

Exploring the Influencing Factors on the Sustainable Development of the Cultural Landscape of Tourist-Type Traditional Villages in Shaxi Town, Yunnan

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Abstract

Yunnan, the province with the largest number of traditional villages in China, is currently facing multiple challenges brought about by globalization and rapid urbanization. These challenges include destructive construction in the process of cultural development and the degradation of regional culture. However, research on the factors influencing the sustainable development of traditional villages is still insufficient. To effectively mitigate this challenge, an in-depth understanding of the influencing factors is crucial. Shaxi Town, with its complex environmental, cultural and socio-economic context, is a unique and critical case for studying cultural tourism and heritage conservation management. This study introduces the Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) model to analyze the multidimensional factors affecting the sustainable development of traditional village cultural landscapes. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 48 respondents from six tourist-oriented traditional villages in Shaxi Town. The findings include factors in four dimensions and seven themes: social, economic, cultural and environmental. This study deepens our understanding of the prerequisites for developing cultural landscapes in traditional villages. It provides valuable guidance to governments and cultural protectors in promoting the sustainable development of these landscapes.

Keywords: Integrated Rural Tourism, Traditional Village, Cultural Landscapes, Tourism-Based, Sustainable Development, Influencing Factors

Introduction

As a valuable heritage of China's agricultural civilization, traditional villages not only carry rich historical and cultural significance but also play an important role in promoting ecological civilization, preserving historical memory, and demonstrating the process of social civilization (Fang & Song, 2020 ; Yang & Liu, 2017). However, in recent years, traditional villages have

faced multiple challenges, including unsustainable economic benefits, insufficient recognition of village values, and declining resident participation. These issues have led to the hollowing out of villages, destructive construction, and the degradation of local culture (Liu & Xu, 2021; Xiao & Fan, 2022).

Although the development of tourism has brought opportunities for the reconceptualization of the cultural and commercial values of traditional villages, as well as economic growth, it has also exposed problems such as inefficiency and blind imitation, further exacerbating the phenomena of repetitive construction and vicious cycles (Hu et al., 2017). According to Pan and Li (2017), developing effective coping strategies for these challenges has become a key issue in the protection and development of traditional villages.

To address these issues, the Chinese government has introduced a series of protection measures, including the release of policy documents such as the First List of Traditional Villages in China and the Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022), which clarifies the central role of traditional villages in cultural heritage protection and rural revitalization strategies. In 2019, President Xi Jinping emphasized that the protection of rural cultural landscapes was key. As of 2023, China's Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has recognized six batches of 'Chinese Traditional Villages,' totaling 8,155 (Central Government of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This series of initiatives reflects the significant importance that the state places on the protection of traditional villages and has attracted extensive attention from the academic community.

Yunnan Province is known for its rich ethnic and cultural resources and diversity, but it is also facing multiple challenges from modernization, urbanization, and marketization, with traditional ethnic cultures under threat (Hu et al.). Traditional villages, which are vital to local economic development, ecological protection, and cultural heritage, are suffering from cultural distortion and environmental degradation brought about by cultural tourism (Zhai et al.). Although there have been studies focusing on the cultural landscapes of traditional villages, the exploration of traditional villages with Yunnan characteristics remains insufficient. This highlights the need for an in-depth study of the key factors affecting the sustainability of cultural landscapes in Yunnan's traditional villages

This study aims to explore the multiple factors affecting the sustainability of the cultural landscapes of traditional villages in Yunnan from the perspective of rural integration. Through this multi-dimensional analysis, the study offers new perspectives and directions for subsequent research in this field, promoting a deeper understanding and more effective protection of Yunnan's traditional village cultural landscapes to ensure their sustainable development.

Literature Review

IRT Modeling and Applied Research

The Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) model, derived from the European SPRIT research project, adopts a holistic approach to rural tourism, incorporating economic, social, cultural, natural, and humanistic factors. Unlike traditional rural tourism, which often focuses on economic and social aspects, IRT emphasizes stakeholder collaboration and integrates diverse resources across social, economic, cultural, and environmental domains (Mitchell & Eagles, 2001;

Weaver, 2005). Grounded in sustainable tourism principles, the IRT model aims to protect and promote local culture and natural landscapes, strengthen ties between tourism and local resources, and foster environmentally friendly, economically viable, and socio-culturally sustainable tourism development. It enhances local participation and underscores the importance of culture and historical landscapes in rural sustainability (Saarinen, 2006).

Rural tourism, which relies on natural and cultural resources, is closely linked to the cultural structure of traditional villages, showcasing the community's history and lifestyle. The sustainability of rural tourism has become a focal point of academic research and practice, particularly in preserving and promoting traditional rural cultural landscapes (Butler, 1999; Garrod et al., 2006). However, the absence of an integrated management framework presents challenges for implementing sustainable tourism operations involving multiple stakeholders, such as tourists, operators, and community members (Mitchell & Eagles, 2001; Sharpley, 2000).

The IRT network proposes an innovative approach that emphasizes networks and linkages, focusing on the complexity and sensitivity of tourism infrastructure and traditional culture in rural communities. Although still in its early stages of global application, IRT has been included in the EU SPRITE program and has been evaluated and implemented in several countries (Clark & Chabrel, 2007). Since 2010, the IRT model has extended outside Europe, including Spain, Greece, France, the United States, and developing countries, demonstrating broad applicability (Barcus, 2013). Chinese cases, such as Yuanjia Village, validate the effectiveness of IRT in promoting rural tourism and cultural preservation (Gao & Wu, 2017), showcasing its potential and practical value in global rural tourism development.

The application of IRT in various contexts illustrates its importance and potential impact. For example, in the northeastern region of Botswana, developing cultural and heritage-based tourism projects through IRT has promoted economic participation and socio-cultural preservation of the local population and diversified the local economy (Lenaoa & Saarinen, 2015). Marzo-Navarro et al. (2017) noted that IRT enhances the competitiveness of the local economy and strengthens the integration of the tourism product with local culture by promoting the complementary development of tourism and traditional economic activities. The strategic matching and value-added nature of IRT is also evident in Ireland's rural tourism. By effectively integrating resources and improving service quality, IRT has increased economic and socio-cultural value, becoming a main driver of local economic development (Cawley, 2009).

The IRT model is not only a practical framework, but also an important contributor to healthy tourism development and community prosperity. As a practical tool for integrated and sustainable development of rural areas, IRT emphasises the importance of an integrated approach in enhancing the socio-economic and cultural fabric of rural communities. By integrating multidimensional resources and stakeholder participation, the IRT model has demonstrated its applicability and effectiveness in promoting rural tourism, cultural preservation and rural revitalisation, and has become a powerful tool for promoting rural development.

Sustainable Development of Cultural Landscape of Traditional Villages in Yunnan Province

Recently, the preservation and development of traditional Chinese villages and cultural landscapes have received extensive attention from interdisciplinary fields, including architecture, tourism, geography, sociology, and anthropology (Li et al., 2019). With the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022), the research focus has further expanded to include rural tourism, village revitalization, and regional cultural conservation. Shaxi Town, Yunnan Province, as a typical study case, has expanded the research perspective from natural elements to multidimensional factors including economic and social structural transformation (Zhang & Chen, 2023), and the study includes comprehensive consideration of local architecture (Feng, 2023) and the evolution of village spatial patterns (Huang & Wang, 2016; Che et al., 2019).

The research methods show a developmental trend from qualitative analysis to quantitative research to interdisciplinary cross-fertilization, covering theoretical and methodological frameworks from multiple disciplines, such as architecture (Christian & Dong, 2016; Jin & Che, 2015), tourism (Che et al., 2019), geography (Zhang & Yang, 2012), and sociology (Pin, 2019). Despite the initial understanding of the influencing factors that promote the sustainable development of traditional village cultural landscapes, existing studies are still inadequate given the complexity of the factors. This study advocates a comprehensive and in-depth research methodology and applies the Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) model, aiming to deeply analyze the multiple factors and their interactions that influence the sustainability of traditional village cultural landscapes in Yunnan, and go beyond the limitations of traditional research methods.

Methodology

Research Context

Shaxi Town, located in the southwest of Jianchuan County, Yunnan Province, China, has a history of more than 2,400 years, and is an important stop on the Ancient Tea and Horse Trail, known as the "only surviving ancient market" (Huang, 2012). Shaxi is strategically located between the three famous tourist centers of Dali Prefecture, Lijiang City, and Shangri-La City (Figure 1), and its historical relics and 40 villages listed as "Chinese traditional villages".

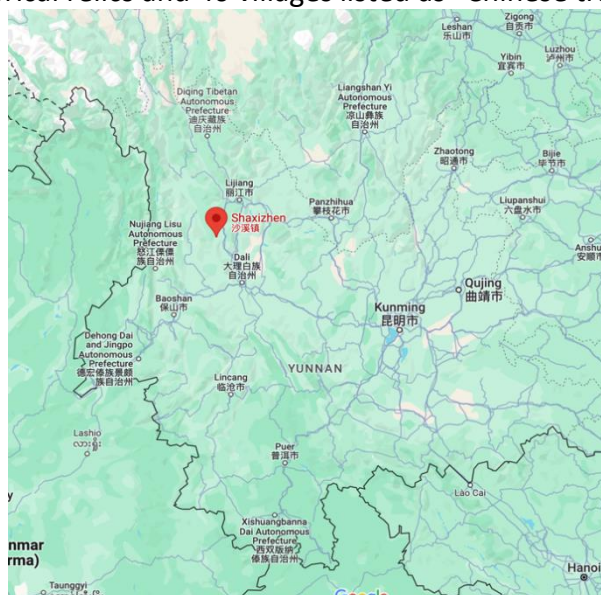


Figure 1: Geographic location of Shaxi Town, Yunnan Province

Source: Google Maps, 2024

Research Design and Sampling Method

Through in-depth interviews with different stakeholders, this study analyses in depth the factors affecting the sustainability of the cultural landscape of traditional villages, providing important insights for understanding and promoting the sustainability of the cultural landscape of traditional villages (Hyunjin, 2020). Specifically, this study conducted in-depth interviews with the key stakeholders of six traditional villages in Shaxi Township, including Xideng Village, Jiangchangping Village, Shilong Village, Dachangle Village, Fushoujang Village, and Xianglong'er Village, which are predominantly developed for tourism purposes, to reveal the key factors that determine the sustainability of their cultural landscapes (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These villages in Shaxi Town, as a crossroads of multicultural landscapes with complex environmental, cultural and socio-economic dimensions, are an important case study for the study of cultural tourism and heritage conservation management planning.

This study uses a respondent selection strategy based on the unique social relationship network of Shaxi Town to explore the changes in the social structure of traditional villages and their interest pluralism under the influence of cultural tourism. This approach enabled the respondents' perspectives and insights to provide a deep understanding for revealing the mechanisms of sustainable development of traditional village cultural landscapes in Yunnan and the challenges they face. The 48 interviewees selected provided rich primary data and insights for this study.

In this study, 48 interviewees were carefully selected through snowball, purposive, and convenience sampling methods, covering six groups: village administrators, experts, villagers, merchants, tourists, and intangible cultural heritages (Table 1).

Table 1
The basic demographic profiles of the interviewees

Source	Local Manager	Community Residents	Business Operators	Visitors	Intangible cultural inheritors	Academic experts
Sideng Village	3	3	3	3	1	
Zhongdeng village	1	3	1	1		
Shilong Village	1	2	1	1	1	
Changle Village	2	2	1	2		
Jiangchangping Village	1	2	1	2		
Long'e Village	1	2	3	2		
Total	9	14	10	11	2	2

(Source: Researcher, 2022)

This diversified sampling strategy deepened data collection, enhanced the reliability and validity of the study, effectively supported the exploration of key research questions, and demonstrated the flexibility and practicality of qualitative research methods. Therefore, this comprehensive sampling method provides a suitable research tool for this study.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study primarily employs in-depth interviews to collect data, combining open-ended and semi-structured interviews. Open-ended interviews are mainly aimed at local managers and experts, encouraging respondents to freely express their opinions, feelings, and experiences, thus facilitating an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena (Hammer & Wildavsky, 2018). This method has no fixed structure, allowing for the collection of rich and detailed qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews target villagers, tourists, merchants, and intangible cultural heritage inheritors. This method is flexible and can adjust the interview guide based on respondents' feedback, enhancing the adaptability of the research method (Meuser & Nagel, 2009; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Combining these two interview methods allows for the in-depth exploration of expert insights and the collection of specific feedback from a broader range of participants, thereby increasing the diversity and representativeness of the data and comprehensively understanding the different perspectives and experiences of the research subjects.

Between May and September 2022, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and, with the consent of the respondents, audio-recorded and transcribed the notes. It was ensured that respondents were aware of the interview process and agreed to keep personal information confidential, and that respondents had the right to stop the interview at any time or to omit questions that may have been an invasion of privacy.

In this study, in-depth interviews were used in order to explore in-depth the insights and experiences of the interviewees on the research topic. To ensure the accuracy of the data, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and in a timely manner, in line with the efficiency and reliability requirements of qualitative research. Based on Denzin and Lincoln's (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). recommendation, further interviews were discontinued when the data presented saturation, i.e., when responses began to be repeated with no new content. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whereby the researcher personally transcribed and read the text multiple times to ensure coding and themes were accurately captured. To enhance the credibility of the study, member checking (Buchbinder, 2011) was practiced and experts in the field were invited to review the data to ensure clarity of themes and accuracy of analysis. In addition, the study was conducted in strict accordance with ethical guidelines to ensure that it was executed with ethical review approval and informed consent of the respondents, and respondent anonymity was maintained by using a number in place of a real name.

Findings

This study reveals six aspects of influences and provides insights into how these multiple influences interact with each other and their impact on conservation strategies and

development patterns. This is followed by a detailed analysis and interpretation of these findings.

Ineffective Government Governance

This study significantly reveals the key role played by government policies in the preservation and promotion of traditional village cultural landscapes, involving regulations, policies, plans, and guidelines at all levels from national to local. Nonetheless, the empirical study in Shaxi Town revealed several sub-influences that constrain the effective implementation of policies, mainly including: 1) inadequate policies, especially insufficient policies and laws on the conservation and restoration of village buildings; 2) the contradiction between policy objectives and reality, as policy formulation is influenced by multiple factors, resulting in a disconnect between it and its actual implementation; and 3) lagging policy formulation. The government sometimes fails to take into account the actual local situation and social development trend in the process of policy formulation; 4) non-transparency and unfairness in the process of policy implementation, where the intervention of specific interest groups may lead to unfairness in the implementation of policies. These factors combine to affect the efficiency and fairness of government policies in protecting and developing traditional village cultural landscapes.

The case of Shaxi Town emphasizes the critical role of the government in cultural landscape preservation, revealing that cultural landscapes can suffer irreversible losses in the absence of clear planning and inadequate policy implementation (Liu et al., 2020). For example, one interviewee shared,

"We have been living in this village for several generations and we sincerely hope that the government will consider our needs when making decisions. In fact, we would love to do something related to tourism in the village, but it is difficult now. At present, our village does not even have a parking lot. Our cars and tourists' cars are often parked on the roadside, which is not only dangerous but also often leads to traffic congestion. So tourists are very reluctant to come here. This is our home and the development of our living environment should involve us because we know our own needs best." (CR05)

This study highlights the importance of strengthening policy implementation, establishing durable and continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and developing effective cultural and environmental protection measures. At the same time, the study points out that the improvement of the policy framework has a decisive impact on the effectiveness of cultural landscape protection. In line with existing studies (Li et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021), this study emphasizes the need to pay close attention to the actual needs and long-term goals in the process of policy formulation, and to enhance the transparency and fairness of policy implementation. In addition, through the creation of an open discussion platform, community participation should be increased to ensure that the effectiveness and fairness of the policy can be substantively implemented.

Lack of Development Funding

The results of this study indicate that the lack of development funds will seriously affect the preservation and development of traditional cultural landscapes. Currently, Shaxi Town relies

on government subsidies, cultural heritage funds, and a small amount of social capital. For example, one interviewee noted that,

"Our entire Shaxi Township villagers is about 20,000 people, but now the rapid development of tourism, especially during the holidays, sometimes Sideng Village will have more than 10,000 tourists in one day, the village's various infrastructures are far from being able to meet. More tourists, come to invest in more businessmen. However, most of them belong to small and medium-sized enterprises, and many of them do not pay taxes. Therefore, the economic development of this place makes no contribution to the local finance. But they take up most of the resources. This puts a lot of pressure on the local government's finances." (LM01)

Funding constraints significantly affect the maintenance of cultural landscapes, infrastructure upgrades, and the promotion of cultural tourism. Financial limitations particularly challenge traditional building restoration in economically less developed regions due to lack of capital and technical resources. Insufficient infrastructure funding reduces community quality of life and hampers cultural landscape maintenance, increases environmental pressures, and hinders educational and health advancements. In cultural tourism, funding gaps obstruct growth despite traditional villages' potential.

This study highlights the role of local taxation in preserving cultural landscapes, noting that national tax policies for small and medium-sized enterprises hinder local governments' tax collection, limiting restoration funds. Reforming the tax system for traditional villages is crucial for fair and effective tax collection, enhancing local government capacity, and supporting sustainable cultural landscape conservation. Rational use of tourism and business taxes, along with tax incentives, will provide solid financial support for traditional village cultural landscape preservation.

Insufficient Human Resources

The development of cultural landscapes in traditional villages is facing a double challenge posed by the shortage of human resources. First, many young people are moving to the cities in search of better employment opportunities, leading to a significant loss of middle- and young-aged labor in traditional villages. This brain drain has severely constrained the ability of villages to attract and retain sufficient human resources to support local cultural development. For example, one interviewee commented that,

"At present, the ageing of traditional villages is becoming more and more obvious. This is mainly due to the fact that most traditional villages are located in areas with less developed economic conditions. This, coupled with the low return on agricultural cultivation and the lack of employment opportunities, has led to capable young people choosing to go to the cities for development." (AE02)

The lack of professional skills of local residents has become a notable obstacle to the preservation and development of the cultural landscape of traditional villages in the context of cultural tourism development in Shaxi Town. Areas of urgent need include cultural heritage preservation, historical research, cultural creativity and catering services. The lack of skills not only hinders the protection and restoration of cultural heritage, but also limits in-depth

cultural understanding and hinders the innovative development of cultural and creative industries. For example, one interviewee's expression that,

"The current job is still very challenging for me, before I would only do some farm work. Now coming to work in the hotel many skills need to be learned from scratch. In fact, we still need training in this area because in this village our job is not only to serve but also to let more people know about our culture here" (CR07)

Studies have shown that population aging and brain drain have dramatic negative impacts on traditional villages, especially in terms of weakening rural economic development and social structure, and intensifying the pressure on local agriculture and traditional culture maintenance (Qiu et al., 2023; Xiang et al., 2023). In addition, the general lack of specialized skills is particularly pronounced in traditional villages such as Shaxi, where local residents face limited access to outside knowledge due to the isolation of their cultural and social environments, especially in the areas of tourism and cultural preservation (Qin et al., 2023; Wang, 2021). Non-locally operated tourism businesses often lack a deep understanding of local cultural heritage, limiting the possibility of passing on cultural values, which in turn affects the ability to provide tourists with authentic and unique cultural experiences.

Therefore, in the face of the complexity of the shortage of human resources in traditional villages, it is necessary for policymakers and community leaders to jointly adopt diversified strategies aimed at promoting the sustainable development of traditional cultural landscapes by enhancing the professional skills and awareness of cultural heritage preservation among local residents. This requires enhanced awareness and protection of the value of local cultural heritage to support the long-term prosperity and development of traditional villages.

Lack of Cultural Identity

In the protection and development of traditional village cultural landscapes, cultural identity plays a central role, reflecting residents' intrinsic perceptions of their traditional identities, measured through dimensions such as emotional attachment and pride (Yi, 2024). The case of Shaxi Town shows that cultural identity differs significantly among residents of different ages and backgrounds; older residents, especially those over 60 years old, take a firm stance on the preservation of traditional dwellings, viewing them as a cultural bridge connecting the past to the present. In contrast, the younger generation and the foreign population are less able to identify with and pass on traditional culture due to the influence of modern culture. For example, one respondent noted that,

"Nowadays, there are many outsiders in the village who come here to rent some old houses for their business, such as opening small hotels, restaurants and so on. However, the requirement for building remodeling at the time of leasing is rarely mentioned in the contract. As a result, many local B&B owners, when renovating their buildings, think more about the function and style of the B&B and how it will attract visitors. They rarely consider the history and culture of the building itself." (LM02)

The study emphasizes the central role of cultural identity in the preservation and development of traditional villages, pointing out its significant influence on ideology, social support and economic benefits. Cultural identity, as the root of the village's spiritual support,

has a profound impact on the values and behavioral orientation of the residents, and constitutes a key prerequisite for the effective protection and transmission of cultural heritage. The level of cultural identity of a village also directly affects the level of social support for traditional culture, and broad social participation is not only fundamental to the protection of cultural heritage, but also a driving force for sustained protection activities. In addition, appropriate cultural preservation and economic development complement each other. Moderate cultural preservation and transmission can stimulate the development of tourism, which in turn promotes economic growth. Conversely, it may run the risk of commercialized exploitation, eroding cultural values and resources.

Consistent with existing literature (Guo & Feng, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2023), this study confirms the general importance of cultural identity for the conservation and development of traditional villages, and further explores the relationship between cultural identity and residents' age and background. By strengthening cultural identity, social support can be enhanced, economic development can be promoted, effective protection and transmission of cultural heritage can be realized, and sustainable development of traditional village cultural landscapes can be ensured.

Insufficient Awareness of Environmental Protection

The findings of the study clearly emphasize the lack of awareness of environmental protection as a key factor affecting the conservation and development of traditional rural cultural landscapes. The main manifestation of this is the neglect of environmental protection by local villagers and tourists, which has led to a series of environmental problems including land pollution, deterioration of air quality and threats to the quality of water resources. The case of Shaxi Town reflects the lack of knowledge on waste disposal and segregation, as well as the negative environmental impacts of the lack of effective waste disposal measures. One interviewee reluctantly stated that,

"Although the environment of our village has improved over the past, the method of disposing of household waste has not changed much. We lack a waste disposal center here. Some villages have the money to transport their garbage to outside landfills, but the shipping costs are not cheap. So, most of the time, we burn the garbage in the village, which is bad for the air quality. The increasing number of tourists also adds to our burden, and they sometimes throw garbage into the Heisui River." (LM02)

This study is consistent with prior research (Ratnasari, 2023), highlighting the critical importance of environmental protection awareness in maintaining traditional villages and their cultural landscapes. In particular, by delving into the issue of waste management, this study demonstrates that environmental problems not only damage the natural environment, but also seriously affect the preservation and sustainable development of traditional cultural landscapes, emphasizing the important role of enhancing environmental protection awareness and implementing effective waste management strategies in promoting the sustainability of cultural landscapes.

Insufficient Community Participation

The lack of community participation was identified as a key factor affecting the conservation and development of traditional village cultural landscapes. As an integral part of village

culture, local residents play a major guardian role in the conservation of this heritage. Therefore, it is particularly important to stimulate participation within the community in the development of effective tourism development strategies for traditional village cultural landscapes. The active participation of local residents can strengthen the transmission of the local cultural spirit to the outside world, which not only reflects their deep understanding of the local culture and history, but also provides tourists with a more profound and diversified cultural experience. For example, one of the local villagers stated,

"Their income is higher than other villagers. Through their deep involvement in tourism development activities, they can interact with tourists, which will enable them to provide more in line with the needs of tourists. This can also be in villagers and tourists." (CR04)

Neglecting the importance of community participation may trigger a series of social and cultural problems. This study is consistent with the prior studies (Li & Zhao, 2023; Bao & Yang, 2022), which have emphasized the key role of community member participation in cultural heritage conservation and visitor experience enhancement. From the perspective of rural integration theory, community participation not only enhances trust, networks and social cohesion within the community, but also balances the relationship between cultural heritage preservation and economic development. The active participation of community members is recognized as a core element of sustainable development, ensuring that tourism activities do not harm local cultural and environmental resources.

Discussion

Village integration practices have been defined as a set of strategies aimed at promoting sustainable development of village communities at the economic, social, cultural and environmental levels through tourism (Mitchell & Eagles, 2001; Weaver, 2005). The strategy focuses on stimulating the active participation of local communities, utilizing local cultural and natural resources as well as traditional cultural elements to create unique tourism experiences, while focusing on the preservation and promotion of traditional village cultural landscapes. Using a comprehensive analytical approach, this study examined the key factors affecting the sustainable development of traditional village cultural landscapes.

The social perspective analysis reveals the direct impact of insufficient community participation and demographic imbalance on the quality and sustainability of rural tourism, and points out that strengthening community cohesion, encouraging youth to stay in or return to their home villages to work, and increasing resident participation and sense of belonging through community building programs are essential for integrated rural development.

The economic perspective emphasizes the central role of state governance capacity in the effective allocation and management of resources; improving the effectiveness of state governance, ensuring the rational allocation of funds and resources, and promoting rural economic development through policy support constitute the economic basis for the success of rural integration practices.

From a cultural perspective, the lack of cultural identity can lead community members to neglect quality services and effective environmental protection, so strengthening community

cultural identity and raising awareness of local cultural values through education and cultural activities is key to promoting sustainable development.

The environmental perspective suggests that environmental protection is an integral part of rural integration practices, including the protection of the natural and cultural environment, and that raising the environmental awareness of community members and adopting sustainable tourism strategies and environmental protection techniques are essential to preserving the rural natural and cultural environment.

Through the perspective of rural integration practice, this study innovatively explores the many factors affecting the sustainable development of the cultural landscape of traditional villages in Yunnan, and provides a profound interpretation of this complex phenomenon through in-depth analyses. The study greatly enriches the academic field of rural integration practice and sustainable development. By focusing on six traditional villages in Shaxi, Yunnan, the study highlights the central role of community participation, effective governance structures, cultural identity and environmental protection in promoting tourism and sustainable rural development. The findings suggest that multidimensional strategies that include social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions are necessary to promote sustainable development in rural landscapes.

Although valuable insights were gained, the single-site case study limits the generalisability of the research. Future research could be extended to multiple geographic regions and employ quantitative techniques to reveal factors. In addition, examining the impacts of global environmental change and socio-economic dynamics, as well as innovative techniques such as digital technology and community engagement, can enhance sustainability (Yin, 2018; Bryman, 2016; Lee & Black, 2020; Ren & Xie, 2024).

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