



RESTORING AND DEVELOPING TRADITIONAL VILLAGES IN CHINA: THE EXAMPLE OF WOLONG ANCIENT FISHING VILLAGE^[*]

RESTAURACIÓN Y DESARROLLO DE ALDEAS TRADICIONALES EN CHINA: EL CASO DE LA ALDEA PESQUERA ANTIGUA DE WOLONG

NAN LI ^[**]

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4692-7461>
linannan11@swu.edu.cn
Southwest University (China)

MEIXIAN WEI ^[***]

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9115-2266>
908824851@qq.com
Yunnan Arts University (China)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges of balancing cultural preservation and tourism development in traditional Chinese villages, using Wolong Ancient Fishing Village in Yunnan as a case study. The research aims to identify effective strategies for sustainable restoration by integrating cultural heritage conservation with socioeconomic needs. Methodologically, it combines historical document analysis, field surveys, and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (residents, tourists, and developers). Findings reveal that while the village's spatial planning and government-enterprise collaboration framework are well-structured, its restored buildings lack immersive cultural experiences, functioning merely as aesthetic "shells." The study concludes by proposing actionable measures to enhance interactive cultural displays, optimize functional spaces, and strengthen community participation. These recommendations emphasize harmonizing vernacular architecture preservation with dynamic tourism models, offering insights applicable to global heritage conservation practices.

KEYWORDS

Cultural heritage; cultural landscapes; rural communities; vernacular architecture; sustainable development

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina los desafíos de equilibrar la preservación cultural y el desarrollo turístico en aldeas tradicionales chinas, utilizando como caso de estudio la aldea pesquera antigua de Wolong, en Yunnan. La investigación tiene como objetivo identificar estrategias efectivas para una restauración sostenible mediante la integración de la conservación del patrimonio cultural con las necesidades socioeconómicas. Metodológicamente, combina el análisis de documentos históricos, encuestas de campo y entrevistas semiestructuradas con actores clave (residentes, turistas y desarrolladores). Los hallazgos revelan que, si bien la planificación espacial de la aldea y el marco de colaboración entre el gobierno y las empresas están bien estructurados, los edificios restaurados carecen de experiencias culturales inmersivas, funcionando únicamente como "envolturas" estéticas. El estudio concluye proponiendo medidas concretas para mejorar las exhibiciones culturales interactivas, optimizar los espacios funcionales y fortalecer la participación comunitaria. Estas recomendaciones enfatizan la necesidad de armonizar la preservación de la arquitectura vernácula con modelos turísticos dinámicos, ofreciendo aportes aplicables a prácticas globales de conservación del patrimonio.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Patrimonio cultural; paisajes culturales; comunidades rurales; arquitectura vernácula; desarrollo sostenible

[*] Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities [SWU1709254], this study uncovers structural analogies between Chinese seal culture and vernacular architecture. Postdoctoral fieldwork (Yunnan Arts University, 2023–2025) anchors its Wolong Village ethnic art case analysis.

[**] Is currently an Associate Research Librarian at Southwest University. Her current research projects focus on exploring the folk culture and art of ethnic minorities in China (especially in Yunnan).

[***] Professor and Ph.D. Supervisor at Yunnan Arts University. Her primary research areas encompass ethnic art theory and ethnic cultural art.



Figure 1. Distribution Map of Traditional Chinese Villages. *Note.* Source: Traditional Chinese Village Digital Museum. Available at: <https://www.dmctv.cn> (Accessed: 25 June 2025).

Introduction

The landscapes of traditional or ancient villages have been shaped by human activities over a long period of time, and are living fossils that show the local characteristics of particular countries and regions. In China, “ancient villages inherit the historical memory, production and life wisdom, cultural and artistic crystallization and national and regional characteristics of the Chinese nation,” they therefore “possess cultural heritage in both tangible and intangible forms, [and] have high historical, cultural, scientific, artistic, social, and economic value” (Zhang, 2021).

Ancient villages unite the national spirit and represent the non-renewable cultural heritage of farming civilizations. Industrialization and urbanization processes have, however, affected such villages to varying degrees, leading to cultural and aesthetic decline, where the appearance of traditional landscapes is undermined by modern buildings and, in some cases, disappears completely. In the past decade, China has introduced documents and policies at the national level to protect ancient villages from excessive urbanization. Since 2003, China’s Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has worked with related departments (i.e., the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of Finance) to include villages with high historical and cultural value and well-preserved structures on the national protection list (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2018). Since the national restoration and protection scheme for ancient villages was launched in 2012, six groups of villages (more than 8,000 villages in total) have been identified as having important protection value (Editorial Department of the Urban and Rural Development, 2023; see Figure 1). Located in China’s southwest border region, Yunnan Province boasts an abundance of distinctive ancient villages, thanks to its unique geographical environment—characterized by three-dimensional topography and climate, abundant water systems and biodiversity—and its rich cultural factors—multiculturalism characterized by ethnic diversity and coexistence.

The first China National Conference on Historic Villages was held in Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province, China between 19–21 November 2015, producing an anthology (*Tourism Planning and Design—Historic Villages: Protection and Rejuvenation*) of theoretical research and case studies focused on tourism planning, landscape architecture, and scenic area management. In May 2017, the first Forum on Traditional Village Conservation in China was held at Nanjing Agricultural University. It was attended by more than 150 domestic and foreign representatives from more than 60 research institutions, including the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China Agricultural University, Japan's University of Tokyo, South Korea's Pusan National University, and the U.S.-based Georgia Southern University. Discussions ranged across three dimensions: the cultural memory of Chinese traditional villages; the theory and practice of traditional village protection; and research into measures for the protection of traditional villages in China. Drawing on local and international experience, participants discussed the dilemmas of what to protect and how traditional villages should be preserved, and engaged on an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional basis by drawing on perspectives from anthropology, architecture, culture, economics, ethnology, folklore, historiography and planning (Liu & Shen, 2017). In October of the same year, the Report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC put forward its rural revitalization strategy. The Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018–2022), which was developed by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, clarifies its significance, stating that the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy is a key initiative for building a beautiful China, and an effective way to inherit traditional Chinese culture (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2018). This brings new opportunities for the protection and development of traditional villages in vast areas of the country.

Preserving the original landscapes and historic and humanistic features of such villages, as well as ensuring the diversity of national cultures, is a current national development priority. Wolong Ancient Fishing Village (Figure 2), which is analyzed in this paper, has rich traditional and cultural resources that have been preserved relatively intact to date (General Office of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 2022). Its local characteristics are evident in its traditional layout and specific cultural flavor (Lin & Li, 2019), giving it substantial academic research value.

Although the conservation and development of ancient villages have been widely researched, there are still relatively few case studies of specific areas (special geographic and cultural contexts), and a lack of in-depth research and empirical analysis that show how conservation and development can be balanced. This paper will help to address these research deficiencies by providing new insights and theories, and will also contribute practical reference points that will guide researchers in related subject areas.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and suggest effective strategies for the protection and development of traditional villages in China and abroad by providing a case study of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village. Traditional villages are valuable cultural assets, in which rich traditional architecture, handicrafts, and folk culture that demonstrate the development and evolution of ancient rural societies are preserved. Through in-depth study, we can better understand the uniqueness of traditional cultures and enhance the population's sense of identity and pride in its history. The rapid development of urbanization has, however, meant that many of these villages are facing serious damage and decay. This, along with the impacts of modernization and economic pressure, makes the protection of traditional villages an urgent priority. By studying Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and dilemmas inherent in its conservation, and suggest appropriate strategies and means for similar sites. This gives this paper wider applicability and reference value. Studying the restoration and development of traditional villages also involves examining local economic development and analyzing the improvement of the population's standard of living. If these villages can be developed in a responsible way, they can provide employment opportunities and promote the transformation of the local economy. Tourism in these areas can drive the growth of local services, handi-

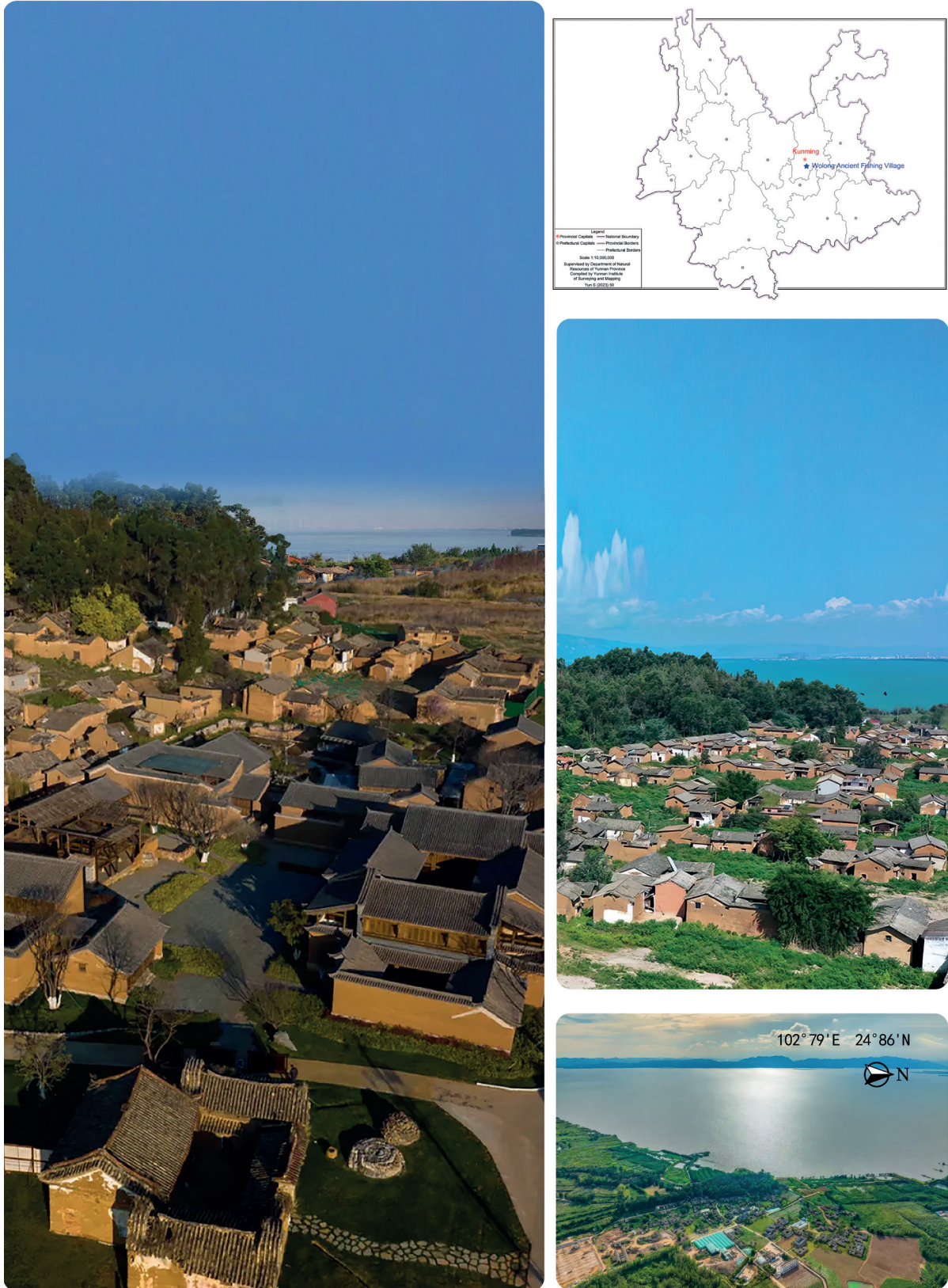


Figure 2. Geopositioning Context: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village within Yunnan Province. Note. SSource: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2022-09-19). Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LitkALmWNJXi-e4xPeT4Q> (Accessed: 26 June 2025).

crafts, and other industries; increase local incomes; and create sustainable development, not just of the villages themselves, but also the regions where they are located.

This paper reveals the actual situation of the village conservation and development project. By observing the project's progress in overall regional planning, the restoration of residential houses, and the development of cooperation between the government and the company, this study shows that relevant research and practice have already achieved a considerable amount to date, including by contributing useful experience and other reference points to similar projects. In also highlighting ongoing problems in the project's actual landscape creation and functional space use, this research will also support, supplement and inspire future work in this area.

Literature Review

Current research into the development of traditional Chinese villages is mainly undertaken by Chinese scholars who have published books, dissertations, and journal articles on the subject. The dissertations are mostly master's theses, and have almost all been produced since 2018. They are, however, most often contained within larger concerns, such as studies of all villages in a particular geographic zone in the country or studies that focus on individual villages in isolation. Of these, the books are the most complete and detailed, and include architectural design, descriptions of village institutions and policies, the excavation and inheritance of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, field surveys, history research, and tourist development.

In 2018, China Architecture and Building Press published a series of books on China's protection, planning, and renovation arrangements for traditional villages. They discuss the characteristics of protection and development in different regions and highlight technology integration, providing a working model that can be referred to and implemented during the large-scale development of protection and inheritance work in traditional villages. The addressed topics include adaptive protection and utilization planning for the protection and development of traditional villages; the improvement of traditional village infrastructure; the expansion of functionals uses; and the inheritance of traditional residential construction techniques.

In 2023, the same publisher produced the "Research Series on the Protection of Traditional Chinese Settlements" which, instead of operating on a provincial (regional) basis, emphasized the significance of traditional architectural and cultural heritage inheritance and the protection of historical and cultural heritage, while establishing the protection and research of traditional settlements as a topic worthy of continued research attention.

Drawing on these research contributions, this paper will focus in particular on the construction and utilization of cultural space in the development project. It also summarizes the previous stage of ancient village protection at the planning level (Suzhou Municipal Planning Bureau, 2008), combines theoretical analysis and tourism development case studies with domestic and international research (Wang, 2013), and addresses contemporary popular topics, including the legislative practice and conceptualization of traditional village protection (Li, 2023) and the role of digital technology in the protection and inheritance of ancient villages (Guo, 2017). This contributes not just to the protection and development of ancient villages, but also to other research fields.

Kong et al. (2021) focus on problems encountered in the development of the heritage of the ancient road, drawing on anthropological, geographical, historical, regional economic, tourism planning, and other perspectives. The authors use field research to analyze the current situation and ongoing dilemmas, proposing to alleviate the 'hollowing out' of ancient villages by exploring the cultural connotations of ancient paths and traditional villages. They also seek to demonstrate that the cross-regional integration of ancient paths can be achieved by constructing thematic cultural belts and developing them as a whole.

Wang et al. (2023) assembled a team of urban planners and architects from China to transform six villages in Zhongshan, Guangdong, China, achieving this by drawing on their celebrities, overseas Chinese culture, and folklore. The published book features two hundred images showing the detailed process of the transformation. This point-to-surface research highlighted the significance of the development of ancient villages to the whole ancient road, and showed how the development of multiple villages impacts a region, thereby contributing a new perspective that continues to influence the contemporary layout of village planning and development. Wang et al. noted that “[d]rawing a line with a point and connecting multiple points with a line” is perhaps the greatest contribution that can be made to the protection and development of ancient villages.

The journal papers’ thematic content is diversified and novel, and has four main aspects: (1) protection and restoration, including the methods, theories, and technological practices of restoring and protecting traditional villages to ensure their cultural and historical values are retained; (2) tourist development and economic benefits, including how to promote economic development through the development of tourism in traditional villages, taking into consideration sustainability and the protection of individual and community rights and interests; (3) community development and resident participation, including the relationship between the restoration of traditional villages and community development, the importance of community and resident participation and the promotion of this kind of development; and (4) cultural values and inheritance, including how to preserve and hand down important cultural elements, such as architecture, folk activities, and traditional craftsmanship.

Theoretical research on the development of ancient villages is unsystematic, with theoretical elements scattered across different areas. Furthermore, countermeasures, including proposed strategies, are also unpersuasive. A closer reflection highlights two major problems—also shown in current domestic journal papers: first, theoretical research is unsystematic and, when considered in combination with practice, is insufficiently in-depth; second, empirical research fails to provide enlightening conclusions, resulting in proposals with weak operability. In addressing these ongoing gaps in the literature, this paper puts forward specific, practical suggestions.

International scholars conducted earlier and more fruitful research into historic and cultural heritage areas and sites, small settlements, and traditional villages; by operating within a range of disciplines, including architecture, folklore, geography, and tourism, they drew on diverse research methods to cover topics as varied as Indigenous perception, village culture and tourism, protection and development, and vernacular architecture (Chen, 2018). Few international studies, however, examine Chinese villages—these are mostly researched by domestic scholars, and often analyze villages in isolation. Li and Guo (2017) studied the current situation of tourism development in traditional villages, and explored the relationship between tourism marketing and cultural preservation. Their analysis found that balancing this relationship provided a directional lead, which influenced the current paper. Lu and Ahmad (2023) obtained data on six traditional villages in Guangxi Province by means of field surveys, in-depth interviews and questionnaires to construct a scientific evaluation system for the sustainable development of traditional villages in Guangxi. Their research method and evaluation indices provided ideas for the field visits and analysis that feature in this paper’s development model. Based on a survey of traditional villages in Guizhou Province, Zhao and Ren (2021) found many problematic issues (e.g., conceptual understanding and cultural and ecological protection) in the process of rural tourism development that led to the destruction of the environment and the loss of regional cultures. Their contribution provided a blueprint and point of comparison for this paper and its recommendations.

The object of this paper, Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, is located in an ethnic minority settlement in Southwest China, which is culturally diverse and possesses rich cultural he-

ritage resources embodied in unique traditions and social structures. Studying this village and its evolution can provide insight into its long history and unique geography, while highlighting its significance to the local community and identify issues that have arisen between the protection of cultural heritage and socio-economic development. Although there are many examples of traditional village restoration in China, Wolong is currently in a state of development, which allows us to clearly observe the process, gain insights into the village's characteristics and problems, and derive universally applicable lessons. This paper is distinguished from other studies by its focus on the particular cultural and ecological environment of the minority area, which results in an acknowledgement of the area's idiosyncrasies and an emphasis on the need for interdisciplinary research. The paper therefore provides specific information and insights that can be applied to broader challenges associated with traditional village restoration and development.

Research Methods and Data Sources

This paper will use a variety of research methods and data sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and problems of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village.

Identification and Use of Research Materials

In seeking to reconstruct the historical development process of the village and explore its cultural connotations and built heritage values, this study draws on a range of research materials related to its history, culture and natural environment. Historical documents, local records, ancient books, and other related literature were first gathered to understand historical changes and important events that occurred in the preceding 600 years. These materials were obtained through provincial and municipal libraries, as well as institutions such as the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. Furthermore, folktales, oral histories, and oral traditions were collected from residents to access the village's collective memory and historical transmission. These oral materials were obtained through communication with villagers and cultural experts affiliated with the aforementioned academic institutions.

Research materials were identified through local libraries, archives and academic institutions. Historical documents, local chronicles and ancient books related to the ancient fishing village were screened and their accuracy and reliability were assessed. Folktales, oral histories, and oral traditions were actively collected from residents, and valuable oral materials were obtained from villagers and cultural experts. Although considerable challenges were encountered, the reliability and accuracy of the materials were ensured by using a comprehensive range of resources and cooperating with relevant parties.

Field Research and Interviews

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the conservation and development of the village, field research and interviews were conducted. The natural environment, architectural style, and community structure were observed during site visits, where the village's restoration, opening, overall planning, and layout were recorded. Specific attention was paid to the structural characteristics of dwellings and internal space utilization, supplemented by photographic documentation. Secondly, 25 semi-structured interviews were carried out with stakeholders (individuals, groups, or organizations that have a direct or indirect interest in the research object or research results), including the original residents (who used to live in the village), workers, and tourism operators. Representative residents of the ancient fishing village were mainly selected as interview subjects, invited to participate in the interviews through digital platforms, community organizations, and related institutions. The selection criteria for 'representative' residents included: community participation (active participation in community activities, organizations or institutions and a high level of interaction with other

residents), historical knowledge (a deep understanding of the history, culture, and traditions of the ancient fishing village), diversity (from across a broad range of ages, genders, occupations, ethnic groups, and socio-economic backgrounds), and reliability (ability to access reliable information sources and oral traditions and accurately describe historical events, people and places). These participants were identified through community organizations, relevant institutions, and other residents.

Furthermore, 20 visitors were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the new layout of the entire village and the spatial planning within the buildings. Semi-structured interviews were employed as a flexible format, enabling an in-depth exploration of the respondents' answers while maintaining a degree of consistency throughout the process.

This interview format was selected for several reasons. First, it allowed the collection of interviewee perceptions and experiences regarding the conservation and development of the ancient village. Second, it enabled the formulation of specific questions for different participants, resulting in richer and more detailed data. Finally, the use of an appropriate interview guide and questioning methodology ensured consistency and comparability throughout the process, facilitating the derivation of accurate conclusions. All interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical requirements; therefore, *inter alia*, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy was protected.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

A combination of qualitative and quantitative analytical methods was employed to process the collected data. This approach was adopted for several reasons: 1) the use of diverse methods enabled the engagement of different dimensions of the village more effectively than a single method approach; 2) it produced more comprehensive, accurate, and reliable data; 3) it allowed for a deeper engagement with the complexity of the village, including its multiple stakeholders and influencing factors; and 4) the integration of different methods will produce a range of complementary effects.

Documentary research was supported by textual and content analysis that extracts key messages and themes from historical documents and folktales. In conducting field research and accessing interview data, qualitative analysis methods were applied, including Topic Analysis—to categorize large volumes of information and data into organized topics—and Pattern Recognition, to identify recurrent patterns and associations in data. Finally, the collected data was synthesized before conclusions were drawn.

These methods and data sources were utilized to generate a comprehensive understanding of the village. They were adopted in preference to other methods, such as questionnaires and experimental design, which were not adopted because of the specificity and complexity of ancient fishing villages and human resource constraints. Consequently, a variety of methods—including literature review, field research, case study analysis, and mixed-methods data processing, were synthesized to ensure an in-depth analysis that draws on diverse perspectives. This multifaceted methodology facilitated a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the village, the proposal of practical strategies, and the provision of guidance for the conservation and sustainable development of other traditional villages.

Results

Case Study

The collection and organization of literature, along with the extraction and textual analysis of local residents' oral traditions, provided significant insights into the village's origins and development, as well as the value of its cultural heritage. Evidence was found of a long historical trajectory, establishing the village as an important cultu-

ral center in both ancient and modern China. Furthermore, the preserved “one seal” traditional houses and the discovered shell mound site were identified as the most significant cultural heritage assets.

Origin and Development

The name of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village—formerly known as Wulong—derives from the traditional *Wolongpu*, and has a history extending back to 1381 during the early years of the Ming dynasty. Located in the Chenggong District of Kunming City, Yunnan Province, the village is situated at the foot of Qixing Mountain on the eastern bank of Dianchi Lake. It is recognized as one of the Eight Scenic Locations of Chenggong, as recorded in the *Chenggong County Annals* (1886) and the “Yu Pu Xing Deng”. This latter source, depicting the period between the late Qing dynasty and the Republic of China, describes an evening scene on Dianchi Lake where the fishing boats returning to Wulong, illuminated by cooking fires and lamps, resemble a constellation of stars from a distance.

During the late Neolithic period, the area was identified as a Wu Man site, where the remains of dwellings housing 37 tribal soldiers were discovered. In addition to designating an ethnic minority group in Southwest China and a residential site, the term ‘Wu Man’ historically referred to ‘barbarians’ in ancient nomenclature. During the early Ming dynasty, some occupants of Jiangnan, in eastern China, settled in the area; subsequently, these 10-12 households were organized into a village under the military cantonment system. The multiculturalism of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties led to the construction of several temples and ancestral halls. Historically, fishing and trade were prevalent in the northern part of the village, while those in the south were characterized by agricultural and intellectual cultivation. During the late Qing and Republic of China periods—specifically during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931-45), more popularly known in China as the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression—the village temple became a school, the ancestral halls became part of the war department, and scientific research was conducted in the village. The Sino-French Youren School for refugees was also established (operating from 1938 to 1942), along with the Chuien Temple and the Jingle nunnery. These developments established Wolongpu as a cultural center in wartime Chenggong.

The Value and Importance of Cultural Heritage

The one-seal architectural style is part of the village’s distinctive identity. Each traditional village has its own unique architectural features, with variations in building form, materials, structure, and decoration. Protecting and restoring this original style allows visitors and researchers to recognize a village’s identity, thereby increasing its popularity and attractiveness. Furthermore, these architectural styles carry rich historical information and cultural connotations, serving as powerful witnesses to the evolution of villages and the inheritance of local cultures. Through building form and style, the lifestyles, values, and aesthetic interests of their residents can be understood. The architectural image of traditional villages also constitutes an important resource for social and economic development; many villages have unique architectural styles, which function as a kind of cultural capital and boost the local economy by positively impacting tourism development and cultural promotion. In the restoration and development of traditional villages, emphasizing architectural style facilitates the protection of the natural environment and traditional building techniques. The materials and structural layout of traditional buildings are generally selected to ensure a more harmonious coexistence with the local climate, geography, and natural resources. When traditional architectural styles are preserved and applied, resource wastage and environmental damage can be reduced, while the local architectural skills and traditions can be maintained.

Apart from its one-seal dwellings, the village’s most important cultural heritage value lies in its shell mound site (Figure 3). In 1958, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chine-

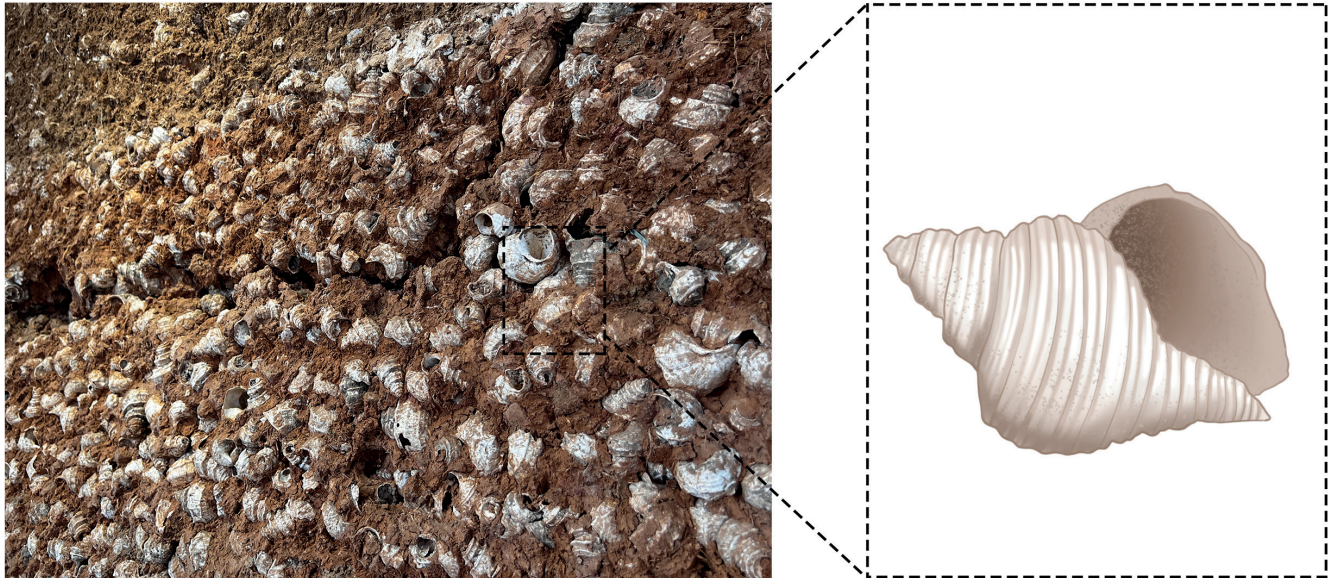


Figure 3. Shell Mound Site. *Note.* Source: Photograph of the exhibition at the Dianfeng Museum, Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.

se Academy of Sciences conducted an investigation around Dianchi Lake and found shell mounds were found on the east slope of Wulong Mountain; this confirmed that humans have lived in Wolong, the village of the Yi ancestors, for at least 4,000 years (Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, 2022). Archaeologists also found a large number of items related to fishing, hunting, and textile work, along with prevalent traces of rice husks on pottery shards that were interspersed with layers of conch shells. In 1973, archaeologists from the Chenggong Cultural Museum also discovered typical late Neolithic artifacts, such as shouldered stone axes and sand-filled red pottery, along with the bones of pigs and other animals.

This shell mound site is currently the best preserved and richest prehistoric cultural site in Yunnan. Unlike its east coast and Guangxi counterparts, the shell mound sites in Yunnan are all of the lakeside type. The village, which lies on the shore of Dianchi Lake, is typical in this regard and is therefore ideally suited to a study of the area's cultural, economic, and social development in the period since the Ming dynasty, and perhaps before.

Field Survey

In July 2023, a field survey of the village examined the “one seal” residential architecture, the new layout, and the main architectural functional spaces (including those within the village's primary buildings).

“One Seal”

The village has preserved a large number of traditional dwellings and buildings derived from them, which are representative of the local style and give the village its texture (Figure 4). Traditional houses in Yunnan, commonly described as “one seal”, belong to a traditional Chinese residential genre frequently adopted by the local Han and Yi ethnic groups. Yunnan is located in a highland area, and its four mild seasons often produce windy conditions. Dwellings with high walls and small windows are desirable here, because they keep out wind and sand and protect against fire. The structures in this area also incorporate internal roofed patios, which save land, improve ambient conditions (including temperature and humidity), and provide shade. This type of residence is usually a quadrangle (i.e., a square surrounded by the main house, side, and reverse-set houses) which forms a sealed or “one seal” unit (Figure 5). The spatial order and humanistic environment of “one seal” structures continue the lineage of Han-style quadrangle houses, reflecting traditional Chinese cul-



Figure 4. Conservation Efficacy Assessment: Pre/Post-intervention State of "one seal" Courtyard Dwellings. Note. Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.







Figure 5. Aerial View of Restored “One Seal”. Note. Source: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2022-07-30). Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BObrOxskxdV_sb9hL0Oo-Q (Accessed: 26 June 2025).

ture and the ethical order of “the ritual” in the architecture. Table 1 shows the architectural styles of the “one seal” traditional residential houses; this is significant because these styles constitute an important part of the village’s cultural heritage and are essential for both their preservation and development. The table also highlights “spatial progression, axial symmetry, inward enclosure and formal evolution”, which is significant to the general discussion because the resulting stylistic features reflect not only the ancient village’s historical background, national culture, and regional characteristics, but also the villagers’ understanding of their homes, lifestyles, and social relationships, which directly impacts both the transmission of culture and the sustainable development of villages.

The Village’s New Layout and Functional Spaces

Building restoration is currently underway in the part of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village that is being developed, and this process is expected to expand in all directions. The restored buildings in the open area are distributed on both sides of the main road, which forms an axis. The Wolong Village Museum and Dianshi Craft Hall are located on the left, while the Library, Dianfeng Museum of Art, and a book studio are on the right (Figure 6).

Table 1. Architectural Styles of Traditional “One Seal” Houses

No.	Image	Architectural style	Description
1		Progression	The spatial elements of “one seal” dwellings are arranged along a longitudinal axis, forming a continuous and orderly space. The transition from fully open outdoor space to semi-open space—and the changes generated by the move from “courtyard-corridor-interior”—yields a rich emotional experience. This creates a harmonious flow, and reflects the philosophical idea of the Golden Mean.
2		Symmetry	The spatial elements of the building follow the order of axial alignment and balanced arrangement, with the central axis connecting the main and reverse-set houses, and the side houses symmetrically arranged along the axis on both sides. The roof heights of all three houses are strictly differentiated; the relationship between primary and secondary elements reflects the Confucian patriarchal system.
3		Enclosure	The building is centered on the patio, surrounded by the main, side, and reverse-set houses; the structures to the left and right are symmetrical along the central axis, forming a cohesive enclosed space. This is a very private form of architecture that reflects the relatively introverted character of traditional Chinese Confucian culture.
4		Evolution	The “one seal” dwelling can be divided, connected, reduced, or increased in a standardized unit pattern, according to the economic circumstances and needs of each household. Common variations include the “half seal” or “three main and two sides” additions, where the type and number of houses are increased. This type of dwelling is extremely adaptable and has influenced contemporary collective housing.

Note. Source: Photographs from Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2020-05-01 and 2023-06-09), available at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/VPcu8BsyDKtZaQP16nTQnQ> and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mFqavZy94ic4cPxYW9cXNA> (Accessed: 28 June 2025). Textual information was collected from the exhibition at the Dianfeng Museum of Art, Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



During the field survey, the authors observed that the project emphasizes the sensory experience in this open area, highlighting cultural experience, leisure, and ecological aspects. Six major thematic spaces (Bo, Yi, Shu, Mei, Xun, and Shang) are currently planned. The corresponding buildings and experiential spaces are: the Wolong Village Museum (Figure 7), the Dianshi Craft Hall (Figure 8), the Library (Figure 9), the Dianfeng Museum of Art (Figure 10), natural viewing spaces such as the Jinhai Pavilion and recreational halls, and planting areas. The layout of Bo, Yi, Shu, and Mei provides expe-

Figure 6. Wolong Ancient Fishing Village (Development) Floor Plan. Note. Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



Figure 7. Wolong Village Museum. *Note.* Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



Figure 8. Dianshi Craft Hall. *Note.* Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



Figure 9. Library. *Note.* Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



Figure 10. Dianfeng Museum of Art. *Note.* Source: Photographs taken by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.

Table 2. The Main Architectural Functional Spaces of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village

No.	Site	Thematic space	Function	Presentation mode
1	Wolong Village Museum	Bo	Record of human activities (production and life)	Text, object display
2	Dianshi Craft Hall	Yi	Display of woodworking techniques (Sunmao mortise and tenon techniques), including construction techniques and craft carving	Object display
3	Library	Shu	Activity space	Text, object display
4	Dianfeng Museum of Art	Mei	Display of local information (ecology, sites, specimens)	Text, installations

Note. Textual data compiled by the authors during a field survey in Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, July 2023.



Figure 11. Thematic Space of Bo, Yi: Artisanal Appreciation & Woodworking Course Experience. Note. Source: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2021-02-07). Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1XWDkilQOmWsiq62AcVJuw> (Accessed: 26 June 2025).



Figure 12. Thematic Space of Shu, Mei: Artwork Exhibition & Didactic Engagement. Note. Source: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2023-04-03 and 2023-04-13). Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rc77qF4yryy2S8QafXrP4w> and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/JOKTPWUPjKeKu-4mENFJD7w> (Accessed: 26 June 2025).



Figure 13. Thematic Space of Xun, Shang: Open-Air Symposium, Performative Demonstrations & Leisure Protocols. Note. Source: Wolong Ancient Fishing Village, WeChat Official Account (2024-07-26 and 2023-06-15). Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8skYZYCF-InNk77jBU03Aw> and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Llqz5ffTFZAKqsRf1jj0YQ> (Accessed: 26 June 2025).

riences of history and culture—including an immersive reading—while Xun accommodates leisure through countryside sightseeing. These features are complemented by folk culture displays, such as those at the Cailian Tea and Kongtao (Pottery) houses. Shang showcases the area's climatic conditions, which are suitable for planting, and displays the project's ecological management and improvements. The village's new layout contains functional architectural spaces in open areas (Table 2). Complementing these established thematic spaces, the scenic area has also organized a series of indoor and outdoor activities and participatory experiences throughout the year, designed in response to climatic variations and aligned with traditional festivals, to demonstrate the distinct functional zoning and utility value of each area (Figure 11, 12 and 13).

Interviews

Interviews with scenic area staff, tourism industry practitioners, and residents were conducted and integrated with information from official publications; this facilitated a clearer understanding of the village's development. The field study also focused on the analysis of the village's overall functional space and the internal spatial layout of the main buildings.

Development

Thousands of residents were relocated to new dwellings in June 2018, to enable the restoration of the village's buildings. After some old houses were partially repaired, the People's Government of Chenggong District, Kunming City, and the Kunming OCT Beautiful Countryside Development Co. officially signed the "Handover Letter of the Protection and Ecological Governance Project of Wulong Ancient Fishing Village in Chenggong" in August 2020. This agreement made the latter party solely responsible for the village's protection, restoration, upgrading, and operation. In May 2022, the Implementation Program of Rural Construction Actions—issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council—emphasized the necessity of restoring traditional villages and extraordinary local cultures, while highlighting regional characteristics and preventing the imitation of urban construction models. The program aimed to create a modern version of "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" (a legendary *shanshui* landscape painting by Yuan dynasty painter Huang Gongwang) (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Consequently, the company proposed building Wulong Ancient Fishing Village as the model of a traditional village in modern China that is environmentally friendly, beautifully built, culturally diverse, and colorful, thereby realizing a "five-in-one" planning concept that integrates agriculture, art, culture, tourism, commerce, and ecology.

The idea of this concept is to ensure all five elements benefit from their coexistence; consequently, hundreds of millions of yuan have been invested to make this happen. The remaining "one seal" architectural structures serve as the project's carrier, while the ecological protection of Dianchi Lake constitutes its theme, supported by the maintenance of the wetland environment and diversified landscape resources. This innovative project integrates ecological management, traditional building and village restoration, agricultural and cultural output, and the popularization of science and technology with cultural heritage and tourism. According to the exhibition materials in the Dianfeng Museum of Art, the village covers an area of 430 acres. To date, the main road and a basic municipal pipe network have been constructed, nearly 20 acres of wetlands have been rehabilitated, and 17 historical buildings—with a total construction area of about 6,000 square meters—have been restored (Wulong Ancient Fishing Village, 2022).

Visitor Experience

During the field survey, we set two main questions related to the sense of spatial experience were posed to visitors:

- 1) Do you think that the current thematic spatial planning of the village's entire open area is reasonable?
- 2) How do you feel after visiting the interior of buildings such as the museum and the Dianshi Craft Hall?

The respondents indicated that the current planning of the six thematic spaces is reasonable. However, it was also reported that the building interiors did not match their expectations; specifically, some exhibits were perceived as repetitive and lacking depth, with several buildings appearing to be empty. It was noted that after learning about the village from online platforms, the impressions had been formed that the "one seal" dwelling was the primary point of interest. Furthermore, respondents reported limited engagement, stating that they were unable to spend more time there and were restricted to taking photographs.

Discussion

The case study provided insight into the village's historical process of development and cultural heritage, while interviews facilitated a clearer understanding of the cooperation between the government and the company in the construction project. Following the field research, the three central issues identified were the restoration of the traditional "one seal" houses, the spatial planning of the entire village following restoration, and the functional use of the buildings.

Implementation of a New Village Layout Based on "One Seal"

The restoration of the "one seal" building was deemed successful, leaving visitors deeply impressed by local cultural characteristics. However, in the currently open area, a clear divergence was observed between the rationality of the overall layout and the actual visitor experience. Regarding the village's organization, the six thematic spaces (Bo, Yi, Xun, Shang, Shu, and Mei) highlight the intended plan and align with the local folk characteristics of Yunnan and the village. It is evident that the village, following three years of reconstruction, has been restored to the public view. The project has implemented reasonable measures to restore traditional dwellings, preserve traditional handicrafts, and protect cultural heritage within a context of long-standing history and a unique natural landscape. Furthermore, the information on display reflects a commitment to environmental awareness and sustainable development. However, it is argued that the actual landscape currently functions as a compilation of restored houses. Despite the architectural uniqueness, the experience lacks a sense of integration and immersion; consequently, the surrounding residential houses that have not yet been restored often appear more appealing to tourists than the new functional spaces.

Based on the unique charm of the "one seal" traditional dwelling and the village's long history, the project should have planned the division of the village more comprehensively and reasonably to restore its folklore and uniqueness to the greatest possible extent. This also applies to areas that have not yet been restored, such as the cultural and creative master artisan workshop and the Dianchi Lake ecological classroom mentioned on the official website. The village's folk culture must be actively explored across different stages of its history and presented in various forms, extended beyond static artifacts and text. Furthermore, the village's cultural characteristics should be analyzed both in terms of the commonality of the Yunnan region and as an individual site, facilitating a clearer reflection of its distinctive aspects.

Functional Spaces and Cultural Displays

Regarding the concept of overall village layout realized by relying on the "one seal" building—although the Wolong Village Museum, Dianfeng Museum of Art, Library, and other key cultural sites are the key construction targets—the displays inside the buildings are relatively weak and mostly consist of static objects and text. They conse-

quently do not produce an interactive effect or a curiosity for exploration, and fail to show the village's rich and distinctive heritage.

The Wolong Village Museum exhibits the village's history and livelihood in two corresponding parts. The former presents the developmental overview of the village and cultural information obtained from the shell mound site; the latter presents the village's farming culture and displays old objects commonly used in the homes of ordinary villagers at the time the village was relocated. This section is divided into four display panels: the human element; the household; utensils and small objects; and farming, fishing, and hunting. The Dianshi Craft Hall highlights woodwork and exhibits construction components and handicrafts.

It was found that half the space in the library contained a photographic exhibition from a photographer's association, of which the curation and layout were relatively simple. The remaining space was a combined reading area and display of traditional Tayin printing techniques. Very few books were on display; the hardware of the bookshelves and reading chairs was incomplete; and the display of printing techniques was set up as a decorative background on the wall.

In the Dianfeng Museum of Art, all works are exhibited on the walls. The content of the exhibition indicates that this is not an art museum in the general sense; instead, it functions more as science and technology museum, as it includes information on ecological conservation, botanical specimens, and geomorphological features. Although some domestic and international art museums exhibit works such as earth art or installations that are not paintings, various factors—including the geographic location of the museum and the significance of the site's conservation—result in a mismatch between the spatial layout and the cultural display. It suggested that it might be more appropriate to place the library's photography exhibition here or to display works of folk art created during the village's development. Currently, however, the distinctive functions of the village's museums, art galleries, and libraries have been blurred; activities and exhibitions appropriate for one space often appear in another, creating a confusing experience for visitors. The text in the Dianfeng Museum of Art is similar to that in the village museum, and both museums and the Crafts Hall exhibit or textually introduce the "one seal" building. The study concludes that the theme of each functional space should be clear, with each maintaining its own distinct exhibition content.

As indicated by the floor plan in Table 2, the Xun-themed functional space (circled in purple) occupies most of the geographic area on the left side of the main road, emphasizing leisure and natural landscape appreciation. According to the survey, the buildings in this space include the Cailian Tea House, the Pottery House (Kongtao), the Wolong Guest House, and the Jinhai Pavilion. Upon entering these buildings, however, it is often found that no facilities exist other than the restored structure itself, or that they have been transformed into coffee shops or temporary exhibition areas. The official website indicates that the floor plan of the Cailian Ecological Exhibition area does not include substantive content of the exhibition, which may reflect that the project is currently a work-in-progress.

Promoting the Sustainable Development of Ancient Villages

Overall Spatial Layout and Local Implementation of the Ancient Village

Visitors generally believe that the spatial layout of the six themes is reasonable, confirming that the project developers have clearly grasped the relationship between the inheritance of local cultural characteristics and the construction of spatial order. The humanistic environment was, however, viewed as weak, as was the sense of experience between the local ethnic culture and social relations generated by the "one seal" dwelling. Entering the village did not give rise to a strong sense of a cultural space; indeed, if unrepaired buildings were not spread throughout the village, visitors could easily form the impression

of visiting a newly built cultural and creative park. It is therefore propose that the village's cultural atmosphere and the experience need to be enhanced through the following:

(1) Incorporate cultural elements to decentralize the regional concept of cultural display. The village's long history and ecological environment could be complemented by adding traditional cultural elements to all corners of the village. For example, local artists or craftsmen could be invited to develop situational cultural display areas through sculptures, frescoes, stone carvings, or videos that convey information about the village's history and traditional lifestyle. Placing these cultural elements in each corner will mean that visitors do not need to be physically present on the premises to view them.

(2) Integrating characteristic cultural industries with ecological landscapes. This does not mean simply inviting cooperative merchants to undertake product marketing, but instead suggests situating production participation in the product production process. Ancient villages are usually located in places with beautiful natural environments and unique ecological resources, and so the development process should focus on protecting and rationally using these resources to ensure the sustainable development of the ecological environment. For example, if cultural and educational experience routes are set up for handicraft production, local traditional food production sites and folklore inns can be provided, running through a number of points and places in the village. The whole village will be active, and every corner will have a sense of dynamism. It is also possible to promote farming experiences by relying on the open structure of the "Xun" themed space. This will not only encourage local economic development, but will also increase the visitors' understanding of the ancient village and strengthen their sense of participation.

(3) Involving social organizations in organizing cultural activities. During the field research, the village organized several traditional cultural demonstrations, such as a Hanfu (ethnic costume) competition and a demonstration of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Wamao. Wamao is a kind of sacred animal unique to Yunnan, in the shape of a cat with its mouth wide open. It is usually made of fired clay or chiseled stone. There is a local folk custom of placing Wamao on the roofs of houses, and in doorways and other locations. Most of these activities are organized by external social organizations, who rent the venues for their needs. Although these partnerships are often short-lived, social organizations can take some of the burden of the preservation and continuation of cultural heritage, because they can undertake research projects and surveys to record and preserve the historical and cultural information of traditional villages. They can also organize volunteers and professionals to participate in the restoration and protection of ancient buildings, and carry out publicity and educational activities to raise public awareness (Gao et al., 2019). In summary: local governments play an important role in formulating policies and providing financial resources and supervision, while social organizations support and participate in research, restoration, protection and publicity. Only with the joint efforts of both actors can the protection of ancient villages achieve long-term results, and realize the goals of restoration, inheritance and sustainable development.

Space Utilization Planning Inside the "One Seal"

Based on the space utilization inside the building, the study indicates that the project construction needs to fully realize the cultural heritage and the protection and inheritance of traditional folk crafts. The restoration and development of traditional villages should avoid a patchwork approach to building restoration, and should shape both the "type" and "soul" of the site, by displaying the village's unique characteristics and resources within architectural clusters. Fieldwork showed the restored buildings were, inter alia, built as craft halls, museums, art museums, and tea houses, and used to display the village and its local ethnic cultural characteristics. But the cultural displays inside these key buildings are weak and show a number of problems: most are object displays and lack interactive and attractive effects; the cultural displays are too traditional and are not integrated; and the contents of several pavilions, most notably

the “one seal” houses, are the same. Indeed, the research found these displays did not reflect the village’s rich cultural heritage, including the “shell mound” culture. Several pavilions were empty, which reflected a failure to incorporate the village’s rich heritage resources. The following four recommendations are offered:

(1) Establishing innovative and interactive display methods. Consider setting up interactive display areas in craft halls, museums, and art museums, and introducing multimedia technologies (including multimedia displays, virtual reality, and other technologies) to enable visitors to learn about the local ethnic culture through an audio-visual and ‘hands-on’ experiences.

(2) Promoting interaction between people. In the tea houses and other leisure spaces, the use of traditional handicraft production and local specialty tea tasting could promote the dialogue and open communication.

(3) Integrating resources and cooperation to diversify display contents. In order to address the problem of content similarity in multiple pavilions, display content should be re-planned and designed in a way that underlines the uniqueness of each pavilion. Different cultural heritages can be selected for display in accordance with theme and orientation in order to avoid content duplication. The collection scope should also be expanded to incorporate more representative cultural relics and cultural heritage that will enrich display content. Cooperation with relevant organizations, academia, local governments, and communities should also seek to improve and develop cultural displays. Experts and scholars can be invited to participate in the planning and design to provide professional advice and suggestions. Cooperation with local residents and cultural practitioners should seek to jointly excavate and pass on local cultural heritage, ensure the accuracy and richness of the display content, and promote community and resident participation. Local residents and cultural practitioners could also be a source of more interesting stories and traditional skills that could be added to the display.

(4) Improving cultural display planning. Detailed planning should be undertaken when carrying out specific implementation. A professional team, including cultural heritage protection experts, exhibition designers, and multimedia technicians, can be organized to oversee project planning and implementation. Overall coordination should also work to ensure the coherence and completeness of the display content while taking the experience and feelings of visitors into consideration.

Conclusion

This paper’s case study addresses the conservation and development of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village in Yunnan Province, China. It first engages the literature to establish the village’s historical background and cultural characteristics. It then undertakes a field study of the village’s overall layout and architectural functional space to address visitors’ cultural experiences. Finally, key information is collected and comprehensively analyzed. It finds that the overall (new) layout of the village, and in particular the planning of the six thematic spaces, have achieved a high level of success. The layout of the entire village’s thematic development has taken into account a range of factors, including local ecological resources, history and culture, and local ethnic customs, while reflecting the sustainable development of ancient villages. The successful restoration of the “one seal” highlights the local folk culture, enhances traditional architectural features, and strongly protects cultural heritage. The excavation and development of ancient villages, and the cooperation between the government and the company, clearly responded to the national call for village construction.

However, there are also clear differences between the planning concept and the project’s actual landscape, which are attested to by the raw landscape, the lack of a strong sense of experience, and the poor use of space within restored buildings. The general

perception is that there is currently only a “shell”, with considerable room for improvement. This paper therefore offers two recommendations for the development of Wolong Ancient Fishing Village: in line with the rational planning of the village’s regional division, the folk experience of the village should be restored as much as possible; further, the functional space of each building should highlight its distinctive theme, the architectural and cultural characteristics of residential spaces should be fully realized, and imitation should be avoided to fully manifest the village’s personality.

The paper also presents a sustainable development perspective on traditional ancient villages that acknowledges and engages both protection and development. Yunnan Province has the country’s largest concentration of ethnic minorities, and its natural and human resources have attracted considerable attention from researchers. The region has many traditional ancient villages that have played important cultural and social roles throughout the country’s history. However, with modernization, they are confronted by many challenges, including population loss, aging buildings, and the gradual disappearance of traditional culture.

This paper makes a novel contribution by focusing on the link between conservation and development. Traditional ancient villages are protected in order to preserve and pass on cultural heritage, while they are developed to promote economic growth and social progress. The paper’s case study makes a valuable contribution in this respect by showing how it is possible to achieve sustainable development while preserving traditional culture.

This paper addresses deficiencies and shortcomings in previous studies by revealing the actual situation of the village conservation and development project and highlighting ongoing problems related to landscape creation and the use of functional space, thereby supporting and complementing findings from previous research.

The finding that the planning of the village—in terms of overall regional layout and residential restoration—is relatively developed supports previous studies that have examined the planning and implementation effectiveness of conservation and development projects. The results highlight ongoing issues with the project, including the effectiveness of the overall village layout and the use of functional spaces within the restored buildings. This complements previous observations in conservation and development projects and provides directions for future improvements. In drawing on these findings, practitioners will not merely focus on planning and implementation, but will also consider the quality of the actual landscape and the effective use of functional spaces. This will inspire future research into improving the quality of landscape design and optimizing the layout of functional spaces, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of conservation and development projects.

Since the object of this study is still under development, the rationality and sustainability of the projects need to be further examined. As a result, some of the issues and views raised in this paper are inevitably preliminary, and it is hoped they will be explored further in future research. In general, the responsible restoration and sustainable development of traditional villages should consider three key factors: visitor experience and inspiration; applicability to, and promotion of, other traditional villages; and future developmental needs. This paper aims to provide a reference for realizing sustainable development and the inheritance of cultural heritage in traditional villages across the world.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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