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# Research on Slow Design Concept Empowering the Cultural Tourism Integration of Rural Waterfront Landscape Spaces: A Case Study of Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort in Jiangxi

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**Abstract:** ***Against the dual backdrop of global tourism transitioning toward high-quality sustainability and China's deepening rural revitalization strategy, rural waterfront landscape spaces serve as quintessential venues for cultural-tourism integration. Their integrated development holds critical significance for rural revitalization. However, current rural waterfront cultural-tourism development commonly faces prominent issues such as excessive ecological intervention, cultural homogenization, and industrial monoculture. This study centers on the Slow Design philosophy, integrating theories such as anti-planning and living cultural transmission. Using the Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort in Jiangxi as an empirical case, it employs literature review and field research to systematically explore the coupling relationship and adaptability between Slow Design and rural waterfront landscape spaces. A four-dimensional transformation strategy system—"ecological restoration—cultural revitalization—industrial integration—community participation"—is constructed. The study demonstrates that slow design—through low-intervention ecological restoration, dynamic preservation of local culture, diversified industrial synergy, and naturalized community participation—effectively addresses core challenges in Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort, including ecological degradation, superficial cultural expression, and fragmented industries. This approach achieves multiple objectives: enhancing ecological resilience, transforming cultural value, optimizing industrial efficiency, and ensuring shared benefits for villagers. This research enriches the application framework of slow design in rural waterfront landscapes while providing a referenceable practical pathway for similar waterfront cultural tourism projects in southern China's water network regions.***

**Keywords:** Slow Design Concept, Rural Waterfront Landscape, Cultural-Tourism Integration, Rural Revitalization, Fairy Lake Scenic Area.

## 1. Introduction

Global tourism has shifted from scale expansion to quality enhancement and green ecological development. The World Tourism Barometer released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 2025 indicates that international tourist arrivals exceeded 300 million in the first quarter of 2025, an increase of approximately 14 million compared to the same period in 2024 [1]. The global sustainable tourism market is projected to reach $376.5 billion in 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 14.8% [2]. Within the Chinese market, the "silver economy" and Generation Z are jointly driving tourism demand toward a shift toward "ecological experiences + cultural immersion." In 2024, domestic tourist visits reached 5.62 billion, with per capita spending hitting a historic high. As core carriers of rural ecology and culture, rural waterfront landscape spaces have become vital drivers for industrial prosperity under China's policies supporting cultural-tourism integration and rural revitalization [3]. However, current rural waterfront tourism development often suffers from excessive ecological intervention, cultural homogenization, and industrial monoculture, urgently requiring appropriate design philosophies and methodologies for resolution. Slow design emphasizes respecting natural foundations, preserving local culture, and prioritizing sustainable development—aligning perfectly with the core needs of integrating culture and tourism in rural waterfront spaces and offering fresh perspectives for high-quality development.

## 2. The Coupling Relationship Between Slow Design Philosophy and Rural Waterfront Landscape Spaces

The roots of "Slow Design" trace back to the Slow Food Movement initiated by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986. This movement opposed the destruction of traditional dietary practices and regional cultures by fast-food culture, advocating for "respecting the essence of food, savoring the dining process, and paying attention to the ecology and humanities behind food." [4] Upon its launch, the movement gained widespread recognition, spreading the Slow Food philosophy far and wide. Inspired by Slow Food, the "Cittaslow Movement" emerged in Italy in 1999, establishing the Cittaslow International Alliance and formulating the Cittaslow Movement Charter. The Charter advocates core principles of anti-pollution, tradition preservation, and ecological conservation, further propagating the value of "slowness." This phase marked the evolution of the "slowness" concept from an intellectual experiment into a regulated, assessable organizational activity, providing experiential references for subsequent dissemination. Subsequently, the "slow" philosophy gradually expanded from dietary habits to encompass lifestyles, permeating from urban planning into the design sphere. By the late 20th century, the Slow Design concept emerged from the Slow Food movement. In the early 21st century, British design theorist Alastair Fuad-Luke first explicitly defined "Slow Design" and constructed its theoretical framework. He integrated the central tenet of

various "slow" movements — resistance to fast-paced lifestyles—into design, defining Slow Design as "a philosophy and methodology grounded in sustainability and centered on human needs, which resists design alienation by extending product lifecycles, strengthening emotional connections, and preserving cultural heritage." [5]

Adopting a problem-oriented approach reveals a deeply symbiotic relationship between Slow Design principles and rural waterfront landscapes. Its core logic addresses the ecological fragility and cultural distinctiveness of these spaces by applying a four-dimensional synergistic framework — ecology, culture, industry, and society—to systematically resolve pressing challenges such as ecological degradation, cultural erosion, and industrial inefficiency, thereby providing sustainable solutions for rural cultural tourism development.

Ecologically, rural waterfront spaces exhibit far lower resilience than urban counterparts. Weak disaster prevention, mitigation, and risk-bearing capacities in rural areas leave crops, farmers' property, and public services vulnerable to severe natural disaster impacts, with post-disaster reconstruction costs vastly exceeding preventive investments. Slow design centers on low-intervention principles, leveraging anti-planning experience to drive dual-track ecological restoration and disaster resilience enhancement. This includes preserving native shoreline vegetation, and employing natural methods like using local materials for bank protection. This restores water bodies' self-purification and hydrological regulation functions, mitigating disaster impacts at their source. Simultaneously, it builds resilient spaces like "ecological buffer zones," enhancing the adaptive capacity of waterfront ecosystems and laying a solid foundation for rural environmental improvement [6].

In the cultural and industrial dimensions, rural tourism commonly faces challenges of cultural fragmentation and industrial homogeneity. Vast traditional cultural resources remain disconnected from production and daily life, making it difficult to translate them into effective tourism value. Slow design advocates for deep exploration of regional cultural essence, transforming static folk customs and intangible cultural heritage into participatory, experiential tourism products (e.g., VR technology experiences, immersive engagement models). This approach extends diverse business formats and builds an integrated "agriculture + cultural tourism" tertiary industry system. This integration not only rediscovers rural value and connects rural revitalization goals like "prosperous industries and talent return," facilitating two-way flow of urban-rural resources, but also avoids homogenization in cultural tourism. It grounds industrial development in local resources, enhancing the competitiveness of rural waterfront spaces.

At the implementation level, slow design emphasizes constructing locally adapted strategies by researching the strengths and weaknesses of rural waterfront spaces and drawing on similar case studies. This approach addresses ecological issues through ecological means while leveraging cultural resources to drive tourism development, creating resilient and vibrant cultural tourism spaces. Theoretically, this approach enriches the application framework of slow design in rural waterfront spaces, translating into referenceable best practices. Practically, it offers actionable optimization strategies for Fairy Lake Scenic Area and similar projects, advancing the exploration of transitioning rural cultural tourism from "resource-driven" to "quality-driven" methodologies. This ensures development benefits genuinely reach villagers while accumulating sustainable development experience, providing valuable insights for the high-quality growth of rural cultural tourism.

## 3. Analysis of Slow Design Concept Compatibility with Fairy Lake Scenic Area

The design approach advocated by slow design aligns profoundly with Fairy Lake Scenic Area's resource endowments, developmental status, and transformation needs. Both share deep compatibility in ecological foundations, cultural cores, and developmental objectives, offering a natural practical ground for the scenic area to resolve developmental challenges and achieve high-quality rural waterfront cultural tourism development. Located in Xinyu, Jiangxi, Fairy Lake Scenic Area is a National Tourist Resort and a AAAA-rated scenic spot. As a quintessential rural waterfront landscape in western Jiangxi, it features 50 square kilometers of open water dotted with over 100 islands, surrounded by forests covering over 95% of the area. boasting an exceptionally rich ecological foundation. Simultaneously, it is the birthplace of the "Legend of the Sweater Girl" and the Chinese Qixi Festival, possessing profound folk cultural heritage. In 2024, the scenic area welcomed 9.1832 million visitors, generating a comprehensive tourism revenue of 781 million yuan. The cultural tourism industry has become the core driving force for regional development, yet it still faces challenges such as balancing ecological conservation with development, deepening cultural experiences, and enhancing industrial integration:

### 3.1 Ecological Dimension

The scenic area has consistently adhered to the principle of prioritizing ecology. In 2017, it was designated as a comprehensive no-farming zone, shutting down all livestock farms. Measures such as 24-hour water quality monitoring and large-scale afforestation have woven a dense ecological protection network. Its approach of "safeguarding the ecological foundation and developing based on natural textures" aligns with the core requirements of slow design: respecting the natural baseline and enhancing ecological adaptive capacity. Slow design strategies—such as preserving natural shorelines, utilizing local materials, and establishing ecological buffer zones—not only complement Fairy Lake's existing conservation framework but also enhance the ecological resilience of its waterfront spaces. This addresses potential ecological vulnerabilities in the scenic area's waterfront zones, fostering a virtuous cycle between ecological preservation and cultural tourism development. This approach aligns perfectly with the scenic area's philosophy of "protecting the lake's pristine waters to cultivate a treasure trove of opportunities."

### 3.2 Cultural Dimension

Centering on Qixi Festival culture as its core IP, Fairy Lake possesses unique cultural resources like the "Legend of the

Knitting Maiden." Current attractions such as the Romantic Three Islands and themed evening events have achieved an initial shift from static cultural displays to dynamic experiences. However, there remains a need to deepen cultural engagement and avoid tokenistic development. Slow design emphasizes uncovering local cultural essence and integrating it into spatial design and daily practices. This approach can drive Fairy Lake to further blend Qixi culture, water town folklore, and waterfront landscapes, extending cultural experiences beyond isolated check-in interactions to everyday production and living scenarios. This allows visitors to deeply perceive cultural heritage, aligning with the scenic area's goal of "bringing culture to life" while addressing the common challenge of fragmented rural cultural tourism.

### 3.3 Industrial Development Dimension

Fairy Lake has established an industrial framework centered on "ecotourism + wellness + specialty agriculture." Its "Huixian" brand organic fish has maintained organic certification for 18 consecutive years, and the scenic area holds national AAAA-level status. However, these sectors currently operate independently. Further integration is needed to ensure cultural tourism benefits local villagers more broadly, transitioning the area from "resource-driven" to "quality-driven" development. This approach will provide a practical model for sustainable rural waterfront cultural tourism.

## 4. Research on Renovation Strategies for Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort Under the Slow Design Concept

Building upon the preceding analysis of slow design principles and their applicability to Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort, and addressing the prominent issues at the ecological, cultural, industrial, and organizational levels, this study constructs a four-pronged transformation strategy: "Ecological Restoration — Cultural Revitalization — Industrial Integration — Community Co-governance." Through low-intervention, localized, and long-term design interventions, this strategy specifically addresses the scenic area's developmental challenges. It also draws appropriately from successful case studies like Gaochun Yaxi Slow City to ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of the strategy.

### 4.1 Ecological Dimension: Low-Intervention Restoration and Resilience Enhancement Strategy

Fairy Lake Qixi Cultural Tourist Resort faces severe ecological degradation: historical mining activities have destroyed hilly forest vegetation, leading to significant soil erosion; the 2023 torrential rains caused substantial economic losses; lake siltation and hardened shoreline structures have reduced water bodies, with effective volume decreasing annually; Agricultural non-point source pollution and domestic sewage discharge have led to water eutrophication. Although total phosphorus concentrations have decreased, they still fail to meet standards, and biodiversity has significantly declined.

Drawing inspiration from Gaochun Yaxi's low-intervention "ecological county" philosophy, a multi-tiered ecological restoration system is being established [7]. First, implement ecological shoreline restoration by removing hardened shoreline sections within scenic areas. Construct ecological revetments using native stone and natural materials like reed roots. Designate "reed + sweet flag" pilot zones on lake shores and tidal flats to enhance water self-purification through aquatic plant cultivation. Second, establish ecological buffer zones by creating wide vegetation strips between surrounding farmland and water bodies. Plant local soil-stabilizing vegetation to reduce fertilizer and pesticide runoff. For exposed slopes left by upstream mining activities, employ "native mixed-species vegetation + microbial soil remediation" techniques to gradually restore forest ecological functions. Finally, the hydrological regulation system was optimized by applying counter-planning theory to establish floating island purification zones and wetland construction areas. This leverages natural water cycles to mitigate flood and drought pressures while implementing a real-time water quality monitoring network to strictly control sewage inflow.

Through ecological restoration, soil erosion in the scenic area has been effectively curbed, water transparency significantly enhanced, and water quality steadily improved to meet excellent surface water standards. Biodiversity in riparian zones has gradually recovered, with notable increases in waterbird and fish populations, forming a complete and stable "lake-wetland-forest" ecological chain. Ecological buffer zones and hydrological regulation systems have substantially enhanced the scenic area's flood defense capabilities, effectively reducing natural disaster threats to agricultural production and visitor safety. This has established a robust ecological foundation for cultural tourism development, achieving a virtuous cycle of ecological conservation and tourism development.

### 4.2 Cultural Dimension: Living Heritage and Scenario Innovation Strategy

The scenic area suffers from insufficient activation of its cultural resources, characterized by "symbolic displays and superficial experiences": The Qixi Festival primarily features evening galas and matchmaking events, lacking in-depth exploration of the "Legend of the Sweater Girl"; 62 municipal-level and above intangible cultural heritage projects remain largely confined to museum exhibits, with skills like Xiafu embroidery and cured meat smoking failing to translate into tourist experiences; Cultural and creative products suffer from severe homogenization, failing to establish culturally distinctive regional brands.

Guided by the theory of living heritage transmission, we will drive the transformation of cultural resources into experiential products. On one hand, we will create immersive cultural scenarios. Drawing inspiration from Gaochun Yaxi's "Golden Flower Tourism Festival" revitalization model [8], we will reconstruct the core scenes of the "Feather-Clothed Maiden Legend" on Peach Blossom Island. This includes establishing the "Feather-Clothed Maiden Workshop" and the "Fairy Lake Wedding Customs Experience Hall," where visitors can participate in interactive activities like braiding colored ropes and crafting traditional marriage certificates. At the entrance peninsula, a non-heritage experience district will be added, inviting local non-heritage inheritors to open workshops and

offer hands-on courses like Xiafu embroidery and Ma Hong Laojiu wine brewing, achieving "viewable, tangible, and participatory" experiences. On the other hand, a cultural IP matrix will be developed by extracting core imagery from the legend, such as the "feather robe" and "Immortal Lake," to create a series of cultural and creative products. Collaborating with scenic area shops, a "non-heritage cultural and creative counter" will be established. Integrating folk activities like the Guanchao Yangtan Dragon Lantern Dance and Qixi Festival blessings with the waterfront landscape, the project will install a cultural commentary system along the lakeside walking path. This system will connect cultural nodes such as the Song Dynasty academy ruins and ancient wharf, forming a "waterfront cultural exploration route."

Cultural scene innovation will significantly enhance visitor satisfaction with cultural experiences, with intangible cultural heritage (ICH) experiences becoming a core attraction for tourists; Sales of cultural and creative products will substantially increase as a proportion of total tourism revenue, establishing the distinctive "Fairy Lake Intangible Cultural Heritage" brand to break free from homogenized competition. Cultural revitalization will awaken villagers' cultural identity, nurturing a cohort of local cultural inheritors and experiential program operators. This will position traditional culture as the core competitive advantage for differentiated tourism offerings, driving the transformation of cultural-tourism integration from superficial display to deep engagement. Visitors will immerse themselves in experiential activities to appreciate the region's cultural charm.

### 4.3 Industrial Dimension: Diverse Integration and Value Enhancement Strategy

The scenic area suffers from a monolithic industrial structure and challenges of "resource fragmentation and integration gaps": over a dozen independently operated agricultural picking gardens lack brand synergy and diverse experiences; advantageous industries like Wanshanghong shoe manufacturing and ecological fisheries remain disconnected from cultural tourism; agricultural products are primarily sold at primary levels with low added value and insufficient e-commerce coverage; industrial resilience is weak, significantly impacted by ecological issues and natural disasters.

Drawing inspiration from Gaochun Yaxi's "cooperative + association + farmers" industrial synergy model, establish a diversified integration system combining agriculture, cultural tourism, and industry. First, consolidate agricultural resources by establishing a scenic area agricultural development cooperative. Integrate scattered picking gardens under unified management, developing year-round attractions like "rice field fishing" and "oil tea picking + oil pressing experiences" to avoid seasonal shutdowns. Leverage stable grain production to create an "agricultural culture experience park," offering full-chain activities including rice planting, fruit picking, and agricultural product processing. Second, promote cross-industry integration by collaborating with the Wanshanghong Shoe Manufacturing Park to develop "intangible cultural heritage crafts + modern design" themed tourism routes, allowing visitors to observe traditional shoemaking techniques alongside modern production lines. Extend the fishery industry chain by establishing "eco-fishery markets" and "fish processing workshops" in waterfront areas, offering experiences like fishing, catching fish, and preparing fish dishes. Combine these with the "Huixian" brand of organic fish for packaging and sales. Third, improve the production and sales system by establishing the unified "Fairy Lake Agricultural Products" brand. Build an online e-commerce platform and offline scenic area direct stores to promote deep processing of products like rice, tea oil, and organic fish, thereby enhancing product value-added.

Industrial integration will optimize the scenic area's tourism revenue structure, ensuring steady growth in cultural and tourism income. Agricultural cooperatives will effectively boost villagers' incomes, further expand e-commerce channels for agricultural products, and continuously enhance brand influence. A diversified industrial system will strengthen the scenic area's risk resilience, reducing dependence on single-source sightseeing tourism. This creates a virtuous cycle where "ecological agriculture secures the foundation, cultural tourism experiences enhance value, and industrial synergy expands influence," providing robust support for thriving rural industries and ensuring more villagers benefit from industrial development outcomes.

### 4.4 Organizational Dimension: Community Co-governance and Participation Empowerment Strategy

The scenic area suffers from inadequate planning coordination, characterized by fragmented development and low villager participation. Resources like agricultural experience parks and cultural venues lack synergistic linkage, while attractions such as the Jiangkou Power Plant Art District operate at odds with the core scenic area's development philosophy, failing to form a cohesive tourism ecosystem. Villagers remain largely passive participants, insufficiently integrated into critical planning and operational processes. The absence of long-term participation mechanisms deeply tied to industrial development prevents them from deriving sustained benefits from tourism growth.

Leveraging industrial linkage as a catalyst, establish a natural organizational system of "industrial symbiosis + villager co-creation." Rather than establishing formal councils, enable villagers to organically form collaborative synergies through industrial participation. First, leveraging diverse business models formed through ecological restoration, cultural revitalization, and industrial integration, prioritize opening positions such as intangible cultural heritage workshops, ecological conservation, homestay services, agricultural experience guidance, and cultural and creative sales to surrounding villagers. Clearly define job skill requirements and revenue distribution rules, enabling villagers to naturally participate in scenic area operations through "employment." Second, encourage villagers in similar industries to form collaborative groups spontaneously. For instance, intangible cultural heritage inheritors can unite to create experience districts, homestay operators can jointly establish service standards, and agricultural experience providers can share customer resources and tools. This industrial collaboration fosters self-managed, self-service organizational structures, with the scenic area providing policy guidance, skills training, and resource matching support. Finally, strengthen integrated

planning by incorporating the entrance peninsula, Peach Blossom Island, and surrounding villages into the comprehensive tourism layout. Integrate the Jiangkou Power Plant Art District into the waterfront cultural exploration route, embedding themes like ecological art and industrial heritage. Guide villagers engaged in related industries to spontaneously collaborate, launching combined products featuring "cultural experiences + industrial research tours + ecological leisure" to achieve organic linkage between attractions and the core scenic area. Simultaneously, establish a "Cultural Tourism Development Shared Fund," allocating a proportion of scenic area tourism revenue for villager skills training, public facility maintenance, and industrial collaboration incentives to stimulate participation and cooperation.

This naturally organized system driven by industrial synergy will fully integrate villagers into all aspects of scenic area operations, cultivating local service teams proficient in indigenous culture and industrial management. This transforms villagers from bystanders of tourism development into core participants and direct beneficiaries. Coordinated planning and industrial collaboration will effectively address resource fragmentation, significantly enhancing the scenic area's comprehensive tourism reception capacity and overall appeal. This fosters a development model characterized by "scenic-village symbiosis and complementary business formats." Stable employment and industrial collaboration will provide villagers with steadily increasing incomes, attracting large numbers of migrant workers to return home. This will effectively alleviate the "hollowing out" of rural areas, deeply integrating cultural tourism development with rural revitalization. The scenic area will gain continuous endogenous momentum and long-term vitality.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides a rational framework for high-quality development of rural waterfront landscapes by systematically analyzing the compatibility of slow design principles with the Fairy Lake Scenic Area and formulating renovation strategies. Practically, the constructed four-dimensional strategy — "ecological restoration, cultural revitalization, industrial integration, and community participation"—can specifically address core challenges at Fairy Lake, such as ecological degradation, superficial cultural expression, and fragmented industries. This approach helps the scenic area achieve multiple objectives: enhancing ecological resilience, transforming cultural value, optimizing industrial efficiency, and sharing benefits with villagers. It provides a referenceable operational pathway for similar rural waterfront cultural tourism projects in southern water network regions.

In terms of experience accumulation, the study clarifies the core logic of applying slow design to rural waterfront spaces: preserving ecological foundations through low-intervention principles, revitalizing cultural essence through living heritage transmission, strengthening endogenous momentum through industrial synergy, and replacing formal governance with natural organization. This logic respects the essential "human-water symbiosis" characteristic of rural areas while aligning with policy directions for cultural-tourism integration and rural revitalization, accumulating concrete experience for the localized practice of slow design concepts.

Regarding academic value, this study enriches the application framework of slow design in rural waterfront landscapes, offering experiential insights for subsequent research. By analyzing the compatibility of slow design with rural waterfront spaces, it provides valuable references for further academic exploration of renewal models for such spaces. Ultimately, it aims to realize a "slow experience" cultural tourism model for rural waterfront landscapes.

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