Research on the Environmental Transformation of the Temple Theater and Adjacent Folk Culture Space in Beiyangcheng Village

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ABSTRACT

This study takes Beiyangcheng Village in Jishan County, a traditional village in southern Shanxi, as the research object, focusing on the renewal and transformation of the village's ancestral temple theater and adjacent folk cultural space. Through the gradual optimization and design of the entertainment space for performing operas, the parade space for community fire, and the sacrificial offering space, this paper proposes a series of strategies for the protection and promotion of folk cultural space, aiming to promote the inheritance and development of traditional village culture. The organic linkage between folk cultural activities and material space in Beiyangcheng Village is further promoted through reasonable spatial zoning protection, historical building restoration, and folk cultural function enhancement and landscape integration.

Keywords: Temple theatre, Environmental transformation, Beiyangcheng Village.

1. INTRODUCTION: BASIC PROFILE OF BEIYANGCHENG VILLAGE

After a detailed exploration of the natural environment and historical background of Beiyangcheng Village, a deeper understanding of the village's basic profile can be gained. Beiyangcheng Village not only has a unique geographical location but also carries a rich historical and cultural heritage. The organic combination of its site selection and natural landscape has provided a solid foundation for the prosperity and development of the village. Its long history and unique traditional layout offer important perspectives for understanding the cultural connotations and social evolution of the village. Next, by sorting out the historical context and spatial layout of the village, we can further the developmental trajectory Beiyangcheng Village throughout history and its cultural inheritance in modern society.

1.1 Village Site and Natural Landscape Environment

Beiyangcheng Village is located in Qinghe Town, Jishan County, Shanxi Province, with geographical coordinates of 111.03°E and 35.31°N [1]. It is situated on the southern bank of the lower reaches of the Fen River and at the foot of Mount Jiwang in the Emei Terrace. The village is surrounded by Mount Jiwang to the south and Mount Gushan to the north, with the seasonal Li Tie River flowing to the east. The Yangcheng Gully, about a hundred meters deep, together with the Li Tie River, forms a natural barrier that enhances the village's defensive function. In addition, the western part of the village has flat terrain and fertile land, providing good agricultural conditions [2]. The natural landscape around Beiyangcheng Village not only offers abundant resources for the villagers but also forms a significant natural protective barrier, further strengthening the village's strategic defensive advantages. The "Gaoliang City" ruins to the north of the village and the Eighth Route Army headquarters site during the War of Resistance against Japan to the south testify to the region's defensive geographical advantages.

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Since ancient times, the local residents have lived along the water. The village site meets the natural conditions of "the storage of the plateau" and "the high and dry terrain" in the Feng Shui theory, and is considered an ideal place for human settlement. The convenient transportation and strategic location make this place an ideal settlement, which is easy to defend and difficult to attack. In addition, the "Ji Peak Stacking Green" landscape of Mount Ji not only adds natural beauty, but also carries profound cultural and historical significance. As one of the birthplaces of ancient Chinese agriculture, this place is closely related to the story of Ji Wang, symbolizing the origin of ancient agricultural civilization.

1.2 Historical Context and Traditional Layout of the Village

The history of Beiyangcheng Village can be traced back to the Neolithic Age, when the ancestors engaged in farming and fishing activities in the Li Tie River Basin. According to archaeological findings along the Fen River and in the Li Tie River Basin, the area has been a place of civilization gathering since prehistoric times. In particular, a large number of "ash pits" and "cave dwellings" were unearthed on the terrace on the west bank of the Li Tie River, proving that the ancestors lived along the water and built along the cliff from the Neolithic Age to the Han Dynasty.

From the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, with the continuous development of society, Beiyangcheng gradually formed a fortress with defensive functions - "Gaoliang City". At the same time, the way of living in the village also changed from the original "cave dwellings" to "fortified settlements". The sites of "Gaoliang City", Yangjia Fortified Settlement, Duanjia Fortified Settlement and Dongtoubao in the village reflect the characteristics of villagers building forts along the cliff and living in clans during this period. During this stage, the spatial structure of the village gradually took shape, and the pattern of "one city, two temples and three forts" gradually emerged, among which Fuyuan Temple and Fogu Temple are two important temples.

During the reign of Emperor Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty, as society gradually stabilized, Beiyangcheng Village experienced a village division phenomenon. Some villagers migrated to the southwest area of Gaoliang City, forming Nanyangcheng Village, while others moved to the west of Gaoliang City, Fuyuan Temple, and Dongtoubao, gradually forming Beiyangcheng Village. At this time, the four major clans of Wang, Yang, Duan, and Du built courtyards here, laying the foundation for the basic layout of Beiyangcheng Village. The spatial layout of the village has unique characteristics, which can be summarized as "two ponds, three main streets, five alleys, and many temples," showing its structural and cultural features.

The geographical environment of Beiyangcheng Village is deeply influenced by Feng Shui theory. The village as a whole is in a north-south orientation, with the east higher than the west. The special topography of the village is formed by geological scouring into two gullies, which converge in a shape resembling the letter "Y," and the villagers call it the "phoenix land." The convergence point is called the "phoenix head," and the extended parts are called the "phoenix body." This topography not only strengthens the village's defensive function but also forms a unique cultural symbol.

The village is backed by Mount Ji to the south and faces the Fen River to the north, forming a beautiful landscape of mountains and water. The Yangcheng Gully and Emei Ridge constitute the natural landforms. More than ten temples, four ancestral halls, and two theaters within the village provide venues for public activities, demonstrating a rich cultural life. At the same time, production facilities such as stone mills and wells, as well as residential buildings and street textures, together constitute the basic structure of Beiyangcheng Village, reflecting its diverse and unique historical and cultural characteristics.

2. CURRENT STATUS OF FOLK CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN BEIYANGCHENG VILLAGE

The Yangcheng Temple Fair and Sacrificial Activities in Beiyangcheng Village originated in the early years of Emperor Yongzheng's reign during the Qing Dynasty and have a history of over 300 years. In ancient times, it was called "going to the temple" and commonly referred to as "making a fuss." Every year on the 29th of the first lunar month, villagers hold a grand sacrificial activity themed around the Fire Spirit Holy Mother. The entire event begins with a god-inviting ceremony at the Fire God Temple, followed by a community fire procession. The procession passes through the main streets and alleys of the village and even extends to Nanyangcheng Village, covering a distance of

about five li. The performance forms in the procession are diverse, including stilt-walking beasts, divine oxen and ancient carts, mule ancient carts, cavalry drums, and flower drum sedan chairs. The atmosphere is fervent, the scene is extremely spectacular, and it attracts a large number of spectators to participate.

In 2006, the traditional dance of stilt-walking beasts was included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage list, marking that the inheritance and protection of this performance form have received more widespread attention. With the continuous development of temple fair culture, the performance content of stilt-walking beasts has also gradually enriched. In the performance, two actors operate a large beast on stilts and march in formation to the accompaniment of drums and music. However, due to the large volume of the beast, the performance has high space requirements, and the performance venue is limited ("Figure 1").

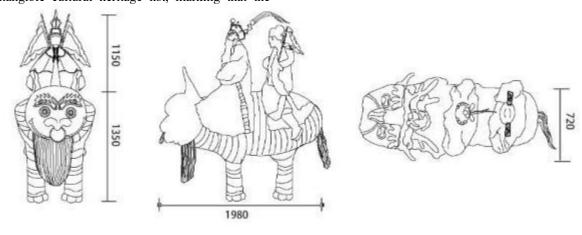


Figure 1 Stilt-Walking Beast Morphology and Size Diagram (Drawn by the Author).

Although the Yangcheng Temple Fair and sacrificial activities have been passed down from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty and have experienced vicissitudes, the activities themselves have never been interrupted. However, due to the lack of space in the village's ancestral halls and theaters, the performance venues have gradually become limited, many traditional props have been severely damaged, and some classic performance forms have gradually disappeared as a result. Since the 1990s, the temple fair activities at the Fire God Temple have gradually declined. Although the application for intangible cultural heritage has enhanced the awareness of protection, and under the efforts of inheritors Duan Tiecheng and Ji Bing-shan, the stilt-walking beast has performed in other places many times and won honors, the scale of the temple fair in Beiyangcheng Village has continued to shrink. Today, the variety of community fire performance programs has been greatly reduced, and the activity range of the stiltwalking beast is limited to the straight-line distance between the North Jiwang Temple and the South Fire God Temple, with the entire activity covering less than 500 meters. The grand community fire scene, which was once jointly participated in by the three streets of South Alley, West Alley, and East Alley, no longer exists. The current temple fair activities are limited to simplified performances within the two main temples in the village, and the street parade has been canceled. The Fire God Temple, which once served as the venue for the activities, has also lost its former liveliness and prosperity ("Figure 2").



Figure 2 Some of the beasts have rotted (photographed by the author).

3. OVERVIEW OF ANCESTRAL TEMPLES, THEATERS, AND NEIGHBORING FOLK CULTURAL SPACES IN BEIYANGCHENG VILLAGE

Beiyangcheng Village once had 16 temples, most of which were distributed on the outskirts of the village. These temples not only served family and social functions but also, together with the residential buildings in the village, formed a complete set of ancient architectural complexes. The main theaters and folk cultural spaces related to the temples are three in number, namely the Jiwang Temple Theater, the Fire God Temple Theater, and the West Plaza of the Fuyuan Temple Brick Pagoda [3].

The Fire God Temple Theater is the core venue for temple fair activities and provides the main space required for such events. The Jiwang Temple Theater is an important place for sacrificial activities and holds profound religious and cultural significance. The West Plaza of the Fuyuan Temple Brick Pagoda serves as a place for villagers' daily leisure and is an important part of the village's living space. These three places are not only part of

the villagers' daily lives but also occupy an important position in the traditional village layout of Beiyangcheng, reflecting the village's cultural heritage and historical continuity.

During the temple fair's parade activities, the route of the beast performance is about five li in total. The performance starts from the Jiwang Temple, passes through the pond and the brick pagoda plaza, enters the ancient post road, exits the west gate and turns south towards Nanyangcheng Village, proceeds along the central street, then returns to the ancient post road in the village, and finally turns east back to the Fire God Temple.

The performance is usually initiated by the opening music of gongs and drums, followed by the main acts. The performance teams are divided into three groups: the first group departs from West Alley, the second group follows from East Alley, and the third group sets off from South Alley, lining up behind the second group. The three groups converge along the way and proceed together towards Nanyangcheng Village, continuing their performances in sequence until they follow the Nanyangcheng performance team (see "Table 1").

Table 1. Dimensions of the stilt-walking beast performance parade streets (photographed by the author)

Traditional Street Name	Category	Starting and Ending Points	Length (m)	Basic Width (m)
Temple Fair Road	Main Street	Starts from Jiwang Temple in the north, ends at Brick Pagoda Plaza in the south	190	3.5/5
Temple North Street	Main Street	Starts from Yang Family Courtyard in the west, ends at Gaoliang City in the east	183	4.5
Temple Fair West Road	Main Street	Starts from the southern city ruins in the south, ends at Beiyangcheng Road in the north	145	5
Temple South Street	Main Street	Starts from the Village Committee in the north, ends at Fire God Temple in the south	162	5.5

The Fire God Temple is located in the southeast corner of Beiyangcheng Village, adjacent to Yangcheng Gully to the south. It was built during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty. The original architectural layout no longer exists. The existing main hall covers an area of 40 square meters, and there are three side rooms used for storing props for community fire performances. The main hall of the Fire God Temple is 8 meters

wide and 6 meters deep, with a single-eave hard mountain roof covered with gray tiles. The beam structure is a three-purlin corridor-less design. The walls and the two gable walls are adorned with 30 square meters of color-painted murals, depicting auspicious dragon patterns, screen patterns, and the Fire Spirit Holy Mother's procession. As the initiating and hosting venue for the Yangcheng Temple Fair, the Fire God Temple once had an

exquisite fire god theater in front of it, decorated with wood carvings and coiled dragon stone pillars, with railings made of stone carvings. However, with the advancement of new rural construction and the lack of rational planning, the square in front of the Fire God Temple has been occupied by villagers' self-built houses, severely restricting the

performance space. Large performances such as stilt-walking beasts are spatially constrained, and audiences have to gather in a cramped space, even climbing onto rooftops to watch, directly affecting the scale and atmosphere of the temple fair, which has become increasingly desolate year by year ("Figure 3").



Figure 3 Current Status of the Yangcheng Temple Fair Performance Space (Drawn by the Author)

The Jiwang Temple Theater is located in the middle of Beiyangcheng Village, about 200 meters to the north of the Village Committee. The main structure of the theater is a Qing Dynasty building, facing north to south, and adopts a courtyard layout. The temple covers an area of 1620 square meters, with a north-south length of 460 meters and an eastwest width of 36 meters. Only the east and west side buildings remain, while the offering hall on the central axis has been destroyed. The side buildings are located on both sides of the stage, each three bays wide and two purlins deep, with a single-eave hard mountain roof and a three-purlin corridor-less beam structure. The five rooms on the east side have been converted into a daytime care center for the elderly in the village, and the temple ground has been hardened with concrete. The open space in the southwest corner of the theater is mainly used for storing props for stilt-walking beast performances and is also the working area for intangible cultural heritage inheritors to make props. However, due to the lack of wind and rain protection facilities, the community fire beast props have been severely damaged, restricting their preservation and use. The Jiwang Temple Theater is not only the starting

venue for the Fire God Temple Fair but also an important space for ancestor worship and community fire performances. It is also used as a training ground for stilt-walking beasts and high-stilt competitions for Beiyangcheng Primary School [4].

The West Plaza of the Fuyuan Temple Brick Pagoda is located to the north of the Beiyangcheng Village Committee, with a Song Dynasty brick pagoda in the southeast corner, which is listed as a national cultural relics protection unit. The brick pagoda was built in the second year of the Baoyuan era of the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 1039), with a square seven-tiered dense-eave design, about 8.1 meters high and a square brick base. The plaza covers a total area of about 758 square meters and is an important part of Beiyangcheng's "Phoenix Land." The brick pagoda, as the central landmark of the phoenix body, is also the highest point of the village. During the temple fair, the plaza becomes the main venue for the convergence and performance of the community fire teams from East Alley and West Alley. Normally, this is an important space for villagers to practice stiltwalking, leg binding, beast costume fitting, and social entertainment. Since the plaza is surrounded by shops, waiting halls, and the village committee, it naturally becomes the central area of the village. However, the lack of greenery means that the plaza is almost unused during the day in summer, with villagers only coming to relax in the evening. In

2016, the village government renovated the area, repaved the roads, painted the walls, laid concrete bricks on the ground, and whitewashed the street-facing buildings, presenting a modern style. This renovation covered the original building materials and appearance, weakening the local characteristics of the traditional village ("Figure 4").



Figure 4 Current Status of the Yangcheng Temple Fair Sacrificial Performance Space (Drawn by the Author).

4. RENOVATION DESIGN OF ANCESTRAL TEMPLES, THEATERS, AND NEIGHBORING FOLK CULTURAL SPACES IN BEIYANGCHENG VILLAGE

After analyzing and assessing the history and cultural heritage of Beiyangcheng Village, it is found that the village's ancestral temples, theaters, and neighboring folk cultural spaces are not only important carriers of traditional activities but also the core areas for the inheritance and development of village culture. However, with the construction of the village and the passage of time, these sites face many challenges in terms of functionality, spatial layout, and environmental quality. Therefore, the renovation design of these traditional spaces is not only the protection and restoration of historical relics but also a key step in promoting the revitalization of village culture, enhancing community cohesion, and promoting inheritance of folk skills. This section will specifically explore the renovation design plans for important areas such as the Fire God Temple Theater, the Ancient Pagoda Plaza, the Jiwang Temple Theater, and the temple fair streets and alleys. The aim is to better serve the daily needs of

contemporary villagers through spatial rectification and functional enhancement while preserving and promoting their unique folk cultural characteristics.

4.1 Renovation Design of the Fire God Temple Theater

The Fire God Temple is an important sacrificial venue in Beiyangcheng Village, and the square in front of the temple has always been the core area for stilt-walking beast performances. Currently, the space of the site is relatively small, especially during the temple fair, when the crowded audience often climbs trees or roofs in order to get a better view of the performance. Now, only the main hall and the offering hall of the Fire God Temple remain, while the original stage and side rooms have been destroyed. The surrounding area has been occupied by newly built houses, and some parts have even been occupied by improperly built pigsties, which greatly affect the environmental quality.

To improve the spatial environment of the Fire God Temple, it is recommended to restore and enhance the site on the basis of maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the original space. First, the stage of the Fire God Temple should be rebuilt, and rammed earth viewing stands should be added

to improve the performance and viewing functions. The newly built side rooms can be used to store the props of the stilt-walking beasts and serve as a display base for tourists to understand this traditional skill. At the same time, the square in front of the temple should be expanded to provide a more spacious venue for the temple fair and meet the daily activity and entertainment needs of the villagers. In terms of material selection, priority should be given to local traditional materials, such as rammed earth and gravel, and appropriate greening design should be combined to make the overall environment coordinated with the village appearance.

4.2 Renovation Design of the Ancient Pagoda Plaza

The Ancient Pagoda Plaza is the core area of Beiyangcheng Village, including the brick pagoda, village committee, shops, and waiting hall. It is an important entrance for outsiders to enter the village and also the center of daily activities for villagers. It is not only a social gathering place for villagers but also an important venue for the inheritance and practice of traditional community fire skills. However, the current status of the plaza is relatively backward and in urgent need of renovation and improvement.

The design plan should revolve around the daily leisure needs of villagers and transform the plaza into the core activity space of Beiyangcheng Village. To this end, it is recommended to add green spaces and resting seats and other facilities to enhance the functionality and comfort of the site. For the facade of the residential buildings around the plaza, the buildings and temporary structures near the brick pagoda that are not in harmony should be demolished, local blue bricks should be used instead of tiles, and the plaza ground should be changed to block stone paving to restore the traditional appearance. As the gateway of the village, an image wall combining modern design and local materials can be set up at the entrance of the plaza to enhance its recognizability.

At the same time, the special needs of villagers practicing stilt-walking should be taken into account. Since the operation of binding the legs of the stilts requires a certain height, villagers usually use tractors as supporting tools. Therefore, rammed earth seats with a height of more than 1 meter can be set up in the design, and multiple levels can be added to facilitate different stilt users to bind their legs and rest. In addition, combined with the temple

fair performance and daily activities, a more suitable venue can be provided for villagers and tourists, further promoting the inheritance and development of village culture.

4.3 Renovation Design of the Jiwang Temple Theater

The Jiwang Temple Theater has a relatively spacious area, which is usually used as a practice venue for folk activities of Beiyangcheng Primary School, especially for the inheritance of traditional folk customs such as stilt-walking beasts, Nine Phoenixes Bringing Auspiciousness, and Zhang Gong Carrying His Wife. In order to better promote folk culture, it is suggested that the function of this theater be further expanded as an important place for the dissemination of folk culture. In addition, the northwest corner of the Jiwang Temple is currently used to store folk props, but due to long-term exposure to the outdoor environment, these props have suffered from corrosion and damage.

Therefore, it is recommended to draw on the concept of the French ecological museum and build a folk exhibition hall on the vacant land in the northwest corner of the Jiwang Temple. The exhibition hall will integrate the functions of prop storage, folk display, and cultural education, and invite intangible cultural heritage inheritors to participate, forming a lively folk cultural space. The newly constructed facility will not only become the main place for villagers, students, and tourists from other places to understand and experience the village's folk culture but also effectively protect and inherit the local traditional culture.

4.4 Optimization Design of Temple Fair Streets and Alley Architectural Landscape

The Ancient Post Road, Southwest Alley, and Southeast Alley are the main streets for the temple fair parade, starting from the Village Committee and ending at the Fire God Temple. The road width ranges from 3.5 to 3.8 meters, with a total length of about 425 meters. These streets are important venues for the temple fair, carrying the activities of the community fire procession. Therefore, the facades of the buildings on both sides of the Ancient Post Road should be renovated to ensure the consistency of building materials and styles, promoting the overall landscape harmony.

During the renovation process, a detailed inventory of the current building conditions should

first be conducted to understand the construction dates and historical characteristics. Based on different materials, graded protection should be implemented. On this basis, the building interface should be optimized to maintain the consistency of the street's architectural style, while encouraging the use of local construction techniques. The road renovation should be based on meeting usage needs and maintaining the village's unique characteristics. For the road surface where stilt-walking beasts march during the temple fair, plain soil can be compacted to improve recognizability. Other streets used as vehicle lanes can be treated with crushed stone compaction, while sidewalks can be paved with flagstones to preserve the unique texture of historical streets and alleys.

5. INTEGRATED PROTECTION OF FOLK CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PHYSICAL SPACE IN BEIYANGCHENG VILLAGE

On the basis of the renovation design of the village's ancestral temples, theaters, surrounding spaces, how to effectively combine the village's folk cultural activities with the protection and optimization of physical space will be the key further promoting the inheritance development of village culture. This section will explore how to achieve organic linkage and sustainable protection of folk culture and physical space through the continuation of the village's traditional spatial structure, optimization of folk cultural spaces, restoration of theater functions, and integration of residential building landscapes.

5.1 Protection and Continuation of the Village Spatial Structure

The spatial layout of Beiyangcheng Village originates from its long historical evolution and reflects the traditional wisdom closely connected with the natural environment and cultural beliefs. The initial spatial planning fully considered the integration of production, life, and beliefs, reflecting the ingenious design at the beginning of the village's formation. As history progressed, especially during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the village gradually formed a building complex and road pattern with defensive functions, eventually taking on the current form of the "Phoenix Land."

Future village development should be based on the existing spatial structure and strengthen respect and protection for the natural environment and historical culture. Historical buildings traditional streets in the core area should be included in the protection scope for detailed investigation and classified protection. In particular, for buildings that have long been in disrepair, personalized repair plans should be formulated according to their specific conditions to ensure the continuation of their cultural connotations. At the same time, strict control should be exercised over the scale and layout of streets and alleys to avoid the impact of peripheral construction on the overall village appearance, thereby ensuring authenticity and integrity of its space.

5.2 Optimization of Folk Cultural Spaces

The Yangcheng Temple Fair, with a history of 300 years, carries significant cultural value. The fair's programs, including stilt-walking beasts and horse-drawn drum carts, are widely loved in the southern Shanxi region. Particularly after the successful inscription of stilt-walking beasts as an intangible cultural heritage in 2014, the folk culture of the Yangcheng Temple Fair has garnered more attention, becoming a cultural calling card for Beiyangcheng Village. Despite this, due to the collapse of the Fire God Temple stage and the occupation of the square by newly built houses, the existing space is no longer sufficient to accommodate the traditional activities of the temple fair.

Therefore, on the basis of restoring the existing space, the needs of folk cultural activities should be taken into account, with emphasis on the multifunctionality and environmental improvement of the space. The restored space should not only meet the needs of the temple fair activities but also cater to daily life requirements, such as the drying of crops, integrating traditional elements to enhance the cultural atmosphere. By reasonably planning the layout and functions of the space, it can be made flexible enough to adapt to various folk cultural activities, enhancing the adaptability and heritage of the space.

5.3 Restoration of Ancestral Temple Theater Functions

The stage, as an important part of the ancestral temple architecture, has always served multiple functions. It has not only been a place for offering performances to the deities but also a venue for villagers' entertainment and cultural inheritance. In the Fire God Temple Fair, Pu Opera is an

indispensable and important part. Through interviews and surveys with villagers, many have expressed their desire to restore the Fire God Temple stage, believing that this move will help to revive the bustling atmosphere of the temple fair and enrich the villagers' leisure life during the agricultural off-season.

When restoring and repairing the stage, its historical and cultural background should be fully considered, and the original architectural style and spatial layout should be followed to ensure the continuity of the historical context. Through this process, not only can the traditional festive activities of the village be restored, but the cultural cohesion and sense of identity can also be enhanced.

5.4 Integration of Residential Architectural Landscape

The performance spaces for folk cultural activities should be designated as core protection areas to ensure the retention of the harmony of building heights, forms, and streetscapes on both sides of the alleys. Most existing streets have cement or earthen surfaces, lacking local characteristics. Therefore, during road repair, traditional materials such as crushed stone, flagstone, and square bricks should be prioritized to preserve the historical texture and local features of the streets and alleys. Meanwhile, the rational use of intangible cultural heritage symbols can enhance the space's directionality and recognizability.

In the process of building repair, the local and authentic nature of traditional architecture should be fully respected, with a focus on detail preservation. Through detailed assessment and restoration of buildings, combined with the traditional skills of local craftsmen, the repaired buildings can meet modern needs while continuing historical heritage. This approach provides an orderly and rich spatial environment for village cultural activities.

6. CONCLUSION

The proposed strategies such as spatial zoning protection, restoration of historical buildings, strengthening of folk cultural functions, and landscape integration have effectively promoted the organic connection between folk cultural activities and material spaces in the village, providing a practical and feasible path for the inheritance and development of traditional village culture.

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