

## ANALYZING THE TRADITIONAL RURAL CULTURAL HERITAGE OF LINGNAN REGION IN CHINA AS THE FOUNDATION FOR PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Jia Sheng ZHOU<sup>1</sup>, Mohd Jaki Bin MAMAT<sup>1,\*</sup>, Quan WEN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Housing, Building & Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

### **Abstract**

*This research analyzes the conservation and development of traditional rural cultural heritage in the Lingnan region of China, with Bagua Village in Zhaoqing City serving as a case study. The protection tasks for Bagua Village encompass the investigation of cultural heritage resources, the assessment of their values, the identification of protection measures, policy support and community participation. The study revealed that the restoration of ancient buildings faces challenges such as the unavailability of materials, a shortage of technicians and inadequate management. The conclusion proposes conservation measures for Bagu Village, including finding substitutes for ancient building materials. Furthermore, it is recommended that the government formulate conservation policies, establish dedicated teams and foster cooperation between businesses and villages to ensure long-term sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional Cultural Heritage; Bagua Village Conservation; Material Substitution; Cultural Resources Survey; Value Assessment; Sustainable Development*

### **Introduction**

The rapid development of China's urban process, accompanied by the continuous advancement of modernization, industrialization and urbanization, has provided many employment opportunities. Many rural residents have migrated to large cities and the reduction of the rural population has led to the decline of rural civilization [1]. In the southern region of China, numerous villages possess traditional Lingnan cultural characteristics. These villages bear witness to the lives, production methods and habitats of traditional rural residents in the south for millennia, serving as fundamental pillars in the social fabric and development of southern China's towns. Thanks to cultural construction and policy support from Chinese society, people are increasingly eager to enhance their own culture and trace their cultural roots. As a result, preserving and sustainably developing rural cultural heritage has become a widely shared aspiration. Currently, many traditional Lingnan villages are at risk of disappearing due to outdated utility and structural aging [2].

This research is based on the perspective of conservation and development of traditional rural landscapes [3], taking Bagua Village, a traditional village in Zhaoqing City, as a case

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\* Corresponding author: mohdjaki@usm.my

study and analyzing the current conservation status of the village in order to propose conservation measures. Bagua Village in Zhaoqing City is a village that follows the planning and construction of Taoist ideology and culture, constructed in the Ming Dynasty period in China about 600 years ago. The layout of Bagua Village displays obvious Taoist cultural characteristics. It follows the design inspired by the Eight Diagrams (Bagua), resembling the shape of a clam. All the houses are built in rings around a central point, with a diameter of approximately 600 meters; the further out you go, the more houses there are (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Aerial view of Bagua Village

(Photo on <https://gs.ctrip.com/html5/you/sight/zhaqing269/69545725.html>)

The architectural style of the village is clearly categorized into defensive buildings (gun towers), residential buildings (ordinary houses) and religious buildings (ancestral halls). These buildings retain the characteristics of southern architecture from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Because of the humid weather in the south, the building materials of the village are mainly green bricks (a type of brick containing aluminum silicate minerals, which appear in a greenish color) and triple clay (since cement was not available in ancient China, a binding agent consisting of lime, crushed bricks and fine sand was used as a building material), as well as roofs of tiled wooden structures (Fig. 2).

In the process of protecting traditional villages, it is first necessary to explore the characteristics of their cultural heritage. For example, the village's ancestral hall has 16 ancestral halls of different surnames in Bagua Village, representing 16 families, among which the "Li" clan's ancestral hall is the most representative. The horizontal layout of the ancestral hall is three openings (the front façade of the building is divided into three equal areas), the vertical layout is three depths (including the front hall, the middle hall and the back room; each part has a different function) and the roof structure is a hard hilltop and a lifting-beam type of brick and wood structure (a kind of architectural structure for the weight of the roof to be transferred to the columns through the beams). The architectural decorations include murals with traditional Chinese mythological stories, wood and stone carvings and other decorative structures (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 2.** The Guo'er Building in Bagua Village, also known as the Sealing Volcanic Wall



**Fig. 3.** Renhuali Gate Tower in Bagua Village, one of the entrances to the village, 2024

Generally speaking, the ancestral hall's decoration boasts numerous intricate details. Each mural on the wall features a distinct main theme, while those in other areas expand upon these themes. They include murals depicting ancient Chinese myths, scenes from people's ancient lives, images, landscape and plants. Common Chinese painting elements like plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums are prominently displayed. Due to their waterproof nature, wood carvings are primarily featured indoors. Their primary function is to decorate and enrich the indoor space using carving techniques, seamlessly blending architecture with wooden structures, achieving a harmonious union of art and technology. The stone carvings, featuring birds, flowers, lions and beasts from mythological stories, are primarily located on the roofs and columns of the buildings. Their primary function is to decorate the facade of these structures, often presented in a symbolic manner. The architectural decoration of

Bagua Village can be varied through different combinations of a single element, showcasing the diversity of the local cultural heritage.

In a nutshell, the buildings of Bagua Village are divided into three main categories: defensive buildings, residential buildings and religious buildings. Residential buildings, which are the largest in volume, have lost their residential function because the spatial layout of the ancient buildings is no longer suitable for modern living standards and the defensive turrets have lost their original function in modern society. So many of the buildings have been structurally damaged and collapsed and the buildings that are still in use are the religious buildings. Religious buildings are important places for villagers to worship their ancestors during important festivals and they are also the main venues for villagers to gather and make decisions.

In order to achieve this goal of preserving and developing the cultural heritage of the village, the following tasks were set:

- a) Survey the cultural heritage resources of Bagua Village and evaluate their value.
- b) To identify the main factors and reasons for the protection and restoration of Bagua Village.
- c) Policy supports and legal protection.
- d) Community participation and sustainable development.

Carry out a comprehensive survey on Bagua Village's cultural heritage resources, encompassing traditional landscape architecture, folklore and customs. Prioritize conservation based on the village's historical, cultural and social significance. Identify crucial factors for preserving traditional buildings, such as structural stability, retention of historical features, materials and construction techniques. Also, take into account potential resource challenges in the restoration process, like insufficient funding, lack of technical expertise, or insufficient professional staff [4, 5].

## Materials and methods

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars in China have been exploring specific measures for rural preservation and development with the support of policies and cultural demands. As the research on the protection and development of rural cultural heritage is special in nature, not a single discipline can solve all the problems, which need the result of the cooperation of several research fields. To systematically analyze the public archives, historical manuscript and printed and published works [6], it must be integrated with the method of literature analysis. Fieldwork and interviews were used to analyze the specifics of Bagua Village, including architecture and traditional practices as well as economic industries, by observing and documenting the current situation on the ground and talking with residents and administrators to gain an in-depth understanding of Bagua Village's cultural heritage [7, 8]. Comparative analysis is used to compare the effectiveness of cultural heritage protection and development in different regions to determine effective protection and development strategies [9].

Through the combined application of the above research methods, this research can explore in depth various aspects of rural cultural heritage at multiple levels, thereby developing a comprehensive understanding of its current situation, problems and needs. The combination of these methods will help us to more accurately grasp the values and challenges of cultural heritage and provide a solid foundation for the formulation of scientific and rational conservation and development strategies.

## Results and discussion

The traditional villages in the Lingnan region possess a relatively profound humanistic heritage, carrying significant historical weight. Bagua Village stands out as one of the few well-preserved villages in this region, characterized by its unique architectural features and influences from Taoism in both appearance and layout. To this day, the village is still a residential village for the local residents. Zhaoqing's topography, climate and traditional culture shaped Bagua Village, valuable in studying local culture, architecture, art and building science [10]. Today, ancient architecture is being studied and gaining attention and new industries offer new chances to preserve and develop this cultural heritage in villages [11]. However, at the same time, traditional villages are facing serious challenges. Therefore, we need to propose applicable strategies to help protect and develop the cultural heritage of Bagua Village.

### *Cultural Heritage Value and Assessment of Bagua Village*

In China, the study and protection of rural cultural heritage began in the 1990s and only in the last decade has it begun to receive attention. With the support of the state, many villages have been put on a list for protection, which means we can find information about the village in official records. Bagua Village belongs to the Municipal Cultural Heritage Protection Unit and the complex is defined as an immovable cultural asset. Therefore, by analyzing the elements that influenced the planning and layout of Bagua Village, we can find the cultural and historical basis for its construction [12]. Additionally, by determining the architectural paradigms and sciences based on the analysis of the architectural structures of Bagua Village's traditional building types, we can identify their common features [13]. Furthermore, by analyzing the artistic connotations through the decorative structures of the buildings, we can assess the value of those buildings [14].

First, the layout of Bagua Village embodies a profound philosophical concept of traditional Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese villages adhere to the "by the mountain and by the water" principle in site selection. Residents of these villages choose ideal locations conducive to survival based on environmental conditions, typically considering geographical factors such as ease of transportation and suitability for crop cultivation, climatic conditions like survival temperature, humidity and precipitation, as well as topography and geomorphology to avoid geological hazards and floods.

Secondly, there are three main types of buildings in Bagua Village, namely residential buildings, study halls and ancestral halls. Residential buildings are the most numerous buildings in the village and are the space for the villagers' daily lives. The buildings are mostly constructed according to the architectural paradigm of the Ming and Qing dynasties, including the main hall, the front hall, as well as the rooms, kitchens and the patio. In the layout of the building, the three rooms are used as the architectural paradigm, which is called "three rooms and two corridors" in the "Guangdong Folk Houses" and can be flexibly changed according to the needs in the actual layout. The study is also known as the study building because the Bagua Village residents are basically engaged in agricultural farming, but since ancient times, villagers have been more focused on reading, through reading to change their fate. In general, traditional Chinese thinking is very important to the opportunity to receive an education and the villagers are farming for their children to provide a good economic basis for receiving an education. Therefore, the residents of Bagua Village in ancient times attached great importance to the investment in the study (education building) and in modern society, we still emphasize the importance of education, so the study building in Bagua Village is an important place as a cultural heritage of the village. Another building that functions like the study building is the

ancestral hall (family temple), which serves as a place for the family to hold rituals, gatherings, propaganda, celebrations, decision-making and, of course, teaching. The spatial layout of the ancestral hall includes a doorway (the main entrance), a patio (an open space), a hengtang (a space for rituals), a bedchamber (a space for resting) and side corridors connecting the various spaces. Ancestral halls are important spaces that are still in use after years of historical development as a place to maintain clan relationships [15].

Finally, it is the decorative structure in Bagua village architecture. The decorative focus of residential buildings is the entrance façade, usually depending on the affluence of the family. The structures of the decoration are wood carving, stone carving, brick carving, grey moulding etc., and the architectural load-bearing structure has the arch structure. Through the analysis of the detailed characteristics of the decorative structure, we can obtain the most direct basis for the information about Bagua village architecture.

#### ***The main problems in the protection and development of Bagua Village's cultural heritage***

Bagua Village's buildings have undergone several changes over the past 600 years. The maintenance of the buildings has been maintained, such as Li's ancestral hall, which was built in the Ming Dynasty during the reign of Tianqi, rebuilt in the Qing Dynasty during the reign of Guangxu and has been maintained for repairs and maintenance for many generations. This is due to the fact that the ancestral hall is used as an important place for the family. With the development of the times, Bagua Village's original architectural space function is no longer suitable for a modern living environment. Many villagers in the village are around the construction of new houses and the original old house is preserved, especially for living in the old house. Due to the structure of the old building aging and the architectural function of the decline of the old building, many of the old buildings are vacant and part of the building presents a collapsed state. Before Bagua Village became a list of cultural heritage protections in Zhaoqing, many spaces and even roads were in a state of abandonment. This was due to the lack of public facilities in the village, which could not adapt to the lifestyle of modern society.

In the perspective of restoration based on ancient architecture, we need to carry out in-depth research on the cultural heritage of Bagua Village. The main goal is to maintain and restore the original appearance of the village by utilizing the existing landforms and architectural paradigms. This involves restoring the environment and architecture of the ancient village, using ancient methods as much as possible in both building materials and the restoration process. The restoration should be consistent with the original architecture and the texture of the environment, reflecting an old-fashioned approach to preserving cultural relics. Avoid the conflict and disharmony between modern building materials and the texture of ancient buildings. For the mutilated ancient buildings, we need to use the restoration of missing parts to restore the authenticity of the building and prevent the Bagua Village of ancient buildings in the restoration phase from being destroyed.

Due to the relatively old architectural paradigm of the village, the restoration of ancient buildings is crucial, as it requires the use of ancient technology and materials that are incompatible with modern construction methods. Based on this incompatibility, we categorize the technical problems encountered during the restoration process:

1) The lack of building materials: Because of the ancient buildings mainly made of green brick and concrete and special varieties of wood as the main building materials, brick production technology and materials in the contemporary world make it difficult to find the appropriate suppliers and concrete production technology has been lost for more than a hundred years.

2) Restoration of ancient buildings related to the lack of technical personnel: with the end of the Qing Dynasty, China's ancient architectural complexes are no longer built, replaced by a new period of modern architecture, so mastering the ancient technology of the masters has long ceased to be inherited and the need to use technology to train the old architectural technicians is also necessary.

3) Records of the village building technology literature are missing: in ancient times, the inheritance of building technology was passed on through the master-apprentice system to learn by hand, so the record about the Bagua village building technology literature is missing.

4) Lack of appropriate management system in the village: Bagua Village usually relies on the self-governance of the villagers for most of the village management, but for the development of the village, it needs a more systematic scientific management team as well as a large amount of financial support.

#### ***Inspiration for the protection and development of Bagua Village through successful cases***

Xidi and Hongcun, the ancient villages in South Anhui Province of China, are relatively well-preserved ancient villages with a long history in China. Regarding the protection of ancient villages in South Anhui, first established under the mode of tourism economy, the resources of ancient villages in South Anhui are characterized by scarcity and development. At present, China's ancient village tourism development mainly involves the interests of the main body of the government, investment enterprises, villagers (operating households, non-operating households), foreign operators and tourists, who are in a different position, each in its own way, to promote the development, protection and inheritance of ancient villages [16].

The protection and development of the ancient village need a lot of financial support, so under the management of the model of tourism operation in the Bagua village, we propose an enlightening development model, as follows [17-19]:

1) The impact of the leasing business model on Bagua Village. Bagua Village is located in Guangdong Province. In this context, the economic scope of the Bay Area, the tourism industry and domestic demand momentum are strong. Leasing can be effectively activated in Bagua Village, the ancient architectural space, giving the space an economic effect. A leasing economic model can be created in the short term with considerable economic effects, resulting in significant economic benefits. In addition, because the management of the ancient village is the responsibility of the municipal government, it can also let the government undertake heavy operational tasks, promote the development and construction of the Bagua village and provide protection.

2) Township enterprise business model. Township enterprise is to rely on the neighboring enterprises to participate in the operation and the residents can participate. Using the advantages of local enterprises, the government's management of the work has been facilitated and more conducive to the development of the village.

3) Invite listed companies to participate in the management of the ancient village. Listed companies have strong financial advantages; through their financing, they can quickly obtain financial support and listed companies master a large number of tourism resources and the local tourism industry in the ancient village to bring economic support.

## **Conclusions**

Located in the traditional village of Bagua Village in Zhaoqing City, the village represents the local indigenous culture and is a remarkable case of culture in the Lingnan region due to its planning in accordance with Taoist thinking. Due to the passage of time, some of the

buildings in the village have collapsed due to structural deterioration and restoration is an important means of preserving Bagua Village. Based on the study and research of Bagua Village, conservation measures regarding Bagua Village were identified during:

- Searching for materials that can replace the missing parts of ancient buildings in modern building materials and practicing feasibility through single building samples.
- Improve the restoration technology of ancient buildings. Although there is no architectural record about Bagua Village, the technology of ancient Chinese architecture is universal and the same type of architectural technology can be used to restore Bagua Village.
- Reuse of the village's ancient buildings, including activating and expanding the villagers' activity space and restoring the use of learning spaces.
- In response to the development issues of Bagua Village, scientific management and business methods are applied to help Bagua Village gain more external support and promote the commercial future of Bagua Village.
- The management of Bagua Village belongs to the autonomy of the residents, but there is also a need to establish a scientific management team and to open up the leasing services of architectural spaces to gain support through a commercialization model.
- To play the leading role of the local government, the government must develop and lead the corresponding protection and support policies, build a diversified team of conservation personnel and increase the promotion of tourism information.
- The government should lead to establish a cooperation model between villages and enterprises, increase employment opportunities, strengthen the participation of residents, attract the outflow of residents to return to their hometowns to participate in the construction and improve the long-term supervision of the conservation strategy.

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