Study on the Planning of Characteristic Towns in Liaoning under the Perspective of Cultural Regeneration

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Abstract
Due to the severity of urban duplication, many cities lack characteristics, which is a smothering of the urban spirit and renders the most precious unique features of urban culture lost. The city needs to obtain its momentum for economic and social development from regional cultures, since regional cultures are the fountainhead of urban characteristics.

Under this background, the construction of characteristic towns becomes a huge strategic choice for the Chinese government. The aim of constructing characteristic towns is to break down urban and rural dual structure, expedite new-type urbanization, promote economic and societal transition, and improve villages and small town living environment. This paper takes the first batch of four national-level characteristic towns in Liaoning as its objects of study.

The paper investigates the population distribution, production layout, national space usage and the ecological environment protection of characteristic towns based on the literature materials of overall planning, land use and tourism development. Combined with on-spot investigations, it studies the process of how modern service industry dominated by “tourism +” can be achieved; how to construct an ecologically livable environment through infrastructure and ecological environment construction; how to combine historical and cultural deposits with modern features in creating a distinctive small-town culture. In the end, the paper conducts a discussion and summary of the strategic planning of characteristic towns.

Keywords: Characteristic town; regional culture; regeneration; planning study Liaoning

1. The conceptual feature, connotation and evolution of characteristic town

The concept of "characteristic town" can be summarized as: the development space platform that is relatively independent from downtown, different from administrative division unit and industrial park, and has clear industry positioning, cultural connotation, tourism and certain community function [1].

The typical characteristics of characteristic town are its "small but excellent scale, special but strong

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industry, aggregate but combined function, and delicate but beautiful shape”. Generally, the planning area of characteristic town is three square kilometers, with core area being one square kilometers. Characteristic town integrates a variety of functions within limited space. Based on foundation and condition, it locates itself as a leading industry that is the most basic, characteristic, and potential. In addition, it fully integrates its industrial, tourism, and cultural function within limited space. Characteristic town determines the overall style of the town, shows geomorphic, cultural, architectural, and ecological features in a multidimensional way, and builds a “gorgeous” town.

Fig.1. Location of four characteristics towns in Liaoning
(Source: edited by the authors)

Construction of Chinese characteristic town was first launched in Zhejiang Province in 2014. It has been recognized by the state after its success. And it was launched nationwide in 2016. As a new thing, characteristic town develops rapidly. Thus, without deep thinking, there is bound to be many problems remain to be solved in practice. For example, so far, few in-depth studies have been done on the cultural connotation of characteristic town.

2. Planning study on characteristic towns in Liaoning

In 2016, the State Council promulgated the first national characteristic town list, in which four characteristic towns in Liaoning are included. They are Xietun Town in Wafangdian, Tanghe Town of Changling District in Liaoyang, Dagushan Town in Dandong, and Zhaquanhe Town in Panjin. Below is the in-depth analysis of two typical cases: Xietun Town and Dagushan Town.

2.1 Liaoning characteristic town --Xietun Town

Located in northern Bohai Bay of Dalian, Xietun Town is adjacent to the Changxing Island National Economic Development Zone. With only one hour’s drive to the downtown area of Dalian, the town covers an area of 192.5 square kilometers, a coastline of 36 kilometers. It has jurisdiction over eight administrative villages and one community, with a total of nearly 500,000 people.

2.1.1 Characteristic orientation of Xietun Town

Like many towns in Liaoning, Xietun Town was a big traditional agricultural town with relatively developed aquaculture, livestock breeding, fruit and vegetable planting, but there also existed issues such as industry homogenization, low competitiveness, and environmental pollution.
Focusing on the population aging, an urgent social problem to be solved in China, Xietun Town takes building tourism characteristic town of leisure pension "slow life" as the goal, builds aging community carefully by combining western old-age insurance concept with Chinese traditional culture, and creates remote aging community of new concept, super-huge type, and leisure style, so as to develop characteristic town. Judging from the present situation, leisure pension industry in Xietun Town develops in a very rapid way, forming a trend of accumulated development. Its next step is to take the establishment of a national tourist resort and a national 5A level tourist attraction as the carrier, so as to further promote the accumulated development of tourism industry, thus creating a world-famous leisure pension characteristic town.

2.1.2 Space construction of Xietun Town

Fig.2. Before: a small traditional fishing village (left)   Today: a characteristic town of Xietun (right)  (The picture comes from the network)

Based on old town, Xietun Town builds new town in an all-round way, that is, Xiangzhou Rural Town, a new town build with the combination of tourism, pension, health, education and other industries, thus gradually realizing the integrative development combining old and new. After development and construction, great changes have taken place in Xietun Town feature. Xietun Town used to be a small coastal fishing village with relatively developed mariculture industry and salt industry due to its abundant shoreline resources. With the development of leisure pension industry, a large number of people have aggregated here, which boosts the development and construction of the town. The old town is flourishing in commerce, while the new town is fashionable and modern. Its eastern mountain areas have natural ecology, while its southwest areas are adjacent to mountains and sea. Nowadays, by tapping regional culture and regenerating industry, Xietun Town has developed from the past barren and backward small village into today’s modern small town with strong economic strength, harmonious and stable society, good ecological environment, and well-off people’s livelihood.

2.2 Liaoning characteristic town -- Gushan Town

Located in the northeast wing of the Liaodong Peninsula, the west of Donggang, Gushan Town borders Dalian in the west, Anshan in the north. It is situated in the core area of Northeast Asian economic circle, separated by sea with the Korean Peninsula and Japan. Judging from Liaoning’s territory, Gushan Town lies just in the interchange of Dalian, Anshan, and Dandong, the only access from Dandong to Dalian.

2.2.1 Characteristic orientation of Gushan Town

Endowed with a profound historical and cultural background, religious culture, frontier culture, western culture, ancient architectural culture and folk custom culture intertwined in Gushan Town, enhancing each other’s beauty. Of which, Dagushan ancient architectural complex is a relatively large northeast ancient
architectural complex combined with Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Under the guidance of regional cultural regeneration, the development of Gushan Town should attach great importance to the construction and protection of the overall style and ecological environment in ancient town, so as to ensure the coordination between the appearance and cultural connotation of the town, keep it in an intact way and vigorously protect the original style of ancient houses, ancient streets and alleys and historical and cultural ancient building complex. Gushan Town takes cultural leisure tourism industry as its special advantage industry, thus forming a virtuous circle with tourism driven by culture, economic development driven by cultural tourism, and mutual promotion between culture and industry, social economy and cultural tourism industry.

2.2.2 Space construction of Gushan Town

In terms of spatial development structure, Gushan Town relies on main towns such as Dagushan, Buddha Temple, Huangtukan, and Dalu Island to create the “diamond” structure of “Three Island integration” development.

In addition, it determines four core functional areas, including industrial park, science and education park, logistics park, and tourism core area, as well as development direction, functional orientation and division layout of characteristic town. By handling the relationship between new town and old town, industrial park and ecological protection zone, commercial area and residential area, scenic spot and historical site protection zone, it strives to build an international town with relatively strong modernization level, ecological and suitable residence, and complete functions. In terms of environmental protection, Gushan Town focuses on ecological and environmental protection to form key protected zones centering on the Yalu River wetland, Luoquanjing Reservoir, Gushan Forest Park, and boosts the rapid development of its surrounding areas with optimized development area taking Gushan Town as the core. In terms of infrastructure construction, it improves urban infrastructures to fully realize gas, heat and water supply. In addition, it also improves the construction of landfill, sewage treatment plant, and public service facilities. In terms of landscape conservation planning, it taps historical and cultural resources in a profound way to explore innovative historical folk culture activities and expand the influence and popularization of regional culture continuously. And the establishment of Dagushan Cultural Association and Dagushan Museum further enhances the development of cultural inheritance. In addition, it attaches great importance to the construction of the overall landscape and ecological environment of ancient town, so as to ensure the coordination between the appearance of the town and culture connotation, preserve and protect vigorously the original style of ancient...
dwellings, ancient streets and historical and cultural ancient architecture complex.

2.3 Summary: comparison of four characteristic towns

Table 1. Comparison of four characteristic towns in Liaoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry foundation</th>
<th>Xietun Town</th>
<th>Tanghe Town</th>
<th>Gushan Town</th>
<th>Zhaquanhe Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea salt resources, fishery, agriculture, and wine industry</td>
<td>Hot spring, natural mineral spring</td>
<td>Seafood resources, rice</td>
<td>Wetland, agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich southern Liaoning cultural connotations and a long tradition of wine-making</td>
<td>Advantaged hot spring resources, pleasant natural scenery and long traditional culture</td>
<td>The top town to produce shellfish in Dandong, mineral resources and rich historical and cultural connotation</td>
<td>Wetland resources, red beach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure pension</td>
<td>&quot;Hot spring plus&quot; mode</td>
<td>Aquaculture ancient town</td>
<td>Ecological leisure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea salt, wine-making, handicraft culture and shadow play culture</td>
<td>Hot spring culture, historical and cultural connotation, and allegro culture</td>
<td>Religious culture, frontier culture, western culture, ancient architectural culture and folk custom culture</td>
<td>Homestay culture, fishing and hunting culture ;Tangpu culture, and straw reed painting skills</td>
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</table>

In the process of development, Xietun Town introduces new industry by relying on its unique sea salt resources, rich southern Liaoning cultural connotations and a long tradition of wine-making. The “leisure pension” industry developed along with this opportunity has aroused people’s strong resonance and cultural identity, and has boosted the development of the surrounding industrial chain, realizing the regeneration of the town. In the process of development, Tanghe Town forms “hot spring plus” development mode by relying on advantaged hot spring resources, which boost the development of the town while promoting tourism industry. In the process of development, Gushan Town fully explores its traditional cultural connotation to endow it with a new connotation and form the situation of tourism driven by culture, and economic development driven by cultural tourism, thus realizing the regeneration of traditional town. By relying on wetland ecological environment, Zhaquanhe Town enriches cultural connotation of the town, enabling the traditional ecological town to have a lasting and vigorous vitality.

3. Construction of Liaoning characteristic town under the guidance of regional cultural regeneration

Under the influence of topography and climate, Liaoning is mostly plain and has four distinctive seasons. In addition, Liaoning Province is bordered by the mainland to the west, and sea to the east. Liaoning's geographical environment is not single, enjoying both inland scenery and the charm of coastal cities. Located in northeast China, Liaoning is the only coastal province among the three provinces in Northeast China that has a vast sea area, long shoreline, numerous islands and rich aquatic resources. Marine culture has a far-reaching influence on Liaoning. In addition, it’s rich in natural resources, geothermal resources and hot springs. In terms of culture, Liaoning enjoys distinctive minority cultural traits such as Manchu due to various nations. Integrated with Manchu Chinese civilization, Liaoning regional folk culture has profound connotations. Therefore, construction of Liaoning characteristic town should not copy the model of Zhejiang characteristic town. Instead, it ought to be rooted in its regional context, and dig deeply its historical and cultural resources, thus building characteristic towns that are in line with Liaoning’s regional features.

Through the study of four Liaoning characteristic towns, it can be clearly seen that all Liaoning characteristic towns rely on traditional industries and focus on the use of natural resources. And they relax
restrictions in aspects such as space planning scope, investment scale and construction requirements, which
has a lot of similarities and differences with that of Zhejiang model. By depending on their original industrial
resources or natural resources, four Liaoning characteristic towns fully tap their traditional cultural
connotation, extract regional cultural connotation, and endow new characteristic industries. Four towns are
distinctive in terms of location, industrial base, cultural connotations, project orientation, supporting
conditions, planning and space implementation, creating real “characteristic towns” of their own region.

Fig.5. Planning pattern of characteristic towns in Liaoning.
(Source: edited by the authors)

Through the study of the characteristics of Liaoning town, this paper briefly summarizes the planning
pattern of Liaoning characteristic town. Firstly, the planning mode of Liaoning characteristic town should
pay attention to the development of industry. Because the industry is the foundation of the development of
characteristic town, and the formation of the key to employment. Combing the regional resources and
industry, combined with the original industry, build the leading industry, and then around the industry, the
functional positioning, industrial design, format design, and functional layout; Secondly, characteristic town of
Liaoning should be a single to comprehensive, contained tourism, leisure, vacation, recreation, night
entertainment, living, distribution, health and other functions; The third, the characteristic town of Liaoning
should be based on the basis of space reconstruction, space development structure, functional zoning, road
traffic Planning, environmental protection planning, style planning, are the need to implement this stage;
Finally, the characteristic town of Liaoning should focus on infrastructure and social security to improve and
enhance the quality of life of small towns residents.

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