

# Study on the Spatial Characteristics of Religious Traditional Villages—Take Songpan County, for Example

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## Abstract

As the carrier of thousands of years of farming culture in China, the value of traditional villages is self-evident, with the rapid development of cities, the problem of hollowing out villages is becoming more and more serious, and religious traditional villages are rich in culture and are also facing threats. Taking Songpan County as an example, through data reference and field research, the overall spatial landscape, public space characteristics and residential courtyard space features in the village's physical space features are studied, and the protection strategies of traditional religious villages rooted in the upper reaches of the Minjiang River are explored. It provides useful reference in theory and practice for the protection and construction of traditional villages in the upper reaches of the Minjiang River.

## Keywords

Religion, Traditional Villages, Spatial Features

## 1. Introduction

Traditional villages have their regional value according to their different geographical environment, natural resources and cultural heritage of different genealogy families, but with the development of society and the implementation of rural policies, Songpan County, as a religious village area in the upper reaches of the Weijiang River, is facing some existing and potential threats. Religious villages in the upper reaches of the Weijiang River, because of their ethnic diversity and so on, need to explore a kind of protection and development model rooted in the status quo in the upper reaches of the Weijiang River according to local conditions.

At present, the vast majority of scholars focuses their research on urban set-

lements and neglects the study of traditional religious villages. In the past, the research has been studied from the perspective of ethnology, religion and political science, and less from the perspective of planning, especially in the relationship between people and villages based on religion and in the social environment, the spatial form of the social relationship between monasteries and villages and the study of its evolutionary mechanism.

Taking Songpan County as an example, this study provides useful reference in theory and practice for the protection and construction of religious traditional villages through data reference and field research, research and analysis of the spatial characteristics of religious traditional villages, explores the methods of protecting and utilizing the spatial characteristics of religious traditional villages.

## **2. An Overview of the Spatial Features of Religious Traditional Villages**

### **2.1. Problems Faced by the Spatial Characteristics of Traditional Religious Villages**

The form of traditional rural settlement often maps the surrounding environment, and the human factor plays a greater role in the process of settlement growth than natural factors. The pattern of the settlement of the group with the religious relationship as the link plays a key role in the formation of the village settlement, and the influence and interaction of religion on the settlement form the skeleton of the settlement.

With the continuous development of urbanization, the heritage of traditional village religious culture appears to be declining (Ma, 2017). The traditional villages existed in the temples, temples and other religious buildings were dismantled, a large number of religious culture and social forms disappeared, and the long-established interaction between sacred space and secular space also disappeared.

### **2.2. Reasons Why the Spatial Features of Religious Traditional Villages Fade**

Since the 1980s, some traditional villages have been overdeveloped, resulting in a mix of new cultural concepts, so that traditional villages and their cultures are eroded and polluted. The indigenous people's religious and cultural concepts and even ethics, which have been firmly adhered to by generations, have given rise to deep doubts, and their inner spiritual beliefs have changed dramatically, and the original cultural composition and structure are changing.

## **3. Analysis of the Spatial Characteristics of Religious Traditional Villages: Take Songpan County as an Example**

### **3.1. Songpan County Overview**

#### **3.1.1. Natural Geography Profile**

Songpan County is located in Aba Tibetan Dai Autonomous Prefecture (Figure 1)



**Figure 1.** Songpan county location map (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).

in Sichuan Province. The area of the whole area of 8486 square kilometers, under the jurisdiction of 2 towns 23 townships. Songpan County East-West geomorphological differences are significant, high in the northwest, low in the southeast. Songpan's climate has the characteristics of obvious changes according to the basin, the microclimate is diverse and the disaster weather activity is frequent (Quan, 2006).

### 3.1.2. Socio-Cultural Background

#### 1) Folk Culture

For historical reasons, Songpan is a multi-ethnic mixed area, once known as “the northwest cultural corridor of Sichuan”, but also the epitome of the national structure and national culture of Aba State. The county is dominated by Han, Tibetan, Hui and Yi. All ethnic groups influence each other, integrate each other, while maintaining their own individuality, forming Songpan's unique and long-standing national customs and local characteristics.

#### 2) Religious culture

Songpan County multi-ethnic integration, religious beliefs are strong. Throughout Songpan County, Buddhist temples alone have Three Kinds of Tibetan, Han and Benzene, as well as Islamic Mosques. They are interlaced and friendly, and each plays the essence of their teachings to participate in various social activities.

## 3.2. Research Overview of Traditional Religious Villages

### 3.2.1. Research Content

This paper takes Songpan County as the research scope, through data collection and finishing, selects the space characteristics complete, religious atmosphere strong typical village focus research, to understand the basic situation of religious traditional villages. Through the field research of typical villages, from the angle of physical space characteristics which are easy to capture the characteristics, we can understand the physical spatial characteristics of religious traditional villages from the three aspects of the village's spatial pattern, public space and residential, and analyze and organize the information, so as to provide a basis for the protection of the spatial characteristics of the traditional villages of religion.

### 3.2.2. Typical Village Selection

There are five traditional villages in Songpan County, two of which are state-level

traditional villages, the village of Linpo in the main temple town of Sichuan and the village of Datun in the hui township of Ten Li. Therefore, the author combined with the integrity of the traditional village space characteristics, ethnic distribution, visibility and other factors, selected 2 representative religious traditional villages for key research, respectively, the main temple town of Linpo village in Sichuan and the village of Datun in the hui township of Ten Mile.

### 3.2.3. Typical Village Introduction

#### 1) Datun Village

Datun village is located in Songpan County, Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, ten-mile Hui township, the whole is a centralized group distribution, mainly in the architectural style of Sichuan North residential buildings, the village has a strong religious atmosphere, Hui cultural characteristics are significant.

#### 2) Linpo Village

Linpo village of Sichuan Province, Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Songpan County, south-east of the main temple town, 23 kilometers from the county town, 18 kilometers from Jiuhuang Airport. The village is built on the mountain, beautiful scenery, the village temple has a long history, with a strong Tibetan Buddhist color (**Figure 2**).

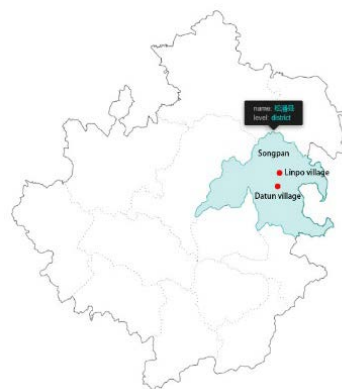
## 3.3. The Overall Spatial Landscape of Religious Traditional Villages

### 3.3.1. Village Site Selection Features

The location of traditional villages follows the principle of coordination with nature, and the traditional villages are spread over the back of mountain surfaces and, in combination with different terrains, exhibit different forms (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**).

#### 1) Village site selection consideration seilife for agricultural production

Traditional villages are mainly agricultural production, because the terrain of Songpan County is significant, the relatively high difference is relatively large, the villagers need to use reasonable site to increase their available agricultural



**Figure 2.** Focus on research villages (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).



**Figure 3.** Datun village landscape pattern map.



**Figure 4.** Linpo village landscape pattern map (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).

land. Villages are mostly located in relatively flat areas, and the location of near-water is convenient for irrigation and conducive to agricultural production.

#### 2) Village site selection considerations for defensive considerations

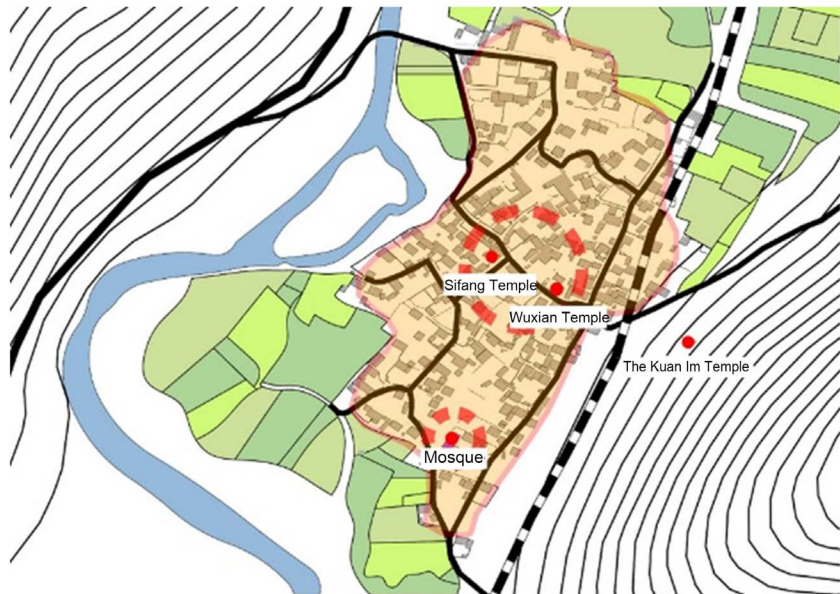
In the late Qing Dynasty, many wars were at war, so the location of villages must take into account the requirements of “defensiveness”. Villages are flooded with mountains and waters, forming a difficult pattern to defend, forming a natural barrier to ensure the safety of villagers.

### 3.3.2. Villages Space Form

Villages also show different spatial forms because of the different forms of the terrain, and because the temple is the spiritual and cultural center of the village, reflecting the spiritual and cultural needs of the villagers, at the same time by the influence of religious culture. Through the research of typical villages, the author analyzes that religious traditional villages are mostly around the temple to form a group-like, scattered irregular village.

#### 1) Group

Group-shaped villages tend to have more abundant development sites. In the village of Datun, for example, the villagers are Hui and Han, the Hui believe islam, the Han people have their own beliefs, there is a mosque and three temples in the village. From the overall spatial layout of Datun village (**Figure 5**), the temples are distributed along the axis, forming a distinct religious axis, and the village form is unfolded as the center of this axis, with a centralized group distribution.



**Figure 5.** Layout of the spatial form of Datun village (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).

## 2) Scatter

Scattered villages are divided into different parts by natural conditions such as rivers, mountains and other factors, which are distributed in scattered layout (Zhang, 2017). Take the village of Linpo as an example, the villagers believe in Tibetan Buddhism, the village existing a Buddhist monastery: Linpo Temple, the village can be used more modest land is limited, the village because of the terrain is divided into two parts of the mountain, connected by road, leading to the monastery (Figure 6).

## 3.4. Features of Public Spaces in Traditional Religious Villages

### 3.4.1. Street Space Features

Datun Village Public Space System is well organized. A main street connects the entrance, architecture, temple and other node spaces, which is not only the village's traffic space but also the public space (Figure 7).

#### 1) branched streets, inwardly closed.

The road forms in the village are mostly branched, divided into main streets, alleys, roads, etc. With the main street as the skeleton series a series of node space and temple space, can ensure access to the monastery, but the roadway is mostly broken road, inward lying closed.

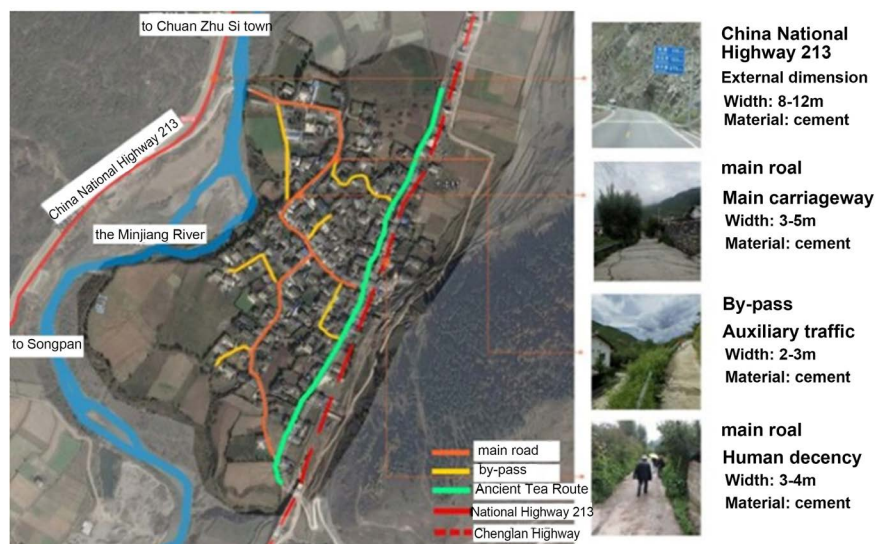
#### 2) Space intensive, the scale is pleasant.

The width of the main street and the height of the corresponding building facade on both sides were carefully measured during the field study (Figure 8). The study found that because of the inconsistent height of the buildings on both sides of the main street, the D/H ratio will have different values and the spatial perception will be different. The village main street is more than 4 meters, d/H ratio is about 1, resulting in a quiet and comfortable feel of space. The inner alleys are mostly 3 meters, with d/H values less than 2, narrow and tight.

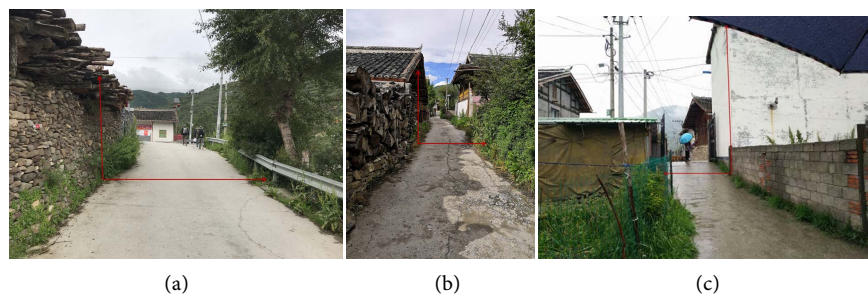




**Figure 6.** Linpo village space form layout (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).



**Figure 7.** Chart of the streets and alleys of Datun village (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).



**Figure 8.** Datun village street scale (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait) (a)  $D/H = 1.5:1$ ; (b)  $D/H = 1:1.5$ ; (c)  $D/H < 1:2$ .

### 3.4.2. Node Space Features

The node space is the space area in which the space occupies the large area of space in the village. In the traditional villages, the main performance is temple front open space, street nodes, small squares, waterfront space and so on. Be-

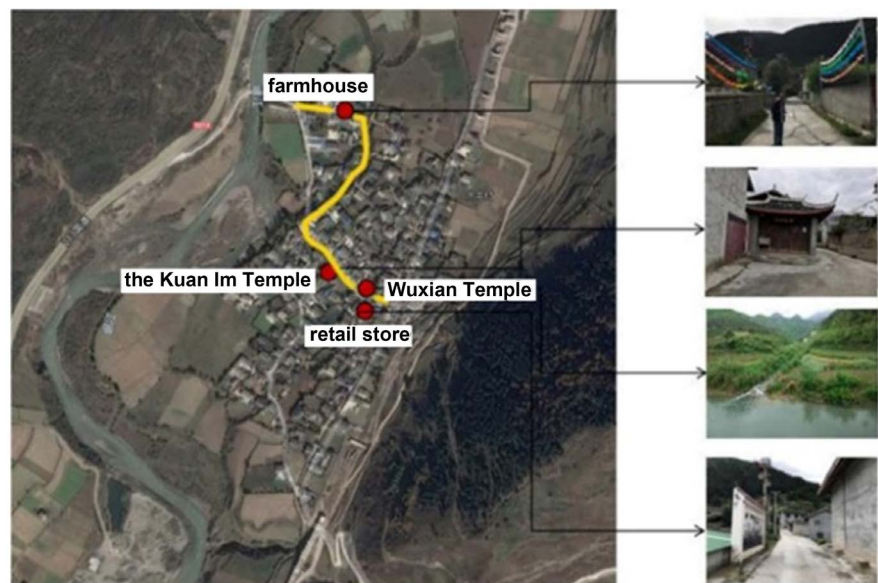
cause the village land is more intensive, there is no clear square space, the public space is divided into the temple front open space and street node two forms (**Figure 9**, **Figure 10**).

#### 1) Temples, Squares

There are usually open spaces in front of the temple to facilitate the development of activities and daily rituals, such as the Temple of The Five Fairy (**Figure 10**), which is now a gathering place for the daily life of the villagers, playing the role of small square space.

#### 2) Street node space

The street node space is divided into “Y” type and “T” type and “ten” type three forms, people gather edgy after tea in these small places to talk.



**Figure 9.** Chart diagram of the public space in Datun village (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).



**Figure 10.** Five fairy temple front square (Picture Source: Author's Self-Portrait).



### **3.5. Space Features of Traditional Village Shousing in Religious Areas**

In traditional religious villages, the influence of temples on residential areas is mainly reflected in the layout and orientation. After field research, it was found that the village residential residences around the temple, but and the temple to maintain a certain distance, and the density of the surrounding houses relatively high. On the face, the orientation is the same as the temple orientation, and there will be more choice of in the residence away from the monastery.

### **3.6. A Summary of the Spatial Features of Religious Traditional Villages**

#### **3.6.1. Religious**

Among the many traditional villages in the western Sichuan region, each village is influenced by its regional culture and has its own unique religious space. Because the main population in the village is mostly different ethnic groups, Tibetan faith in Tibetan Buddhism, Hui people believe in Islam, have their own temples, and the Han people also have their own faith, forming a number of temples. Religion has influenced the spatial layout, public space and residential layout of traditional villages.

#### **3.6.2. Ecological**

The location of traditional villages is natural, and the ecological characteristics of the village are reflected in the organic integration of culture and natural environment. For example, site selection takes into account the needs of mountain and water patterns, agricultural production, etc. Rural streets and alleys are adapted to the terrain, and residential buildings are also constructed from local materials.

#### **3.6.3. Sense of Place**

Songpan County religious traditional village space has a strong sense of place, village space according to the village entrance, streets to the order of the building progressive, with a clear sense of hierarchy and sequence; Pleasant street scale will give the villagers a sense of belonging and enhance the cohesion of the village.

## **4. Protection Strategy for the Spatial Features of Religious Traditional Villages**

### **4.1. Overall Space Landscape Protection**

Religious culture has an impact on the overall spatial landscape of religious traditional villages. Songpan County's traditional religious villages have a unique spatial feature because of their unique cultural and topographical characteristics, reflecting the rich wisdom of construction and historical value.

We protect the location and overall appearance of traditional villages, to respect the natural environment of the village, protect the local landscape, to avoid

the damage caused to the village by over-renovation, to continue the traditional village texture, protect religious buildings, to achieve sustainable development of the village, in the process of protection, we should pay attention to the protection and continuation of the village space sequence sense, improve the villagers' sense of belonging and identity.

#### **4.2. Protection of Public Space Features**

The public space of Datun Village includes the roadway and the intersection square, which carries the main public activities in the village, such as sacrifice, dragon dance, lanterns and other activities, both public and ceremonial. The protection of public space should not remain at the level of physical environment, but should be combined with maintaining the structure of settlement space and maintaining the vitality of public space. As far as planning and design is concerned, the public event space should be based on the protection of the original site, while retaining the original traffic flow line, which will facilitate the daily production and life of the villagers and provide a venue for traditional activities such as sacrificial performances and dragon dance performances. At the same time, typical design elements can be extracted from religious space and applied to the construction of new areas to continue the historical landscape.

#### **4.3. Protection of the Space Features of Residential Courtyards**

The residential courtyards in Datun village should adopt different ways of protection or restoration according to its historical value, architectural style and architectural quality, and maintain its original spatial form as far as possible, and its protection and restoration methods can be divided into four types: key protection category, general protection category, rectification class, transformation and demolition category, specific to the details of repair can take the following measures:

##### **1) Building structure**

Repair damaged buildings, adhere to the "repair as old" principle, maintain or update the original wooden structure system, the damaged wooden components using raw materials, the original process replacement, with materials not specifically done old.

##### **2) Building doors and windows**

When repairing damaged doors and windows, highlight the original traditional crafts, such as pickaxes, carvings, etc., to avoid the use of nails and machine carving. For severely damaged doors and windows, to restore the original style as the repair goal, use the same style as the original door and window replacement, with no intention to do old.

### **5. Conclusion**

Through the study of the spatial characteristics of traditional villages, this paper finds that, under the background of most people having their own religious be-

liefs, the monastery, as the carrier of the village's belief, has played a comprehensive spiritual role and influenced the spiritual form and spatial structure of the village. Songpan is located in the Yangtze River civilization and the Yellow River civilization, nomadic civilization and farming civilization, border minority culture and Central Plains culture intersection, after years of washing and historical casting, forming a rich local customs, but also the universal significance of human cultural character: harmonious coexistence. To protect traditional religious villages is to protect China's precious historical and cultural and natural resource heritage, which is conducive to promoting the construction of social spiritual civilization and promoting the harmonious development of the economy (Zhang, 2014). Therefore, according to local conditions to carry out village planning and development, to protect the characteristics of the village is the planning designers' urgent task.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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