

# Study and Active Utilization of Traditional Village Culture in Mentougou, Beijing

Haiying Li<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Architecture and Art, North China University of Technology, Beijing 100144, China

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Email: lhy@ncut.edu.cn

## ABSTRACT

Traditional villages serve as vital carriers of culture, bearing the weight of rich historical legacies. This paper, through an exploration of distinctive historical artifacts such as ancient residences, temples, traditional crossing towers, and historic theaters within the rural villages of Beijing's Mentougou district, as well as an examination of intangible cultural heritage, unveils the profound cultural connotations and distinctive features embedded in these villages. The paper proposes a series of viable strategies for revitalization, aiming to safeguard traditional culture while fostering sustainable development in the villages, thus contributing to the comprehensive advancement of society.

**Keywords:** *Traditional villages, Revitalization, Heritage resources, Intangible cultural heritage.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mentougou is situated southwest of downtown Beijing, belonging to the residual ranges of the Taihang Mountains with rugged terrain. The area borders Hebei Province to the north and west, historically serving as a crucial transportation hub and military fortress connecting Beijing to Hebei, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, and other regions. It has also been significant as a vital water source and strategic military location for Beijing. Due to its complex topography and inconvenient transportation in the mountainous region of Mentougou, the villages have been relatively less influenced by external factors. Consequently, they have been able to maintain a more primitive natural environment and cultural appearance. The traditional villages in this area not only preserve ancient architecture from the Ming and Qing dynasties but also boast numerous historical landmarks such as ancient temples, theaters, and historic arcade. Additionally, these villages are rich in folk arts and cultural activities.

Plateau, characterized by a terrain that slopes from northwest to southeast. The region is crisscrossed by rivers from three different systems, encompassing over three hundred tributaries. Among them, the Yongding River is the grandest within the Haihe River system, while the Qingshui River belongs to the Daqing River system. Additionally, two rivers are affiliated with the Beiyun River system.

Mentougou is considered the area with the most abundant traditional village resources in Beijing. It is home to a plethora of cultural relics and historical remains, with many villages situated along ancient trade routes and surrounding old river channels. Among the 9 towns and 178 administrative villages in Mentougou, three have been designated as China's Historical and Cultural Famous Villages (accounting for 60% in Beijing), twelve as Chinese Traditional Villages (representing 46% citywide), and fourteen as Beijing Municipal Traditional Villages (comprising 31% citywide), making it a concentrated repository of Beijing's collective memories ("Table 1").

## 2. TRADITIONAL VILLAGE LAYOUT IN MENTOUGOU

Mentougou is located in the transitional zone from the North China Plain to the Mongolian

Table 1. Distribution of traditional villages in Mentougou District

Location	Town-	Traditional Village Names
The western deep mountainous area	Qingshui Town	Yanjitai Village#, Zhangjiazhuang Village#, Shangqingshui Village, DuJiazhuang Village, QiJiazhuang Village, Tahe Village, and Huang'an Village.
	Zhaitang Town	Chuandixia Village ※*#, Lingshui Village *#, Huangling West Village *#, Malan Village *#, Xihulin Village *#, Yanhecheng Village *#, Sangyu Village, Yangjiayu Village, Shuangshitou Village, Baiyu Village, Donghulin Village, and Lingyuesi Village
The central and northern deep mountainous area	Yanji Town	Jieshi Village *#, Weizi water VVillage *#, Tianzhuang Village, Yubai Village
The central deep mountainous area	Datai Town	Qianjuntai Village *#
The central deep mountainous area	Wangping Town	Dongshiguyan Village *#, Jiuyuan Village
The central shallow mountains	Miaofengshan Town	Yingtaogou Village, Jianguou Village, Shangweidian Village
The South central shallow mountains	Tanzhesi Town	Lujiatan Village, Pingyuan Village
The eastern shallow mountains and plains	Yongding Town	Shimenying Village, Wanfotang Village, Shifo Village
	Longquan Town	Liuliqu Village※*#, Sanjiadian Village*#

a Note: The villages in the table are arranged from west to east in Mentougou. Those marked with ※ are designated as China's Historical and Cultural Famous Villages, \* as Chinese Traditional Villages, and # as Beijing Municipal Traditional Villages.

### 3. TRADITIONAL VILLAGE HERITAGE RESOURCES

#### 3.1 Ancient Residences

The village of Chuandixia in Zhai Tang Town, located in the western part of Beijing, boasts a history of over 400 years and is renowned for its well-preserved ancient residences. Nestled against the mountainside, the village features houses of varying heights, preserving a total of 74 sets and 689 rooms of Qing Dynasty dwellings, “Figure 1” is the typically local residential building.



Figure 1 Chuandixia Village.

a Taken by the author

Lingshui Village has a long history, more than 600 years of vicissitudes of life. Despite being located in the mountains, the cultural heritage here is extremely deep. The residences in the village, such as the former residence of Liu Maoheng and Liu Zengguang, are all relatively intact houses (“Figure 2”). Most of these houses are three-step and five-step structures, with gatehouses, screen walls, carved beams and painted buildings, and simple and exquisite brick carving [1]. This architectural style shows the characteristics of literati elegance and can be described as a model of village architecture in northern China.



Figure 2 Lingshui villagers dwelling.

a Taken by the author

Liuliqu Village is an ancient village with a history of more than 500 years, and still retains more than 30 sets of 200 courtyard houses from the Ming and Qing dynasties ("Figure 3"). During the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the glazed glazed factory used by the royal family moved to Liuliqu Village, and was fired by the Ministry of Works. Almost all the glazed ornaments used in the imperial Palace, imperial tombs, gardens and other royal buildings were fired by Liuliqu Kiln. Liuliqu Village glazed factory has become an important building in Beijing, and there are landscape buildings such as Liuliqu, Liuliqu bridge and Liuliqu Tower in the village.



Figure 3 Liuliqu village dwellings.

a Taken by the author

These three villages have all been honored with the title of China's Historical and Cultural Famous Village. Generally, in the Mentougou area of western Beijing, numerous villages are renowned for preserving traditional residential compounds. In this region, residential structures are predominantly quadrangle dwellings, with some three section compound. The main houses typically are located in north facing to south with three or five rooms, and the east or west wing rooms usually having two rooms each. In addition, there are also "daozuo" houses which located at the south with windows facing to courtyard. Due to the cold winters in the mountainous area, houses are usually equipped with heated brick beds ("kang") and ground stoves. The foundations of the main buildings are often higher due to the cold climate in the winter.

Wealthy families often build three-entry and five-entry houses, which are paved with square brick floors, entrance towers with wooden carving ("Figure 4", "Figure 5"), screen walls ("Figure 6"), high steps, large panel doors, wide halls, grinding brick walls to the seam, roof ridges mostly adopt water-based scorpion tails ("Figure 7, 8"), thick walls, simple and exquisite. Many houses still have intact boulders and doorsteps in front of their gates. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, brick carvings ("Figure 9"), the stone carvings ("Figure 10", "Figure 11", "Figure 12"), and wood carvings

present various forms, and the patterns are full of auspicious symbolic significance, fully reflecting the local people's faith and blessing.



Figure 4 Entrance tower.

a [https://www.sohu.com/a/518224790\\_121211503](https://www.sohu.com/a/518224790_121211503)

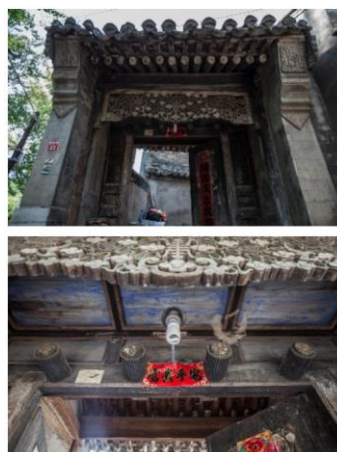


Figure 5 Wooden carving.

a Taken by the author



Figure 6 Entrance screen wall.

a [https://www.sohu.com/a/518224790\\_121211503](https://www.sohu.com/a/518224790_121211503)



Figure 7 Clearwater ridge.

a Taken by the author



Figure 8 Ridge scorpion tail.

a Taken by the author



Figure 9 Brick carving of ridge.

a <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707541496711549424&wfr=spider&for=pc>



Figure 10 Stone carving.

a <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707541496711549424&wfr=spider&for=pc>



Figure 11 Stone carving.

a <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707541496711549424&wfr=spider&for=pc>

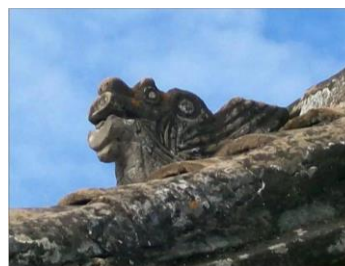


Figure 12 Stone hanging beast.

a <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707541496711549424&wfr=spider&for=pc>

### 3.2 Ancient Arcade

In Mentougou, there are still over ten well-preserved ancient arcades, many of which can be traced back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Despite having lost their original functions, these ancient arcades remain exceptionally valuable as an ancient architectural form. The architectural style of ancient arcades evolved from city gates and city walls. Typically spanning streets, alleys, or water channels ("Figure 13" for a circular arch crossing tower spanning a river), these structures take on the form of a city platform. They feature arched openings at the bottom for pedestrian passage, while the upper part is equipped with temple halls ("Figure 14"), some even include pavilions, and some take on the form of city gates (Figure 15"). Although ancient arcades generally have only a single storey, their considerable height earned them the designation of "pavilions." These ancient arcades are typically located at the entrance of villages, serving as obligatory passage points for entering and leaving the streets.





Figure 13 In Juanmen Village.

a Taken by the author



Figure 14 In Liuliqu Village.

a Taken by the author



Figure 15 In Wanfotang Village.

a Taken by the author

The arcade has multiple functions: first, it has the security function of the gate, the entrance of the arch is set up as a gate, closed at night to play a protective role. Secondly, the arcade also has the function of believing in Buddhism, and the statue is worshipped on the platform, and people can worship when they pass through the door. Third, the arcade also has a function of the Fengshui. The ancients believed in the influence of Yin and Yang feng shui, so if the street is not smooth, the arcade must be set aside exit, set up doors to prevent the leakage of Fengshui, and so on. These functions make the arcade play an important role in history and culture and become the treasure of the Mentougou area [2].

### 3.3 Ancient Opera House

The ancient opera houses in Beijing represent a unique form among numerous ancient architectural structures in China. Initially used for sacrificial and ritual activities, they later evolved into places where people gathered for entertainment, especially with the rise of temple fairs and gatherings. In Chinese culture, the north is considered the primary and significant direction, while the south is considered secondary. Therefore, opera house constructions typically avoid facing the primary direction and often adopt a south-facing north or east-facing west orientation [3].

The entire opera house is generally divided into a front stage and a backstage, interconnected with the backstage serving as the dressing room and preparation area for actors, usually equipped with windows and a separate door. In the case of the Circular Arch Opera House (Figure 16<sup>a</sup>), the front stage features a suspended mountain-style double-sloped awning roof, while the backstage has a solid mountain-style double-sloped roof. The architectural depth and span of the front and back stages are substantial, with the connection of the two forming a linked truss roof structure. Most opera houses have a front stage with a suspended awning roof, while the backstage functions as an ancillary space with a smaller depth and lower height compared to the front stage.



Figure 16 In Juanmen Village.

a <https://www.douban.com/photos/photo/405305943>



Figure 17 In Zhuangjiazhuang Village.

a <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707541496711549424&wfr=spider&for=p>  
c



Figure 18 In Malan Village.

a Taken by the author

The front stage space of the opera house serves as the performance area for actors. The front stage typically adopts a layout with three open sides as the main design (“Figure 16”, “Figure 18”), providing a more unobstructed view for the audience. Alternatively, some have three enclosed sides (“Figure 17”), with only one side open to the audience, a layout more suitable for frontal viewing. The front stage is mostly composed of three bays, with a larger span in the middle bay supported by columns and smaller spans on either side, supported by either columns or walls. The overall width generally ranges from 7-10 meters. The front of the opera house's stage is often meticulously designed, with elaborately carved brackets and ox legs on the columns and beams, and carvings such as exquisite bird and animal motifs on the lintels and friezes above the columns (“Figure 18”). The partition wall between the front and back stages, serving as the stage background, usually consists of wooden-carved screens, though solid walls are also used for convenient backdrop changes. Doors connect the front and back stages to facilitate the entrance and exit of actors.

Although ancient opera houses lacked modern lighting and sound equipment, their diverse architectural wooden structures and vibrant decorations carried rich historical and folk cultural elements of the Beijing region. As a unique cultural heritage, ancient opera houses not only preserve traditional opera culture but also showcase exquisite and outstanding local architectural art.

### 3.4 Ancient Temples

In Chinese history, there has been a connection between religious deities and folk beliefs. Therefore, temples often simultaneously enshrine deities from both religious and folk traditions, reflecting the pragmatic and utilitarian nature of beliefs. A significant characteristic of temples in traditional villages is the practice of worshipping multiple deities collectively, where numerous spirits are accommodated within a single temple or main hall, illustrating a widespread phenomenon. The changing worship objects of the populace at different times have led to considerable variations in the development of folk belief temples throughout history [4]. “Table 2” is a list of some ancient temples in the traditional village of Mentougou. Buddhism has deeply influenced this region, with prominent temples like Jietai Temple and Tanzhe Temple still attracting devoted worshippers. Some smaller Buddhist and Taoist temples are gradually deteriorating as the local population diminishes, but many can still see the glory of history.

Table 2. Ancient temples in traditional villages in western Beijing

Denomination	Temples (existing)	Object of worship	Village
Buddhism	Lingquanchan Temple (“Figure 19”)	The Jade Emperor	Linshui Village
	White Robe Guanyin Hermitage	Avalokitesvara	Sanjiadian Village
	Lingyue Temple (“Figure 20”)	Four Heavenly Kings, Skanda, and the Guiding Buddha	Linyuesi Village
	White Waterfall Temple	Maitreya Buddha, Four Heavenly Kings, and Vairocana Buddha	Yumai Village
	Shuanglin Temple	Avalokitesvara	Shangqingshui Village
	Lingyan Temple	Shakyamuni Buddha+ Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei (Three Military Commanders)	Qijiazhuang Village
	Tanzhe Temple	Shakyamuni Buddha and Avalokitesvara	Pingyuan Village
	Lingquan Temple	Avalokitesvara and Marquis of the Horse (God of Valor)	Huanglingxi Village

Denomination	Temples (existing)	Object of worship	Village
Taoism	Kuixing Tower	Kui Xing (Dominion over the Rise and Fall of Literature)	Linshui Village
	Wenchang Pavilion	Emperor Wen Chang (Overseer of Achievements, Fame, and Wealth)	Linshui Village
	Laojun Hall	Supreme Venerable Sovereign	Yanhecheng Village
	Three Officials Pavilion	Wenchang (God of Literature and Arts) and the Three Officials of Heaven, Earth, and Wate	Liuliqu Village
	Shengquan Temple ("Figure 46")	Lord Zhang (the protector of future generations in folk traditions)	Yanjiatai Village
Catholicism	Catholic Church	God and Jesus Christ	Housangyu Village Xihulin Village
Folk belief	Dragon King Temple	Dragon King (God of the Waters)	Sanjiadia Village Xiaweidian Village Linshui Village
	Temple of the Heavenly Immortal Holy Mother	Three Sisters of the Holy Mother (Yunxiao, Qiongxia, Bixia)	Lingshui Village
	Temple of Guan Yu	Guan Yu (Generals of the Three Kingdoms Period)	Jieshi Village Liuliqu Village Shimenying Village Chuandixia Village
	Sanyi Temple	Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei (Three Military Commanders)	Jiuyuan Village
	Miaofeng Mountain Goddess Temple (" Figure 21")	Nine Heavens Mysterious Lady	Jiangou Village
	Wudao Temple	Five Tiger Generals (Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei Ma Chao and Huang Zhong)	Qianjuntai Village Chuandixia Village
	Kiln God Temple	Kiln Deity (Guardian Deity of Craftsmen)	Juanmen Village

The selection of temple sites commonly exhibits two prominent characteristics: convenience and visibility. One category of temples is situated within the village, connected to main roads, serving as crucial public structures within traditional villages closely associated with the daily lives of villagers. During significant festivals, activities are organized around the temple, transforming it into the central public space of the village. When combined with elements such as stages, it becomes a vital venue for cultural exchange in the village. Another category of temples is strategically placed on hills surrounding the village, overlooking the entire settlement. These temples serve as structures embodying faith and spirituality, offering solace to the villagers' hearts. These temples are not only symbols of religious beliefs but also central hubs for local cultural heritage and community activities.



Figure 19 Lingquanchan Temple

a <https://www.xiaohongshu.com/explore/6248dcee00000000102e5cb>



Figure 20 Lingyuesi Temple

a <https://tuchong.com/3744658/105223156/>



Figure 21 Goddess Temple

a <https://tuchong.com/3711133/53887543/>

In the western region of Beijing, the interplay, collision, integration, and harmonious coexistence among Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism have a history of a thousand years, forming a unique religious and cultural phenomenon that reflects the vast inclusiveness of Chinese culture. The area is characterized by a wide and diverse array of temples, and the prosperity of these temples serves as a testament to the thriving ancient trade routes in western Beijing. Buddhism has deeply influenced this region, with prominent temples like Jietai Temple and Tanzhe Temple still attracting devoted worshippers. However, some smaller Buddhist and Taoist temples are gradually deteriorating as the local population diminishes.

### 3.5 Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to cultural elements that do not exist in tangible forms but are transmitted through oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, and other forms. Mentougou District boasts a rich and distinctive intangible cultural heritage, characterized by abundant resources and a strong folk atmosphere. National-level intangible cultural heritage in Mentougou includes Jingxi Taiping Drum, Miaofengshan Temple Fair, Liuli Firing Technique, Qianjuntai and Zhuanghu Fan Festival. Baiyu Yangge Opera, Mentougou Longquan Wuzi Drum, Xizhaitang Mountain Clapper Opera, Weizi Shui Yangge Opera, and Yubai Village Bouncing Opera are all listed in the Beijing municipal-level intangible cultural heritage registry.

## 4. CULTURAL HERITAGE INHERITANCE AND REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES FOR ANCIENT VILLAGES

### 4.1 *Urgent Need for the Protection of Traditional Villages*

In the traditional villages of western Beijing, there is a wealth of historical information, cultural landscapes, and numerous unique historical memories. However, due to the age of many traditional village buildings, lack of convenient transportation, and the migration of young people for work, these villages are predominantly inhabited by elderly residents. Consequently, many buildings have suffered damage from long periods of neglect, lack of management, and maintenance, leading to significant deterioration. In some cases, the development of tourism in traditional villages, coupled with voluntary efforts by villagers to renovate their homes, has paradoxically destroyed the original architectural character, hastening the rapid decline of these traditional villages [5].

### 4.2 *Strategies for the Revitalization of Traditional Villages in Western Beijing*

#### 4.2.1 *Preservation of Traditional Village Ancient Buildings*

To protect ancient dwellings, firstly, it is necessary to use modern technologies such as laser scanning and digital modeling to investigate and record ancient village buildings in detail, and create detailed architectural archives and records, including information about structure, materials, and finishes. Secondly, regular inspections should be carried out to solve the structural problems of ancient buildings promptly to prevent further damage. Attention should also be paid to the restoration using traditional building materials and techniques to maintain the authenticity of the building. Third, in terms of management, a special management organization or committee should be established to be responsible for the management and maintenance of ancient villages, and residents' awareness of the protection and maintenance of ancient villages should be improved through training and residents should be encouraged to participate [6].



#### 4.2.2 *Improvement of Infrastructure and Eco-friendly Rural Development*

In the process of preserving and developing ancient villages, improving infrastructure and establishing sustainable eco-friendly rural areas enable people to enhance the living and working conditions of villagers. This, in turn, lays the foundation for the development of tourism, leading to an improved overall residential and tourist experience. Simultaneously, it is imperative to prioritize the conservation of the natural environment, intensify efforts to ensure the ecological sustainability of ancient villages, and promote the development of projects such as eco-friendly agriculture and green energy. These initiatives contribute to providing villagers with sustainable livelihoods.

#### 4.2.3 *Development of Traditional Village Tourism*

In traditional villages, strategically developing traditional-style guesthouses provides visitors with a comfortable experience of local life. These guesthouses not only offer local specialties, unique dining experiences, and traditional cuisine but also captivate the interest of tourists. Establishing museums or cultural centers is another crucial initiative, utilizing digital technology to document and disseminate intangible cultural heritage, including the creation of online platforms and virtual museums. The introduction of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies enhances the presentation of intangible cultural heritage, attracting a broader audience while showcasing the rich history and traditional culture of the region.

To effectively convey the history and culture of the village to visitors, training villagers to provide professional tour guide services is essential. This helps tourists gain a deeper understanding of the unique aspects of the village while actively participating in agricultural experiential activities. Relying on the cultural resources of the ancient village, such as regional culture, traditional craftsmanship, and local customs, the development of local cultural and creative products becomes an innovative approach to drive local economic growth. Through creative design and the incorporation of intangible cultural elements, various products, including handicrafts, art pieces, and cultural derivatives, can be developed and promoted extensively using new media. This not

only contributes to cultural preservation but also stimulates the economic development potential of the local area [7] [8].

### 5. CONCLUSION

By comprehensively employing the aforementioned revitalization strategies, ancient villages can achieve the goals of cultural heritage preservation, economic development, and community revitalization. In this process, it is essential to strike a balance between preserving traditional culture, maintaining ecological environments, and promoting economic growth to ensure the sustainable development of ancient villages. Simultaneously, the protection of ancient villages allows for the inheritance and safeguarding of historical culture, enhancing social identity and cohesion, fostering the integration of urban and rural development, and driving comprehensive and sustainable social progress.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Sun Keqin. Investigation on the regional culture of ancient villages in west Beijing [J]. *Local Chronicles of China*, 2008(7):5. (in Chinese) DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1002-672X.2008.07.013.
- [2] WANG Yue. The Disappearing Street Building [J]. *Beijing Chronicle*, 2002(9):1. (in Chinese)
- [3] Luo Deyin. Research on the Architecture of Ancient Chinese Opera Stage [D]. Tsinghua University [2023-12-14]. (in Chinese)
- [4] Gao Jing, ZHAO Zhi-feng, Miao Qiangguo. A study on the function, location and spatial relationship of traditional village temples: A case study of Mentougou, Beijing [J]. *Construction of small towns*, 2020, 38(7): 9. (in Chinese) DOI: CNKI: SUN: XCJS.0.2020-07-011.
- [5] Wang Yuncai, Guo Huancheng, Yang Li. Evaluation and sustainable utilization model of traditional Villages in suburban Beijing: A case study of traditional villages in Mentougou District, Beijing [J]. *Scientia Geographica Sinica*, 2006, 026(006):735-742. (in Chinese) DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1000-0690.2006.06.016.
- [6] Yu Huang, Du Shanshan, Chen Jianzho. Current situation, problems, and

countermeasures of village tourism development on Ancient Commercial Road in west Beijing [J]. Journal of Beijing Vocational College of Agriculture, 2020, 34(2): 6. (in Chinese) DOI: CNKI: SUN: BNGB.0.2020-02-008.

- [7] Que Weimin, Song Tianying. The heritage value and protection planning proposal of the Ancient Road in the west of Beijing [J]. Chinese Landscape Architecture, 2012(03):84-88. (in Chinese) DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1000-6664.2012.03.016.
- [8] Deng Qi. Jingxi traditional villages' overall protection and planning of the implementation of ShuLve [J]. Journal of Beijing Planning Construction, 2013 (3): 8. (in Chinese) DOI: CNKI: SUN: GHJS. 0.2013-03-017.