

Traditional Tujia Village Architecture in Southwest Hubei, China

Subjects: Architecture And Design

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A traditional village is a spatial unit comprising a community of farmers who live and reproduce in a specific area for generations. Traditional villages are a product of Chinese agricultural civilization and they have extremely high historical and cultural values. The rapid urbanization in China in the past four decades has significantly affected traditional villages, resulting in a series of problems such as limited space, damaged style, weak sense of place, and loss of skills.

Keywords: Tujia ; traditional village architecture ; sustainable design

1. Introduction

A traditional village is a spatial unit comprising a community of farmers who live and reproduce in a specific area for generations ^[1]. Traditional villages are a product of Chinese agricultural civilization and they have extremely high historical and cultural values ^[2]. Most traditional villages are rich in cultural heritage, including traditional architecture and folk crafts ^[3]. However, due to urbanization over the past decades, traditional villages have been exposed to impacts, damages, and eventually degradation. According to the results of field investigations conducted by the Research Center of China Village Culture, the total number of traditional villages in the basins of the Yellow River and Yangtze River decreased substantially from 9707 to 5709 from 2004 to 2010 (7.3% per annum and 1.6 villages per day) ^[4]. For example, various traditional villages are distributed in the Tujia zone of southwest Hubei, China, and the unique stilted buildings vividly showcase the local ethnic style. However, the wooden stilted buildings, which are a valuable tangible cultural heritage, are in danger because they can no longer meet the needs of modern society ^{[5][6]}.

At the same time, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China issued The Notice on the Survey of Traditional Villages and published six batches of the List of Chinese Traditional Villages in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, and 2022. A total of 8155 villages were designated as national traditional villages ^[7]. Meanwhile, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council put forward in the Opinions on Doing a Good Job in the Key Work of Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization in 2023 the overall requirement of “constructing modern, livable demonstration buildings for farmers and improving the style of villages based on local characteristics, regional characteristics, and ethnic characteristics” ^[8]. Moreover, Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture emphasized in the Notice on Promoting the 14th Five-Year Plan for Agricultural and Rural Modernization in 2023 that village construction should adapt to local conditions, preserve the local ecological style of mountains, water, rivers, and fields, and encourage the design and promotion of residence building prototypes that have regional characteristics, meet various functional requirements, and have different construction cost levels ^[9]. The above initiatives provide policy support for the protection and utilization of traditional villages in the new era, making sustainable development of traditional villages a widely discussed research topic.

In summary, it is evident that the development of Tujia ethnic village architecture in southwestern Hubei province is facing numerous practical challenges. How to overcome these obstacles and achieve sustainable design in village architecture has become a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

2. Traditional Tujia Village Architecture in Southwest Hubei, China

Protection and utilization are two key research topics for the sustainable development of traditional villages. Previous studies mainly focused on three aspects: Firstly, from the perspective of tangible spatial forms, studies have been conducted on the formation and evolution patterns of village spaces and corresponding strategies for conservation and utilization have been proposed; such research is primarily concentrated in the fields of spatial geography or rural planning, with a macroscopic view and a predominance of quantitative analysis; For instance, Li ^[10] conducted research on villages in the Xiangjiang River Basin, exploring the evolutionary patterns and driving factors of village forms from both the

horizontal spatial (upstream, midstream, downstream) and vertical temporal (late 20th century to the present) dimensions, providing data support for spatial layout optimization and regulation. Secondly, from the perspective of abstract cultural value, studies have been conducted on village social governance and cultural transmission; this type of research is mainly focused on cultural heritage or anthropology, with a primary emphasis on qualitative studies of individual cases. For example, Ji ^[11] conducted a case study on Zhaoxing Dong Village, exploring the comprehensive protection model and measures for the intangible cultural heritage of the Dong ethnic group from a cultural heritage perspective. Thirdly, research in this area focuses on studying the optimization paths for the living environment of traditional villages from an ecological and energy-saving perspective. This type of research primarily concentrates on architectural energy-saving technologies, with a predominant emphasis on experimental simulation and quantitative analysis. For instance, Chen ^[12] extracted construction techniques from traditional dwellings, including layout and materials, and employed software such as Phoenix (v.2019) and Ecotect (v.2010) for simulation and verification, ultimately proposing strategies for spatial adaptive transformation. The aforementioned studies have approached the tangible forms or abstract values of traditional villages from various fields and perspectives, conducting research on qualitative or quantitative aspects. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research from a sustainable design perspective that combines qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously.

Furthermore, research on traditional Tujia villages in southwestern Hubei province has mainly focused on qualitative aspects such as cultural arts and traditional skills, while quantitative research has been relatively limited and primarily focused on green and energy-saving aspects. For instance, Zhang ^[13] analyzed the formation, evolution, and connotation characteristics of Tujia stilted buildings in-depth from the perspective of regional culture, providing a solid foundation for subsequent scholars in this field. Gong et al. ^[14] utilized qualitative research methods to analyze the construction techniques of the keyhead-shaped timber structure, which is commonly found in Tujia stilted buildings in western Hubei. Peng ^[15] and Li ^[16] conducted energy-saving analysis and optimization of the living environment of Tujia stilted houses from the perspectives of the water environment and wind environment, respectively. These studies made achievements in aspects of both tangible and intangible elements of traditional villages and provided reference paths for their sustainable protection and utilization from macroscopic dimensions to microscopic dimensions.

In conclusion, sustainable research on traditional villages in southwestern Hubei province tends to focus on tangible forms or abstract cultural aspects, with research methods leaning towards either qualitative or quantitative aspects. Overall, there is a lack of comprehensive research conducted from the perspective of sustainable design (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Summary of current research on the sustainability of traditional villages.

Regional Scope	Perspective	Sample Type	Critical Path	Methodology	Disciplinary	Summary (Limitations)
General region	Spatial form (concrete manifestation)	Regional community (macro-level)	Research on the formation and evolution of space, and propose strategies for conservation and utilization.	Quantitative analysis	Spatial geography or rural planning	There is a tendency to focus more on concrete forms or abstract cultural domains, and the research methods often lean towards qualitative or quantitative studies in specific areas. Overall, there is a lack of comprehensive research conducted from the perspective of sustainable design.
	Cultural value (abstract)	Typical case study (micro-level)	Study of village social governance and cultural inheritance	Qualitative analysis	Cultural heritage or anthropology	
	Ecological energy conservation	Typical case study (micro-level)	Study of the optimization path of residential environment	Quantitative analysis	Building energy efficiency	
Tujia region in southwestern Hubei province	Cultural arts and skills inheritance	Regional community/typical case study	Study of the formation, evolution, techniques, and environmental improvement	Qualitative analysis	Cultural arts, architectural energy-saving	

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