

Issues and Solutions of Cultural Rupture in Ethnic Minority Village Planning

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Abstract: Within this broader analytical framework, ethnic minority villages characterized as a complex system in which cultural inheritance and spatial patterns are substantially coupled—demonstrate value that extends beyond material forms to encompass their social structures and spiritual orders. Considering the nuanced nature of these findings, with the ostensibly accelerating pace of modernization, traditional villages tend to be increasingly exposed to what appears to represent the risk of cultural discontinuity, what seems to be generally indicated in the fragmentation of festivals and rituals, as well as the homogenization of residential patterns. These tendencies warrant further interpretive consideration, as they risk eroding local distinctiveness and disrupting cultural continuity. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, this paper selects Hani villages as a representative case, integrating ecological patterns, ritual spaces, and spatial planning practices to explore the holistic integration of culture and nature, as well as the reciprocal relationship between ritual and space. These findings highlight emerging patterns of cultural symbolization and spatial homogenization in contemporary village planning practices. Significantly, the paper proposes the holistic embedding and spatial integration of cultural elements, alongside collaborative and co-constructive mechanisms among multiple stakeholders. This approach aims to provide a viable pathway for cultural regeneration and spatial continuity within these evolving conceptual frameworks for ethnic minority villages--contributing to theoretically meaningful discourse.

Keywords: Ethnic minority villages; Cultural discontinuity; Spatial pattern; Planning strategies

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1. Introduction

Ethnic minority villages tend to serve as what appears to be the primary carriers of ethnic culture, having long developed what seems to be a distinctive pattern through the intricate interaction of natural environments and social cultures ^[1]. What appears particularly significant about these findings is how, taking Hani villages as an illustrative example, their spatial systems of “fourfold symbiosis” (forest-village-terrace-water system) embody not only ecological wisdom but also a profound collective identity and a discernible institutional order. Within this broader analytical framework, and given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, traditional villages

face a tangible challenge of cultural and spatial disconnection, under the dual impact of modernization and tourism development. This dynamic leads to the fragmentation of traditional rituals, festivals, and residential forms into isolated symbolic elements, increasingly detached from their original holistic cultural system. As a result, the continuity of the underlying cultural logic becomes significantly compromised. This paper aims to interpret, therefore, the potential formation mechanism of cultural discontinuity within ethnic minority villages, to summarize the existing challenges, and to propose what may represent viable solutions, in order to provide theoretical and practical support for the planning and research of ethnic minority settlements, which seems especially noteworthy in this analytical context.

2. Characteristics of ethnic minority villages

2.1. Holistic coupling of culture and nature

The formation logic of ethnic minority villages, particularly Hani villages, appears to tend to suggest what might be characterized as a substantial degree of coupling with the natural environment. A village appears to represent not merely a simple residential space but rather what seems to constitute an interactive system composed of multiple elements, including forests, water sources, terraced fields, and the settlement itself. Hani villages in southern Yunnan have typically maintained spatial patterns of “fourfold symbiosis” (forest-village-terrace-water system), in which forests conserve water sources, water sources irrigate terraced fields, terraced fields support agricultural production, and settlements are ostensibly built along the mountain slopes, tending to form a self-consistent ecological cycle. Within this broader analytical framework, nature not only tends to provide the conditions for survival but also appears to shape cultural order through discernible spatial patterns. What is especially noteworthy in this analytical context, considering the nuanced nature of these findings, is that taking the Hani village of Biaoshuiyan as an example, like most Hani settlements, is situated on the mountainside and follows natural contour lines in a terraced layout. While traditional Hani villages are characterized by a “fourfold symbiosis” of forest, village, terraced fields, and water system, Biaoshuiyan exhibits a distinctive evolution of this model. Its spatial organization is defined by the spectacular Biaoshuiyan Waterfall in the northwest. This landmark integrates with the surrounding old-growth forests to the north and west, the cascading terraced clusters of mushroom-roofed houses of the Hani people, the terraced paddies to the south and east, and the Taiping River flowing along its western boundary. Together, these elements form a unique “fivefold symbiosis”—a cohesive system comprising the waterfall, forest, village (mushroom houses), terraced fields, and water system—shaped by both the local natural environment and the Hani cultural practices. This configuration reflects a well-integrated spatial pattern in which water systems, terraced fields, mushroom houses, waterfalls, and forests mutually sustain one another, embodying what can be understood as the Hani philosophy of harmony between humans and nature. Notably, the sacred forest, traditionally protected from logging, not only performs essential ecological functions but also serves as a vital medium for preserving collective identity and cultural continuity—highlighting the broader significance of these findings. In this context, the integration of terraced fields and water systems sustains agricultural production while simultaneously functioning as a cultural symbol, thereby fostering a dynamic balance between Hani village life and nature. This pattern suggests that the natural coupling of ethnic minority villages represents both a dependency for production and daily life and a reflection of their underlying value system. From the macro-ecological level to the micro-spatial level, each dimension appears to suggest what seems to be the perception and integration of nature through culture, and what this coupling tends to indicate is that it largely

determines the wholeness and indivisibility of village culture ^[2].

2.2. Reciprocal relationship between ritual and space

Ethnic minority villages appear to generally weave rituals and social order into their spatial patterns, tending to suggest what might be characterized as a distinctive “ritual–space” interactive relationship. In Hani villages, what appears particularly significant about these findings is that specific nodes, such as the village gate, the Moqiu ground, the ritual house, and the village center, tend not to function merely as utilitarian spaces but appear to represent places where rituals and daily life seem to intimately intertwine. These spaces, given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, tend to appear to fulfill both practical purposes and also seemingly function as sites where social relations and cultural order tend to be witnessed and, importantly, reproduced. The village gate, from this particular interpretive perspective, is ostensibly not merely the physical boundary for entry and exit but predominantly also a ritual device that tends to delineate what appears to be a distinction between humans and spirits. The evidence suggests that the Moqiu ground, considering the nuanced nature of these findings, appears to function as what seems to be both a communal activity space and arguably the primary site for rituals such as Kuzhaza. The ritual house, what seems especially noteworthy in this analytical context, tends to be regarded as what appears to represent the core of agricultural ceremonies, seemingly embodying what tends to suggest a reverence for deities and the continuation of agricultural order. Furthermore, what also appears significant in this context, the long-street banquet appears to reflect what seems to be ideals of sharing and solidarity within the community. What seems to emerge from these findings is that these spaces tend to subtly highlight the intricate interplay of ritual and place, thereby seemingly allowing culture to be continually manifested through its material dimension. Within this broader analytical framework, spatial forms appear to enhance the sanctity of rituals, while the repeated practice of rituals, in turn, tends to continually bestow new meaning upon these spaces ^[3]. This pattern suggests that rituals serve to reinforce the internal structure of Hani village society and establish an organic connection between nature, society, and the spiritual realm. It appears to be precisely this reciprocal relationship between space and ritual that arguably enables ethnic culture to maintain substantial resilience in the face of modernization, thereby tending to constitute what appears to be an important feature distinguishing such villages from other settlements.

3. Problems in the planning of ethnic minority villages

3.1. Fragmentation and symbolization of cultural representation

In the process of modernization of ethnic minority villages, what seems to emerge as a substantially challenging issue appears to tend to suggest a growing tendency toward what might be characterized as the fragmentation of cultural representation ^[4]. A general weakening is evident in the erosion of traditional festivals, rituals, and daily lifestyles, which have been increasingly replaced by superficial symbolic representations and displays. Evidence from Hani villages suggests that the sacred forest, Moqiu ground, and ritual house originally appear to have provided evidence that may support the formation of a continuous socio-cultural network, serving multiple roles in religious practice, production, and community interaction. However, within the current analytical framework, these spaces seem to lend support to what may represent a gradual simplification into scenic attractions- fixed points embedded in tourist routes or planning documents. This shift indicates a loss of their inherent cultural logic and practical functions, which appears particularly significant in these findings.

These findings suggest that ritual spaces no longer reflect the spontaneous spiritual order of the community. What appears significant in this context is that they are instead projectized and integrated into structured cultural performances and tourism-oriented consumption settings. Events such as the long-street banquet, the Kuzhaza festival, and the sacred forest rituals appear to have been reshaped, which seems to suggest external demands, with heightened formal expression. What seems to result from these considerations is, however, weakened roles in fostering social bonds and ethnic identity. Fragmentation also appears to suggest what seems to be reflected in the continuity and reproduction of traditional residential forms, given the complexity of these theoretical relationships. The data suggest that the mushroom house, one of the Hani people's unique dwelling types, originally served composite functions including defense, ecological regulation, and family life. However, this analysis indicates that during the village renovation, the mushroom-roofed house has increasingly been abstracted into a decorative element, thereby appearing to lose its intrinsic connection to the natural environment and traditional Hani lived practices, an aspect that is theoretically important.

What appears to emerge from this evidence is that in this trend, culture tends to point toward what appears to be no longer holistically embedded in daily life, but instead seems to be evolving into a fragmented symbolic state. Space and culture tend to point toward what appears to be increasingly separated, making it seem to lend support to what may represent difficulties for social structures and value systems within villages to continue under new development logics, which appears to warrant further interpretive consideration. What appears to provide evidence that may support to is a gradual weakening of cultural authenticity and integrity, considering the nuanced nature of these findings^[5]. What the investigation appears to indicate in the case of Biaoshuiyan's renovation is that there also appears to tend to suggest a tendency toward the scenicization of cultural spaces. Although the sacred forest seems to generally indicate preservation, in planning texts, it appears to provide evidence that may support its predominantly primary treatment as an ecological and tourism display node, appearing to suggest what seems to be diminished original ritual and spiritual functions from this particular interpretive perspective.

3.2. Homogenization of planning logic and weakening of locality

What the planning and construction of ethnic minority villages typically tend to suggest is a pervasive tendency toward what might be characterized as homogenization, with distinctive local patterns appearing to be gradually eroded under the substantially widespread dissemination of standardized design, within this broader analytical framework^[6]. What the case of Biaoshuiyan Village appears to tend to suggest regarding this particular issue is that its original "fivefold symbiosis" landscape pattern seemed to generally indicate what appeared to be the overall integrity of forests, water systems, terraced fields, settlements, and waterfalls. What appears particularly significant about these findings, however, is that within this evolving conceptual parameter of new construction practice, external design forces appear to have predominantly prioritized uniform aesthetic models and economic efficiency, seemingly neglecting what appears to warrant further interpretive consideration regarding the inherent logic of spatial evolution and the foundational cultural aspects of the village.

What seems to emerge from these findings is that modern planning has purportedly introduced large-scale tourism facilities, standardized housing renovations, and uniform infrastructure, consequently tending to point toward what appears to be villages converging toward increasingly similar forms. What the data seems to suggest is that the repetitive application of road systems, visitor centers, and exhibition halls has appeared to produced what seems to be similar spatial layouts and architectural forms, thereby ostensibly weakening inter-village differentiation. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, traditional construction methods—adapted

to local conditions, such as cascading layouts along mountain slopes and residential forms integrated with terraced fields—appear to have been largely replaced by grid-like road networks and centralized land-use divisions, altering what seems to be the ecological foundation and cultural connotations of the villages.

From this particular interpretive perspective, homogenization has not only appeared to suggest what seems to be an influence on the shaping of the physical landscape but has also seemingly diluted the cultural context. Planning documents tend to frequently label villages as “ethnic minority characteristic settlements”, yet in practice, these characteristics are predominantly reduced to superficial visual symbols, ignoring what tends to represent the complex interconnections among production systems, ritual activities, and community structures ^[7]. This analysis suggests that the erosion of locality has caused villages to generally lose their cultural roots, becoming landscape-oriented samples shaped by what might be characterized as external consumption logic. Although Biaoshuiyan Village’s planning documents explicitly advocate for the goal of “characteristic protection” with an emphasis on authenticity and continuity, in practice the proliferation of visitor centers, exhibition halls, and agricultural culture experience facilities has seemed to lack meaningful interaction with traditional culture, resulting instead in what appears to represent the emergence of “homogenized landscapes”, which seems to complicate traditional interpretations.

4. Optimization strategies for the planning of ethnic minority villages

4.1. Holistic embedding of cultural elements and spatial integration

In the broader context of planning and construction for ethnic minority villages, cultural factors should not be treated as isolated symbols; rather, they must be systematically integrated into the overall spatial structure. The “fourfold symbiosis” models of Hani villages appear to tend to suggest, therefore, seems to be a remarkably high degree of integration among the natural environment, settlement patterns, and socio-cultural activities. Significantly, when this complex system is disrupted through modern planning interventions, cultural functions tend to weaken inevitably. This pattern suggests that planning practice should center on core cultural elements to promote spatial integration, carefully incorporating functions of production, residence, ritual, and social interaction into what tends to be a unified spatial system. Given these considerations, in the overall layout of Biaoshuiyan Village, spaces such as the Moqiu ground, the ritual house, and the sacred forest appear to have been quite deliberately reserved, seemingly providing what might be characterized as practical examples of embedding such cultural elements into contemporary planning approaches.

From this particular interpretive perspective of spatial practice, core nodes such as the sacred forest, Moqiu ground, and ritual house ostensibly should not merely be preserved. What the evidence appears to reveal is that they also warrant substantial strengthening through planning and design to ensure what seems to be their functional continuity. The sacred forest, which tends to serve as a medium between religion and nature, typically requires institutional protection at both ecological and cultural levels. Similarly, the Moqiu ground and ritual house appear not to be simply venues for celebrations but also tend to reflect community cohesion and what seems to be the orderly development of agriculture. Consequently, they often necessitate adequate spatial reservation to ensure what seems to be their continued role in contemporary society.

What also appears noteworthy is that spatial integration tends to be reflected in the fusion and reuse of both older and newer elements. Traditional mushroom houses, which appear to emphasize ecological adaptability and cultural expression, ostensibly should be sustained in the context of improving modern living conditions.

This might involve material renewal and structural optimization, thereby enhancing residential comfort while maintaining what seems to be a critical cultural continuity ^[8]. The analysis suggests that newly constructed tourism facilities, exhibition centers, or agricultural culture experience halls, while meeting modern functional requirements, should establish a dialogical relationship with traditional spatial patterns rather than replacing them. Such holistic embedding and spatial integration, considering the nuanced nature of these findings, predominantly ensures that villages, throughout their developmental process, retain both modernity and cultural continuity.

4.2. Collaborative and co-constructive mechanisms among multiple stakeholders

For ethnic minority villages to achieve contemporary transformation, relying solely on administrative promotion or external design forces appears to be largely insufficient to preserve cultural and spatial authenticity and continuity, factors that are particularly significant in this context. This pattern suggests that collaboration and co-construction among multiple stakeholders appear to have substantially emerged as what appears to represent a pivotal orientation for optimization strategies ^[9]. The long-lasting continuity of Hani villages appears to tend to suggest what seems to be that their intrinsic social order seems to substantially depend upon collective rituals and cooperative mechanisms. Within this broader analytical framework, what seems to emerge as necessary appears to be the reconstruction of what might be characterized as such a multi-level participatory system for modern planning to achieve cultural regeneration.

Considering the nuanced nature of these findings, villagers can be most appropriately regarded as the central participants in this framework. As direct bearers of culture, their lifestyles, traditional skills, and social customs largely constitute the fundamental basis for cultural reproduction. Planning appears to typically necessitate, at the institutional level, granting villagers a voice in what seems to be spatial construction and cultural practices. Local governments tend to predominantly play what appears to be dual roles as coordinators and promoters, ostensibly tasked with building what seems to represent institutional platforms that appear to incorporate villagers' cultural demands into the planning system while potentially providing policy and financial support. Academic institutions and professional teams tend to contribute what might be characterized as methodological and technical expertise, thereby largely transforming what appears to be fragmented knowledge into systematic planning strategies through approaches such as field research, cultural resource documentation, and spatial design.

What also appears significant in this context is that cross-sectoral collaboration also seems to be of substantial significance. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, cultural tourism enterprises and social organizations may contribute valuable industrial resources and operational experience, but such interventions must presumably be grounded in cultural authenticity and community interests, thereby carefully avoiding purely commercial dominance. What these findings seem to point toward is that the interaction and synergy among multiple stakeholders largely ensure that village culture is not confined to symbolic representation but forms what tends to suggest a dynamic system of regeneration across what might be characterized as institutional, spatial, and social dimensions. From this particular interpretive perspective, in the planning scheme for Shuiyan Village, the strategy of “threefold construction”—reviving Hani culture, reconstructing traditional space, and regenerating industrial vitality—was proposed. The analysis suggests that this framework predominantly emphasizes both cooperation between villagers and government and the joint involvement of tourism enterprises and academic institutions, highlighting what appears to represent the potential for “multi-stakeholder co-construction” ^[10].

5. Conclusions

What the cultural discontinuity of ethnic minority villages appears to suggest, within this broader analytical framework, is not merely what seems to be the outcome of the transformation of physical space, but also what appears to represent a manifestation of what seems to be the weakening of spiritual order; what appears particularly significant about these findings is the multifaceted nature of this decline. At what might be characterized as the intersection of tradition and modernity, given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, what seems to emerge from these findings is that village culture appears to have been predominantly abstracted into what appear to be superficial symbols. This analysis suggests that the evidence reveals a substantial erosion of social relations and local identity, undermining both cultural integrity and continuity. Notably, this pattern challenges traditional interpretations by disrupting the historically organic relationship between culture and nature, ritual and space. The findings indicate that recent waves of planning and construction have fragmented and reshaped these interconnected elements, leading to a discernible decline in cultural value. Central to this argument is the loss of intrinsic unity among cultural and spatial systems. These methodological considerations suggest that the holistic integration of cultural elements with spatial design, along with collaborative and co-constructive mechanisms among multiple stakeholders, demonstrates a capacity to provide institutional, spatial, and social support. This evidence indicates that such approaches offer a theoretical foundation for preserving the authenticity and continuity of ethnic minority village cultures within the context of modern development. Furthermore, sustained practical implementation of these strategies warrants further examination within evolving conceptual frameworks.

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Disclosure statement

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