

A Discussion on Livability Issues of Rural Dwellings in the Context of Rural Revitalization

ZHU Liangwen¹, CHENG Haifan²

Author Affiliations 1 Professor; 2 Associate professor, Email: chenghaifan@kust.edu.cn; 1 & 2 Faculty of Architecture and City Planning, Kunming University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT: Ecological livability is one of the five overarching goals of rural revitalization, and this study focuses on issues concerning the livability of rural dwellings. It proposes a “Hierarchical Reference Framework for Evaluating the Livability of Rural Dwellings”, and analyzes and evaluates the livability of both traditional and newly built rural dwellings in China. Three representative rural dwelling projects conducted by the authors over the years are examined to evaluate improvements in livability, followed by reflections on the problems revealed. The discussion focuses on three key aspects: The setting of livability goals and standards, the challenges and special policies related to livability in impoverished areas, and the tensions between the conservation of rural dwellings as “immovable cultural relics” and livability requirements. Particular attention is given to discussions and recommendations regarding regulatory, policy, and conservation requirements concerning such protected dwellings.

KEYWORDS: rural revitalization; traditional rural dwellings; newly built rural dwellings; livability; immovable cultural relics

Introduction

Ecological livability, as one of the five overarching goals of rural revitalization, has a direct bearing on our research on rural dwellings. The authors strongly concur with Professor LIU Shouying’s view: “The primary indicator of successful rural revitalization is dignity—dignified living conditions, public services, and people...”¹⁾ Living in peace and working happily has long been the greatest aspiration of both urban and rural life in China, and building a house has traditionally been the foremost priority of rural families [1].

The livability of rural dwellings currently faces two direct challenges: first, how can the conservation and res-

toration of traditional dwellings be enhanced to meet contemporary standards of livability? Second, how can newly built rural dwellings achieve a high level of livability? These issues involve many specific aspects. Below, we discuss these issues from three perspectives: Evaluation of the current state, reflections on practical experiences, and exploration of the problems.

1 Current conditions of rural dwellings in China and their livability assessment

The inclusion of “ecological livability” in the central government’s rural revitalization strategy, along with the requirements issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development regarding rural housing and vil-

[The format of citation in this article]

Zhu, L. W., & Cheng, H. F. (2026). A discussion on livability issues of rural dwellings in the context of Rural Revitalization. *Journal of South Architecture*, (1), 61-70.

• **Fund Projects:** National Key R&D Program of China during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2020YFD1100705)

Document Identification Code A DOI 10.33142/jsa.v3i1.18735

Article number 1000-0232(2026)01-061-10

Received: 2026-2-3

Accepted: 2026-2-11

Copyright © 2026 by author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

<http://www.viserdata.com/journal/jsa>

lage construction [2], clearly reflects farmers’ aspirations for stable and comfortable living. However, how should livability be evaluated? What is the current status of livability in traditional and newly built rural dwellings, and what challenges do they encounter? These questions constitute the basis for this discussion.

1.1 Reflections on evaluation criteria for livability of rural dwellings

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, human needs are divided into five ascending levels: Physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization [3]. Naturally, this involves the concept of “dwelling.”

In 2009, while researching the core values of tradi-

tional rural dwellings, the authors proposed a “Five-Level Hierarchy of Dwelling Needs” based on this theory. Given that no formal standard currently exists for evaluating the livability of dwellings, this framework may serve as a reference. After slight revisions, it has been transformed into the “Hierarchical Reference Framework for Evaluating the Livability of Rural Dwellings” (Figure 1 [4]). In the framework, E, D, C, B, and A represent five levels from low to high, with each level further subdivided into three grades—3, 2, and 1 (low, medium, high). The meanings of the five levels are clearly defined in the diagram. Although the framework does not provide a quantitative assessment of dwelling livability, it can at least offer a relatively intuitive qualitative classification.

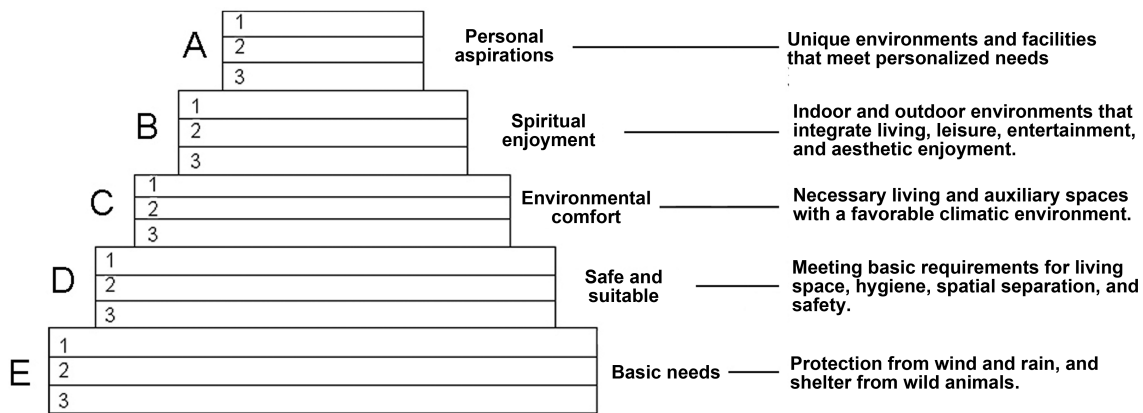


Figure 1 Hierarchical reference framework for evaluating the livability of rural dwellings

1.2 Analysis of the livability of current traditional rural dwellings in China

China’s rural areas are vast and economically diverse, and the conditions and problems of traditional rural dwellings vary greatly. This analysis focuses primarily on rural areas in the less-developed western regions of China.

Traditional rural dwellings are inseparable from agriculture. Functions such as grain storage and the keeping of farm tools are essential, but they also lead to problems such as space occupation, cluttered storage, rodent and insect infestation, and negative impacts on hygiene. Different regions and ethnic groups have their own customs regarding agricultural routines, sideline production, and agricultural-related festivals and rituals, and these customs in turn shape their specific livability needs.

Traditional rural dwellings are also closely tied to

livestock. Cattle and horses serve as primary labor, while poultry and livestock are important supplements to the rural subsistence economy. They require substantial space, and human-animal cohabitation is common, resulting in significant sanitation challenges.

“Once fire was introduced into human dwellings, the hearth gradually took shape, strengthening the bond between humans and fire [5] 12-13.” The less economically developed an ethnic group or region is—especially those in the southwestern mountainous areas—the more central the role of fire becomes in traditional dwellings. The hearth serves multiple functions—cooking, heating, smoking meat, and repelling insects—and also holds symbolic significance as a focal point for family gatherings. However, prolonged smoke accumulation darkens the interior, and fire hazards remain among the greatest risks associated with such dwellings.

Adequate spatial separation is the minimum requirement for livability, yet this issue persists in many traditional rural dwellings. In the past, some ethnic minority groups had certain problematic residential arrangements (e.g., prior to the 1990s, Dai bamboo dwellings in Xishuangbanna featured undivided sleeping areas) [6]76-116. In some impoverished minority areas (such as the Yi in the Liangshan region and the Hani in Honghe Prefecture), all domestic functions are concentrated in a single space, with sleeping areas minimally demarcated around the hearth. Situations such as growing household size, economic poverty, insufficient floor area in existing dwellings, and difficulties in creating interior partitions are still commonly observed today.

Timber-and-earth traditional rural dwellings commonly exhibit long-term disrepair—decaying structural timbers, cracked walls, and leaking roofs—a widespread condition across rural regions. The lack of maintenance funds and rural hollowing accelerates structural deterioration and eventual col-

lapse, posing direct and severe challenges to livability.

The conservation of traditional built form and the continuity of associated cultural practices represent core intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of livability. Few traditional dwellings in rural areas are well preserved; most are severely damaged, and many have already disappeared.

Traditional rural dwellings can generally be categorized into three types based on economic conditions: Low-income, moderate-income, and high-income dwelling typologies [7] (Figure 2). Because economic conditions vary widely across regions, it is difficult to quantify the proportion of each type. Overall, based on our fieldwork in the Southwest in recent years: Low-income dwellings are numerous, with livability generally corresponding to E1-D3 levels; moderate-income dwellings are the most common, with livability generally in the D2-C3 range; high-income dwellings are fewer in number, with livability mostly at the C2-C1 levels.



Figure 2 Classification of traditional dwellings by economic status (2a: Low-income type; 2b: Moderate-income type; 2c: High-income type)

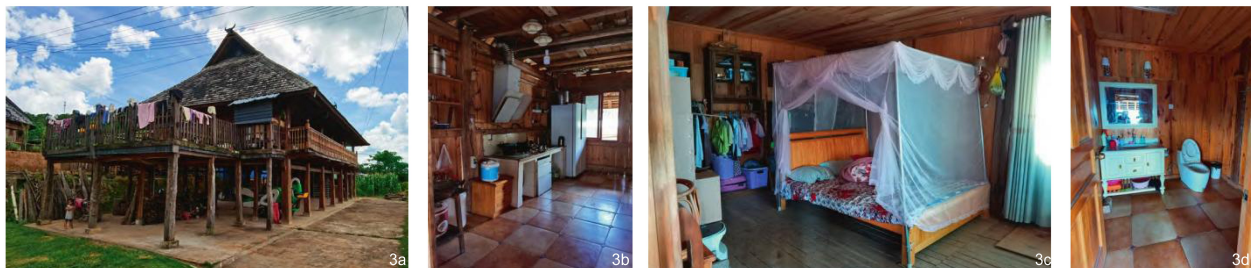


Figure 3 A self-built new rural dwelling in Jingmai Mountain, Lancang, Yunnan (3a: Exterior; 3b: Kitchen; 3c: Bedroom; 3d: Bathroom)



Figure 4 Two conditions of current new rural dwellings (4a: Well-constructed unified housing; 4b: Self-built housing that detracts from environmental character)

1.3 Livability analysis of newly built rural dwellings

Many newly built rural dwellings have been built in recent years. Most are self-built by villagers, while some are built through coordinated development. In more economically developed areas, the proportion of the latter is higher.

Overall, the construction quality of newly built rural dwellings has improved considerably: Structural safety has increased, and earlier problems of crude structures and materials have largely been overcome; functional performance has improved: Room divisions generally meet basic standards, kitchens and bathrooms have been added, and human and livestock are separated; the indoor environment has improved significantly, with larger daylighting areas and enhanced facilities and interior finishes (Figure 3). However, many problems remain in newly built rural dwellings: Planning lags behind, spatial layouts are often poorly conceived, and the overall environment is substandard; despite a relatively large floor area, the functional layout remains inadequate; the exterior appears unrefined, with disparate forms, materials, and colors that compromise traditional rural character; construction quality is often substandard, and some structural elements and materials lack adequate safety performance. Accordingly, as stated in a joint document issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and the National Rural Revitalization Administration, “the design and construction standards of rural housing in China urgently need improvement, ‘and it is necessary to’ enhance housing functions and improve housing quality [2].”

Overall, newly built rural dwellings (Figure 4) show some improvement in livability compared with low-income and moderate-income traditional dwellings, but most remain of relatively low quality and generally correspond to Levels D2-C1. The reasons for the generally low quality of newly built rural dwellings include: A lack of planning vision—construction is dispersed, prioritizing individual dwellings over the communal environment; a lack of quality consciousness—emphasis is placed on imposing height and scale while interior functionality is neglected, with attention paid to façade at the expense of internal detailing; a lack of aesthetic discernment—local traditions are disre-

garded, creativity is absent, imitation is uncritical, and formal expression is disordered; and a lack of professional design input—the role of design is misunderstood, investment in design is deemed unnecessary, and construction execution often lacks technical competence.

2 Reflections on three successive projects involving ethnic minority dwellings and their livability issues

The following section examines three projects the authors have engaged in over the past twenty years to reflect on livability-related issues in both traditional dwelling restoration and various forms of newly built rural dwelling development.

2.1 Experimental newly built Dai Dwellings in Xishuangbanna (1999) [8]

The issues to be addressed at the time included: Improving functional layouts (dividing sleeping areas, adding kitchens and bathrooms, and utilizing raised floors); changing construction materials (replacing timber with reinforced concrete due to timber scarcity); preventing the loss of traditional architectural character of Dai bamboo houses (as villagers began constructing flat-roofed brick houses, placing this heritage at risk of disappearance); and accommodating economic constraints (each self-built house had to remain within an 80,000-yuan budget). The research began in 1997. It was easy to develop proposals, but the implementation proved difficult. The first experimental “bamboo house” was constructed from January to April 1999. Its functional layout was significantly improved, and its architectural character retained the traditional hipped roof and part of the raised floor. To reduce costs, a monolithic prestressed precast reinforced concrete structure was adopted.

The aim of this experimental project was to conduct an individual exploration into the modernization of Dai bamboo houses from traditional forms [9] 137-143. Upon completion, it was well received by villagers and hailed as the advent of the “third-generation bamboo house” (Figure 5), achieving the intended transition from second-generation timber-frame “bamboo houses” to third-generation reinforced-concrete ones. In terms of livability, this experimental “bamboo house” was assessed as having improved from Level D1—typical of villagers’ newly built dwellings at the time—to Level C1.



Figure 5 The first experimental newly built rural dwelling of the Dai in Xishuangbanna

(5a: Exterior; 5b: Interior; 5c: Floor plan of the first experimental building (200.25 m²); 5d: Partially elevated ground floor)

In retrospect, after the project was widely implemented in numerous Dai villages, new problems arose: Dense clusters of new “bamboo houses” emerged; although their livability had improved compared to traditional bamboo houses, the overall village environment regressed, becoming far less picturesque than before. While population growth, land scarcity, and increased building density were contributing factors, the primary causes were the lack of comprehensive planning, neglect of environmental quality, ad hoc construction practices, and inadequate regulatory oversight. “Ecological livability” inherently encompasses the rural environment, spatial organization, and built form in an integrated manner. Therefore, the document jointly issued earlier by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and other departments, which states that “rural housing construction should proceed in parallel with environmental improvement, with attention to enhancing supporting services and the village environment”, is entirely correct.

2.2 Conservation and restoration of Hani Mushroom houses in Yuanyang (2017-2019)

The issues to be addressed at the time included the needs of poverty alleviation and dilapidated-house renovation, strong demands for functional improvement, and the constraints imposed by cultural-heritage conservation regulations. Since the authors carried out the first pilot maintenance and renovation project on a Hani mushroom house

[10] in 2015 in Azheke Village, located in the core zone of the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces World Heritage Site, the research team continued on-site conservation and restoration work in Azheke from 2017 to 2019, from September 2018 to the end of 2019, on-site guidance was provided for the restoration of 33 traditional residential buildings (this project was shortlisted for the Architectural Achievement Award of the WAACA in 2025) [11]. Following restoration, structural safety—particularly in walls and roofs—was significantly enhanced, yet the exterior appearance was preserved unchanged. Indoor functions and environmental quality were enhanced, and residents expressed general satisfaction (Figure 6). These severely deteriorated timber-and-earth mushroom houses represented the low-income type of traditional dwellings and were still inhabited by residents. The residents had high expectations for improvement. However, because Azheke Village is one of the key villages in the core zone of the World Heritage site, the houses were designated as “immovable cultural relics,” their repair was subject to numerous restrictions on form, size, height, materials, and so on, which led to many conflicts. Upon completion of the restoration, the self-assessed livability level improved from Level D3 to Level D1, but it still fell short of residents’ expectations and remained far from true livability.



Figure 6 Conservation and restoration of Hani mushroom houses in Azheke Village, Yuanyang

(6a: Exterior before restoration; 6b: Exterior after restoration; 6c: Interior before restoration; 6d: Interior after restoration)

Reflecting on the project, the entire restoration process was fraught with intractable tensions: These low-income type traditional dwellings had very poor livability and the residents had strong demands for improvement, yet the status of the houses as “immovable cultural relics” imposed numerous constraints. How should such contradictions be resolved? (The issues raised here and below will be further discussed in the next section.)

2.3 Implementation of newly built Yi Dwellings in Sanhe New Village, Zhaojue, Sichuan (2018-2019)

The issues to be addressed at the time were as follows: Sanhe Old Village, a severely impoverished Yi village in the Liangshan Mountains of Sichuan, was designated for relocation and reconstruction following a personal inspection by General-Secretary Xi Jinping on February 11, 2018. This relocation was necessary for poverty

alleviation and carried special political significance. The newly built rural dwellings were required to substantially enhance living functionality while embodying a distinctive new architectural character of Yi housing. Due to land constraints, the new village was divided into two sections, with a total of 29 newly built rural dwellings (Figure 7) constructed along with tourism and public facilities. Owing to the previous extreme poverty and the special construction conditions, the self-evaluated livability of the newly built Yi dwellings improved markedly from Level E1 (old village) to Level C2 (new village). Moreover, the construction of Sanhe New Village, from planning to design, integrated newly built rural dwellings with the overall village environment, resulting in simultaneous improvement of both individual houses and the broader settlement environment (Figure 8).



Figure 7 Newly built rural dwellings of the Yi in Sanhe Village, Zhaojue County, Sichuan (7a: Exterior; 7b: Interior)



Figure 8 Interior view of Point No. 2 in Sanhe New Village, Zhaojue County, Sichuan

In retrospect, both projects were situated in impoverished regions. The former was in a key village within a World Heritage core zone, and the latter benefited from the special opportunity of a visit by the General Secretary. Both received certain funding, which helped address livability issues to varying degrees. Yet how can livability challenges in other impoverished villages and dwellings be effectively addressed? And how should appropriate livability targets be established?

3 Discussion of several issues related to livability of dwellings

3.1 Setting livability goals and establishing standards

From the three cases discussed above, it is clear that although all achieved improvements in livability, the extent of improvement and the final targets differed significantly. Without clear goals set in advance, improvements could only be made on an ad hoc basis. This is partly due to differences in baseline conditions, objective constraints, and funding levels, and partly because no formal livability goals or standards have yet been established; localities remain in an exploratory phase. Without established goals and standards, rural housing construction cannot be properly regulated, which is also a key problem in current rural development.

When it comes to the goals of rural dwellings, they are of course primarily constrained by economic capacity, but they are also shaped by people’s aspirations and cul-

tural influences. Since the pursuit of livability cannot usually be achieved in a single step, nor can it be frequently adjusted, it is advisable to propose a range of target levels. Moreover because current baseline conditions vary greatly, this range should be relatively broader. We recommend that, in the context of rural revitalization, the long-term livability target for rural dwellings should reach the C-B level, specifically C3-B1 (Figure 9). This represents a substantial improvement over the current E1-C1 levels of traditional dwellings and the D2-C1 levels of newly built rural dwellings. Given that low-income type dwellings exhibit a significant gap from livability standards, each improvement cycle should strive for a larger improvement step.

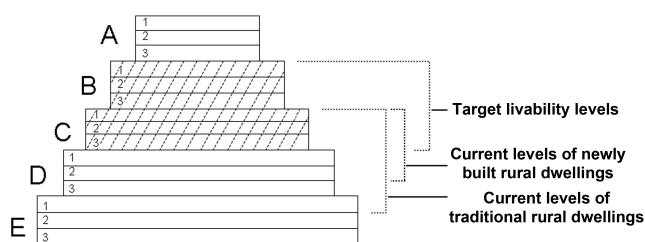


Figure 9 Recommended long-term livability target levels

As rural revitalization progresses, relatively unified standards for the livability of dwellings should be established. Such standards should undoubtedly address both the overall village environment and the quality of individual dwellings. The former includes adequate infrastructure, complete public facilities, and an attractive environment; the latter includes sufficient floor area, well-designed functional layouts, good spatial quality, and a pleasing architectural character. The indicator system for rural dwellings should include land area, building area, functional spaces, physical indicators such as sunlight, ventilation, and daylighting, as well as the surrounding environment and architectural character requirements. Quantitative requirements for these indicators should be differentiated by region (developed, moderately developed, and under-developed areas), by dwelling type (traditional or newly built), and by time frame.

3.2 Livability challenges and special policies in impoverished areas

In low-income rural areas, a small number of villages have been relocated to towns under major national pro-

jects, where livability issues are primarily addressed through state investment and coordinated urban-level planning. Another small number of villages have undergone consolidation, full relocation, or construction of new settlements (such as Sanhe Village in Zhaojue County), and these projects generally receive dedicated funding, enabling livability issues to be addressed to varying degrees. The most challenging cases are the numerous low-income type villages that remain in their original locations. Although these villages are poor due to their remote mountainous locations, some possess good ecological environments, distinctive ethnic cultures, and relatively intact traditional settlement patterns despite deterioration. Many are highly valuable (such as rare ethnic-minority settlement relics or scarce examples of unique dwelling types), and some have been designated as national-level traditional villages (such as Azheke Village in Yuanyang). These villages continue to exist naturally in their original locations, yet their situation is the most precarious: Economic decline has led to partial abandonment and increasing village hollowing. Abandonment is neither feasible nor acceptable; preservation suffers from inadequate awareness and, more critically, insufficient funding—even national-level traditional village subsidies fall short of conservation needs. Development faces a shortage of skilled personnel and no clear direction, with only a few able to leverage tourism. Livability improvements in dwellings of these villages rely primarily on residents' own investment: Low-income households cannot afford repairs, resulting in deterioration and haphazard construction; wealthier households often demolish old houses and construct new ones at will, thereby damaging traditional village character.

Such low-income type villages are fairly numerous in certain provinces and represent the most challenging component of rural revitalization: Preservation is difficult, development is difficult, and achieving both simultaneously is even more so. They are farthest from achieving livability, making the attainment of livability goals particularly arduous. For such low-income type villages, the authors have long recommended the establishment of special policies with focused government support [12]. As demonstrated in recent years, without the policies and measures

of the national poverty-alleviation campaign, poverty issues would have been extremely difficult to resolve. Special policies include: Targeted support (distinctive designation, dedicated archives, and institutional pairing); tailored measures (mobilizing internal capacity, providing external assistance, and ensuring goal implementation); and dedicated funding (special-purpose funds, social contributions, and strictly earmarked use).

3.3 The Contradiction between livability and the restoration of dwellings as “Immovable cultural relics”

In recent years, China has designated a number of traditional villages and dwellings as “immovable cultural relics” in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Determination of Immovable Cultural Relics (Trial)* (the “Guidelines” hereinafter) [13]. Some have even been classified as national- or provincial-level cultural heritage protection units (such as Wengding Wa Village in Cangyuan). This is entirely appropriate and necessary for former residences of notable figures or dwellings associated with historical events. However, for traditional dwellings still inhabited by residents, it creates numerous problems that arise from the fundamentally different attributes of “dwelling” and “cultural relics.”

A “dwelling” is, by definition, “the residence of the people.”[14] This is its essence and core. Its culture emerges from habitation: A courtyard inhabited by a family becomes a vessel of family culture, and a village inhabited by an ethnic group becomes a carrier of ethnic culture. “Dwelling” is dynamic and changing. Living spaces inevitably evolve with demographic shifts, economic development, and environmental improvement. Traditional dwellings themselves have developed through continuous change and will continue to do so. In contrast, “cultural heritage” must preserve historical authenticity and therefore should not change. The two concepts are theoretically contradictory.

In practice, this contradiction manifests as the tension between residents’ demands to improve livability during the restoration of “immovable cultural relics” dwellings and the restrictions imposed by heritage-protection regulations. In rural areas, beyond addressing structural safety, material reinforcement, and roof repair, villagers often re-

quest expanded functions, increased floor area, higher ceiling heights, or improved appearance. Some of these requests are reasonable from the perspective of enhancing livability. Particularly in low-income type dwellings, where houses are rudimentary, functions are mixed, locally sourced and opportunistic materials are used, and construction lacks standardized methods or norms, the gap between “tradition” and contemporary livability is substantial, leading to strong demands for improved living conditions. Yet some of these dwellings, due to their “distinctive form and style,” “representativeness,” or “typicality,” or because they form part of a World Cultural Heritage site, have been designated as “immovable cultural relics” or even “cultural relics protection units.” The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics stipulates: “The use of immovable cultural relics must adhere to the principle of preserving their original condition, ensuring the safety of the building and its affiliated relics, and prohibiting damage, alteration, additions, or demolition.”[15] As a result, disagreements—and even sharp confrontations—often arise between residents and heritage-management or design personnel. When participating in the restoration of 33 mushroom houses in Azheke Village, Yuanyang, we encountered such conflicts every day and often had to adopt compromise solutions to control the major issues while letting the minor ones go. It can be said that every restored house was the result of mutual compromise; otherwise, restoration would not have been possible.

In response to the theoretical and practical contradictions in restoring “immovable cultural relics” dwellings, we propose the following three areas for discussion and recommendation.

(1) Can relevant regulations be appropriately revised?

Traditional dwellings, as tangible cultural heritage, require serious protection, but their designation as “immovable cultural relics” should be approached with caution. It is recommended that the *Guidelines for the Determination of Immovable Cultural Relics (Trial)* (2018) issued by the National Cultural Heritage Administration be appropriately revised. In Article 7, concerning traditional dwellings, wording such as “designation may be permitted

only under exceptional circumstances” and “generally subject to strict control” should be added.

If traditional dwellings remain within the scope of “immovable cultural relics”, it is recommended that Article 26 of the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (2017 Revision)*—which states that “...prohibiting damage, alteration, additions, or demolition”—be supplemented with: “For traditional dwellings still in residential use, necessary alterations or additions that respond to livability needs and do not impair the integrity of core protected elements may be permitted, provided that the proposed interventions undergo rigorous review and formal approval, followed by strict oversight.”

(2) Can protection and utilization policies be appropriately adjusted?

For traditional dwellings already designated as “protected heritage units,” it is recommended that they should, in principle, no longer serve residential functions (with a few original residents allowed to remain as caretakers). Their conservation and restoration should strictly follow heritage-protection requirements, and the funding should primarily be provided by the government.

For traditional dwellings designated as “immovable cultural relics” but still in residential use, it is recommended that policy be adjusted to “safeguard cultural traditions and relic values while enabling incremental improvements in livability”—that is, protection takes precedence, but limited, incremental development is permissible.

The concepts and policies for “immovable cultural relics” dwellings and “cultural relics protection units” should be clearly distinguished and differentiated. It is recommended that cases previously misclassified due to conceptual ambiguity be re-evaluated and adjusted as appropriate.

(3) Should restoration requirements be moderately relaxed?

Restoration requirements for “immovable cultural relics” dwellings should be based on practical realities and appropriately relaxed. In principle, exterior-appearance protection should remain strict, while interior development and modifications may be more flexible. Regarding height,

scale, materials, and form, “minor changes,” “gradual adjustments,” and “progressive relaxation” should be allowed when required for livability. Exterior restoration should strive to maintain original appearance while distinguishing traces of different periods.

For low-income type dwellings with substantial livability gaps, it is recommended that requirements be further relaxed. The *Guidelines* should provide overarching principles, while specific restoration content and methods are determined through on-site assessment, with post-completion documentation and archiving. Strict adherence to “no alteration from the original” or “approval of drawings prior to construction, followed by rigid compliance” is not advisable.

Conclusion

“Livability” is both a core goal of rural revitalization and an inherent aspiration of rural dwellings. Studying rural dwelling livability not only strengthens the policy framework for rural revitalization but also addresses the practical demands of contemporary rural housing construction.

A standard for evaluating dwelling livability is necessary. Building on prior research, we propose a “Hierarchical Reference Framework for Evaluating Rural Dwelling Livability,” which serves as the basis for analyzing the current state and challenges of traditional and newly constructed rural dwellings in China. This forms the foundation of the present study.

Three prior projects led by the authors (covering both traditional dwelling restoration and explorations of newly built rural dwelling types) are briefly presented to critically reflect on livability-related issues, among which three key issues constitute the focus of this paper.

Without defined goals and standards for livability, rural housing construction cannot be regulated, which is a major problem in current rural development. Therefore, the paper first discusses “the setting of livability goals and the establishment of standards” and presents our recommendations.

The greatest challenge to livability lies in low-income type areas. This is the most significant insight from our research, and we therefore propose that targeted policy sup-

port is essential to address this issue.

The contradiction between livability and the restoration of “immovable cultural relics” has been a frequent, widespread, and pressing issue in recent practice—particularly for low-income type dwellings. This paper therefore focuses on analyzing these theoretical and practical tensions and presents focused discussions and specific recommendations concerning regulatory frameworks, policy adjustments, and restoration standards.

Addressing real issues, analyzing contradictions, solving problems, and promoting rural revitalization constitute the purpose of this study. Preserving traditional character and transmitting traditional culture amid development is not only a timeless principle for improving the livability of traditional dwellings but also a high-quality pursuit for the livability of newly built rural dwellings.

Acknowledgements: Sincere thanks to the “Observers” research team of Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST) for their on-site work in Azheke and Sanhe Villages. For the former, Zhang Pan, Zeng Qingyou, Luo Xiaojie, and Zhao Saisai participated in the restoration work; for the latter, Zhang Pan, Zeng Qingyou, Huang Chun, Chen Wenya, and Sa Jinxing from the Design & Research Institute Co., Ltd. of KUST, along with graduate student Wang Yu from KUST, each made contributions to the project.

Source of Figures and Tables

Figure 6: Courtesy of Li Liping;

All other images were created or captured by the authors.

Note

1) Liu Shouying. Nine Perspectives on Rural Revitalization [Z/OL]. Planning China, (2021-06-23) [Accessed 2022-04-12]. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1703270335155875007&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

References

- [1] Xia, Q., Luo, Y., & Zhang, B. (2021). Rural construction for farmers: The preservation of traditional villages. *Planners*, (10), 26-33.
- [2] Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, & National Rural Revitalization Administration. (2021, June 8). *Guidelines on accelerating the modernization of rural housing and village construction*. https://www.mohurd.gov.cn/gongkai/fdzdgknr/tzgg/202106/20210621_250525.html.
- [3] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>.
- [4] Zhu, L. W. (2010). Avoid the restriction of form, trace back to the origin of residence: On the key values of traditional folk residence. *China Ancient City*, (6), 12-16.
- [5] Yang, F. Q., & Zheng, X. Y. (1991). *Huotang culture record*. Kunming, China: Yunnan People's Publishing House.
- [6] Zhu, L. W. (1992). *The DAI or the Tai and their architecture & customs in South China*. Bangkok, Thailand: D D Books.
- [7] Zhu, L. W. (2017). Considerations on some questions of traditional villages research. *Southern Architecture*, (1), 4-9.
- [8] Zhu, L. W. (2000). A note of Dai people's new housing test. *New Architecture*, (2), 12-15.
- [9] Zhu, L. W. (2011). *The value and inheritance of traditional dwellings*. Beijing, China: China Construction Industry Press.
- [10] Zhu, L. W. (2016). The reflection and exploration of poverty-stricken traditional dwellings maintenance and renovation: An experiment of Hani traditional dwellings. *New Architecture*, 2016 (4), 40-45.
- [11] Cheng, H. f., & Zhang, P. (2025) *Local design research: 2011-2023*, (8), 112- 113. Wuhan: Huazhong University of science and technology press.
- [12] Zhu, L. W. (2020). Reconsideration of traditional villages under the rural revitalization strategy. *Southern Architecture*, (2), 62-67.
- [13] National Cultural Heritage Administration. (2018, June 27). *Guidelines for the recognition of immovable cultural relics* (for trial implementation). <http://www.ncha.gov.cn/>.
- [14] Zhu, L. W. (2015). Discussion on the activation of traditional folk house. *China Ancient City*, (11), 4-9.
- [15] National People's Congress. (2017, November 4). *The Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics*.