

Research on Villages Classification and Development Strategy under the Concept of “Five States” Fusion ——Taking Traditional Villages in Southern Shaanxi as an Example

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ABSTRACT: As the origin and an important carrier of Chinese traditional culture, traditional villages have been irreversibly affected by population loss, unused land, ecological damage and cultural annihilation through urbanisation and modernisation. Accordingly, their protection and development are facing practical problems, such as recession, disappearance and transformation. Based on the embeddedness of local characteristics and local culture in the traditional villages, and combined with the evolution characteristics and resources endowment of traditional villages, the multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional, and dynamic research perspectives are applied to explore the suitable and efficient strategies classified protection and development for traditional villages. Traditional villages are structural organisms in which humans and nature symbiotically interact in a specific time and space process, confirming the trajectories of activities and true effects of economic and social development in different historical stages. This paper constructs a ternary regional system for traditional villages by incorporating the traditional village spatial subject research into the traditional dual analysis framework of ‘Human and Land’. This paper further proposes the traditional village analysis method centring on ‘Five States’ fusion, focusing on the village’s ecology, culture, industry and space and the endogenous linkages and co-progress between these elements. A diversified, adaptable and complicated traditional village collaborative development mechanism is summarised by analysing the multiple types of interactions and combination relationships generated by each element. At the same time, combined with the life cycle evolution process of traditional villages covering ‘Formation-Development-Maturity-Decay-Rejuvenation’ and based on the analysis of dynamic transformations and transformations between ecology, culture, industry and space, the following is put forward in the paper. First, in the ‘Formation-Development’ stage, the traditional villages present the development characteristics of ‘Ecological Resource Concentration’. Second, in the ‘Development-Maturity’ stage, the traditional villages present the development specialty of ‘Industrial function Symbiosis’. Third, in the ‘Mature-Decay’ stage, the traditional villages present the development impetus of ‘Differentiated Collage Organisation’. Finally, in the stage of ‘Decay-Rejuvenation’, the traditional villages present the development change of the ‘Adaptation and Regulation Between Culture and Landscape’.

KEY WORDS: five states; traditional villages; classification; development strategy; Southern Shaanxi

Traditional villages, as the root and important carrier of Chinese traditional culture, embody a unique blend of

local characteristics and ethnic styles. These vernacular cultural elements are pivotal in implementing the rural re-

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vitalization strategy under the context of the new era. The protection of traditional villages has been identified by the academic community as one of the most significant research areas within the domain of Chinese traditional culture for the next decade[1]. Since the first announcement of the Chinese Traditional Village List in 2012, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, along with other governmental bodies, has released five batches, totaling 6819 traditional villages across 30 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. Several laws and regulations have been enacted, elevating the protection and development of traditional villages to a national strategic level. However, the rapid advancement of urbanization and modernization in China has increasingly highlighted the conflict between the economic and social development needs of rural areas and the protection of traditional villages, naturally leading to challenges in the development and transformation of these villages[2]. Today, many traditional villages, after undergoing “reformation” or “revolution,” are facing issues such as conceptual deviations leading to the destruction of their original appearance, extensive development resulting in malignant outcomes, and the intensification of conflicts due to multiple competing demands. Thus, as efforts to protect and develop traditional villages continue, it is crucial to employ a multi-methodological theoretical perspective to scientifically understand these villages, explore the characteristics of their evolution and classify their development, and propose targeted, more efficient classification-based development strategies.

As a scientific and intuitive research method, the classification of traditional villages has gained recognition and attention from the academic community, with research interest continuing to rise. Reviewing existing research by domestic and international experts and scholars, the classification of traditional villages aids in identifying common characteristics, thereby promoting the living inheritance of local resources and traditional culture, and advancing the classified protection and development of traditional villages. Currently, research directions and focuses within the academic community vary, with most studies categorizing traditional villages based on single factors such as topog-

raphy, cultural characteristics, spatial form, functional composition, intrinsic value, or residential types[3-5]. A smaller number of scholars have employed a comprehensive classification approach, considering the interconnections and interactions of multiple elements within traditional villages[6]. In terms of research theories and methods, most classifications rely on qualitative or quantitative evaluations of traditional villages based on comprehensive evaluation results derived from systematic evaluation theories. The application of new technologies and theories, such as big data, has also enhanced the objectivity and scientific rigor of traditional village classification^[7-9]. In summary, academic research on traditional village classification demonstrates diversity and multi-perspective approaches. However, in the current context of rural revitalization and the transformation of urban-rural relationships, traditional villages are entering a new phase of transformative development. Existing studies still lack a dynamic, multi-factor comprehensive classification method to address the transformation, protection, and development of traditional villages.

This article, based on an understanding of the current state of 22 nationally recognized traditional villages in southern Shaanxi, adopts a dynamic and multi-dimensional research perspective to focus on the dynamic evolution and combination of four major elements: ecology, culture, economy, and space. It explores the applicability and operational mechanisms of the “Five States” research concept in the process of traditional village classification. Furthermore, the study attempts to construct a “Five States” integrated classification method at the regional scale of southern Shaanxi, based on the development characteristics of different types of traditional villages. This method aims to explore various development paths and propose scientifically effective strategies for protection and development, with the ultimate goal of promoting the sustainable development of traditional villages.

1 Theoretical foundations and analysis of the “Five States” integration

1.1 Origins of the “Five states” integration theory

Traditional villages are rich repositories of diverse historical and cultural information specific to their regions,

reflecting the real impacts of different historical periods and socio-economic developments. These villages embody an organic human-environment relationship that was established during the agrarian era, characterized by a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Throughout the evolution of the human-environment system in traditional villages, the relationship between human and the natural environment has consistently been the contradictory one of guided feedback, mutual-constraint adaptation, and collaborative development. As a result, scholars have gradually decomposed the human system and natural system into various elemental types such as lifestyle, behavioral habits, social structure, economic types, cultural beliefs, and ecological environments, and have systematically studied the interactions among these elements. Li Bohua, Zeng Rongqian, and others categorized traditional villages into four major systems: ecological environment, spatial subject of traditional villages, social culture, and material support, and investigated the nonlinear evolution mechanisms presented by the complex interactions within these systems[10]. Zhou Shangyi further decomposed the human sphere into layers of livelihood, institutional framework, and ideology, integrating them with the natural layer as a comprehensive analytical framework, and constructed the “four-layer integrated” regional analytical system theory and method for the human-environment relationship in traditional villages[11]. Building on theories of synergy, dissipative structures, and complex adaptive systems, I have introduced the spatial subject of traditional villages within the framework of binary analysis of “human and environment” to construct a “three-aspect” analytical framework. This framework focuses on the dynamic interactions and synergies among the four elements of ecology, culture, economy, and form in traditional villages, and proposes the “Five States” analytical method, aiming to uncover the local characteristics of traditional villages to better guide their protection and development.

1.2 Composition of the “Five States” integration

The “Five States” approach is rooted in a longitudinal perspective on the dynamic interactions between the

traditional village inhabitant (economy and culture), village space (form), and environment (ecology). These four elements, as a complete structural organism, exhibit intrinsic linkage and collaborative progression, fully embodying the dynamism, unity, and integrity of the “three-aspect” relationship system among humans, environment, and village space[12](Figure 1). In the system:

(1) Ecology refers to the totality of geographical location and associated natural conditions of a social unit, which forms the natural foundation and resource base for the formation and development of traditional villages. As an external driving force, it lays the initial framework for the village’s generation and development.

(2) Culture is the sum of the influences that social existence exerts on human consciousness, value orientations, and related factors, reflecting the social behavior norms and collective cultural consensus of traditional villages, including historical culture, spiritual consciousness, and survival rules and so on. This cultural state subtly shapes and constrains the villagers.

(3) Economy refers to the comprehensive system of livelihood activities and behavior systems formed by the long-term interaction between people and the natural ecological environment within a social unit under local conditions. It epitomizes the village’s modes of production, survival wisdom, and intrinsic driving forces.

(4) Form pertains to the physical spatial representation and structural sequence resulting from the interaction between natural ecological factors and social factors of a social unit. The evolution of form, from singularity to diversity, from disorder to order, and from privacy to openness, fully reflects the transformation in local villagers’ cultural spirit, value pursuits, and collective psychological consensus.

(5) Dynamism recognizes that traditional villages, as living organisms, are characterized by complexity and comprehensiveness. Their protection and development must satisfy the basic requirements of ecological foundation support, economic model promotion, spatial form guidance, and cultural spirit shaping, thereby promoting the dynamic balance and coordinated advancement of the “five states”[13].

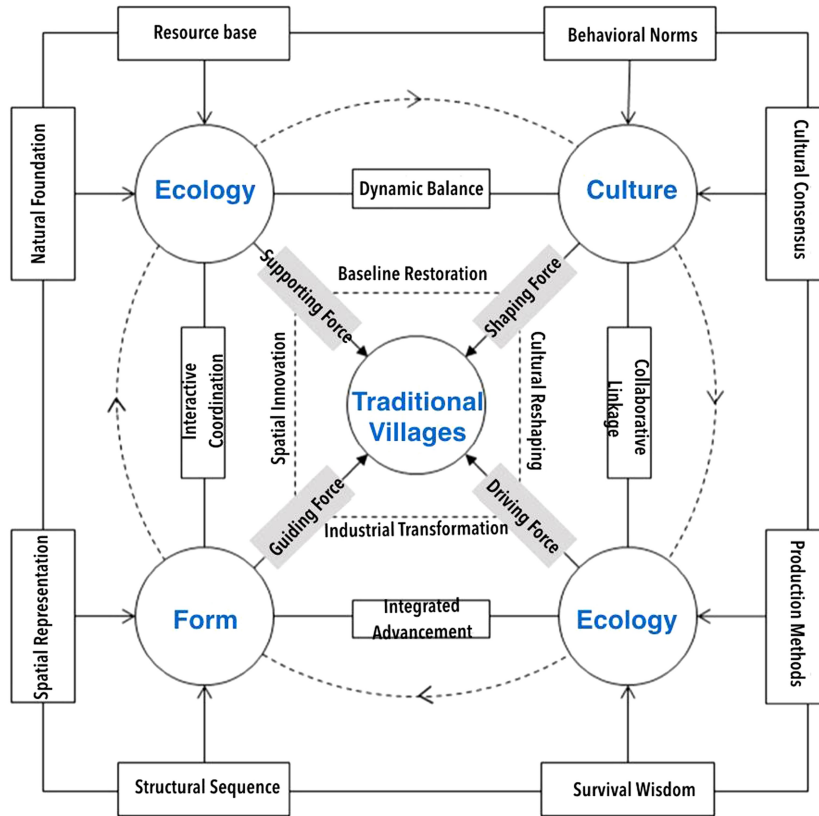


Figure 1 Analysis of the elemental connotations of the “Five States” of traditional villages

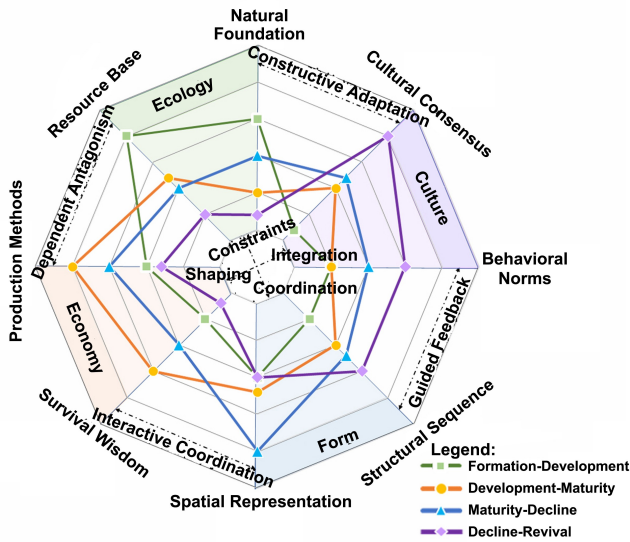


Figure 2 Research on the Interaction and Collaborative Relationship of the ‘Five States’ in Traditional Villages

1.3 Synergistic mechanisms of the “Five States” integration

Within the “Five States” framework, the elements exhibit diversity, functionality, and dynamism as they evolve across both temporal and spatial dimensions, resulting in a variety of interactive combinations. By systematically analyzing the interactive logic of the “Five States” through-

out the dynamic evolution of traditional villages, we can dissect the synergistic development mechanisms formed during the prolonged interaction between the cultural system, material space, and natural system of these villages (Figure 2). The specific relationships are as follows:

(1) Ecology and culture display the constructive adjustment relationship: Ecology serves as the local source of cultural identity in traditional villages, giving rise to the cultural spirit and psychological consensus unique to the village. Culture, in turn, reflects the value system underpinning the human-environment relationship in traditional villages, profoundly influencing the villagers’ systematic and holistic understanding of the natural environment.

(2) Ecology and economy display the dependent antagonistic relationship: Ecology provides the foundational production platform and essential living resources, serving as the physical basis for the village’s economy. The economy, on the other hand, represents the fundamental approach through which villagers engage with, utilize, and modify the natural environment, demonstrating their survival wisdom.

(3) Ecology and form display the constraining coordination relationship: Ecology is the fundamental external factor shaping the physical form of traditional villages, defining the natural geographical boundaries of the village's material space and limiting the disorderly extension of its basic spatial structures. Form, as the outcome of human-environment interaction and coordination, is the physical manifestation of the villagers' passive adaptation to and active transformation of the natural environment.

(4) Culture and economy display the shaping and Integration relationship: Culture encompasses the collective consensus of the village's production activities, guiding the transformation of the material space, the updating of production techniques and tools, and the evolution of production-related thinking and behavior. The economy integrates the village's survival culture, reflecting the collective psychology, lifestyle attitudes, and survival perspectives of the local community.

(5) Culture and form display the guiding feedback relationship: Culture is the fundamental essence and cultural core of the village's material space, functioning as the informal force guiding the transformation of spatial representations, the construction of structural sequences, and the establishment of geographical relations. Form, as the physical carrier and external representation of the villagers' ideological concepts, reinforces and intensifies the collective cultural consciousness through its renewal and feedback.

(6) Economy and form display the interactive coordination relationship: The economy is a crucial internal driving force for the survival and development of traditional villages, with adjustments and optimizations in the village's industrial structure leading to changes in its material spatial form. The form, in turn, provides the essential material foundation for social production, with its elastic properties supporting and promoting the transformation of the village's production networks and industrial structures.

Throughout the life cycle of a traditional village—from formation to development, maturity, decline, and revival—the ecological, cultural, economic, and formal elements undergo a series of dynamic transitions that drive the spatial-temporal evolution of this complex macro-system.

(1) Formation to development: The shift from passive adaptation to active transformation of nature by villagers characterizes a development phase of “ecological resource convergence,” where ecology primarily drives development, followed by the economy.

(2) Development to maturity: Changes in internal land use and population growth lead to “industrial symbiosis,” disrupting the traditional stable economic structure of the village, resulting in a mechanism where the economy becomes the primary driver, with form playing a secondary role.

(3) Maturity to decline: Under the influence of urbanization and modernization, the number of traditional villages dominated by singular or homogeneous factors gradually decreases, forming a “differentiated patchwork organization” dynamic, where form and economy lead, followed by culture, with ecology becoming subordinate.

(4) Decline to revival: The significance of local cultural factors becomes more prominent during the revival of traditional villages. Driven by market forces and capital, a dynamic shift towards “cultural-landscape adaptive regulation” emerges, where culture leads and interacts adaptively and synergistically with economy, ecology, and form[14].

2 Classification of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi from the perspective of the “Five States”

2.1 Selection of research samples

Southern Shaanxi refers to the southern region of Shaanxi Province, encompassing the prefecture-level cities of Hanzhong, Ankang, and Shangluo, with a total of 28 districts and counties. Bordered by the Qinling Mountains to the north and the Daba and Micang Mountains to the south, this region is traversed from west to east by the Han River, characterized predominantly by hilly and mountainous terrain with numerous rivers. Situated at the boundary between northern and southern China, Southern Shaanxi's unique natural environment has fostered a diverse and integrated socio-cultural atmosphere. This environment has provided the local population with abundant material resources and an ecological foundation, resulting in a rich and distinct traditional village cultural landscape shaped by both natural and cultural influences. However, the late

start of traditional village conservation efforts in China, incomplete scientific theoretical guidance, and the lagging socio-economic development in rural areas have exacerbated the urgency of addressing the protection and transformation of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi. Currently, among the five batches of national-level traditional village protection lists published in China, 22 are located

in southern Shaanxi: 15 in Ankang, 5 in Hanzhong, and 2 in Shangluo. This study uses these 22 nationally recognized traditional villages as samples to develop a classification and evaluation framework, aiming to analyze specific types and development strategies for traditional villages in southern Shaanxi, thereby providing references for future protection and development efforts (Table 1) (Figure 3).

Table 1 Statistics of national-level traditional villages by district and county in the southern Shaanxi region

Municipalities	Counties	National-level traditional village names	Number of national-level traditional villages
Ankang	Ziyang County	Yingliang Village, Xiangyang Town	15
	Shiquan County	Changxing Village, Houliu Town	
		Changling Village, Yundou Town	
	Xunyang County	Miaowan Village, Qili Village, Chiyan Town	
		Wanfu Village, Chiyan Town	
		Zhanjiawan Village, Chiyan Town	
		Zhongshan Village (Guojia Laoyuan), Zhaowan Town	
	Hanbin District	Niuyin Jiapo Village, Xianhe Town	
		Shuangqiao Village, Yeping Town	
		Wangzhuang Village, Zaoyang Town	
		Gaoshan Village, Gongjin Town	
		Qianhe Village, Tanba Town	
		Mahe Village, Tanba Town	
Tianbao Village, Shuanglong Town			
Shuangbai Village, Shizhuan Town			
Hanzhong	Liuba County	Chengguan Village, Chengguan Town	5
		Miaotaizi Village, Liuhou Town	
		Moping Village, Jiangkou Town	
	Chenggu County	Lefeng Village, Shangyuanguan Town	
Ningqiang County	Qingmuchuan Village, Qingmuchuan Town		
Shangluo	Shanyang County	Guzhen Community, Manchuan Pass Town	2
	Zhen'an County	Yunzhen Village, Yungai Temple Town	

2.2 Constructing of the evaluation system

Traditional villages are complex, multi-dimensional regional systems with temporal characteristics. To analyze the development status of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi, a combined qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. The qualitative aspect, primarily based on group perception, interprets and transforms the specific characteristics of village development. The quantitative aspect relies on textual materials and statistical data to provide objective and scientific analysis. The specific analyti-

cal framework considers ecological enhancement, cultural integration, economic transformation, and spatial reconstruction as key driving forces, leading to the development of an evaluation index system based on the "Five States" integration concept.

The hierarchical structure of the classification evaluation system comprises four levels: the target level, criterion level, factor level, and indicator level. The criterion level includes ecology, cultural, economy, and form. To enhance operability, the system draws on the "Traditional Village

Table 2 Evaluation index system for the development of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi based on the “Five States” integration concept

Target level	Criteria level	Factors level	Indicators level	Indicator factor abbreviations	Standard description
Dynamic development of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi	Ecology	Resource richness	Plant and animal resource richness	Reflects the landscape of animal and plant, indicating the diversity of plant and animal resources.	Constraint (↓) / support (↑)
			Water resource richness	Reflects the water landscapes in the village area, indicating the uniqueness.	
			Mineral resource richness	Reflects the mineral resources, indicating the abundance.	
		Land carrying capacity	Arable land ratio	Reflects the proportion of cultivated land to total land area, indicating agricultural productivity.	
			Residential Land ratio	Reflects the proportion of residential construction land to total land area, indicating the current state of village development.	
	Culture	Local cultural preservation	Cultural longevity	Reflects the historical depth of material culture.	Restriction (↓) / shaping (↑)
			Local cultural retention rate (material cultural heritage)	Refers to the preservation status of material cultural heritage, indicating the degree of local culture preservation.	
		Culture activation	Proportion of inheritors (intangible cultural heritage)	Refers to the proportion of intangible cultural heritage inheritors in the village population, indicating the degree of local culture inheritance.	
			Cultural industry output ratio	Refers to the proportion of cultural industry output in the village's total production value, indicating the utilization of local culture.	
	Economy	Socio-Economic growth	Per capita net income	Reflects the standard of living and affluence of local villagers.	Driving (↓)/promoting (↑)
			Income source distribution	Reflects the distribution of income sources, indicating economic activity levels.	
			Annual income growth rate	Reflects the proportion of income growth relative to total income, indicating economic development in the village area.	
		Industrial structure transformation	Industry structure ratio	Reflects the proportion of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, indicating the level of industrial structure development.	
			Value added ratio	Reflects the proportion of value added to total production value, indicating economic development in the village area.	
			Agricultural employment ratio	Reflects the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, indicating the development level of local agricultural industry.	
	Form	Form integrity	Preservation of traditional patterns	Proportion of area occupied by traditional streets and alleys.	Dispersal (↓) / concentration (↑)
			Preservation of traditional style	Proportion of buildings preserving traditional architectural style.	
		Spatial dispersion	Original resident retention rate	Refers to the proportion of original residents among the current permanent population, reflecting population concentration.	
			Population density	Reflects the dispersion of living spaces.	

Evaluation and Recognition System (Trial)” and various scholarly rural development evaluation frameworks. The four criteria were further refined into eight factor indicators, incorporating data from various villages, resulting in

19 evaluation indicators for constructing the “Five States” integration concept-based evaluation index system (Table 2). The components are as follows: (1) Ecological Enhancement: Natural ecological environment serves as the

foundational support, with resource richness and land carrying capacity as indicators to assess the ecological development conditions of traditional Villages; (2) Cultural Cultivation: Local cultural concepts are the core of development, with indicators for cultural preservation and activation used to evaluate the transmission and development of local culture; (3) Economic Transformation: Village industrial development is a fundamental driving force, with indicators for socio-economic growth and industrial structure transformation reflecting the modernization level and trends in the village economy; (4) Spatial Reconstruction: Spatial form characterizes village identity, with changes in village spatial forms assessed through indicators of form integrity and spatial dispersion.

Based on practical understanding and data processing of the national-level traditional villages in southern Shaanxi, expert scoring methods were used, incorporating a five-ranking scale and pairwise comparison matrices to

determine and rank the weights of each evaluation indicator (Table 3). Using the newly constructed “Five States” integration concept evaluation index system, the 22 national-level traditional villages in southern Shaanxi were evaluated and scored. The evaluation results classified the impact on village development as positive (↑) or negative (↓), ultimately leading to a systematic evaluation of southern Shaanxi’s traditional villages and the identification of corresponding types through comparative analysis.

2.3 Classification of village types

By clarifying the positive and negative correlations of the indicators of ecology, culture, economy and form in relation to the development of traditional villages, a theoretical classification into 16 distinct types of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi is proposed. This classification is based on combinations of the four elements’ “↑” or “↓” states. Additionally, the interaction and synergy of

Table 3 Weights and ranking of evaluation indicators for the development of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi based on the “Five States” integration concept

Criteria layer	Weight	Ranking	Factors layer	Weight	Ranking	Indicators layer	Weight	Ranking
Ecology	0.197	3	Resource richness	0.400	2	Plant and animal resource richness	0.343	2
						Water resource richness	0.499	1
						Mineral resource richness	0.158	3
			Land carrying capacity	0.600	1	Arable land ratio	0.706	1
						Residential land ratio	0.294	2
Culture	0.358	1	Local cultural preservation	0.667	1	Cultural longevity	0.250	2
						Local cultural retention rate (material cultural heritage)	0.750	1
			Culture activation	0.333	2	Proportion of inheritors (intangible cultural heritage)	0.250	2
						Cultural industry output ratio	0.750	1
Economy	0.347	2	Socio-economic growth	0.417	2	Per capita net income	0.222	3
						Income source distribution	0.413	1
						Annual income growth rate	0.365	2
			Industrial structure transformation	0.583	1	Industry structure ratio	0.376	2
						Value added ratio	0.424	1
Agricultural employment ratio	0.200	3						
Form	0.098	4	Form integrity	0.417	2	Preservation of traditional patterns	0.400	2
						Preservation of traditional style	0.600	1
			Spatial dispersion	0.583	1	Original resident retention rate	0.375	2
						Population density	0.625	1

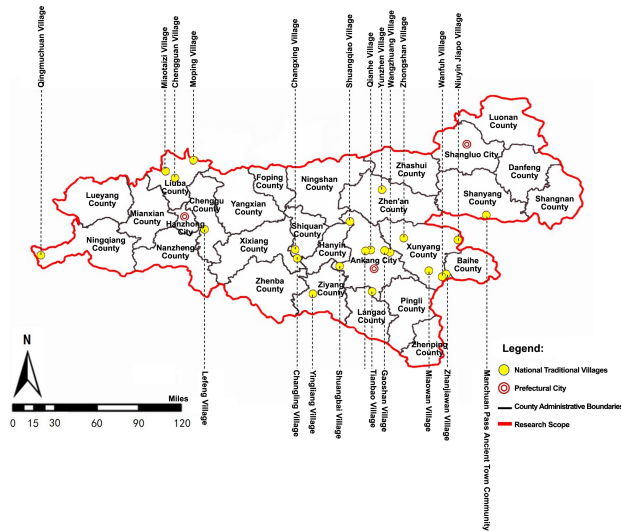


Figure 3 Distribution of national-level traditional villages in southern Shaanxi

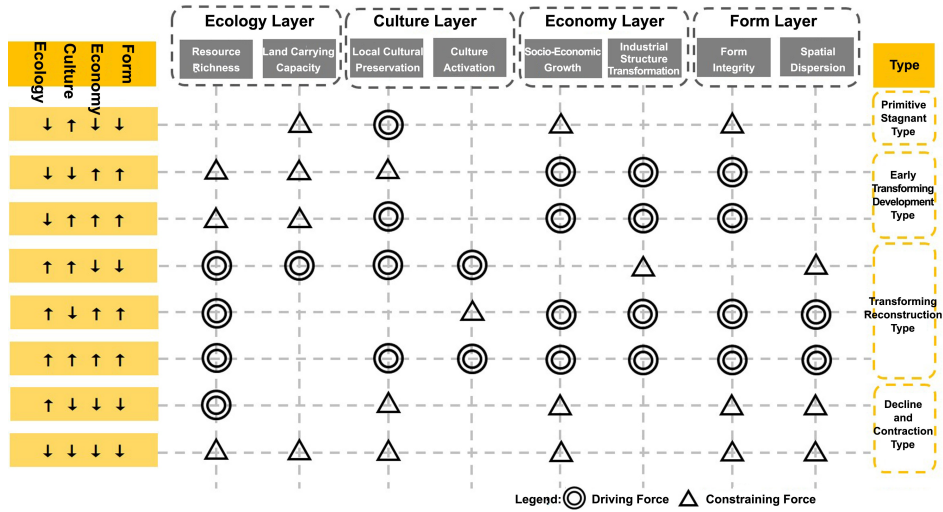


Figure 4 Evaluation criteria mechanism for the classification of traditional villages in southern Shaanxi

these elements in practice indicate that economic updates are inherently based on spatial transformations, while spatial expansion is driven by economic development [6]. Consequently, eight combinations where economic and spatial developments are mismatched are excluded (Figure 4). Building on the previous development indicators, a classification model from the “Five States” perspective is developed, summarizing the following four types (Table 4):

(1) Primitive stagnation type: These traditional villages possess rich historical and cultural heritage and are generally well-preserved. Typically located in remote, underdeveloped mountainous areas with minimal external interference, these villages continue in a state of natural evolution with production, life, and ecological aspects retaining their original forms without modern economic inter-

ventions. An example is Zhanjiawan Village in Xunyang County, Ankang City, which, built on the mountainside, retains its Ming and Qing period village layout and traditional architectural style, with the local lifestyle largely unaffected by modern elements.

(2) Early transforming development type: These villages have a solid foundation for current development with minimal outflow of population. Despite substantial infiltration of external culture and advanced ideas, some modernization has occurred in traditional industrial models, material spatial forms, and village functions. Local characteristics and traditional historical cultures have been protected and developed, revitalizing cultural consciousness among residents. For instance, Miaotaizi Village in Liuba County, Hanzhong City, named after the “Han Zhang Liuhou Shrine” located there, has begun to develop cul-

tural tourism, with a solid foundation for economic development.

Table 4 Classification of traditional village types in southern Shaanxi based on the “Five States” integration concept

Order	Type	Ecology	Culture	Economy	Form	Characteristics	Representative villages
1	Primitive stagnant type	↓	↑	↓	↓	The village has rich historical and cultural heritage, with no socio-economic transformation activities.	Zhanjiawan Village, Wanfu Village, Zhongshan Village
2	Early transforming development type	↓	↓	↑	↑	The village’s traditional industries and material space have undergone partial modernization.	Qianhe Village
		↓	↑	↑	↑	The village has certain economic and cultural development conditions; however, its ecological advantages are not prominent.	Miaotaizi Village, Niuyin Jiapo Village
3	Transforming reconstruction type	↑	↑	↓	↓	The ecological environment and cultural resource conditions are favorable, but traditional industry development is slow.	Yingliang Village
		↑	↓	↑	↑	The current development status is positive, but local cultural characteristics are not prominent.	Chengguan Village, Changling Village, Lefeng Village
		↑	↑	↑	↑	The development of various elements is relatively balanced, with an unclear direction for future growth.	Qingmuchuan Village, Guzhen Community of Manchuan Pass Town, Yunzhen Village
4	Decline and contraction type	↑	↓	↓	↓	The village lacks endogenous development motivation and external support.	Mahe Village, Changxing Village, Moping Village, Tianbao Village, Wangzhuang Village
		↓	↓	↓	↓	The ecological environment is relatively fragile, and the village lacks other endogenous development motivation and external support.	Miaowan Village, Gaoshan Village, Shuangbai Village, Shuangqiao Village

(3) Transforming reconstruction type: Rich in natural ecological and historical cultural resources, these villages have been significantly influenced by urbanization and modernization. With market dynamics, policy support, and capital investment, changes in population and economic structures, as well as the reshaping and inheritance of cultural landscapes, are evident. They face new demands for transformation and development. Examples include Qingmuchuan Village in Ningqiang County of Hanzhong City, and Yunzhen Village in Zhen’an County of Shangluo City, where notable material and intangible cultural heritage has led to cultural tourism becoming a primary economic activity, featuring historical cultural tourism with ancient buildings and facilities, as well as folk cultural tourism representing local legends, beliefs, traditional crafts, and daily customs.

(4) Decline and contraction type: These villages face fragile ecological environments and significant population

hollowing, leading to natural degradation and functional loss of material spaces, with many assets becoming idle. Traditional industrial models lag in development, and local historical cultures are eroded, resulting in a lack of internal motivation and external support for village development, making contraction an inevitable trend. An example is Miaowan Village in Xunyang County, Ankang City, where severe population loss, fragile ecological protection, and loss of traditional culture have led the village into a state of natural decline.

3 Protection and development strategies for different types of villages

Based on the intrinsic characteristics of various types of traditional villages, and guided by the principle of “targeted protection and categorized development,” this section proposes distinct development directions and strategies. The aim is to achieve differentiated and efficient development of traditional villages, thereby supporting rural

revitalization, aiding precise poverty alleviation, and advancing urban-rural integration.

3.1 Traditional villages of primitive stagnation type—focusing on cultural and ecological leadership in building a cultural and scenic community

Addressing the issues of declining natural and cultural heritage, weak cultural awareness, and unsatisfactory inheritance conditions in these traditional villages, the following strategies are proposed based on the approach of “exploring local resources, tracing village memories, restoring material spaces, and recreating living scenarios”:

(1) Unearth core values and establish a local cultural resource repository: Identify and catalog various local natural and cultural resources to uncover the core characteristics and values of traditional villages. Utilizing modern internet technologies, such as big data, textual, graphical, and visual tools, enhance research on village genealogy, architectural surveys, and detailed records. Create cultural heritage genealogies, cultural context maps, and virtual village scenarios to establish a local cultural resource repository.

(2) Enhance cultural identity and promote a routine inheritance mechanism: Based on the characteristics and protection status of different types of cultural heritage, adopt an inheritance approach of “preserving original states, extracting values, fostering innovation, and ensuring sustainable use.” Utilize family, industry, and societal methods for cultural study, inheritance, and dissemination. Develop collaborative and localized mechanisms for routine, situational, and continuous cultural transmission to strengthen collective consensus and cultural identity, thereby revitalizing the core cultural values of traditional villages.

(3) Reconstruct village memory and build a cultural and scenic community: Leverage the relationship between historical culture and material space carriers to deepen the village’s cultural foundation. Repair and update material space landscapes and functions to achieve a temporal and spatial unity of historical elements and scenic spaces. Reconstruct local cultural landscapes, consolidate collective local memories, and establish a cultural and scenic community to enhance local identity and residents’ sense of

belonging, thereby revitalizing the village’s vitality and the symbiosis of residents’ memories.

3.2 Traditional villages of early transforming development type—cultivating rural economy and expanding industrial chains

To address the issues of single traditional industry models, weaknesses in developing specialty industries, inadequate facilities, and contradictions in living needs, the following strategies are proposed based on the approach of “extending industrial chains, strengthening economic support, enhancing living environments, and catalyzing development”:

(1) Extend industrial chains and increase traditional agricultural value: Build on the existing traditional agricultural industry foundation by introducing modern technologies, agricultural talent, and substantial funding. Develop high-quality, efficient, and specialized ecological and organic agriculture. Leverage agricultural e-commerce, tourism, and contract production to promote deep integration of “agriculture + internet,” extending the agricultural industrial chain and enhancing the value-added of traditional industries, thus creating local specialty industry brands.

(2) Incubate potential factors and strengthen specialty industry competitiveness: Integrate unique resources such as natural ecology, agricultural landscapes, historical culture, and folklore. Focus on market demand and tourism development to incubate economic value and promote deep integration of traditional agriculture, handicrafts, local skills, and tourism services. Emphasize differentiation and personalization of specialty industries, develop distinctive industry brands, create brand catalytic effects, and enhance the competitiveness and influence of specialty industries.

(3) Improve service facilities and enhance living environment comfort: Based on ecological circularity concepts, optimize infrastructure configurations, and strengthen public service capabilities to meet both material and spiritual cultural needs of villagers. Preserve local flavors and scenarios, improve living environment comfort, and create “livable, workable, and touristic” eco-friendly, modern, and intelligent villages. This will act as a catalyst

for nurturing rural economies and a haven for pastoral idylls, fulfilling villagers' aspirations for a better life.

3.3 Traditional villages of transforming reconstruction type—linking regional development and innovating village intelligence

To address the issues of homogeneous development directions, balanced content, weak development forces, and singular development actors in these traditional villages, the following strategies are proposed based on the approach of “clarifying development directions, facilitating integrated regional development, encouraging diverse stakeholder participation, and promoting cluster-based development”:

(1) Establish unique brands to highlight rural tourism differentiation: Assess the current development trends and examine village resource conditions to define development directions in leisure and wellness, and specialty tourism. Create local specialty tourism brands through tourism project development, establishing a dual-driven mechanism of external and internal development. Focus on personalized, distinctive, and branded tourism, thereby enhancing the quality and appeal of traditional village tourism.

(2) Integrate regional development to create a cultural tourism network: Utilize clustering and complementarity effects to co-develop and share regional infrastructure and service facilities. Focus on traditional villages as “growth poles” and coordinate with neighboring villages to achieve integrated regional development. Construct a cultural tourism network with distinct regional characteristics, aligning with urban-rural integration plans to eliminate homogeneity and establish a well-interactive, comprehensive tourism system.

(3) Innovate development mechanisms for intelligent village operations: Encourage diverse stakeholder involvement to create a development mechanism where villagers actively participate, government provides guidance, and social organizations offer support. Promote integrated development of “people-village-heritage” through intelligent technology platforms, revitalizing diverse resource uses. Develop a “technology-driven, scenic-village integrated, intelligent operation” model for comprehensive, smart, and scenic management and operations of traditional villages.

3.4 Traditional villages of decline and contraction type—introducing limited external intervention and proactively responding to population hollowing

To address issues such as severe population hollowing, fragile ecological environments, difficulties in asset circulation, and insufficient capital support from government and enterprises in these traditional villages, the following strategies are proposed based on the concept of “adapting to natural succession, limited external intervention, strategic measures, and long-term development assurance”:

(1) Respect villager preferences and address hollowing issues: Align with natural succession patterns, respect villagers' relocation preferences, and scientifically assess the level of village abandonment. Use minimal human intervention to guide ecological migration and collective resettlement, improving villagers' living standards. Employ digital technologies to document and preserve local characteristics, establish concentrated museums for abandoned village features, and reuse distinctive components and materials for environmental enhancement or other village renovation projects. Address issues related to abandoned land through land relinquishment and ecological restoration to maximize the value of traditional village heritage resources[15].

(2) Resolve property rights issues to ensure long-term resource maintenance: Based on asset clearing and verification, explore breakthroughs in property rights and establish unified management mechanisms for traditional village assets. Transform land ownership through collective or state-owned forms to guide property rights transfer, applying various protection and development methods to revitalize asset value. Support collective economies by attracting corporate capital, forming new village-enterprise cooperative economic organizations, and ensuring sustainable maintenance of traditional villages[16].

Conclusion

The numerous traditional villages in China have been irreversibly affected by urbanization and modernization processes, leading to issues such as population loss, land abandonment, ecological degradation, and cultural erosion. Effectively managing the relationship between the protec-

tion and development of traditional villages and socio-economic progress is therefore an urgent issue. This paper employs the “Five States” concept to conduct a classification study of 22 national-level traditional villages in southern Shaanxi, exploring targeted classification and development strategies, and providing new perspectives and methods for dynamic, multi-faceted research on traditional village development in China. The main conclusions of the study are as follows: (1) By examining the internal elements and dynamic synergy of ecological, cultural, economic, and spatial factors in traditional villages, this study analyzes the role of the “Five States” in the evolutionary process of traditional villages and constructs a development evaluation index system and classification method for traditional villages. (2) By clarifying the different combinations of “Five States” factors, traditional villages in southern Shaanxi are categorized into four types: Primitive Stagnation, Early Transformation Development, Transformation and Reconstruction, and Decline and Contraction. Corresponding development strategies are proposed for each type based on their evolutionary characteristics. Given the complexity and uncertainty of traditional village elements, further empirical exploration of the “Five States” classification model is needed. Additionally, case studies of provincial-level traditional villages in Southern Shaanxi should be continued and supplemented.

Figure and table sources

All figures and tables are created by the author.

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