

The Local Expression of “Reclusive Culture” : Based on the Interior Design Practice of Caoshanxi Yin Hotel

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Abstract: With the growing demand for leisure and vacation travel among urban populations, enabling guests to experience the unique cultural charm of a destination while enjoying a secluded retreat has become a central focus in resort hotel design. Using the interior design project of Caoshanxi Yin Hotel as a case study, this paper investigates and extracts core regional and cultural elements. Through design techniques such as spatial interplay, material combinations, and light-and-shade arrangements, it organically integrates local characteristics with reclusive cultural traditions, transforming traditional cultural essence into a modern hotel design language. The study explores pathways for synergistically combining local cultural preservation with innovative hotel spatial design, providing practical insights for cultural identity and design innovation in similar resort hotels.

Keywords: resort hotel design; reclusive culture; locality; Zen-inspired space; Yihuang County

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The Local Expression of "Reclusive Culture" —— Based on the Interior Design Project of Caoshan Xiyin Hotel

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Abstract: As urban residents' demand for leisure and vacation travel continues to grow, a key focus in resort hotel design has become how to enable guests to experience the unique cultural charm of the locality while enjoying a leisurely retreat. This article based on the interior design project of Caoshan Xiyin Hotel, the project researched and extracted core elements of the local region and culture, through design approaches such as spatial interpenetration, material combination, light and shadow construction, it transformed the core of traditional culture into a modern hotel design. This article explores the path for the organic integration of local cultural inheritance and innovative hotel spatial design, providing practical references for the cultural conception and design innovation of resort hotels.

Keywords: resort hotel design; traditional cultural context; locality; Zen space; Yihuang County

With the accelerated urbanization process, urban residents face increasing pressures from work and daily life, leading to a growing demand for "reclusive lifestyles" that allow them to "escape the hustle and bustle and rejuvenate their minds and bodies." Leisure and vacation travel centered around hotels has gradually become the preferred choice for urban residents seeking relaxation. This shift in demand has prompted resort hotels to evolve from mere accommodation spaces into comprehensive cultural immersion venues, upgrading their role as vital carriers of regional cultural

experiences ^[1]. Reclusive culture, as a vital component of Eastern traditional culture, embodies a humanistic essence of self-improvement and protection—not an attitude of withdrawal from society ^[2], but rather a spiritual pursuit of "having the mind immersed in the city while the body dwelling in the forest," which aligns perfectly with contemporary aspirations for tranquility and minimalist living. Cao Shan Baoji Temple in Yihuang County, Jiangxi Province, originally constructed in the 11th year of the Xiantong era of the Tang Dynasty (870 AD), stands as the world-renowned ancestral temple of the

Caodong School. It boasts a millennium-old Zen heritage and an authentic natural landscape integrating "mountains, waters, forests, temples, and villages," profoundly influencing the local cultural fabric. Located within the Cao Shan scenic area, Cao Shan Xi Yin Hotel possesses unique qualities for Zen practice and mountain retreats. Its design is centered on the concept of "Zen-Inspired Stream Seclusion," focusing on the core principles of the Caodong School and the living inheritance of Yihuang's cultural legacy. By integrating contemporary reclusive needs with surrounding resources, the hotel explores localized practices in interior design for suburban resort hotels. This paper uses the hotel's design as a case study to analyze its strategies for cultural preservation and the creation of a reclusive atmosphere, offering insights for cultural continuity and design innovation in similar hotels.

1 Relevant Theoretical Foundations: Contemporary Reclusive Culture and the Logic of Local Design

1.1 Definition of a Resort Hotel

A resort hotel is a high-end accommodation facility "themed around natural landscapes, cultural experiences, or wellness and health care, equipped with comprehensive resort amenities" [3]. As a lodging format specifically designed for leisure travelers, resort hotels can be categorized into three types—urban resort hotels, suburban resort

hotels, and destination resort hotels—based on the distinct characteristics of their target clientele^[1]. Unlike traditional urban hotels, resort hotels primarily serve local and national tourists, and are typically located near urban natural scenic areas such as lakes, coastlines, hot springs, and forests. While providing relaxation, they also showcase the rich regional and historical cultures to visitors.

1.2 The Expression of “Reclusive Culture” in Modern Hotel Design

The reclusive culture originated from pre-Qin Daoism, with its core principle being "disregarding fame and gain while returning to one's true nature." In contemporary contexts, traditional reclusive culture has undergone a positive transformation, evolving into a lifestyle for urban dwellers seeking spiritual sanctuary and physical and mental healing, with its essential requirements being "tranquility, privacy, naturalness, and healing." The expression of reclusive culture shows a clear upward trend in modern hotel design; however, it often appears overly superficial and symbolic, with an excessive accumulation of traditional elements and symbols making the overall ambiance seem contrived and lacking depth. We believe that authentic reclusive culture should minimize artificial traces by integrating local landscapes and cultural heritage; balance tranquility and privacy to provide spaces for solitary reflection; preserve the cultural essence

for contemporary inheritance rather than relying on symbolic pile up; and adapt to modern functionality while balancing Zen-inspired aesthetics with comfort.

1.3 Local Design Logic

"Locality" is not merely a collage of simplistic elements such as symbolization or superficial decoration; rather, it is a design philosophy that integrates concepts of regional identity and local context. It represents a design approach that, through an in-depth decoding and innovative encoding of the architectural site, prioritizes natural adaptability, historical layering, cultural translatability, and social publicness^[4]. Local design involves a process of "decoding, extracting, reconstructing, and reproducing" the cultural DNA of a region. By integrating contemporary contexts and functions, it transforms traditional culture into a perceptible spatial language, with the core objective of avoiding homogenization and endowing spaces with distinctive regional identity. Local design emphasizes "respecting the site and being rooted in the region," considering nature, culture, materials, and lifestyles to establish an organic connection among "culture, site, space, and people."

2 Design Basis: Overview of the Caoshan Scenic Area and Hotel Project

2.1 Natural Features and Regional Culture of Caoshan Scenic Area

Yihuang County, situated in the southern part of Fuzhou City, Jiangxi Province,

derives its name from the confluence of the Yishui and Huangshui rivers where its administrative seat was established. Renowned for its vibrant culture and profound heritage, the county boasts abundant cultural resources where Chan Buddhism, academies, traditional opera, and ancient architecture complement each other, shining through the ages. During the mid-to-late Tang Dynasty, Chan culture flourished here, giving shape to the "Five Levels of Ruler and Minister" doctrine of the Caodong School. Caoshan Baoji Temple serves as the ancestral hall of the Chan Buddhist Caodong School, while Shigong Temple is acclaimed as the "Premier Buddhist Practice Ground of Mazu." In the Song Dynasty, numerous academies and private schools flourished; the young Wang Anshi sought education in Yihuang, and Zeng Gong documented the region's scholarly atmosphere in his timeless essay "Record of Yihuang County School." During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Tangyin summer cloth dominated the market, establishing Yihuang as one of China's three major production and distribution centers for this fabric. The Yihuang dialect laid the foundation for the Erhuang style of Peking Opera, while Yihuang opera troupes performed extensively across the country. Tang Xianzu's "Four Dreams of Linchuan" premiered successfully here, gaining international recognition. Both Yihuang opera and Hegang dance were inscribed as national intangible

cultural heritage, and the ancient town of Tangyin is hailed as a "Museum of Ming-Qing Architectural Heritage."

Cao Mountain Scenic Area, located in Chenfang Village, Fenggang Town, Yihuang County, Fuzhou City, Jiangxi Province (8 kilometers from Yihuang County town), features key attractions including Cao Mountain Baoji Temple, Cao Mountain Agricultural Zen Town, and Cao Mountain Cultural and Creative District. Centered around Baoji Temple, the area comprises five core tourism zones: the Agricultural Zen Town Resort, Cao Mountain Buddhist Academy Study Zone, Wellness and Health Zone, Forest Ecological Recreation Zone, and Distribution & Support Facilities Zone. In January 2018, Yihuang Cao Mountain Scenic Area was designated as a Jiangxi Province 4A-level tourist attraction by the Jiangxi Provincial Tourism Development Commission. The area boasts exceptional natural scenery with verdant mountains and winding streams, creating a pristine landscape where "mountains embrace streams, streams border forests, and forests surround temples" —a setting perfectly suited to Zen philosophy and reclusive culture. Local traditions preserve rich mountain dwelling heritage alongside intangible cultural heritage practices such as qin music performance, xia cloth weaving, and wood carving. Traditional dwellings predominantly use natural materials like fir wood and river stones,

featuring minimalist designs; the rustic quality of xia cloth and the fluid lines of wood carvings collectively embody a unique "harmony between music and Zen" ambiance.

Caoshan Baoji Temple, abbreviated as Caoshan Temple, was initially constructed between the 11th and 14th years of the Xiantong era under Emperor Yizong of the Tang Dynasty (870–873) by Master Benji. It is one of the five major schools of Chinese Buddhist Chan Buddhism and is renowned as the "Ancestral Temple of the Caodong School" ^[5]. The Caodong School was founded by Master Liangjia at Caoshan, with its core Chan principle being "Mozhao Chan," which emphasizes "meditating in silence to observe the mind and maintaining constant awareness in quietness." It seeks the state of "perfect harmony between principle and reality and a return to simplicity," advocating for the realization of Chan teachings through daily life and nature while opposing elaborate rituals.

2.2 Overview and Project Positioning of Caoshanxi Yin Hotel

Cao Shan Xi Yin Hotel is situated in the core area of the Cao Shan scenic zone, adjacent to Cao Shan Baoji Temple, with a construction area of approximately 16,054.58 square meters. It comprises functional areas such as guest rooms, a Zen tea room, and a Chinese restaurant, positioning itself as a high-end Zen-inspired wellness resort

hotel primarily catering to urban residents seeking spiritual healing and traditional culture, as well as Zen meditation enthusiasts. Under the theme "Xi Yin" (Seclusion in the Stream), the hotel adopts a design philosophy centered on "being nestled among mountains and waters, immersed in Zen ambiance, and returning to one's authentic self." Guided by three principles— "Zen essence without religiosity, local character without imitation of antiquity, and seclusion without isolation" —it achieves a harmonious integration of tradition and contemporary design, as well as Zen philosophy and practical functionality. The hotel complex features a modest and expansive overall layout, with its core design philosophy centered on "preserving nature and integrating with the landscape" : priority is given to retaining the existing natural mountains, waters, and villages, achieving organic integration between the buildings and the surrounding mountains and water systems through coordinated axial relationships. Simultaneously, the complex coexists harmoniously with the adjacent residential buildings, embodying both the essence of Caodong Zen Buddhism and the unity of natural scenery with artistic expression, while showcasing the sophistication of traditional Chinese layout principles and its inherent cultural charm. The hotel' s exterior continues the elegant Tang-style architecture of Baodi Temple on Caoshan Mountain, exuding tranquility and grandeur that reflects its millennia-

old cultural heritage; it also skillfully incorporates distinctive local residential elements such as white walls, gray tiles, and the traditional dougong bracketing system. Through the ethereal atmosphere of Eastern Zen and the simplicity of wabi-sabi aesthetics, the design weaves a unique temporal and spatial Zen ambiance.

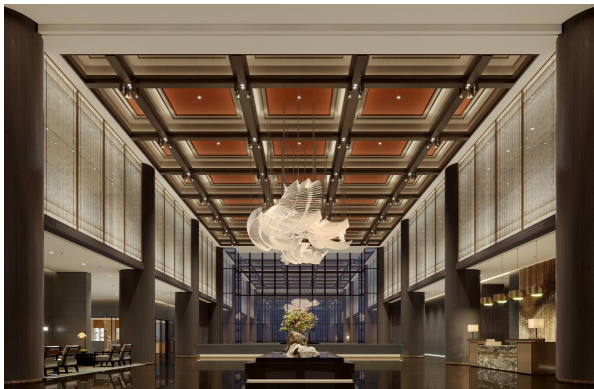
3 Practical Examples of Interior Space Design for Caoshanxi Yin Hotel

3.1 Spatial Sequence: Planning for a Progressive Meditative Retreat Path

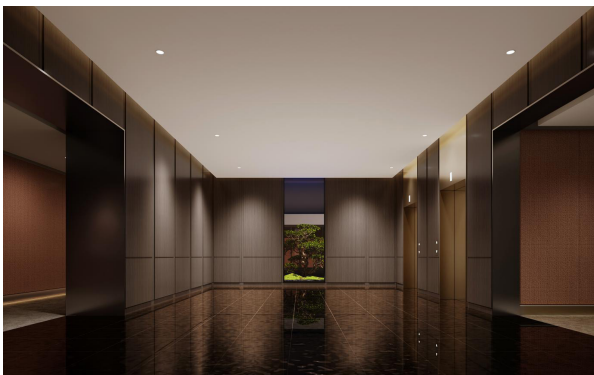
Drawing on the Cao Dong School of Zen's practice principles of "Silent Illumination Zen" and "Gradual Entrusion into Concentration," the hotel has designed a four-stage spatial sequence— "Enrollment— Mind Calming—Seclusion—Zen Practice" —guiding visitors from the hustle and bustle into tranquility.

The first section, "Entrance": The architectural entrance hall features a off-white stone base complemented by rock formations, water features, and soft lighting, effectively isolating visitors from external noise. The second section, "Silence": The lobby and lounge incorporate extensive open spaces, with floors paved in imitation gold brick stone and walls clad in gray stone; a central still-water landscape guides visitors toward inner tranquility. The third section, "Seclusion": The corridor is narrow yet well-proportioned, featuring skylights that allow natural light

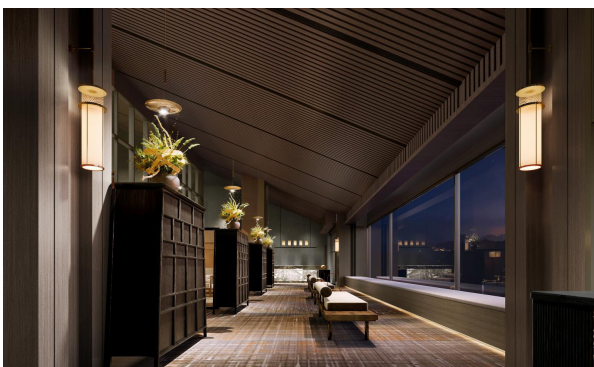
infiltration; the floor is covered with an ink-wash patterned carpet, while the corridor lighting utilizes base-mounted diffuse light strips to enhance the sense of retreat. The fourth section, "Zen Practice": This core functional area adopts an enclosed layout to ensure privacy, with view-opening windows framing mountain and water vistas that facilitate meditative contemplation.



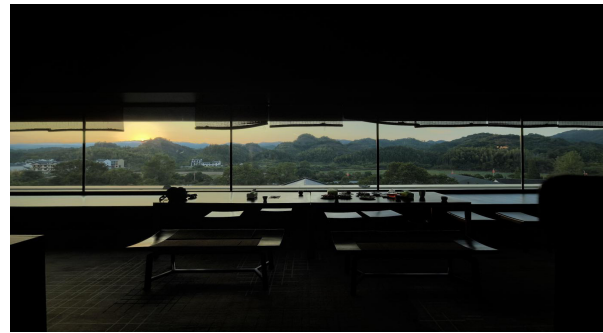
(Figure 1: Hotel lobby appearance)



(Figure 2: Elevator lobby and passageway appearance)



(Figure 3: Render of the rest area)



(Figure 4: Actual outdoor view from the rest area)

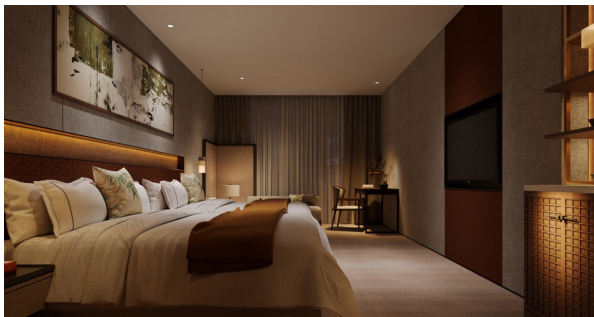
3.2 Form and Inheritance: Functional Reconstruction of Traditional Cultural Elements

The hotel's interior space draws inspiration from the Zen hall of Caoshan Baoji Temple and local Caoshan residential architecture, reimagined and adapted to fit the hotel's practical functions.

The Zen Hall embodies the principles of "centrality, symmetry, tranquility, and mind-nurturing," primarily employed in the main hall and the administrative office. The main hall features a symmetrical layout centered around a tranquil water feature, creating a Zen-inspired effect of "emptiness at the center." The administrative office adapts to the surrounding terrain, incorporating meditation platforms and tea seating to recreate the serene atmosphere characteristic of the Zen Hall.

Drawing on elements such as the materials, forms, and detailed components of local residential architecture, these features are extensively applied in both public spaces and guest rooms: Eastern Jiangxi residences typically consist of single-story or semi-story brick-and-wood structures,

featuring either a single-story main section with additional floors on the secondary level, or a single-story lower hall with floors above; most incorporate a courtyard ^[6]. The public areas center around the atrium and administrative hall, fully utilizing traditional courtyard design principles by incorporating large-scale skylight windows during construction to maximize natural light intake, thereby enhancing the hotel's welcoming atmosphere. The guest rooms adopt a "main room-side rooms" layout, divided into a relaxation zone and a leisure zone. While fulfilling basic rest functions, they also include tea-drinking areas and reading/writing spaces, offering diverse spatial configurations for resting, hosting guests, and reading during travel.



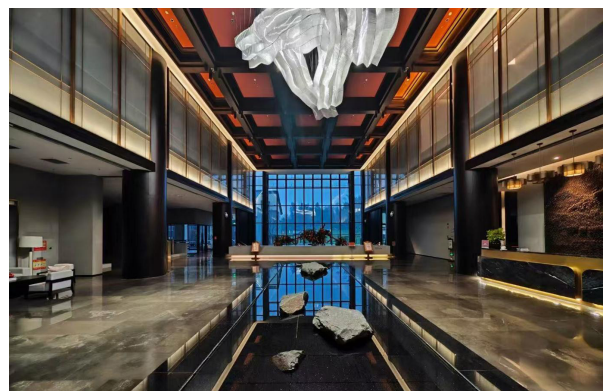
(Figure 5: Render of a standard guest room)

3.3 Material Language: The Fusion of Local Materials and Zen-Inspired Textures

In hotel design material selection, the principle of “prioritizing local sources and emphasizing natural materials” is adhered to, with local natural materials given precedence.

The wall finishes employ locally sourced solid wood veneer composite panels that

highlight the natural grain texture of the material. The veneer surfaces undergo only a simple open-paint treatment, with varying paint application ratios achieving a perfect balance between the original grain character and a smooth finish. The lobby and public areas feature plain semi-matte limestone walls paired with glossy imitation gold brick flooring. This contrast between the floor’s “dark, glossy, textured” appearance and the walls’ “light gray, matte, smooth” finish creates a space impression of tranquility, elegance, and refinement. Public areas are adorned with abundant native landscape plants, fostering a natural harmony of “stone, grass, wood, and flowers.” Certain wall sections incorporate woven hardcover decorations, while soft furnishings utilize natural materials like linen and jute. Decorative lighting features linen and bamboo-woven fixtures, with wood carvings—a component of intangible cultural heritage—integrated into furniture details, embodying the concept of “ornamentation without ostentation” through authentic material choices that align with the spirit of “returning to simplicity.”



(Figure 6: Actual photo of the lobby)

3.4 Light and Shadow Creation: Natural Spatial Healing

“Natural light takes precedence, supplemented by artificial lighting” —during the design phase, techniques such as daylight integration, light filtering, and color temperature control were employed to create a serene and therapeutic atmosphere.

Natural light is extensively introduced into the interior space through skylights, curtain walls, bay windows, and oblique windows: the curtain walls of the lobby and atrium allow sunlight to cascade in, blurring the boundary between indoors and outdoors and creating a flowing play of light and shadow; side lighting from corridors and guest rooms is filtered through the skylights, producing mottled diffused light that is bright yet not glaring, soft, and calming; floor-to-ceiling windows in the Zen tea hall bring in views of mountains and water, while oblique windows let in natural light, ensuring overall brightness while promoting relaxation. Artificial lighting employs embedded spotlights, floor lamps, and concealed light strips, all emitting a uniform warm color temperature of 2700K–3000K to minimize glare, enhance the therapeutic atmosphere, and achieve the effect of “light and shadow embodying Zen essence, serene illumination nurturing the inner self.”

3.5 Soft Furnishing and Decoration: The Abstract Transmission of Local Cultural Symbols

The soft furnishings and decor adhere to

the principles of “imagery, minimalism, and everyday functionality,” abstractly preserving the essence of Zen philosophy and core elements of the local cultural heritage.

The furniture draws inspiration from Zen chairs and table designs, simplified into a “low-seated, wide-faced” style incorporating intangible cultural heritage wood carving patterns. The furnishings feature local coarse pottery, celadon, and wood carvings, complemented by dried branches, dried flowers, and ramie fabric ornaments that evoke a sense of nature and intangible cultural heritage. Wall displays showcase minimalist calligraphy, rubbings, and simple landscape sketches centered around the theme of “stillness, emptiness, streams, and mountains,” conveying Zen philosophy and natural beauty. The water features consist primarily of shallow ponds and flowing springs, whose murmuring sounds guide the mind toward tranquility, aligning with the Zen principle of “silent contemplation of the mind.”



(Figure 7: Actual photo of the lounge)

3.6 Functional Scenario: The Immersive Creation of Contemporary Reclusive Living

Centered around six key experiences—“residence, dining, meditation, tea tasting, mountain viewing, and stream listening”—this space blends Zen philosophy, intangible cultural heritage, and modern functionality to create an immersive retreat experience.

“The Residence” centers around guest rooms, featuring a minimalist and elegant design equipped with smart amenities, incorporating elements of ramie fabric and wood carving; “The Dining Experience” focuses on a Chinese restaurant, offering local seasonal vegetarian dishes served with coarse pottery and celadon tableware to showcase the regional culinary culture; “Meditation and Tea Tasting” is centered around a Zen tea room, complete with a stone tea table and a zither-playing platform, providing a dual experience of tea ceremony and Zen practice; “Mountain View and Stream Listening” utilizes outdoor terraces and public leisure areas, including a meditation and reading zone that fosters deep interaction between people and nature while fulfilling modern leisure needs.

4 Design Value and Cultural Significance

4.1 Spatial Value: An Innovative Paradigm for Zen-Inspired Vacations

The hotel overcomes the traditional dilemma of resort hotels being mere accumulations of symbols by creating

a spiritual space that integrates Zen philosophy, healing practices, and intangible cultural heritage. It transforms Zen meditation concepts and intangible cultural elements into experiential spatial language, addressing contemporary guests’ needs for spiritual healing. Deeply rooted in Caoshan, the hotel incorporates local characteristics and intangible cultural techniques to establish a distinctive regional identity. By balancing Zen aesthetics with modern functionality, it serves as a practical model for cultural preservation and innovation among similar hotels.

4.2 Cultural Value: The Living Transmission of Zen Buddhist Heritage

The hotel embodies a dual legacy of Zen philosophy and local culture, conveying its cultural essence through spatial design, materials, and furnishings while integrating distinctive local elements such as qin playing, ramie fabric, and wood carving into daily experiences. Serving as a platform, it amplifies the influence of both Zen culture and local traditions, exploring an inheritance pathway that connects “culture—intangible heritage—space—experience” and providing a model for revitalizing traditional heritage in contemporary contexts.

4.3 Social Value: The Spatial Response of Contemporary Reclusive Culture

The hotel offers “micro-vacation and light meditation” solutions, creating a spiritual

sanctuary for urban dwellers to alleviate mental stress. It promotes the transformation of resort hotels from consumption-oriented establishments to spiritual experience-oriented venues, fostering the integration of Caoshan's tourism and cultural heritage while achieving synergistic development among culture, tourism, and design, thereby demonstrating significant social value.

5 Conclusion

The interior design of Cao Shanxi Yin Hotel centers on Zen culture as its core, employs cultural heritage as its methodology, and aims for contemporary seclusion. Through strategies such as spatial sequencing, formal continuity, and material expression, it integrates Zen philosophy, cultural context, and modern living, achieving the goal of "Zen essence embedded in form, seclusion rooted in the heart," thereby creating a modern Zen-inspired space with strong local character. This practice demonstrates that traditional cultural heritage serves as a vital spiritual resource; the essence of Zen design lies in spiritual transmission, while the key to localized design is deep-rooted engagement with the region. Moving forward, such resort hotels should adhere to the principles of "locality, minimalism, healing, and symbiosis," fostering synergistic development between traditional culture and local cultural contexts to realize a perfect embodiment of "seclusion culture" in its local context.

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