
Traditional Village Protection and Activation Utilization

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Abstract: As an important component of cultural heritage, traditional villages carry rich historical and cultural landscape information, possessing extremely high civilization value and inheritance significance. The diversity of traditional villages' values makes their protection and activation utilization of great significance in the current era. This article elaborates on the methods of traditional village protection and utilization from two aspects: the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage protection in traditional villages and enriching the development paths of traditional villages. It concludes that living protection, sustainable utilization, continuous innovation, and scientific development are the fundamental lifelines of traditional village protection and activation utilization.

Keywords: Traditional villages; Protection and activation utilization; Intangible cultural heritage protection and inheritance; Development paths

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1. Introduction

Traditional villages, as a crucial component of cultural heritage, embody abundant historical and cultural landscape information, bearing exceptional civilization value and inheritance significance^[1]. In October 2014, during a visit to Anhui, the General Secretary emphasized the need to further promote the integrated development of culture and tourism, strengthen the protection, inheritance, and utilization of traditional villages and traditional architecture, and facilitate the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional culture^[2]. The 2025 Central Document No. 1 underscores the advancement of traditional village characteristic protection zone construction, the enhancement of rural cultural heritage protection, inheritance, and activation utilization, and the thorough implementation of rural cultural relic protection projects^[3].

2. Basic connotation and value of Chinese traditional villages

The definition of traditional villages in China refers to those formed earlier, endowed with abundant traditional resources, and possessing certain historical, cultural, scientific, artistic, social, ecological, and economic values^[4]. There are mainly four conditions for the formation of traditional villages. Firstly, the surrounding environment: the village landscape bears distinct historical features, the village site selection has prominent characteristics, and the types of village relics are rich.

Secondly, spatial pattern: the village characteristics are cultural, the village texture is unique, and the village structure is complete. Thirdly, traditional architecture: the building types are diverse, the architectural style is regional, and the architectural decoration is artistic. Fourthly, intangible cultural heritage characteristics: the intangible types are diverse, the intangible features are representative, and the intangible inheritance is dynamic.

The value of traditional villages is diverse. Firstly, traditional villages have resource value as non-renewable elements of human cultural history. Secondly, they possess cultural value, serving as a spiritual home for cultural confidence and cultural consciousness. Thirdly, traditional villages hold ecological value, embodying respect for nature, compliance with nature, and rational utilization of nature. Fourthly, they exhibit distinctive value with differentiated regional features, particularity, and abundant relics. Fifthly, traditional villages have industrial value, driving the transformation and activation of industrial development. Sixthly, they embody aesthetic value, representing the high unification of natural beauty, social beauty, and artistic beauty.

3. Contemporary significance of traditional village protection and activation utilization

The protection and activation utilization of traditional villages are important platforms for implementing rural revitalization strategies. Traditional villages are spiritual homes that foster cultural confidence, self-esteem, consciousness, and self-improvement ^[5]. Such efforts can fully activate rural economic regeneration, stimulate the endogenous driving force for traditional village development, and provide a creative transformation platform for facilitating benign interaction between urban and rural elements ^[6]. By using traditional villages as cultural carriers, we can cultivate new momentum for rural development, enhance the quality of agricultural development, and continuously promote industrial prosperity. The protection and activation utilization of traditional villages drive rural revitalization, turning cultural confidence into conscious cultural development.

These efforts also possess unique value in regional integration. Huizhou-style traditional villages, for instance, stand out in the current integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region, featuring a comprehensive system, rich connotation, distinct characteristics, complete structure, and profound value. They simultaneously exhibit the core values of Chinese culture. In integrating the Yangtze River Delta and promoting high-quality creative transformation and development, these villages hold an unparalleled position, serving as focal points that highlight cities' competitiveness, attractiveness, and influence. They are traditional village brands that best showcase China's spiritual and cultural values.

Furthermore, the protection and activation utilization of traditional villages can coordinate new urban-rural relationships, strengthening the consciousness of villagers to protect their villages, shifting from "being asked to protect" to "wanting to protect." These efforts activate rural economic regeneration and stimulate the endogenous driving force for the development of traditional villages.

4. Methods for the protection, activation, and utilization of traditional villages

4.1. Protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage

The protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage primarily involve preserving the ecological environment of such heritage and activating the economic vitality of intangible cultural heritage tourism destinations ^[7]. The rapid development of modern society has brought significant impacts to the traditional inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. To effectively protect and pass on this heritage, it is essential to preserve its ecological environment. Once the intangible cultural heritage has its own independent development environment, it can gradually integrate into modern society through government policy guidance. Financial support is indispensable for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, and another means of protection and inheritance is activating the economic vitality of intangible cultural heritage tourism destinations, such as enhancing immersive experiences for tourists.

4.2. Enriching development paths for traditional villages

The development paths of traditional villages need to be explored and utilized in multiple ways. By promoting traditional village tourism, we can enrich these development paths and showcase attractive activities and skill highlights^[8]. Improving the development path of traditional village tourism can provide opportunities for tourists to understand intangible cultural heritage.

One way to enrich the development path of tourism destinations is through experiential tourism. At intangible cultural heritage inheritance centers, attractive and participant-friendly projects can be opened to the public, enhancing tourists' sense of participation and experience. For example, in Jingdezhen, tourists can engage in the entire process of ceramic making, enjoying an immersive experience that boosts their participation and satisfaction with their own creations.

Another approach is educational tourism, which combines research and learning with travel^[9]. Traditional villages are rich in intangible cultural heritage, and by combining tourism with learning about these skills, participants can deeply understand, follow, and learn relevant crafts, exploring and inheriting the essence of intangible cultural heritage.

5. Problems in the protection, activation, and utilization of traditional villages

The protection, activation, and utilization of traditional villages face several challenges, including funding pressures, a shortage of talent for protection and utilization, inadequate social awareness, and imbalances in protection and utilization^[10]. Infrastructure development, heritage protection, and resource utilization in traditional villages require significant financial investment, and the funding pressure for their protection necessitates support from the government, society, and citizens. The lack of professionals and teams in fields such as tourism planning and cultural heritage protection leads to a lack of scientific rigor and systematic approach in protection and utilization efforts. The cultural value and social significance of traditional villages have not been widely recognized, and there is a lack of understanding about the importance of their protection and utilization. In the process of protecting and utilizing traditional villages, effective protection and reasonable utilization are often overlooked, with some focusing solely on protection and hindering development, while others overexploit, diminishing the value of the heritage.

6. Conclusion

As an essential component of cultural heritage, traditional villages carry rich historical information and cultural landscapes, possessing immense civilizational value and significance for inheritance. This article elaborates on the methods for the protection, utilization, and development of traditional villages from two aspects: the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in traditional villages and enriching their development paths. Active protection, sustained utilization, continuous innovation, and scientific development should be the fundamental lifelines of protection, utilization, and innovative development.

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