

From YuanBaoshan's "Stone-Housing Villages" to Spiritual Homeland: Symbolic Expressions of Local sentiment in Wang Xuefeng's "Sunny Days"

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Abstract: *Wang Xuefeng is a Professor and Master's Supervisor at Guangxi Arts University, China. He specialises in employing innovative techniques in blue-green landscape painting to depict the landscapes of southern China and its ethnic minorities. His landscape painting "Sunny Day" centres on the "Houses on Rocks" at Yuanbaoshan Qingzhai Village in Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi, China. Blending traditional ink wash with mineral pigments, it conveys local ecology and ethnic culture through on-site sketching. This article examines the work through a semiotic lens, integrating ecological aesthetics theory to analyse its symbolic expression of rural sentiment. Taking Yuanbaoshan's "Stone-Top Dwellings" as its geographical prototype, "Sunny Day" translates the Miao people's survival logic of "living by mountains and waters" through visual forms of objects. It employs colour-emotion coding to bear the collective memory and cultural identity of the ethnic group, while conveying the triple dimensions of "ecology-life-spirit" in the countryside through compositional order. This achieves an emotional elevation from concrete geographical landscapes to humanity's "spiritual homeland," ultimately becoming an artistic vessel that safeguards rural authenticity and perpetuates cultural memory within an urbanised context. It offers reference points for the creation and interpretation of contemporary landscape paintings centred on rural themes.*

Keywords: Wang Xuefeng; Bright Sun; Landscape Painting; Rural Sentiment; Symbolic Expression; Ecological Aesthetics; Miao Culture

1. Introduction

Within the contemporary context of accelerated urbanisation and the homogenisation of rural cultures, landscape paintings centred on regional topography transcend mere natural depiction. They evolve into spiritual conduits transmitting collective memory and reawakening homeland identity. The karst topography of Yuanbaoshan in Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi, alongside the Miao "Stone-Top Dwellings" cultural landscape, form a unique symbiosis of nature and humanity, serving as vital prototypes for local artistic creation. The artist employs diverse techniques to innovate the language of Chinese landscape painting, excavating regional aesthetic characteristics within the traditional cultural lineage. By fusing regional distinctiveness, survival wisdom, lived memories, and spiritual beliefs into the

interplay of brushwork, ink, and colour, and through the symbolic treatment of concrete objects, a comprehensive system for expressing local sentiment is constructed.

Existing research on rural art predominantly focuses on macro-cultural narratives, with insufficient exploration of the symbolic logic underlying the synergistic interplay of "objects-colour-composition" within individual works. Consequently, this paper takes Bright Sun as its case study. Drawing upon the artist's August 2025 WeChat interview and theories of ecological aesthetics and rural culture, it examines how the work employs the signifier-signified relationship of visual symbols. Specifically, it analyses how the "foundational symbol" of rocks, the "life symbol" of flowing water, and the "humanistic symbol" of stilted houses, alongside the orderly arrangement of colour and composition, achieve a progressive expression from regional landscape to rural sentiment and ultimately to humanity's shared spiritual homeland. This reveals how contemporary rural landscape painting transcends mere representation to embody profound cultural resonance. The "humanistic symbol" of stilted houses, alongside the orderliness of colour and composition, to achieve a progressive expression from regional landscape to rural sentiment, and ultimately to humanity's shared spiritual homeland. This reveals the core value of contemporary rural landscape painting in cultural inheritance and emotional resonance.

2. Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods to analyse the symbolic expression in Wang Xuefeng's landscape painting Bright Day. Qualitative research, grounded in natural settings, emphasises understanding the subjectivity and contextuality of research subjects through deep observation and meticulous analysis (Merriam, 2009). Unlike quantitative research, it does not rely on statistical data or standardised measurements but focuses on the specific contexts and rich meanings of research subjects. The flexibility of qualitative research enables researchers to adapt to evolving research scenarios, delving into complex cultural phenomena and emotional expressions. Furthermore, it prioritises the interactive relationship between researcher and subject, emphasising subjective experiences and interpretations during the research process. This approach more authentically reflects the cultural connotations and emotional implications inherent in the subject matter (Creswell, 2014).

Within art research, artworks serve as cultural expressions that frequently convey profound cultural meanings and personal sentiments through symbols, metaphors, and emotional resonance. Qualitative methodologies, through in-depth interpretation of artistic creations, can uncover the cultural symbols and emotional expressions embedded within them, providing rich data and theoretical support for understanding an artist's creative intent and cultural stance.

The core research question explores the expression of nostalgia for the homeland within Wang Xuefeng's landscape paintings. As a complex emotional and cultural phenomenon, qualitative research methods can, through in-depth analysis and interpretation of the artwork, understand the emotional experiences expressed by the artist and the cultural context presented within the work.

The research design employs a case study approach, selecting Wang Xuefeng's on-site sketches as the subject. Through meticulous analysis and semiotic interpretation of the paintings, it delves into the expression of nostalgia within his works. Representative case studies are analysed using semiotic theory to examine formal elements, medium and technique, and thematic content, thereby revealing underlying cultural significance and conveyed emotions.

Data Collection: This study primarily employs three data collection methods: literature review, observation, and interviews. Literature review involves reading, analysing, and organising relevant scholarly materials to comprehensively and systematically examine the research question. These sources encompass art criticism, cultural studies, and semiotic theory, providing theoretical foundations for analysing landscape paintings. Visual analysis focuses on Wang Xuefeng's landscape works, examining natural elements, arbitrary symbols, and traditional motifs to explore their symbolic significance and role in conveying nostalgia for the homeland.

The interview method involves conducting in-depth interviews with the artist to gather interpretations of Wang Xuefeng's landscape paintings. Interview topics encompass expressive techniques within the paintings, the significance of cultural symbols, and the emotional and conceptual expressions conveyed. These interviews provide rich primary data, further deepening the understanding and analysis of Wang Xuefeng's works.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study employs a semiotic analytical approach. Semiotics is the discipline studying signs and sign systems, aiming to explore how signs convey meaning and their relationship with cultural and social contexts. Symbolic signs are those established through social or cultural conventions, where the meaning bears no natural connection to the represented object—such as written language or symbolic patterns in painting (Peirce, 1931). Indicative symbols denote signs bearing causal or physical connections to their referents, such as smoke signifying fire (Peirce, 1955). Emotional symbols establish similarity or figurative associations with their subjects, exemplified by portraiture in painting or natural landscapes in landscape painting (Peirce, 1931).

This study aims to explore the cultural connotations and rural sentiments embedded within Wang Xuefeng's landscape paintings. Data analysis will centre on three core dimensions: formal elements, medium and technique, and thematic content. Employing Peirce's semiotic theory and thematic analysis methodology, it will systematically interpret the paintings' deeper meanings. Semiotic Analysis: First, grounded in Peirce's semiotic theory, this study will conduct an in-depth analysis of the symbolic systems within Wang Xuefeng's landscape paintings. Symbolic identification will focus on the paintings' formal elements (such as composition, lines, and colour), medium and technique (such as ink wash and wash techniques), and thematic content (such as mountains, rocks, trees, and dwellings). Following Peirce's tripartite classification of signs, the research will distinguish: (1) Iconic Symbols (Icon): Signs conveying meaning through resemblance, such as depictions of rocks that may mimic the artist's memory of their homeland's mountainous landscape. (2) Indexical Signs: Signs conveying meaning through causal relationships or spatio-temporal associations, such as the use of ink wash suggesting the contextual lineage of traditional landscape painting. (3) Symbolic Signs: Signs conveying meaning through culturally established conventions, such as a boulder symbolising an indomitable spirit. By analysing the specific manifestations of these symbols within the works and their cultural connotations, this study reveals how the artist employs painterly language to convey personal emotions and cultural identity. The focus of symbolic analysis lies in how the artist, through artistic choices, transforms formal elements, medium and technique, and thematic content into symbols bearing specific meanings.

(Employing Braun & Clarke's, 2006) thematic analysis methodology, recurrent patterns of meaning within Wang Xuefeng's landscape paintings will be categorised and distilled. This

thematic analysis will focus on recurring imagery, narrative patterns, and emotional tones within the artist's oeuvre. The research will identify core themes permeating the works, such as "the harmonious unity of nature and humanity," "the contemporary continuation of traditional culture," and "profound nostalgia for the homeland." Particular attention will be paid to how these themes interconnect with the artist's personal memories, emotions, and shared experiences, ultimately shaping the overarching meaning of the works. The thematic analysis will not merely examine "what is depicted," but delve deeper into "why it is painted" and "how painting serves to express complex emotions and cultural identity." For instance, an analysis of the theme of houses will explore how they function as a "cultural landscape," bearing the collective memory and identity of the migrant artist towards his homeland.

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) was constructed by the researcher based on semiotics and expressions of nostalgia for one's native land, serving as an analytical tool for examining artistic works.

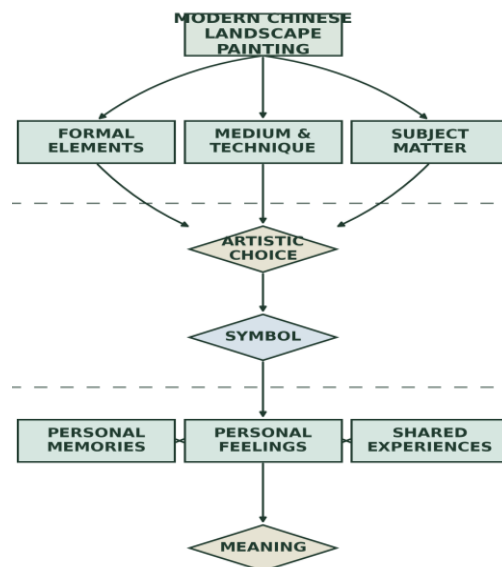


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Symbolic Expressions of Nostalgia in Chinese Landscape Painting
 Source: All researchers

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Li Ri's Works



Figure 1: Wang Xuefeng, *Sunny Day*, 2022, Chinese ink painting, 68 × 68 cm
 Image source: Wang, X. F. (2023). *Gong: Boundless: New Vision of Art*. Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House

This Chinese landscape painting centres visually on a uniquely formed colossal rock formation occupying the dominant position within the composition. Fluid and varied lines delineate the contours of layered rock faces and the contorted postures of trees. Perched atop the rock's upper right is a stilted Miao village dwelling, beneath which a stream meanders down to the fields at the painting's base. The solidity of the rock contrasts with the expansive trees, while the tranquillity of the architecture balances the fluidity of the water, creating a dynamic interplay. The interweaving of firm and supple lines vividly interprets the artistic concept of "nature and humanity coexisting" within the landscape genre.

The composition is dominated by blue-green tones, with the blue-green hues of the rocks forming a striking contrast to the golden accents scattered throughout. The rock formations are rendered through gradations of blue, green, and orange, sculpting a solid three-dimensional structure. The foliage employs a stippled colouring technique, with branches intertwining to enrich the visual rhythm while echoing the natural charm of "lush vegetation". The stilted houses are depicted in warm brown tones.

The work employs traditional Chinese painting media, using ink wash as its foundation and layered rendering with mineral pigments. The background features expansive areas of flat, deep blue, interweaving and blending with the colours of the foreground elements. This approach preserves the characteristic colouring of traditional blue-green landscapes while amplifying the region's unique topography – the interplay of blue skies, massive rocks, and wooden dwellings – through the collision of hues. The fusion of traditional and contemporary painting techniques ultimately embodies a distinctive regional aesthetic.



Figure 2: Wang Xuefeng, Wang Xuefeng's 'Sunny Day' Colour Expression

The composition is dominated by blue-green tones. As seen in Figure 2, the blue-green hues of the foreground boulders possess the characteristic lustrous texture of mineral pigments. Ink washes allow blue and green to blend seamlessly, both recreating the moss-covered appearance of Yuanbaoshan's rocks due to perpetual dampness and subtly echoing the "rainy and misty" climate typical of southwestern mountainous regions. The blue-green hues of the midground trees are applied in a dappled manner, where the fresh, vibrant foliage intertwines with the ink-washed branches. This visual effect of lush vegetation echoes the landscape genre's depiction of natural vitality, precisely reflecting the region's characteristic of being a water-source forest area with "dense vegetation and verdant greenery". This palette constructs a "cool and humid" atmosphere, allowing viewers to almost feel the mountain mist and stream chill, serving as a direct projection of the region's "high humidity, low pollution" ecology.

The blue-green palette transcends mere naturalistic depiction. Against the backdrop of urbanisation damaging rural ecosystems, the interwoven blue-green hues and moss-covered stones in the composition serve as a poetic declaration of Yuandao Mountain's untouched ecology, symbolising the pristine authenticity of nature. This resonates with (Zeng,2020) core assertion that "ecological aesthetics emphasise nature's intrinsic value." On the emotional front, this blue-green hue carries the sensory memories of Miao people for their homeland: the slippery moss touched by hands while climbing mountains in childhood; the lustre of foliage reflected in mountain streams—all transformed through colour into palpable nostalgia for the homeland. As (Fang,2017) observes, the chromatic symbols of vernacular art remain profoundly intertwined with a community's lived memories.

This is a work created from life, centred on the theme of the "Stone-Top Dwellings" in Qing Shan Village, Yuanbao Mountain, Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi, China. It focuses on the unique landscape ecology and cultural scenery of the area. My choice of blue as the dominant hue stems from multiple considerations. In traditional Chinese culture, blue transcends mere colour to embody spiritual symbolism, often representing loftiness, purity, and spirituality. This resonates perfectly with the pristine air and sunlight characteristic of Yuanbaoshan's high altitude. Upon first ascending Qing Shan Village, standing beneath the eaves of a stilted house and gazing skyward, the azure seemed exceptionally "translucent." The high-altitude air was so pristine that even the wind carried no dust. Sunlight cascaded down, rendering the sky as though washed repeatedly, a blue devoid of any grey undertones. Then, looking down at the mountain stream, water flowed over stones, reflecting the sky's blue while embracing the green of the riverside grass. That blue carried a living energy, not a cold, hard block of colour, but one with warmth. This palette serves both to depict the pristine, untouched environment of Yuanbaoshan's Qing Shan Village and to capture the 'stillness' of Miao village life: free from urban clamour, where mornings awaken to birdsong and evenings fade with cooking smoke, where even the rustle of leaves in the wind seems slowed. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025)

Golden accents blend delicately into the gradations of rock and foliage, engaging in an exquisite dialogue with the dominant blue-green palette. This infuses the cool landscape with a warm spiritual core: it embodies both nature's "sparkle"—the moment sunlight filters through the forest to illuminate moss—and the "warm memories" of rural life. The resplendence of Miao silverware with gilded borders, the lingering warmth of hearth fires, and the gold-thread embroidery adorning festive garments—these fragmented scenes of daily life coalesce through the visual association of gold. Gold further symbolises the vitality of rural culture. Against the blue-green natural backdrop, its accents resemble the luminous essence of Miao culture distilled through time – unobtrusive yet ever-present. (Wang,2018) observes that Chinese aesthetics consistently infuses cultural philosophy, with gold serving as a chromatic symbol bearing life consciousness, implicitly embodying the spiritual core of "vital spirit" and "immanent vitality".

On an emotional level, gold evokes not merely visual warmth but crystallises the Miao people's collective identity with cultural inheritance. (Peng,2020) observes that "bright symbolic hues" within vernacular palettes often serve as direct manifestations of cultural vitality, forging natural light and shadow with ethnic memory into visual language—a living testament to cultural continuity.

Whilst painting, I constantly recall the old stone mills and steps in the village – stones trodden by Miao villagers for decades, centuries, moss growing and falling, falling and growing. Within the stone's grain lie the footprints of countless generations. My use of gold leaf in the composition aims to capture this 'rustic warmth': the stones are not cold, but warmed by the lives of the Miao people. The gold leaf's radiance against the blue background evokes the sensation of touching that slippery moss, glistening in sunlight, and feeling the pulse of the mountains hidden beneath the stones. These are not museum specimens, but living entities with stories to tell. They radiate brightness and warmth. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025).

The warm brown stilt houses form the cultural core against a cool backdrop, their wood tones tempered with faint ink washes, precisely recreating the authentic appearance of Miao stilt houses—"timber structures weathered over time." This warm brown embodies the visual translation of traditional aesthetics where "nature forms the essence, while humanity defines the application." (Zhang,2018) noted that "colour selection in vernacular architecture consistently adheres to the principle of 'simplicity coexisting with nature'." Emotionally, warm brown serves as a concentrated vessel for the rustic warmth of rural life. The warmth of the hearth within the wooden house, the play of light and shadow on the wax-dyed cloth hung out to dry by the mother, the simple patterns of the bamboo basket by the doorway—these scenes of life, though not directly depicted, unfold in the viewer's mind through the evocative associations of warm brown. This transforms the architecture from an isolated landscape into a "lived-in vessel of the countryside," stirring a longing for a simpler existence.

The azure sky is rendered using flat-painting techniques, its high saturation breaking from the traditional ink wash's subtlety to precisely capture Yuanbaoshan's sky—characterised by high altitude and minimal pollution. This "profound yet luminous" blue, born of the region's pristine air, becomes a visual emblem of its distinct identity through colour (Wang, 2015). This azure sky symbolises a "spiritual sanctuary untouched by modern restlessness," coalescing with the blue-green landscapes below to form an "idealised rural retreat beyond the clamour." It serves as a visual anchor for the "spiritual homeland" within contemporary hearts. (Fang,2017) posits that the colours of rural art carry spiritual yearnings. This azure blue embodies the collective memory of the Miao people of their homeland's skies. Whether gazing at the clear heavens of childhood or glimpsing the horizon upon returning from distant travels, this shade of blue transforms into a resonance of nostalgia transcending time and space. It even evokes a shared yearning for a "pure, rural homeland" among viewers across regions.

The overall colour scheme forms an organic system characterised by "blue-green as the foundation, gold as the accent, warm brown as the core, and deep blue as the boundary". The natural space constructed by blue-green and azure blue forms a harmonious visual symbiosis with warm brown humanistic architecture and golden spiritual symbols. This not only replicates Yuanbaoshan's regional landscape of "blue skies, giant rocks, and wooden dwellings" but also subtly aligns with the triple dimensions of the homeland: "nature – humanity – spirit" (Peng, 2025). This colour system transforms specific regional landscapes into universal symbols of "authentic local identity": blue-green signifies ecological purity, warm brown embodies cultural simplicity, gold represents spiritual brilliance, and deep blue points towards inner tranquillity. These hues serve not merely as visual elements but as conduits linking regional ecology, collective memory, and universal spiritual aspirations. They enable viewers to "return to their homeland" through colour, allowing transregional observers to discover their own "spiritual homelands" through resonance. ultimately achieving an

emotional elevation from the "specific hometown" to the "shared spiritual homeland of humanity." This aligns with (Zeng,2020) ecological aesthetic principle that "artistic colour should construct a symbiotic dialogue between ecology and humanity."

From a painterly perspective, this depicts an ostensibly ordinary Miao village subject. Though portraying mundane scenes, I employed Chinese painting's most opulent colour palette, using the most resplendent hues to interpret this simple yet profound theme. The natural space woven from blue-green and azure hues captures Yuanbaoshan's "true essence"; The warm brown timber houses embody the evening warmth enveloped in the fragrance of rice drifting from the hearth, representing the roots of humanity; gold is concealed within the mossy glow and silver ornaments, symbolising the radiance of spirit. Viewers can feel the moisture of the mountain mist and the warmth of the timber houses, while simultaneously following the colours to their "spiritual homeland." This precisely fulfils the concept of "ecology and humanity coexisting" and demonstrates sincere respect for this ethnic culture. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025)

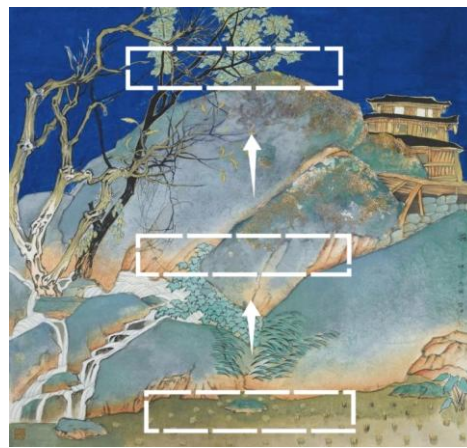


Figure 3: Wang Xuefeng, Composition of the work "Sunny Day"

The composition establishes a vertical visual axis through "water and fields — stone and vegetation — dwellings — sky" (as per Figure 3). Elements ascend orderly from the lower to upper frame, with the axis achieving symbolic transformation via the pathway of "visual form — rural survival logic — Collective Emotional Resonance," symbolically integrating the Miao people's "ecological dependence, foundational livelihood, and spiritual belonging" into the composition.

"Water" unfurls in sinuous lines across the lower canvas, extending through rock crevices and winding around vegetation. Its dynamic flow echoes the Miao people's survival logic of "water as lifeblood," where water sources form the settlement's core sustenance. The arrangement of "water near dwellings, water encircling stones" fulfils ecological necessities while embodying the cultural belief that "water is the lifeblood of the land." This symbolises the "source of rural life," awakening viewers' rural memories associated with water and fostering recognition of the "foundation of existence" in the countryside.

Moving upwards from the water, "stone and vegetation" fill the central composition with "stone as foundation, vegetation as accent": substantial rock formations provide stable support, while plants embedded in crevices break monotony, creating a "stillness-motion" equilibrium with water's fluidity. This visual composition mirrors the foundational principle of "mountains as

base, vegetation as utility" in daily life: rocky terrain provides ground for cultivation, while plant life yields fuel and sustenance. It crystallises the symbolic meaning of "nature's dual gifts to the homeland," evoking viewers' labour memories and deepening emotional recognition of "rural roots."

The "dwelling" adheres to the rock's form with its regular outline, facing the watercourse. It creates a visual contrast with natural elements while maintaining a harmonious connection through its shape. This embodies the Miao philosophy of "human habitation coexisting with nature," where the stilted house's location wisdom of "building against the mountain, dwelling beside the water" manifests ecological principles, carrying the meaning of "the core of rural life" (Fang & Mao, 2024). As the focal point of the composition, it evokes memories of communal dwelling, symbolising humanity's place within nature and deepening a sense of belonging.

The "sky" at the top of the composition unfolds in an expansive, ethereal form, blending seamlessly with the house to create a balanced "void above, substance below" composition. Its signifier resonates with the Miao belief of "venerating heaven as divine," where the sky embodies a "spiritual sanctuary" as the "abode of deities." Its expansive form subtly conveys "boundless protection," awakening viewers' spiritual memories tied to the heavens. This creates space for emotional resonance, fostering a sense of "spiritual belonging."

The four elements connect along a vertical order, completing the symbolic translation of the three-dimensional needs of "ecology – life – spirit." Through an implicit linear narrative, it guides the viewer along a visual path to understand the core of the countryside, achieving an emotional resonance that moves from "seeing the composition" to "understanding the countryside," providing an analytical framework for similar creations.

The composition seeks to thread together the authentic rhythms of Miao village life. The vertical arrangement naturally progresses along the daily logic "from sustenance beneath our feet to faith above our heads" – the most authentic narrative mode for Miao rural life. The water below mirrors the "stream of life" beside the village, nourishing rice fields and settlements while preserving the survival memory of "water as the lifeblood." The stones and vegetation ascending represent the mountain dwellers' ancestral reliance: massive rocks form terraced fields; houses cling to the stone facing the water, stilted wooden pillars driven into crevices, eaves tilted towards the stream. As evening smoke rises, this becomes a living testament to "human-nature symbiosis." The overall design invites viewers to follow this path, as if traversing a Miao village trail, deciphering the ecological roots, living spirit, and spiritual source of the countryside through its everyday scenes. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025)



Figure 4: Wang Xuefeng, Work: 'Sunny Day' – Expression of Natural Elements

The colossal rock formation serves as the central element permeating the composition, as depicted in Figure 4. It functions as the pivotal vehicle for conveying the concepts of "rural roots" and "the symbiosis of nature and humanity." Its significance unfolds progressively across three dimensions: visual presentation, cultural associations, and emotional resonance.

Traditional Chinese landscape painting has long regarded "rocks as the backbone of mountains," viewing boulders as symbols of "natural order" and "the foundation of heaven and earth." (Zong,1981), in discussing the spirit of traditional landscape painting, also noted that mountain rocks consistently bear the "visual metaphor of the relationship between heaven and humanity." In this work, the visual dominance of the boulder and its lines, blending rigidity with suppleness, perpetuate this cultural tradition: its stable form and the tranquil stilted houses behind it form a "natural foundation — human dwelling," while creating visual tension with the flowing water's dynamism. This subtly echoes the traditional landscape dialectic of "mountain as stillness, water as movement." The boulder serves both as the physical foundation supporting the stilted house and as a visual expression of the Miao people's survival philosophy of "dwelling by the mountain," profoundly resonating with the core logic of "revering and relying upon nature" within their local culture.

The "heavy weight" and "sense of time sedimentation" of the boulders are imbued with profound connotations of "local roots". (Fang,2006) observed that regional landscapes often serve as "containers for collective ethnic memory." These boulders stand as silent witnesses to generations of Qing Shan Village's continuity, their unchanging mass and form precisely mirroring the spiritual need for "stability and perpetuity" within rural culture. Compared to the dynamic shifts of flowing water and the seasonal cycles of trees, the immutability of these boulders serves as a central anchor for viewers' emotional projection: they bear the collective memory of the Miao people of an "unchanging homeland," while also evoking in cross-regional observers associations with "the mountains and stones of their own hometowns," thereby fostering an emotional resonance of "spiritual homecoming." This resonance aligns with (Gage,1999) assertion that "visual elements construct poetic dwelling spaces." The boulder serves as the most solid emotional foundation within this space, achieving an elevation from specific regional landscape to universal rural sentiment.

The boulders complete a full transformation from concrete landscape to emotional vessel: through regionalised visual treatment, they become an intuitive medium conveying Yuanbaoshan's natural character; through contemporary reinterpretation of cultural traditions, they articulate the eternal proposition of "nature-human symbiosis"; ultimately, through the universalisation of their emotional resonance, they ascend to become spiritual symbols bearing humanity's shared rural memory. This powerfully demonstrates that modern landscape painting can effectively convey the three-tiered rural essence of "regional character – cultural tradition – universal sentiment" through artistic treatment of concrete natural elements, providing a concrete and vivid case study for rural-themed artistic creation.

The solid form of the boulder visually resonates with the serene stilted houses and the fluidity of flowing water. I preserved its rugged texture and mossy quality. This unadorned appearance bears witness to the collective memory of generations nurtured within Qing Shan Village, as well as the enduring legacy of house-building, farming, and the enduring resilience of the homeland amidst shifting landscapes. The colossal mountain rock occupying two-thirds of the composition is not only a recreation of the actual scene but also a material embodiment of the Miao philosophy of building "in harmony with the terrain." It stands as a natural monument born of

karst topography and a silent witness to the passage of time. More than a visual symbol, it serves as a bridge connecting regional characteristics, cultural memory, and universal human emotions. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025)

The intertwined trees and vines within the composition, particularly those clinging to precipitous rock faces, translate the core rural ethos of "resilience of life" into an immediately perceptible visual language. The intricate root systems penetrate rock crevices and cling tenaciously to stone and soil. Their posture of "thriving against adversity" vividly embodies the survival ethos of the Miao ancestors who rooted themselves in their homeland and resisted hardship. It has become a symbolic imprint of the Miao people's indigenous practices for survival amidst adversity: bearing witness to the toil of their forebears in reshaping the landscape, while also carrying the collective memory of their ancestors' struggles. Vines weave through this scene as 'dynamic symbols', their sinuous trajectories disrupting the stillness of branches and trunks. Like flowing veins of life, they infuse the mountains and rocks with vitality, resonating with the Miao people's fundamental belief in the interconnectedness of all things (Guizhou Provincial Institute of Ethnic Studies, 2009). This profoundly aligns with the cultural tradition of "nature-human symbiosis," a symbiosis rooted in the people's deepest dependence upon the land beneath their feet.

The posture of trees reaching towards the sky and dwellings extends the "aspiration for elevation," symbolising the Miao people's steadfast pursuit of a better life amidst challenging terrain. Simultaneously, the branches' inclination towards the houses subtly evokes the warmth of "home," tightly binding natural instincts with a sense of belonging to the land. The alternation of decay and rebirth forms a symbolic system of "life's cycle," resonating with the Miao creation myth's cosmic vision of "the perpetual rotation of all things" (Yang, 2018). The core of Miao creation narratives lies in "the cycle of life and death, the perpetual renewal of all things." The withering of branches serves as a "phased symbol" of time's sedimentation, while the sprouting of new shoots embodies the "symbol of hope" for cultural transmission. Wisdom is passed down orally by the elder generation, while the younger generation grows nourished by the soil. Within this cycle lies the people's steadfast commitment to preserving their homeland's cultural heritage. The symbolism of trees serves as a "memory anchor" awakening collective nostalgia for the homeland. Trees transcend their natural attributes, becoming spiritual bonds linking individual memories to communal longing.

The grasses and low-growing plants clinging to the boulders complement the "symbol of life," reflecting the ordinary strength found in the soil. Though not towering like trees, they take root tenaciously in the crevices of the rock, much like the common folk of the Miao homeland—without earth-shattering feats, yet sustaining the functioning of their homeland and the transmission of their culture through daily perseverance. These diminutive plants infuse the austere rock with warm vitality, proclaiming that "ordinary life possesses strength." They also expand the "symbol of life" to encompass both macro and micro forms, resonating (Li, 2015) emphasis on the Miao ecological ethic of "equality among all beings." This rural empathy within equality represents the most unadorned elevation of hometown sentiment.

"Water flows in fluid curves, constructing a tableau of 'coexisting rigidity and suppleness'—a Miao emotional projection onto the native landscape. Seeping from the rocks that symbolise the homeland's foundation, its lines encircle the fields like a mother's arms, extending to the stilted houses. Here, the sinuous curves of water contrast with the angular rocks and the straight lines of the stilted structures, forming a 'soft versus hard' dichotomy. The 'softness' of water embodies the nurturing warmth of the homeland, while the 'rigidity' of rocks and structures

represents the steadfast shelter of home. This contrast in lines encodes the Miao people's philosophy of 'water as the lifeblood, home as the core', affirming that 'settling by water' is not merely a survival choice but a homely logic woven into their very blood (Guizhou Provincial Institute of Ethnic Studies, 2009).

The form of "water seeping through rock crevices and converging in valleys" embodies the fusion of the Miao ancestors' wisdom of "cultivating homes through water" with their deep-rooted connection to the land. The meticulous depiction of water flowing alongside terraced fields points to generations of "cultivating land by water": ancestors harnessed stream water to irrigate terraced paddies, carving livelihoods from rugged mountains, making "water" the pivotal element transforming "foreign lands" into "homelands". The rivers of Yuandao Mountain are not merely geographical features; they serve as emotional conduits through which ethnic groups build homelands and forge cultural identity by harnessing water resources (Guangxi Nationalities Research, 2020).

For those who have left their homeland, the streams depicted in paintings evoke collective memories: the scent of soapberries from their mothers washing clothes by the riverbank, the splashing sounds of children catching fish. Water becomes a cultural gene, elevating the "hometown" beyond geographical coordinates to an emotional imprint in the bloodline, sustaining attachment and identification with the homeland (Guizhou Provincial Institute of Ethnic Studies, 2009).

The symbol of water stands as the core vehicle for the Miao people's nostalgia for their homeland and their cultural memory. It serves as a symbolic bond, linking the natural contours of Yuandao Mountain with the Miao people's attachment to their homeland. Across visual, ecological, and emotional dimensions, it transforms abstract nostalgia into tangible visual language, forming a spiritual bridge connecting individuals to their ancestral roots. As the embodied manifestation of Miao nostalgia, it renders love and steadfastness towards the homeland visible and palpable, becoming a living testament to spiritual roots.



Figure 5: Miao Village, Stone-Set Dwellings, Actual Scene, Source: Photographed by researchers in Yuanbaoshan, Rongshui County, Guangxi, China, 2022

The stilted houses atop boulders are not mere architectural replicas; they are vibrant symbols of Miao rural sentiment within the tradition of Chinese landscape painting, where "form conveys meaning". Its warm wooden texture echoes the cosy warmth of life around the hearth, while its intricate mortise-and-tenon joints bear witness to the intergenerational transmission of family craftsmanship. Through dialogue with the mountain's weighty stone, it forges the Miao people's attachment to their homeland, their mountain-adapted survival wisdom, and their collective memory into a visual language. This not only aligns with the aesthetic core of

landscape painting aesthetic core of "heaven and man coexisting in harmony," while also becoming a tangible manifestation of the Miao people's inner image of home.

The cantilevered bases of stilted houses embed themselves into rock crevices along natural stone patterns—not merely adapting to terrain, but an intuitive expression of the vernacular dwelling logic where "homes are embedded within nature". As depicted in Figure 5: the curved overhang of the eaves dynamically echoes the drifting clouds on the horizon, as if the structure has reached a gentle understanding with the heavens. There is no rigid confrontation, only adaptation and symbiosis—a balanced relationship where the rocks support the building and the building nestles against the mountainside. This embodies the Miao people's fundamental understanding of dwelling in the homeland: the stability of the land is the foundation for the continuity of home; while reverence for nature is the prerequisite for the land's enduring vitality.


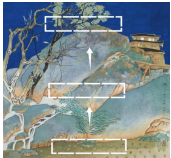

Amidst accelerating modernisation, the stilted houses' steadfast preservation of traditional aesthetics and construction techniques fundamentally safeguards the authentic character of the homeland (Guizhou Provincial Institute of Ethnic Studies, 2009). Within the scene, its static, grounded presence forms a visual counterpoint to the murmuring stream and the gentle sway of leaves — the stream embodying the rhythmic pulse of rural daily life, quietly nourishing the homestead; while the leaves symbolise the pulsing vitality of the homeland, silently transmitting energy. Within this interplay of stillness and movement lies the living essence and tranquillity of the countryside, metaphorically suggesting that, regardless of external changes, the fundamental character and vitality of the homeland remain unchanged. For the Miao people who have left their homeland, this stilted house serves as an anchor for rural memories: the wooden lattice windows evoke the daily routine of drying crops by the window, while the ox-horn shaped eaves recall ancestral tales told by elders. Thus, the landscape of Bright Sun becomes a "tangible rural memory," symbolically conveying the emotional bond to home.

The interplay of stillness and movement throughout the composition resonates with the tranquil essence of Miao rural life: the serene sky embodies the steadfast foundation of the homeland, while the weighty rocks represent the earth's solid grounding. The subtle rhythms of streams and leaves personify the homely warmth of daily existence—the sound of irrigation during harvest, the whisper of wind through leaves during quiet moments. This artistic conception mirrors the essence of Miao rural culture: within the rugged karst landscape, the homeland is not merely a place of dwelling but a wellspring of inner peace. It visually articulates an enduring pursuit—a reverence for nature, a commitment to communal continuity, and a steadfast dedication to the land's perpetuation.

Through sketching authentic scenes of Miao villages, this work not only captures the unique lifestyle and natural environment of China's Miao ethnic minority but also pays tribute to their wisdom. They have chosen to survive in the most challenging terrain, confronting a harsh natural landscape—strewn with massive rocks, scarce soil, and extremely severe living conditions. Yet, with tenacious vitality, the Miao have forged an admirable way of life upon this seemingly inhospitable land. This indomitable spirit forms the core theme I sought to convey in this work. Through this artistic expression, I hope viewers not only appreciate the majestic natural landscape of Yuanshaoshan but also grasp the wisdom and spirit of the Miao people in their harmonious coexistence with nature. This technique of elevating ordinary scenes into artistic expression not only lends greater depth to the imagery but also ensures the enduring commemoration of the Miao people's spirit. It further conveys my affection

for my homeland, Guangxi, and my commitment to promoting ethnic culture. (Wang Xuefeng, WeChat interview, 29 August 2025)

Table 1: Discovery: Symbolic Significance of Nostalgia in Wang Xuefeng's Work 'Sunny Day'

Artwork	Visual Form	Symbolic Code	Context	Local Sentiments Meaning
 <p>Figure 2</p>	Expressions of Colour	Blue-green Gold Dark Blue Warm brown	Pure Bright Tranquillity Timeless	Memories of the native land's ecology The warmth of rural life Sense of Belonging to Home
 <p>Figure 3</p>	Composition and Layout	Sky Houses Stone Vegetation Water Field Layered progression	Spirit Life Ecological	Human-Nature Symbiosis
 <p>Figure 4</p>	Natural elements Cultural Elements	Boulders Trees Wild grasses Streams Houses	Solid and eternal Thriving against adversity Vitality Source of Life Homestead	The Roots of Belonging Resilience and Memory Connection Homeland Imagery and Cultural Stewardship

5. Conclusion

Through his work, the artist expresses the concept of harmonious coexistence between nature and humanity, while also demonstrating his identification with Miao village culture and respect for traditional painting techniques. The authentic depiction of natural elements and their integration with traditional architecture within the paintings demonstrate this symbiosis. Using the natural landscapes of their homeland as a medium, the artist conveys the concept of nature and humanity coexisting. The elements within the paintings evoke tranquillity and vitality, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries. They transform the Miao village into a collective projection of "home" for viewers: both a faithful representation of Miao village life and a universal, unadorned yearning for a homeland. This connection further elevates into cultural preservation within modernity. Through their work, the artist preserves the texture of the homeland, countering cultural homogenisation. The paintings become spiritual vessels conveying the warmth of the land and perpetuating cultural memory, ultimately evoking a collective resonance to safeguard the roots of our homeland.

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