

# A Brief Analysis of the Protection and Inheritance Paths of Ethnic Minority Cultures in Yunnan's Border Happy Villages Under the Background of Rural Revitalization Strategy

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**Abstract:** As an important strategic area located on China's southwest border, Yunnan Province has a 4,188-kilometer-long border line, with 16 indigenous ethnic minorities living across the border, boasting extremely rich ethnic cultural diversity. In response to the development needs of the new era, Yunnan Province has launched and implemented the modern border happy village construction project. In this construction process, traditional ethnic minority cultures are not only important cultural resources and spiritual wealth but also key components of rural revitalization. Focusing on the core theme of "the protection and inheritance paths of ethnic minority cultures in Yunnan's border happy villages", this paper explores the following key issues: First, what are the main achievements and challenges in the construction of Yunnan's border happy villages? Second, what specific measures and mechanisms have been adopted for the protection and inheritance of traditional ethnic minority cultures? Third, how to promote the integrated development of culture, industry, and tourism, and what practical problems exist? Fourth, how to achieve the coordinated development of cultural protection and modernization? Through a systematic analysis of these issues, this paper strives to provide theoretical guidance and practical references for the deepening paths of border happy village construction and ethnic cultural protection.

**Keywords:** Rural revitalization; Border happy village; Ethnic minority culture; Protection and inheritance

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## 1. Development status and achievements of border happy village construction in Yunnan province

### 1.1. Significant improvement of infrastructure and basic public services

Modern border happy villages are a new development model for border areas proposed by Yunnan Province, in the background of the rural revitalization strategy, which is a systematic and all-round modern village renovation project <sup>[1]</sup>. In terms of infrastructure, from 2021 to 2023, Yunnan Province coordinated and

allocated 13.8 billion yuan for the construction of border happy villages, carrying out comprehensive construction in 374 border administrative villages. Among them, infrastructure such as transportation, communication, and water conservancy has achieved leapfrog development<sup>[2]</sup>. The improvement of key facilities such as hardened roads, power supply, and 5G network coverage has not only improved the living conditions of border residents but also promoted connectivity and information flow between regions.

In terms of public services, basic public services such as education, medical care, and elderly care have been tilted towards border villages. Breakthrough progress has also been made in key people's livelihood facilities, such as domestic waste treatment and sewage management<sup>[3]</sup>. These improvements are not only directly related to the sense of gain, happiness, and security of border residents but also create necessary material conditions for subsequent economic development and cultural inheritance.

### **1.2. New engine for characteristic industry development and economic growth**

Prosperous industries are the foundation of rural revitalization. Adhering to the principle of "one county, one industry; one village, one product", Yunnan's border happy villages have built a differentiated characteristic industrial system relying on the natural resources and geographical advantages of each village, forming high-value industrial chains dominated by tea, coffee, etc. By 2025, each village will have at least one leading industry, with an annual collective economic income of over 100,000 yuan<sup>[4]</sup>. New formats such as rural tourism and agricultural product processing complement traditional agriculture, providing opportunities for young people to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship; most border happy villages have established farmers' professional cooperatives, improving the organizationalization level and bargaining power of farmers, laying the foundation for increasing border residents' income, and effectively curbing the outflow of border residents and rural hollowing-out.

### **1.3. Improvement of ethnic unity and the grassroots governance system**

The stability and development of border areas require a strong governance foundation. The construction of Yunnan's border happy villages takes the modernization of grassroots governance as an important content, advancing various tasks by improving the rural governance system and enhancing grassroots governance capacity. It strengthens the leading position of the Party, gives full play to the leading role of village-level Party organizations, and ensures the implementation of the Party's lines, principles, and policies at the grassroots level. At the same time, it innovates governance methods, introducing modern governance concepts and technologies on the basis of respecting traditional grassroots autonomy<sup>[5]</sup>. Through these measures, the modernization level of the grassroots governance system has been continuously improved, and the participation and satisfaction of villagers have also increased accordingly. More importantly, in the governance process, it emphasizes the equality, unity, and mutual assistance of all ethnic groups, consciously forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, making grassroots governance an important platform for exchanges and integration among all ethnic groups and enhancing mutual understanding.

## **2. Protection and inheritance mechanisms of traditional ethnic minority cultures in Yunnan**

### **2.1. Institutional innovation of ethnic cultural ecological protection zones**

Yunnan has innovatively established a system of ethnic traditional cultural ecological protection zones,

focusing on delineating specific areas and comprehensively protecting intangible cultural heritage (ICH), adhering to three combination principles such as government leadership and social participation, and providing institutional and financial support <sup>[6]</sup>. At present, Yunnan has established more than 85 cultural ecological protection zones, as well as multiple ICH inheritance bases and workshops, which not only ensure the integrity and authenticity of ethnic cultures but also contribute to their living inheritance.

## **2.2. Protection and inheritance system of intangible cultural heritage**

China has practiced ICH protection for 30 years, and Yunnan has formed a multi-level protection system from the national to the provincial, municipal, and county levels, covering systems such as representative works and inheritor recognition <sup>[7]</sup>. By supporting inheritors, building inheritance and learning platforms, and combining teacher-apprentice inheritance, school, and community education, it addresses the problems of aging inheritors and the shortage of successor talents; at the same time, it preserves materials for cultural inheritance through digital protection and archive construction.

## **2.3. Practices of cultural creativity and innovative development**

While protecting traditional cultures, Yunnan promotes its creative transformation and innovative development, integrating culture with modern life and industries. For example, traditional handicrafts are integrated with modern design, national cultures are disseminated through new media, and national festivals are integrated with modern elements, realizing the complementarity of cultural protection and innovative development, which not only retains the core values of culture but also endows it with new vitality <sup>[8]</sup>.

# **3. Mechanisms and paths of integrated development of culture and industry in Yunnan's Border Happy Villages**

## **3.1. Empowerment of rural tourism for cultural protection and inheritance**

Rural tourism is an important path for cultural protection and inheritance as well as rural revitalization in Yunnan's border areas. Ethnic characteristic villages and traditional buildings are their core attractions, which can balance cultural display and economic benefits <sup>[9]</sup>. In the construction of border happy villages, it is necessary to balance protection and development. By establishing a benefit-sharing mechanism and clarifying protection norms, tourism can feed back cultural protection, avoiding cultural alienation or lack of vitality.

## **3.2. Multi-dimensional coupling mechanism of ICH industrialization of ethnic minorities**

ICH resources in border areas such as Yunnan's Dai pottery and Dulong blankets have been transformed through industrialization, forming a multi-dimensional coupling mechanism: integration of traditional craftsmanship and modern design, connection of traditional production and modern markets, cooperation between inheritors and enterprise designers, and linkage between local industries and international markets. This mechanism can not only achieve economic benefits but also provide a sustainable impetus for the living inheritance of ICH <sup>[10]</sup>.

## **3.3. Comprehensive model of integrated cultural and tourism development**

The integration of culture and tourism is an important trend in rural revitalization in ethnic areas. Relying

on resources such as characteristic villages and traditional villages, Yunnan's border happy villages have formed three major models: "culture + tourism" to innovate products and create in-depth experience projects; "culture + industry" to integrate and expand, driving the development of related industrial clusters; "culture + community" to achieve common prosperity, allowing local residents to benefit through the establishment of a benefit-sharing mechanism.

## **4. Problems and challenges in the protection and inheritance of traditional ethnic minority cultures**

### **4.1. Aging of ICH inheritors and talent gap**

In border ethnic minority villages, the aging of ICH inheritors and the talent gap are prominent. Elderly inheritors master core cultures, while young people are less motivated to inherit due to their tendency to live in cities and the relatively low income of traditional craftsmanship, threatening the intergenerational transmission of culture. Encouraging and cultivating young inheritors has become an urgent problem to be solved<sup>[11]</sup>.

### **4.2. Balance between cultural alienation and authenticity protection**

In the construction of modern border happy villages, driven by market demand and commercial interests, some ethnic cultures have become overly commercialized and performative, and even deviated from their essential connotations. Although economic benefits are obtained in the short term, it damages the authenticity and nationality of culture, which is not conducive to long-term and in-depth inheritance.

### **4.3. Contradiction between protection and development**

In the cultural construction of ethnic minorities in border happy villages, there is no clear standard for balancing protection and development. Both over-protection and over-development have drawbacks. At the same time, the limited financial and human resources in border areas restrict the depth and breadth of the construction of protection zones.

### **4.4. Cultivation of cultural confidence and national identity**

Affected by modernization and globalization, the sense of national cultural identity and cultural confidence of ethnic minority groups in border areas, especially young people, have declined, affecting the internal motivation for cultural inheritance. It is necessary to enhance their cultural confidence and national identity through education, publicity, and community participation<sup>[12]</sup>.

## **5. Integration of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation and cultural inheritance**

### **5.1. Mechanism of ICH empowering ethnic unity**

Intangible cultural heritage has a unique social education function and can become an important carrier for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. While protecting and inheriting their own cultures, all ethnic groups in Yunnan's border areas also conduct cultural exchanges and integration<sup>[13]</sup>. Through joint participation in activities such as national festivals and ethnic cultural exhibitions, people of all

ethnic groups enhance understanding, resolve differences, and strengthen identity in cultural interaction. For example, cross-ethnic participation in national festivals, mutual appreciation and learning of ethnic cultures, and joint market-oriented development of ethnic characteristic products have all become important ways for unity and integration among all ethnic groups. These cultural practices neither weaken the nationality of each ethnic group nor split the unity of the Chinese nation, but emphasize unity and identity on the basis of acknowledging diversity.

## **5.2. Interaction between cultural identity and political identity**

In border areas, the inheritance and protection of ethnic cultures are directly related to the identity of people of all ethnic groups with the country, society, and the Chinese nation community. When people feel that their culture is respected and protected, and their ethnic characteristics are preserved and inherited in daily life, they will have a deeper trust and identity with the country. The initiative of “cultural enrichment of villages” in the construction of Yunnan’s border happy villages is a specific embodiment of combining cultural protection with ethnic unity and social governance. By building cultural facilities, organizing cultural activities, and formulating cultural policies, people of all ethnic groups can perceive national care, social respect, and ethnic equality in cultural inheritance, thereby enhancing their identity with the Chinese nation community.

## **6. Key directions for future development**

### **6.1. Deepening talent training and intergenerational inheritance**

In response to the problems of aging ICH inheritors, talent outflow, and inheritance gaps in border happy villages, establish a talent training mechanism suitable for border characteristics. First, build ICH inheritance and training bases, link with surrounding colleges and universities, and cultivate “double-qualified” local talents proficient in ethnic craftsmanship and mastering modern cultural and creative skills and online marketing. Second, implement subsidy incentives in combination with border assistance policies, improve the treatment of inheritors, attract young people to return to their hometowns, and encourage teenagers to learn craftsmanship. Third, improve the teacher-apprentice inheritance system, combined with point rewards and honorary commendations, to ensure the intergenerational transmission of craftsmanship.

### **6.2. Scientific balance between cultural innovation and authenticity protection**

Based on the uniqueness of the village’s ethnic culture, establish a scientific innovation and protection mechanism. First, formulate evaluation standards, set up a village-level cultural protection group to supervise cultural and creative and folk custom innovation activities, and prevent excessive commercialization and alienation <sup>[14]</sup>. Second, dig deep into the core connotations of ethnic culture related to border defense and neighborhood harmony, guide innovators to retain the essence of culture, and create achievements with both ethnic and border characteristics.

### **6.3. Integration of ethnic cultural ecological protection and community participation**

Taking villagers as the main body, promote community participation in cultural protection. First, establish a “cultural protection + benefit-sharing” mechanism, allowing villagers to benefit from participating in cultural protection, performances, and cultural and creative activities <sup>[15]</sup>. Second, formulate village-level ethnic

cultural protection norms, clarify villagers' responsibilities, and guide them to protect cultural carriers. Third, smooth participation channels, listen to villagers' opinions, and stimulate internal motivation.

#### **6.4. Multi-dimensional cultural publicity and identity building**

Strengthen the cultural confidence and identity of border ethnic minorities through multi-channel publicity. First, rely on cultural venues in the village to carry out cultural lectures, folk custom experience, and other activities to enhance a sense of belonging. Second, link schools, sentry posts, and neighboring villages to carry out cultural exchanges and promote mutual identity among people of all ethnic groups. Third, use new media to publicize the village's culture and stories of defending the border and inheriting culture, expand influence, and attract young people to participate.

#### **6.5. Exploration of technology empowerment and digital culture**

Use digital technology to solve border inheritance problems and achieve long-term inheritance. First, rely on digital assistance policies to establish digital archives and databases of ethnic cultures for permanent preservation of resources. Second, explore forms such as digital ICH, online teaching, and live streaming to break geographical restrictions and expand the scope of cultural communication. Third, build digital cultural exhibition areas to assist the integration of culture and tourism and strengthen the role of technology empowerment.

### **7. Conclusion**

The implementation of the rural revitalization strategy has pointed out the direction for the development of Yunnan's border ethnic areas. The remarkable achievements made in the construction of modern border happy villages in terms of infrastructure, economic development, and public services have laid a material foundation for the protection and inheritance of traditional ethnic minority cultures. At the same time, Yunnan's explorations and practices in ethnic cultural ecological protection, ICH inheritance system construction, and cultural innovative development have found new paths for the living inheritance of ethnic cultures. The integrated development of culture with industry, tourism, and governance is not only a need to adapt to the times but also an inevitable choice to achieve the sustainable inheritance of culture. Through these integrations, traditional cultures have gained new vitality and forms of expression, ethnic minority groups have obtained more development opportunities, and ethnic unity and a sense of community have been deepened.

However, issues such as the balance between cultural inheritance and modernization, talent training, and authenticity protection still need in-depth exploration. Future work should pay more attention to systematicness and scientificity, establish a more perfect policy support system, stimulate the internal motivation of grassroots and communities, and promote the protection, inheritance, and innovative development of traditional ethnic minority cultures on the basis of following the laws of cultural development, injecting more profound cultural connotations into rural revitalization. At the same time, people should deepen the understanding of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, take cultural protection and inheritance as an important way to promote ethnic unity and enhance national identity, and continuously strengthen the identity and sense of belonging of people of all ethnic groups to the Chinese nation community in the living practice of culture, providing cultural motivation and spiritual support for the

long-term stability and high-quality development of border areas.

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