festival is not only a carnival for artists to express themselves, but also a combination of local culture, traditional festivals, and interaction between art and the residents. On the one hand, the exhibitors asked the artists to cooperate with the local villagers, and on the other hand, they also encouraged the villagers to actively participate in the production and transformation of the artworks. The exhibits are a combination of local culture and the artist's thoughts and feelings about the countryside, making the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial a model for using art to link people and the rural area.

With each art triennial, the awareness of local participation grew and the number of villages joining in the exhibitions increased, and the festival was made possible by the contributions of a large number of local people: residents helped run the business exhibits, managed the dormitories and exhibition zone, or volunteered to give tours. Beginning with the fourth edition of the festival, the festival committee began recruiting local volunteers to cope with the shortage of staff, and this recruitment has gradually expanded each year.

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<b>Table 1 - Statistics of local volunteers of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial</b>			
	2012	2015	2018
Number of registrants	39	152	301
Number of participants	30	65	103
Actual total number of participants	132	465	427

Each triennial committee determines whether to keep the artwork by considering three questions: is it a generally accepted artwork? Can it withstand local winter blizzards? Is it compatible with the local rural environment? The best of these preserved works will be integrated into the local environment as part of the village. More and more villages are joining this gathering and taking an active part in the management of the works.

<b>Table 2 - List of participating villages and works of each Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial</b>							
	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
Participating Villages	28	38	67	92	102	110	102
Number of new works		158	225	216	178	182	169
Number of works exhibited	153	224	329	365	367	378	378

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial has shown that revitalizing the countryside through art can only be achieved by giving the local people the right to speak and by involving them in the exhibition process. During the design process, the design content is closely linked to local life. Local artisans were hired and local industries were demonstrated during the production of the exhibits, so as to help the locals to learn skills and revitalize their industries. The indigenous people are synonymous with the local culture.

What is needed to revitalize the countryside is not art, but the countryside, and art is just one way through which to try to regain the connection between people and the land.

But there is no denying that, this creative form will lead to homogenization of works. Many works often have to wait until the approach illustration to know who the author is and what does this work want to express. Even the master's work is staggering. For example, Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's work *Rice Field*. In this work, silhouette of farmers and cattle are placed in the rice fields. They had farmed the land all day and nights. And in the fields, there are also have the verses were written on transparent plates. The words express the praise to the local people who are industrious in farming. Mr. Fukushima is the owner of this fields. He gave up farming before the Art Triennial organized. After this work caused a sensation, He was also inspired, then restored the farming work until the third "art Triennial".



**Figure 2-** Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's work *Rice Field*  
 (The picture originates from the internet)

### 1.3 Financial sponsorship of the art Triennial

The first art triennial was held mainly thanks to the financial support of the Niigata Prefecture government. But, since the third art triennial, "New Millennium Development Plan" had shut their operations. Policy support, which accounts for 60% of the total budget, had ended. This incident cause the preparations for the art triennial were in a deadlock. However, the success of previous art triennial had gave confidence to local people and foreign sponsors. And then they decided to keep the triennial going.

From the third art triennial, arts triennial Committee began to establish "hometown tax". A part of the income tax is deducted to support the art triennial. At the same time, people can donate money to art groups they want to sponsor. For businesses and organizations, also launched a sponsorship activity called "corporate social responsibility".

Although, there is no more support from "New Millennium Development Plan". But the commission fees and subsidies allocated by the state, still give the smooth holding of the Art triennial a lot of help.

<b>Table 3 - Financial sponsorship/income of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial 2018</b>		
Projects		Financial sponsorship /Income (Thousands of yen)
cities	Tokamachi	105312
	Tsunan	14688
The coffers of the government		249900
Donation		131953
Gate money		156640
Tourist income		6619
Summary		665112

### 1.4 Economic spending of the art festival

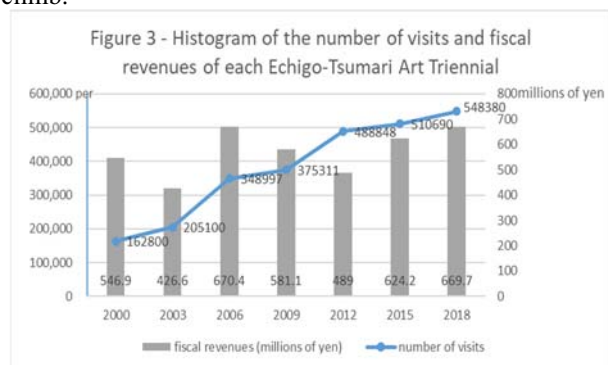
Take the seventh art triennial as an example, the expenditure is mainly for daily operation. Maintenance and depreciation costs of various facilities also account for a large part. In addition, artists from other countries who participated in the art triennial also received a certain amount of transportation expenses and subsidies for the production of their works. At the same time, embassies and related institutions of some countries in Japan will

give financial assistance to these artists. It reduced the cost of the Art triennial Committee.

### 1.5 Economic benefits of Echigo-Tsumari area

The “Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial” has been held seven times since 2000 and has contributed greatly to the economic revival of the region.

Many pieces of works are dotted around Echigo-Tsumari. The distance between different works is very far. People go to Echigo-Tsumari time after time in order to see more works. Visitors will stay here longer. Accordingly, expense of transportation fees, accommodation, meals and some other activities will climb.



Besides the direct economic benefits of the art festival, such as transportation, dining, accommodation, tour service, in addition to the expansion of the festival's influence, the branding of the Echigo-Tsumari has also achieved certain economic returns. Since the first Art Triennial, volunteers, local manufacturers and artists have been working together to develop products such as T-shirts and brooches to go with the artworks. For example, the organizers take the Yayoi Kusama's creation as a prototype, then was made into brooches.

In the fourth edition of the art triennial, designs for local products have been solicited through the Internet, and it was a great success. At present not only in Japan, but also in China, a large number of people are willing to buy agricultural products in Niigata such as Koshihikari rice online



**Figure 4-** Straw hats and T-shirts with the art triennial's logo  
 (The picture originates from the internet)



**Figure 5-** Canvas bags with the art triennial's logo  
 (The picture originates from the internet)

Mr. Fukushima's farmlands mentioned above are not alone. After an in-depth investigation of this area, it is found that 500 hectares of farmland has been abandoned. That hectare is only about half of its efflorescence.

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial Committee has formulated the system of farmland adoption. People who wants to adopt the farmlands may join *Matsudai Terrace Bank*. Adopters can support terraced farming with funds or farm in person. The daily management of farmlands is mainly in the charge of local farmers, and the rice harvested in autumn is distributed according to how much land have you adopted. This system has attracted many people who love Koshihikari, the sales scope of local specialty products has been expanded. From this process, both environmental and economic benefits can be brought.

Nowadays Echigo-Tsumari has built a complete chain of local specialty products and a sizeable sales network in Japan. The increase in Echigo-Tsumari's influence has also attracted a certain degree of attention for other local resources.

## 2 China is rich in land art resources

### 2.1 Geographical abundance

In China, numerous geological remains have formed a variety of natural landscapes, all of which are of great aesthetic value. Such geological relics is non-renewable, non-replicable and unique. As the name “land art” implies, it is an art form based on the land, which is suitable to develop based on these geological resources and to grasp their characteristics.

### 2.2 The suitability of culture for the development of land art

China is a country with agrarian civilization, where land and people are inseparable. From ancient times to the present, Zhuangzi's theory that “man is an integral part of nature” has profoundly influenced the development of Chinese art, and the materials used and sites selected in land art are closely related to nature, so that the land art can be regarded as the concrete practice of the idea of “man is an integral part of nature” in the field of contemporary art.



Along with the rapid economic growth, China's cultural industry has also shown an open and inclusive shape, providing a certain living space for land art, and more and more government departments have also noticed the role of the art industry in promoting local economy and culture.

### **2.3 China's rural development policy can be served as support**

At the moment, China is continuously deepening and consolidating its efforts to alleviate poverty in a precise manner, and cultural poverty alleviation is an indispensable part of targeted poverty alleviation. If material poverty alleviation is to be further deepened into cultural poverty alleviation, it is necessary to help the distressed areas at the cultural and spiritual levels. On top of it, China is vigorously promoting the construction of beautiful countryside, striving to build a rural area where economy, politic, culture, society and ecological civilization can develop in harmony.

As an art form, land art brings artists and designers together through geo-cultural and artistic collision and fusion, helping villages develop their industries while reclaiming their regional culture and spirit. This art form coincides with the concept of cultural poverty alleviation and the construction of beautiful countryside, and is suitable for integration.

### **2.4 The advantages of China's Internet in logistics and information dissemination**

Thanks to China's developed Internet communication form, it is easy to promote the art festival to tourists more directly through online marketing, that drive tourists to visit and consume, and achieve economic success. It is conducive to better communication between the committee and visitors at the same time.

## **3 Comparisons and reflections on the current state of domestic development**

### **3.1 Snow Country in Heilongjiang Province**

Similar to the Echigo-Tsumari area which is called "Snow World" by Yasunari Kawabata, there is also a "Snow Country" in Heilongjiang Province in China, and the climate and environment of the two places are largely the same. The difference between the two is that Heilongjiang's "Snow Country" is more like "scenery marketing" rather than cultural exportation. The local government had been vigorously developing the tourism industry, while by coincidence the "Snow Country" became widely known as a tourist attraction due to a variety show. However, local businesses took advantage of the situation to raise prices, and were boycotted by tourists all over the country after they were exposed, which directly led to the decline of their tourist industry.

In the face of this situation, I believe that the local can learn from the experience of Echigo-Tsumari in order to

strengthen the basis of commercial management, expand the communication channels to promote itself, and reverse the bad impression of the "Snow Country". While promoting the tourist industry, develop the intersection with the arts and cultural industries, and build "Snow Country" into a cultural brand.

### **3.2 Current situation of art revitalizes the countryside in China**

Revitalizing the countryside by artistic means is not new to enterprise. There are some related practices all over China. But after a short period of excitement, most of them are hard to hide the depression. Some of the art festivals, the first art festival created a sensation, but no more was heard of these festivals. Some other art festivals have engrossed in a world of the artist's own inner. They can only be limited in a limited area, and it is difficult to expand to the outside world.

#### **3.2.1 XuCun village·Heshun international art festival.**

XuCun village is subordinate to Songyan Town, Heshun County, Jinzhong City, Shanxi Province. It is located the hinterland of Taihang Mountain, and the history can be traced back to the Chun-qiu period. Although it has a lot of remains of historic sites, but cultural relic level is not enough to let the government protect the remains of historic sites. Because of the short frost free period on Taihang Mountain, the natural environment of this village is odious. There remained in village only older people and children.

Yan Qu, a Chinese artist, promoted the "XuCun village plan" to achieve the goal of reviving ancient villages. XuCun village·Heshun international art festival is organized once every two years since the first art festive was held in 2011. The artists selected the abandoned cinema as the specific restoration experiment. Through two years of transformation and continuous improvement, Xucun International Art Community completed in the original cinema. At that time, "XuCun village plan" caused widespread concern of the society. But the influence of "XuCun village plan" is more reflected in art rather than rural revitalization. Therefore, the interaction between rural areas and the art festival lacks vitality and sustained motivation.



**Figure 6-** Xucun International Art Community  
(The picture originates from the internet)

### 3.2.2 Wulong Lanba Art Festival.

This festival is jointly sponsored by Lanba Art Museum and Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. They also jointly set up an academic committee to ensure the professionalism and academic quality of works in art festival. Through the combination of business and art, the art festival will build Lanba into an art brand, and it also improves Lanba's international reputation. The art festival committee established the Lanba Art Museum to reconcile the professional logic of art and the commercial gain. In this art festival, works were going to emphasize the interactivity.

2019 Wulong Lanba Art Festival aims to "return art to the people". It means, the art works require interact with the audience. For example, Gilles Stassart created a restaurant full of randomness. This work is called *SLOT FOOD*. The artist made a slot machines out of bicycle tires. The audience can pull the lever of the slot machine, then random choose dishes randomly. The meal is full of drama.



**Figure 7-** *SHOT FOOD* in 2019 Wulong Lanba Art Festival  
 (The picture originates from the internet)

Throughout the art festival, a lot of artworks interact with tourists or nature, and the result goes well. But the festival lacks interaction with villagers. Artists interact with the audience yet with the villagers is lamentable.

## 4 Reflection and innovation in the new paradigm

The success of the "Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial" also provide a new development thought for some underdeveloped areas of our country in similar situation, on the basis of which a China-based innovation could be developed.

### 4.1 Government input

In the Chinese context, the success of regional art festival in China is dependent on close cooperation between curators and local governments. The government should make effective judgments and regulate them mainly by means of decision making, public guidance, and resources coordination.

#### 4.1.1 Policy support.

For the "Echigo-Tsumari" style of land art, the house and the land are the basis for the creation of the artwork, and

the government's support is needed to facilitate housing transactions and good land policies. After the exhibition, the curator and the local government will have to work together to preserve the exhibits and to continue the operation of the functional exhibits.

#### 4.1.2 Human resources deployment.

The planning of projects with regional features inevitably involves the participation of local residents. In China, poverty alleviation work is being carried out with the concept of "targeted poverty alleviation" as the basic strategy. It is necessary to "teach others to fish and they will fish for a lifetime" in targeted poverty alleviation, but in order to truly teach a person to fish, the first step is to change the perception of the locals. Government departments need to work with curators to promote villagers' awareness of participation by holding seminars and other means, and they also need to strengthen business and ideological training for the grass-roots staff involved in the cooperation.

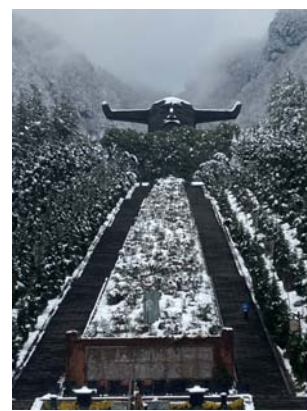
#### 4.1.3 Integrated resources.

Some of the villages face the issue of having too few permanent residents, and most of the residents are elderly people who are not energetic enough to afford a lot of work, therefore, human resources of nearby villages should be appropriately integrated.

The construction of infrastructure and public transport facilities is crucial to the development of the art festival. In the case of the "Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial", various exhibits were connected to each other by public transport. The provision of a reasonable number of restaurants and accommodation services also contributes to the smooth running of the festival. At the initial stage, the government can step in and bring in local private capital, but later on it can be opened up to make better use of local characteristics.



**Figure 8-** The scenery of Shennongjia  
 (The picture originates from the author)



**Figure 9-** Statue of ShenNong  
 (The picture originates from the author)

Parts of the areas that are rich in land art are not necessarily well-resourced areas. The supply chain in some areas cannot bear the burden of the influx of outsiders. Located in West Hubei, Shennongjia forestry

district is known for its rich landscape morphology and good mountain ecology, and it lies at the intersection of Ba-chu culture and Yin-shang culture, with the “the Legend of Dark” funeral ritual music heritage, it has profound cultural heritage, and is also the southernmost natural ski resort in China with a great potential for development. However, Muyu Town, a tourist distribution center in Shennongjia, will suffer from power outages for several days in winter due to heavy snow, which is a fatal problem for the development of the art festival and requires the intervention of government departments to ensure material security.

#### 4.1.4 Balance between environment and development.

The development of the art industry and tourism has given birth to a mode of consumption of rural ecology, but this transformation is worth considering. While developing the industry, we should pay attention to whether there is any risk of emptying the pond to get the fish. The development of rural areas is not to completely deny the environment and industrialization, but to integrate industries and regions, and try to reduce negative impacts such as ecological damage. The government should adjust the balance between regional development and ecology among developers, and preserve the characteristics of the village itself.

#### 4.2 Introduction of artists

Art exhibitions cannot be held without artists, and the introduction of artists cannot be achieved without publicity. Adequate publicity must be given to regional features through various media channels to attract artists.

In addition to recruiting artists in the field of art, it is also suitable to call for entries in the form of competitions in universities. For well-known artists, invitation to participate in the exhibition is a more appropriate way. The introduction of artists needs to combine public selection and invitation only as the basic strategy, and different methods should be chosen according to the different characteristics of the artists.

Financial support can be given to artists for transportation costs as well as the cost of transporting materials, with appropriate subsidies.

#### 4.3 International exhibition form

The success of the “Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial” lies not only in its roots in local villages, but also in the fact that by inviting artists from different countries, it expresses the regional characteristics of different cultural perspectives.

In the face of the demands of internationalization, it is first necessary to establish a sound and practical system of international cooperation. For the organizations and individuals participating in the festival, a sound system is the threshold of success cooperation.

Some of the volunteers at the “Art Triennial” come from schools in or near the region. Similar methods can

be used when organizing this kind of event in China, and even organic collaboration between local schools and schools in other countries can be developed. By using international student volunteers, the goal of multi-cultural integration can be achieved.

## 5 Conclusion

For China, the revitalization of the countryside by art is a feasible way, yet in the process, local awareness of this industry form and the public's aesthetics of the art form is something that needs attention.

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