

EVALUATING THE VALUE OF TRADITIONAL VILLAGES: A CASE STUDY OF ABA TIBETAN AND QIANG AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE, SICHUAN

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Abstract— With the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization, the value of traditional villages has become increasingly marginalized, particularly in ethnic minority areas where cultural, ecological, and social structures face multiple challenges. This study focuses on the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, examining the preservation and development of traditional villages inhabited by Tibetan and Qiang ethnic groups. A multidimensional value assessment framework is constructed, encompassing four key

Value Assessment	dimensions: village environment, spatial pattern, traditional architecture, and intangible cultural heritage. By integrating literature analysis, field investigation, expert evaluation, and multi-source data, the study systematically identifies and classifies the comprehensive value of traditional villages in the region. The results reveal that these villages exhibit strong regional characteristics and cultural continuity in terms of environmental adaptation, construction techniques, cultural inheritance, and spatial organization, yet are currently threatened by spatial disruption, architectural degradation, cultural disconnection, and inadequate protection mechanisms. Based on the assessment, the villages are categorized into five types, and multi-level strategies are proposed, including planning-oriented protection, coordinated resource management, cultural revitalization, and digital empowerment. The study aims to explore sustainable development paths tailored to ethnic minority regions and provide theoretical and practical guidance for the scientific conservation and policy-making of traditional villages.
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I. Introduction

Traditional villages are vital carriers of Chinese historical and cultural heritage, serving as

spatial units for the continuation of rural civilization [1]. They encapsulate the diversity and uniqueness of regional

architectural styles, modes of production and daily life, as well as ethnic cultural traditions. In recent years, the rapid process of industrialization and urbanization has led to a sharp decline in the number of traditional villages, severe disruption of their spatial patterns, and the gradual fading of cultural memory. The conflict between preservation and development has become increasingly prominent. Against this backdrop, how to scientifically assess the comprehensive value of traditional villages and determine their protection priorities has become a key issue in achieving rural revitalization and promoting the sustainable utilization of cultural heritage.

Located at the transitional zone between the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the alpine valleys of northwestern Sichuan, the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture is a significant ethnic settlement and ecological functional area [2]. The region is characterized by diverse natural environments, rich ethnic

cultures, and abundant historical relics, preserving a large number of traditional villages with distinctive Tibetan and Qiang features. These villages display unique architectural forms and cultural landscapes. However, due to the combined effects of geographical constraints, population mobility, and economic development patterns, many traditional villages in Aba are facing functional decline, cultural weakening, and spatial degradation. It is thus urgent to conduct systematic value assessments to support subsequent classification-based protection, rational development, and policy-making.

In response, this study takes Aba Prefecture as the research area and establishes a multidimensional evaluation framework incorporating cultural, landscape, ecological, socio-economic, and vitality dimensions [3]. By integrating GIS spatial analysis with multi-source data, it conducts a comprehensive assessment of traditional village values, aiming to provide both practical guidance and theoretical

references for the conservation and sustainable utilization of traditional villages in Aba and other ethnic regions.

II. General Overview

A. Overall Situation

In 2012, the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture launched the first round of applications for the designation of national-level traditional villages. Representative villages such as Taoping Qiang Village and Zhuokeji Official Manor were successfully included, marking a significant step forward in the region's traditional village preservation efforts [4-5]. Since then, Aba Prefecture has continuously advanced foundational work including village surveys, cultural resource registration, and the formulation of preservation plans, gradually establishing a protection system centered on the inheritance of ethnic culture and the conservation of ecological environments.

In 2019, based on the comprehensive evaluation framework for traditional

villages in Sichuan Province and considering the realities of highland ethnic areas, Aba Prefecture issued the Implementation Plan for the Protection and Development of Traditional Villages in Aba Prefecture. The plan proposed a protection and utilization approach that emphasizes "ethnic characteristics", living heritage transmission, and integration into regional tourism.

To date, a total of 53 villages in Aba Prefecture have been listed in the national traditional village directory, and 146 villages have been included at the provincial level. These villages represent various ethnic groups, including Tibetan and Qiang, and are primarily distributed across key areas such as Maerkang, Lixian, Xiaojin, Songpan, and Maoxian. The protection efforts focus on iconic cultural elements such as watchtower clusters, village gates, official manors, and vernacular dwellings, while emphasizing an integrated landscape system of mountains, waters, forests, farmland, and villages. Aba Prefecture was also awarded the title of

"National Demonstration Prefecture for Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Transmission", becoming the first prefecture level administrative unit in Sichuan to achieve comprehensive, region-wide, and population-wide coverage of four-level cultural ecological protection zones.

As of now, the prefecture has registered 20 national level intangible cultural heritage items, 101 at the provincial level, and 552 at the prefectural level, ranking first in Sichuan Province in terms of the total number of four level heritage listings.

B. Current Characteristics

Traditional villages in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture exhibit strong regional specificity and cultural continuity in their environmental adaptability, spatial organization, architectural construction, and cultural transmission mechanisms. Collectively, these characteristics form a unique settlement system representative of plateau ethnic groups.

In terms of environmental adaptability, Aba Prefecture is located at the intersection of the eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Hengduan Mountains, featuring complex terrain, significant elevation differences, and diverse climate types. Traditional villages are generally sited according to the principle of "adapting to the mountain terrain and residing near water", making full use of valley terraces, foothill slopes, and natural water sources to form highly adaptive ecological settlement patterns. Meanwhile, the villages have accumulated rich local knowledge in responding to cold climates and geological hazards, demonstrating remarkable capacity for environmental adaptation [6].

Regarding spatial organization, the layout of traditional villages is shaped by the combined influence of natural landforms, religious beliefs, and social structures. Most villages exhibit radial or linear spatial structures centered around religious buildings, watchtowers, or village gates. Internal spaces are

organically connected through alleys, courtyards, and public nodes, forming compact, orderly, and defensive spatial systems. Village boundaries are clearly defined, with layered spatial structures that reflect rational functional zoning and stable settlement logic.

In terms of architectural construction, village buildings predominantly feature Tibetan-style stone-and-wood structures and Qiang-style watchtower architecture. Locally available materials such as stone, timber, and rammed earth are widely used, forming a building system well adapted to plateau climates and geological conditions. The architectural forms emphasize structural stability and thermal regulation, showcasing sophisticated vernacular construction techniques and indigenous craftsmanship traditions. Architectural colors, decorative finishes, and construction details reflect strong ethnic symbolism, with high cultural recognition and historical value.

As for cultural transmission mechanisms, traditional villages

in Aba serve as important carriers of rich intangible cultural heritage from Tibetan and Qiang communities, encompassing religious rituals, festival customs, oral traditions, and folk crafts. Intergenerational cultural transmission relies primarily on family structures and collective village practices, with cultural reproduction occurring through everyday life, festival ceremonies, and ritual events. As cultural spatial units, the villages also represent crucial expressions of ethnic identity and belief systems, displaying strong cultural self-organization and vibrant mechanisms for living heritage transmission.

C. Existing Challenges

Despite the progress made in the protection of traditional villages, the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture still faces numerous challenges due to a range of complex factors. These challenges are primarily reflected in the following aspects.

With the continued advancement of rural

infrastructure construction and tourism development, some traditional villages have undergone changes that fail to respect their original spatial patterns and environmental characteristics. As a result, traditional settlement fabrics have been fragmented, and spatial forms have become increasingly disordered. Many newly constructed buildings are poorly coordinated with traditional dwellings in terms of scale, proportion, and architectural style, significantly compromising the integrity and historical continuity of village landscapes. In addition, infrastructure projects such as road paving and river channel modification have altered original ecological patterns and landscape structures to a certain extent.

Due to rising construction costs, limited access to traditional building materials, and the demands of modern living, an increasing number of villagers have opted for reinforced concrete and other modern materials in place of traditional stone-and-wood

structures [7]. Consequently, traditional architecture has been gradually replaced by modern buildings, blurring the original architectural identity. Furthermore, many traditional buildings have long suffered from neglect and deterioration, resulting in various structural safety risks and, in some cases, collapse or abandonment, leading to the gradual loss of significant historical architectural resources.

As young people continue to migrate out of rural areas, the number of bearers of traditional knowledge and skills has drastically declined. Intangible cultural heritage elements such as traditional construction, handicrafts, and ceremonial practices are at risk of being lost. Cultural mechanisms and community memory related to religious rituals, local dialects, and village norms are weakening, leading to a loss of cultural self-organization. Moreover, some villagers lack a strong sense of cultural identity or awareness of the need for protection, showing limited cultural resilience in the

face of external cultural influences.

The popularity of ethnic culture and ecological tourism has led to several traditional villages in Aba becoming focal areas for tourism development. However, some development models are driven primarily by economic returns, neglecting the intrinsic value and cultural depth of the villages. This has led to rapid and superficial commercialization, often resulting in homogeneity across villages. In some cases, traditional living spaces have been overly transformed into tourist-oriented landscapes, disrupting local residents' way of life and reducing culturally embedded meanings to consumable experiences, thereby weakening the agency and authenticity of the villages.

Although several policies on traditional village protection have been issued at both national and local levels, challenges remain in the implementation process. These include poor policy enforcement, insufficient financial support, and a lack of effective regulatory systems.

Some villages lack scientifically sound and appropriately tiered conservation planning, resulting in difficulties in executing specific protective measures. In addition, interdepartmental coordination remains weak, with issues such as overlapping responsibilities, unclear accountability, and fragmented information systems limiting the systematization and sustainability of protection efforts.

D. Cause Analysis

The challenges do not exist in isolation but are the result of long-term, systemic interactions among multiple natural, social, and policy-related factors. From a structural perspective, the core causes of the problems in traditional village preservation in Aba Prefecture can be summarized as follows:

Aba Prefecture is in a transitional zone between the eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Hengduan Mountains, characterized by dramatic elevation differences, complex geological structures, and frequent natural disasters.

Hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, and mudslides pose direct threats to village site safety, architectural stability, and long-term preservation. This high-risk natural environment significantly increases the technical difficulty and financial cost of preservation and restoration, leading to continued degradation of village spaces.

As a remote ethnic minority region in western China, Aba Prefecture has a relatively fragile economic foundation and limited fiscal capacity, resulting in insufficient funding for traditional village protection and slow progress in basic preservation work. In the context of an underdeveloped market system and a narrow industrial structure, traditional villages often lack sustained economic support and internal development momentum. In some cases, villagers prioritize their basic livelihood needs by demolishing or altering traditional buildings, accelerating the erosion of original architectural styles.

Urbanization and labor migration have caused a large

proportion of the young population to move to urban areas, resulting in aging populations and hollowed-out villages. The decline in labor force not only reduces village vitality and weakens cultural transmission but also hampers the maintenance of traditional buildings, agricultural practices, and artisanal skills. Furthermore, the influence of modern education and communication has weakened the younger generation's sense of identity with traditional culture, diminishing their internal motivation for cultural continuity.

Although a few national and provincial policies on traditional village protection have been introduced, there remains a disconnect between top-level design and local implementation. On one hand, the legal status of village protection is not clearly defined, and many related systems lack enforceability and operability, leading to protection efforts that are often symbolic or ineffective. On the other hand, conservation planning is either outdated or lacks targeted

measures. The absence of supervision and evaluation mechanisms hinders coordination between planning, construction, and management, resulting in a broken "planning execution regulation" chain.

Village preservation initiatives are often dominated by government agencies and external experts, overlooking the role of residents as cultural agents and stakeholders. This leads to a mismatch between preservation actions and local needs, lacking grassroots support and long-term sustainability. Without effective incentives and guarantees, villagers may remain passive or resistant to conservation efforts. Additionally, public awareness of the cultural value of traditional villages remains limited, and societal attention and support are still insufficient.

III. Research Methodology

The study aims to construct a theoretical framework for the value assessment and classified protection of traditional villages in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, and to

propose locally adaptive strategies for their preservation and development [8]. To ensure scientific rigor, systematic analysis, and practical relevance, a multi-method approach is adopted, combining literature review, indicator system construction, field investigation, expert evaluation, and comprehensive assessment.

A. Literature Review and Policy Analysis

The study systematically reviewed relevant policies, evaluation standards, and academic research on traditional villages at the national, provincial, and municipal levels [9]. Key documents such as the National Traditional Village Recognition Standards and the Implementation Plan for the Protection and Development of Traditional Villages in Sichuan Province were analyzed. Additionally, practical experiences from advanced regions such as Jiaying and Huizhou were examined to inform the construction of the value assessment framework in Aba Prefecture [10]. This

process helped clarify the fundamental principles, classification logic, and conservation orientations of value assessment, laying a solid institutional and theoretical foundation for localized research.

B. Indicator System Construction

Based on the results of literature review and policy analysis, and considering the geographical environment, ethnic culture, and spatial distribution characteristics of Aba Prefecture, this study developed a four-dimensional value assessment system consisting of "village environment, spatial pattern, traditional architecture, and traditional culture" [11]. Each dimension includes four specific evaluation indicators, totaling sixteen indicators in all. A five-point Likert scale is used to score each indicator, resulting in a clear, logically structured, and operationally feasible quantitative assessment system. This system provides a solid foundation for subsequent field

surveys and comprehensive evaluations [12].

C. Field Investigation and Case Study

Representative traditional villages were selected for on-site fieldwork to obtain first-hand data on their natural ecological features, spatial layouts, architectural heritage, and intangible cultural resources. In addition, interviews were conducted with local government officials, village residents, and cultural heritage bearers to gain deeper insights into the current status of preservation efforts, cultural identity, development potential, and existing challenges [13]. On this basis, typical cases were analyzed in detail to extract the value characteristics and conservation priorities of different types of traditional villages [14].

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Value Determination

Traditional villages in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture embody rich historical, cultural, and

ecological value. As important carriers of rural memory, they play a significant role in preserving and transmitting traditional culture and highlighting regional characteristics. Based on the natural attributes of Aba's traditional villages, as well as the current preservation challenges and underlying causes, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation of their multidimensional value. It focuses specifically on four dimensions which are village environment, spatial pattern, traditional architecture, and traditional culture to support the classification of village value and the development of appropriate conservation strategies [15]. Additionally, the assessment framework integrates multiple dimensions such as economic, social, historical, and ecological value to facilitate the effective protection and utilization of local characteristics.

Drawing on national and provincial traditional village evaluation systems, and incorporating Aba's specific

geographical, cultural, and spatial characteristics, this study develops a locally adapted value assessment system [16]. First, the framework is grounded in theoretical guidance from national and provincial policy documents, including the National Traditional Village Recognition Standards and the Implementation Plan for the Protection and Development of Traditional Villages in Sichuan Province. Core evaluation principles such as authenticity, integrity, continuity, and ecological harmony were adopted as the foundation. Practical experience from advanced regions such as Jiaxing and Huizhou was also referenced to emphasize integrated evaluation of both tangible and intangible heritage, and the holistic preservation of regional cultural systems.

A multidimensional evaluation framework was constructed based on the local conditions of Aba Prefecture, including its position on the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, its complex climate and fragile ecology, and its diversity of

ethnic cultures. The framework includes four dimensions: environmental adaptability, spatial organization, architectural construction, and cultural transmission mechanisms where tailored to reflect the realities of the region.

The indicator system was developed through a combination of systematic literature review, official data from departments such as the Aba Bureau of Culture and Tourism and the Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau, as well as extensive fieldwork and in-depth interviews in typical villages. Data collected from these survey interviews were further organized and incorporated into the evaluation process, particularly in assessing cultural vitality, community participation, and the continuity of traditional lifestyles. A database of current village conditions was established, allowing for a thorough classification and synthesis of representative resource endowments, preservation status, challenges, and development

potential. In addition, qualitative insights derived from interview data were used to supplement quantitative indicators, enhancing the reliability of the evaluation results which serves as an empirical foundation for value assessment.

To evaluate the value characteristics of traditional villages in a systematic manner, this study constructs a four-dimensional evaluation framework centered on village environment, spatial pattern, traditional architecture, and traditional culture. Four specific indicators are set under each dimension, totaling sixteen, to enable scientific identification and classification of overall village value.

In the village environment dimension, the assessment focuses on the village's adaptability to natural conditions and the degree of ecological coordination. This includes evaluating topographical suitability, the harmony between water systems and ecological resources, the integrity of the natural environment, and the ecological

carrying capacity and habitability that highlighting the ecological wisdom and sustainability of village life in highland and mountainous regions.

In terms of spatial pattern, the assessment emphasizes the integrity of spatial organization and visual expression. Indicators include the completeness of settlement forms, the rationality of spatial organization and functional zoning, the coordination of landscape features, and the preservation of historical spatial textures. These criteria aim to determine whether traditional spatial logic and regional characteristics are maintained and to reveal the ethnic cognition, social structure, and cultural order reflected in spatial layouts.

The traditional architecture dimension focuses on the construction logic and craftsmanship value of buildings as cultural carriers. It includes structural and craftsmanship characteristics, the expression of ethnic architectural styles, the harmony of building ensembles, and the continuity of traditional

construction skills [17]. The goal is to evaluate whether the local construction tradition is representative and complete, and whether it has formed an architectural system with strong regional identity.

The traditional culture dimension highlights the vitality of living heritage and the sustainability of community culture. Indicators include the activeness of intangible cultural heritage, the continuity of language and lifestyle, community cultural identity and participation mechanisms, and the preservation of cultural spaces and public venues. These indicators reflect the cultural vitality and integrity of the cultural spatial system, emphasizing the cultural continuity of Tibetan and Qiang villages at the spiritual, behavioral [18], and institutional levels as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Value Evaluation Standards for Traditional Villages

Dimension	Evaluation Indicator	Indicator Description	Scoring Criteria (5-point scale)
Village Environment	Suitability of Topography	Whether the village site is ecologically safe and convenient for living, reflecting environmental adaptation wisdom.	5: Scientifically located with stable terrain and high disaster resistance. 1: Unstable terrain and disaster-prone.
	Ecological Resources	Degree of harmony and sustainable use between village and surrounding water, forests, grasslands, etc.	5: Rich ecological resources with high coordination. 1: Damaged ecology and rough usage.
	Environmental Integrity	Whether the natural landform, vegetation, and water systems maintain originality without serious damage.	5: High originality. 1: Severely damaged environment and degraded landscape.
	Carrying Capacity and Livability	Capacity and suitability of the environment for human habitation.	5: Comfortable living environment and strong carrying capacity. 1: Harsh and unsuitable for habitation.

Spatial Pattern	Spatial Integrity	Whether the overall spatial layout continues historical forms, including alleys and courtyard systems.	5: Complete layout with clear alleys. 1: Fragmented form and chaotic structure.
	Functional Zoning	Rational zoning for residence, worship, traffic, etc., with clear spatial logic.	5: Clear and rational functional zoning. 1: Disordered and missing functions.

Traditional Architecture	Landscape Coordination	Coordination among landscape elements such as color, scale, and terrain.	5: Harmonious visual coordination 1: Visual conflicts and disorder.
	Historical Texture	Preservation of spatial structures and evolution traces from different historical periods.	5: Clear historical texture and evident evolution traces. 1: Severely damaged and unrecognizable texture.
	Craftsmanship	Whether structural types and construction craftsmanship are well preserved and reflect ethnic skills.	5: Well-preserved traditional structures and exquisite craftsmanship. 1: Major alterations and loss of skills.
	Ethnic Architectural Style	Whether appearance and decoration reflect cultural traits of Tibetan, Qiang, and other local ethnicities.	5: Strong ethnic characteristics expressed; 1: Ethnic features lost or modernized.
	Building Coordination	Harmony and unity among buildings in height, style, and scale.	5: Unified architectural style. 1: Chaotic and inconsistent styles.
	Skill Transmission	Presence of local craftsmen and integrity of traditional construction skill inheritance.	5: Complete skills and good inheritance. 1: Endangered or broken skill transmission.

Traditional Culture	Intangible Cultural Heritage	Presence and vitality of traditional festivals, rituals, and customs.	5: Active and ongoing intangible culture. 1: Cultural extinction or interruption.
	Lifestyle Continuity	Retention of local languages, clothing, and food customs in daily life.	5: Well-preserved language and lifestyle. 1: Fully modernized way of life.
	Cultural Identity	Degree of cultural recognition, participation, and initiative among villagers.	5: Strong cultural identity and wide participation. 1: Indifference or loss of cultural values.
	Cultural Spaces	Preservation and continued use of temples, meeting halls, watchtowers, etc.	5: Well-preserved cultural venues with active use. 1: Missing or abandoned cultural spaces.

B. Value Classification

Based on preliminary research and quantitative evaluation, this study constructs a value classification system for traditional villages in Aba Prefecture, grounded in a comprehensive analysis of the natural resource endowment, cultural characteristics, and development potential of rural settlements. This system focuses on four core dimensions: "village environment, spatial structure, traditional architecture, and traditional culture." It combines quantitative scoring with expert judgment to determine the value levels of villages in each dimension. Furthermore, based on ethnic cultural characteristics, geographical ecological types, and the current development status of the villages, potential high and medium-value villages are classified into different types, aiming to provide scientific support for targeted strategies and differentiated protection measures.

The study classifies the high and medium-potential villages in Aba Prefecture into five

categories: Ecological Mountain Villages, primarily located in high-altitude, ecologically sensitive areas, emphasizing the harmonious coexistence of the natural environment and settlement space; Cultural Vitality Villages, focused on the active transmission of intangible cultural heritage, with a strong continuation of ethnic rituals and daily cultural practices; Architectural Heritage Villages, which preserve a large number of authentic and finely crafted Tibetan and Qiang dwellings and historical buildings, constituting important samples for architectural typological studies; Model Layout Villages, characterized by complete spatial structure and clear historical fabric, preserving traditional social structures and settlement orders; and Integrated Characteristic Villages, which exhibit balanced characteristics in ecology, architecture, and culture, possessing strong comprehensive development potential.

C. Protection and Development Approaches

In the practical process of protecting and developing traditional villages, Aba Prefecture should adhere to the principle of integrating "holistic conservation with dynamic utilization", coordinating the evolution of natural ecology, historical culture, and human settlement environments. This study proposes a protection and development framework adapted to the characteristics of highland ethnic regions, grounded in the cultural DNA and actual conditions of Aba's villages. Four key strategies are outlined as follows:

Planning serves as a foundational and guiding tool in the protection and development of traditional villages. Aba Prefecture should establish a multi-level spatial control system consisting of territorial spatial planning, specialized heritage protection planning, and village construction planning. In counties with a high concentration of traditional villages, priority should be given to the formulation of specific protection and development plans that clarify the objectives,

scope, priorities, and implementation pathways. Particularly, the concept of "cultural anchoring" should be introduced, incorporating sites of ethnic rituals, religious landmarks, and major festival spaces as cultural markers within the planning framework, ensuring the continuity of village cultural identity through spatial expression. A planning led approach lays the groundwork for differentiated strategies, scientific governance, and gradual development.

Given the diverse value types and complex protection challenges of Aba's traditional villages, it is essential to follow a principle of context-specific and differentiated conservation. A graded and categorized management system should be established based on assessments of historical significance, architectural integrity, cultural vitality, and development potential. Villages can be classified into types such as key protection, style coordination, and characteristic cultivation, each with tailored protection priorities and

intervention strategies. For example, key protection villages require strict control over new constructions and a focus on preserving authenticity and historical continuity; style coordination villages should guide the improvement of architectural form and spatial order; and characteristic cultivation villages may introduce controlled innovation to stimulate development potential. Effective protection also relies on the integration of cross-sectoral resources, involving cultural tourism, housing and construction, natural resources, and agriculture departments in a coordinated effort to conduct cultural surveys, restore historic buildings, upgrade infrastructure, and improve ecological environments which ultimately forming a collaborative governance model of "government leadership, departmental coordination, community participation, and societal support".

The vitality of traditional villages lies in the continuity of cultural memory and its

integration with contemporary life. Protection should move beyond static preservation toward dynamic and innovative expressions of cultural heritage. Leveraging the unique Tibetan and Qiang cultural assets, Aba should promote a hybrid approach of "traditional culture and modern functions", integrating spatial forms, traditional architecture, and contemporary uses. Industries such as rural tourism, folklore experiences, traditional craft exhibitions, and cultural education programs can transform cultural resources into sustainable economic assets, increasing local participation and endogenous development momentum. Special attention should also be paid to the protection and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, including traditional festivals, local languages, and oral histories. Culturally grounded community participation should be encouraged to preserve collective memory in everyday life. Meanwhile, the intensity and pace of village revitalization must be carefully managed to

avoid cultural commodification and maintain authenticity in the modern context.

The protection of traditional villages is a systematic undertaking that requires comprehensive support in policies, institutions, and financing, along with the proactive adoption of digital and intelligent technologies. Aba Prefecture should establish dedicated fiscal mechanisms, such as special funds and incentives for traditional village protection, while encouraging private investment and social capital participation. Simultaneously, digital tools including big data, GIS, 3D modeling, and remote sensing can be employed to build digital archives for traditional villages, enabling dynamic monitoring and visual management of architectural data, cultural resources, and spatial patterns. A digital platform for traditional village protection should also be developed, integrated with smart rural governance and digital cultural tourism systems to enhance multi-level coordination and decision-

making. Additionally, capacity-building efforts targeting local governance teams and traditional artisans should be strengthened to enhance internal self-protection capabilities, laying a solid foundation for the long-term sustainable protection of traditional villages.

V. Conclusion

The study focuses on the value assessment and classified conservation of traditional villages in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, proposing a comprehensive theoretical framework and offering targeted guidance for context-sensitive protection and development strategies. Through a multi-method approach, including literature review, policy analysis, indicator system construction, field investigation, and expert consultation, the research systematically evaluates the multidimensional values of traditional villages in Aba and establishes a locally adapted value assessment system, providing a scientific foundation for subsequent classification-

based conservation and development.

Traditional villages in Aba Prefecture bear significant historical, cultural, and ecological values and serve as vital carriers of Tibetan and Qiang ethnic heritage. The study conducts a detailed analysis across four dimensions which are village environment, spatial patterns, vernacular architecture, and intangible culture, revealing the value characteristics and conservation priorities of different village types. This evaluation framework not only aligns with national and provincial standards for traditional village protection but also reflects the unique geographical, cultural, and social context of Aba, demonstrating the strength of localized research.

By combining quantitative evaluation with expert judgment, the study proposes a value-based classification system and applies it to the management of villages in Aba Prefecture. Five distinct types are identified: Ecological Mountain Villages, Culturally Vital Villages, Architectural

Heritage Villages, Spatially Exemplary Villages, and Integrated Characteristic Villages. This classification helps clarify the conservation focus and development direction of each village type, offering practical guidance for local governments in implementing differentiated protection policies.

To support the protection and development of traditional villages in Aba, the study puts forward four strategic recommendations: planning-led and culture-oriented approaches; integrated resource allocation with tiered conservation; continuity of cultural memory through adaptive reuse; and diversified safeguards empowered by digital technologies. These strategies advocate for an integrated protection model encompassing ecological, cultural, and economic dimensions, emphasizing a culture-centered pathway to sustainable development. Moreover, the adoption of digital and intelligent technologies enhances the efficiency, transparency, and scientific rigor

of conservation efforts, enabling traditional villages to rediscover vitality and relevance in the context of contemporary society.

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