

# A study on the protection and utilization of ancestral temple building in Southeast Hubei province-- A case study of Baini village

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**Abstract.** The protection of rural traditional ancestral halls is currently facing severe challenges in the process of rapid urbanization. Aiming at the practical difficulties of traditional ancestral halls, such as the decay of building materials, the damage of building structure, the disappearance of construction techniques, and the destruction of context and environment, this paper analyzes the contemporary value of traditional ancestral halls in traditional villages by taking Baini Village in Tongshan County, Hubei Province as an example. The research points out that the stability of building materials and structures can be improved through the rescue restoration of traditional ancestral halls; the ancestral halls and traditional villages should be integrated into the overall protection and revitalization through strategies such as integration of traditional ancestral halls and villages, integration of new and old, and integration of production and villages, so as to promote the revitalization of rural culture and provide endogenous power for the sustainable development of traditional villages, and provide reference for the future protection of rural architectural heritage.

**Keywords:** Protection of historical heritage, Restoration of ancient buildings, Inheritance of ancestral hall construction techniques, Overall protection strategies, Revitalization of local culture.

## 1 Introduction

Due to the influence of migration movements such as "population from Jiangxi migrate to Huguang" and the natural environment of local mountainous areas, many traditional villages with clans living together still remain in southeastern Hubei, and maintains the state of having an ancestral shrine in every village. In accordance with statistics, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has issued five batches of traditional villages in China (as of June 2019), of which 206 of them in Hubei Province have been picked, with 70 in southeastern Hubei, accounting for 34%. The traditional village form of clan settlement gives a positive survival for the organization and management of clans.

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Meanwhile, as a medium to sustain such family ties, the ancestral shrine represents a notable position in the traditional village and performs an influential role in its spatial evolution. As a result, ancestral shrines have turned into the carriers of families' traditional cultural concepts and organizational structures in southeastern Hubei.

Taking Baina Village in Tongshan County as a case, this article discovers the contemporary value of preserving and revitalizing the traditional villages' ancestral shrines given the real dilemmas of "preservation extinction" and "constructive destruction" encountered by traditional villages. Furthermore, this paper combines the ancestral shrines and traditional villages into a holistic conservation system to present references for revitalizing rural culture and the sustainable development of traditional villages.

## **2 Judgment of the value of ancestral shrines in traditional villages**

Rural revitalization is a systematic program, which comprises industrial revitalization, talent revitalization, cultural revitalization, ecological revitalization, and organizational revitalization. "Rural revitalization requires both shaping and casting the soul." Rural revitalization means revitalizing the culture of the countryside. Xi Jinping mentioned, "We should promote the revitalization of rural culture, improve the ideological and moral construction and public culture in rural areas. Using the core socialist values as the leader, profoundly excavate the ideology, humanistic spirit, and moral code held in the great traditional farming culture. Cultivate talents to tap into the local culture, and develop the main theme and the righteousness of society. Nurture a civilized rural atmosphere, a harmonious family atmosphere, and simple folk customs, enhance the spiritual outlook of farmers, improve the civilized level of rural society, and make the countryside glow with a new atmosphere of civilization." The ancestral shrines in traditional villages reveal their value in two levels: space and culture. In the current context of rural revitalization, ancestral shrines present an irreplaceable position in the continuation of the cultural lineage of traditional villages, the creation of public space, the activation of social relations, and the inheritance of local culture.

### **2.1 Spatial value: the multi-functional place to unite local communities**

As the spatial center of the traditional village, the spatial value of the ancestral shrine in the traditional village is mostly indicated in the spatial layout, architectural order and structure, and use functions. With the traditional ancestral shrine as the essence, the characteristic village bay is arranged, and the overall accessibility is enhanced by the well-connected streets and alleys, hence creating a tight and precise spatial layout of the village. The huge multi-functional space presents a strong and ritualistic architectural order for the gathering of the community. In the meantime, the rustic but fine architectural construction, full of folk wisdom, brings out the solemn gathering atmosphere.

Ancestral shrines symbolize patriarchal organization, the family's political, economic, cultural, and ceremonial center, and the grassroots organization and multi-functional public area of patriarchal society. The most basic function is to implement a place of worship for the residents. At the same time, it is also a social venue for important activities, such as weddings and funerals, rewards and punishments for clan members, annual performances, genealogical revision, as well as a council hall and hospitality for guests. Moreover, it has the function of rewarding, punishing, and educating the clansmen. Therefore, all affairs related to the clan can be performed in the shrine.

As a link of blood relations, the ancestral shrine is the major place for rituals and clan activities. Thus, it ties the clan unitedly and stimulates the sense of clan community among the village and clan relatives so that the clan's descendants can stay in harmony and friendship with each other. In rituals, people seek spiritual support. By cherishing their ancestors and tracing their origins, they strengthen their blood ties, which inspires a sense of belonging and identification with the clan as a social group. The rituals allow the clan members to identify themselves with their ancestors, obtain a sense of existence, and integrate mentally into the clan.

Apart from the rituals, the ancestral shrine also serves as a place for a wide range of activities. It is the political center of the clan, as well as the cultural and recreational center of the clan; therefore, people's lives are intimately connected with it. Blood relations, marriage relations, and friendships are the main social relations of people, and mutual care and assistance among members of the same clan, relatives, and friends are the principal means of interaction. In the ancestral shrine, people can hold a wide range of activities such as weddings, funerals, and birthdays and in the ancestral shrine during festive seasons, such as Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, Winter Solstice Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. These types of interesting clan activities enhance communication and care among people and simultaneously satisfy people's psychological and spiritual needs, promote the harmony of the clan, and increase the cohesion and centripetal force of the clan.

## **2.2 Cultural value: the "living fossil" of rural history and culture**

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation, and it is also the source of the continuity and perpetual vitality of traditional villages. In conventional villages, ancestral shrines are prosperous in philosophical ideas and moral concepts and are the root of outstanding Chinese traditional culture and socialist core values. It still has the features of uniting local communities and societies and transmitting traditional rural culture. Additionally, it can present the spiritual impetus for the revitalization of traditional villages and make them flourish. The inheritance of clan culture is helpful to the development and improvement of the great culture of the nation. The prosperity of the clan culture shows the reality of social stability and people's happiness from the side.

As a meaningful outcome of traditional family culture in China, the ancestral shrine, under the leadership of socialist core values, has increasingly turned into a nostalgic link and cultural place, embodying our national beliefs and spirit. At the same time, as a historical relic, the construction of ancestral shrines usually integrates the highest level of skills in a certain historical period due to their prominent position in traditional villages. Accordingly, they have a high historical and cultural value and are essential in increasing village self-governance and passing on the excellent Chinese traditional culture in rural revitalization. In addition, it inherits and develops the contemporary cultural value of the ancestral shrines and makes full use of the spiritual ties of clan shrines to improve people's culture, unite people's hearts, and link people's nostalgia and emotions so that traditional villages can keep their local characteristics in a culturally diversified environment.

## **3 The real dilemma encountered by Baini Village**

### **3.1 Overview of village circumstances**

Baini Village is placed in the northeast of Tongshan County, in the middle reaches of Fushui Lake. Also, it is 25 kilometers away from the county town and 7 kilometers away from Dafan township. Because of the big highway passing through the village, it is close to

the national 4A-level scenic spot of Yinshui Cave and the exit of G56 Hangzhou–Ruili Expressway, so the external transportation is convenient. Several ancient houses and abundant cultural resources in the village, such as Tan Clan Ancestral Shrine, the Revolutionary Site of the Third Red Division, and the Tomb of General Xiao Keyun, are deeply embedded with brilliantly embedded glory red culture. These red cultural resources are of high quantity and quality and have the characteristics of original integrity, which run through the Tongshan Agrarian Revolution and the Anti-Japanese War, and have high historical value and realistic educational value. Concurrently, Tan Clan Ancestral Shrine was recorded as a key cultural relic protection unit in Hubei Province, and Baini Village was chosen as the fifth batch of traditional Chinese villages in 2019.

There are 9 groups of villagers in Baini Village, with 685 households and 2512 people. Most of the young and strong people in the village decide to work in different cities and regions, so the resident population is comparatively small. The village is largely populated by older people, young women, and children, so the phenomenon of land abandonment, population hollowing out, and aging are noticeable. In the procedure of urbanization and rural revitalization, Baini Village is encountering the coexistence of preservation destruction and constructive destruction, population hollowing out, and the idling of ancient residence bases.

### 3.2 Coexistence of preservation destruction and constructive destruction

Preservation and constructive destruction exist as two opposite concepts, which are remarkably dangerous to traditional villages. The former is to treat traditional villages as cultural relics in the name of conservation and leave them unused and unattended without revitalizing them, resulting in their natural extinction. The latter is to carry out relevant construction in multiple conservation and development, resulting in the environmental destruction of traditional villages.



**Fig. 1.** Photo of damage of ancient building structure.



**Fig. 2.** Photo of damage of ancient building technique.

Even though the current local government has recognized the cultural value of traditional villages, there are still differences in the perception of conservation. It regularly limits the daily use of villagers to reach the goal of conservation, which objectively causes the space to be idle, coupled with notably insufficient maintenance funds, executes the dwellings lack the necessary daily maintenance and do damage. However, the ancestral hall of the Tan Clan belongs to the provincial cultural preservation unit and is crowned as numerous cultural and educational bases. By contrast, its doors are usually closed, and it needs the means of revitalization and utilization, and it fails to play its proper function of community public cultural service, so its traditional clan cultural function is constantly

replaced or diluted. This kind of preservation destruction further accelerates the overall extinction of the ancestral shrine and the neighboring cultural environment. Once the clan shrine, which represents a vital character in the traditional village, is damaged and no longer affects the daily life of the clansmen, the clansmen will lose their spiritual space, thus surely quickening the extinction of the intangible cultural heritage attached to the ancestral shrine (shown in photo 1 and 2).

The construction of gorgeous countryside has produced great opportunities for the protection and development of Baina Village. Nevertheless, some thoughtless village construction has severely destroyed the traditional village appearance. For example, in the process of creating a beautiful village, there is a phenomenon of emphasizing development rather than protection. Conformably, there are different construction activities, usually disregarding the space and scale of traditional villages, producing huge squares and lawns in front of the ancestral shrines of the Tan Clan. Or, in the name of conservation, demolishing old dwellings and making fake antiques under the guise of maintenance, or altering and expanding ancient dwellings by residents to enhance their living conditions. These have provoked constructive damage to traditional villages' overall appearance and cultural environment, stimulating the decline of traditional villages, and instantly required strengthening scientific guidance.

### **3.3 Coexistence of hollowing out of traditional villages and construction of new dwellings**

The hollowing out of traditional villages involves land resources, population, and industries expanding and emptying inside. It is also an accurate outcome of gathering rural laborers in cities and towns in urbanization. Since the Chinese long-term urbanization model under the "urban-rural duality" structure, the "hollowing out" difficulty has happened because villages' shortage of residents generating capacity. Consistently, some ancient buildings with historical and cultural values have failed due to the reduction of daily maintenance, and the environment has been greatly damaged, and traditional villages are suffering disappearance. After the workers returned to the village, they abandoned their old houses and started new areas out of the old village, near the highway, to determine the difficulty of housing tension. Considering the shortage of overall style control, the architecture of the new area does not match in with the traditional village style.

Most of the permanent residents in Baina Village are old, children, and women, and young adults normally return to the village only on major holidays such as the Spring Festival every year. As permanent residents drop, various traditional dwellings and new residences are left idle all year round. Considering the construction of traditional villages is restrained, villagers tend to produce new residences on the outskirts of the villages, leading to the intensification of the hollowing out of the initial ancient residential bases.

## **4 Suggestions**

### **4.1 Restoration and inheritance of ancestral hall construction techniques**

The daily maintenance of ancient buildings mainly refers to the maintenance work that does not need to disturb the core force system of ancient buildings, such as roof weeding, replacement of individual rafters or door and window components, small-scale oil paintings, wall plastering, and loose foundation reinforcement, partial repair or replacement of weathered floor tiles, etc.

First of all, by "using old materials", that is, using old wood to repair and strengthen the ancient buildings, to ensure that the original wooden components of the ancient buildings are used to the greatest extent. At the same time, use reinforcement as much as possible, and don't try to replace it with new materials or old materials that do not belong to the building.

Secondly, under the premise of not disturbing the cultural relics, modern scientific and technological means such as 3D laser scanning technology, pulsation testing technology, non-destructive testing and analysis technology can be used as auxiliary means for the maintenance of ancient buildings, so as to achieve more comprehensive and effective protection of ancient buildings.

In addition, on the basis of mastering the technological characteristics of the ancestral hall building in the early construction period, the maintenance and protection methods based on the traditional construction techniques should be adopted to make maximum use of the original building materials and structural system for repair and construction, so as to achieve the authenticity of materials, techniques and shapes. Meanwhile, through renovation, it will radiate the historical charm and reveal the cultural, scientific and artistic value of the ancestral hall building.

## **4.2 Integration of ancestral shrines and villages and continue the cultural lineage**

The revitalization of rural culture is the soul of rural revitalization strategy and the endogenous driving force to improve comprehensive rural revitalization. A complete traditional village comprises a single building and several building groups, and the historical and cultural information contained therein cannot be artificially separated. Ancestral shrines and traditional villages are interdependent and play a fairly significant position in strengthening the continuity of rural culture.

In the protection and revitalization of traditional villages, it is required to drop the former protection mode of emphasizing the single entity but not the group and insist on combining ancestral shrines and villages to sustain the cultural lineage together. The special cultural significance of ancestral shrines in traditional villages in southeastern Hubei determines that the revitalization of rural culture in this region should be based on ancestral shrines. By advancing the functional layout of traditional villages and forming new patterns of rural culture, Baina Village should enhance the grassroots public cultural service system under the daily needs of villagers, relying on the ancestral shrines of the Tan Clan. Functional spaces such as the 4:30 school, daycare center, village cultural station, and farmhouse bookstore further enhance the construction of rural public service facilities. Through the interaction between urban and rural areas, multiple species of study tour exchange activities for primary and secondary school students are operated periodically to implement powerful impetus for the rural revitalization of Baina Village and reveal the new atmosphere of local rural civilization, to produce a harmonious social relationship of urban-rural integration.

## **4.3 Integration of the old and the new, and symbiosis of the field**

Unlike the close community relationship in a traditional rural society that gives the overall village planning, the construction of modern villages lacks unified planning control. Families largely decide the location of residential bases under their financial resources and preferences. Considering the distinct orientations of the houses, the front and back of the houses are uneven, indicating the features of scattered, chaotic, and small, and the intensive utilization rate of the village land is not high. Because of the shortage of suitable control mechanisms, villagers extend the scope of their residential bases and expand to the

surrounding vacant land at will to occupy the "land enclosure" phenomenon, making the village layout messy.

Firstly, the traditional villages should be preserved by giving full play to the initiative of the villagers, and the parts that can be repaired must be repaired under the premise of satisfying the housing needs, which not only perpetuates the vitality of the traditional villages but also reduces the waste of land resources. Additionally, in order to strengthen the combination of the old and the new, the existing traditional village pattern should be adopted as the basis for the construction of new villages by constructing buffer zones on the periphery of traditional villages and concentrating on new villages separately. This can make the traditional villages, and the new villages have convenient transportation links, and the streets and alleys can be lasted, while the new buildings are managed in terms of style and appearance. While reaching the villagers' requirements for modern life, the style coordination between the old and new buildings is kept, and the symbiosis of the field is promoted.

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