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Research on Regional Characteristics and Clustering Protection of Shanxi Historical Villages and Towns

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Abstract

Historical villages and towns are considered as cultural phenomena, of which the origin, generation, and development are closely related to historical environment in certain spatial areas. Historical villages and towns show adaptability to historical environment; moreover, historical villages and towns have also enriched various forms of regional history, presenting different characteristics. In this study, historical context of villages was analyzed by considering geographical environment, geopolitics, and defense policies of Shanxi province in China. Central land that supported frontier was identified; moreover, the exchange between silk and iron was encouraged. To compile regional pattern of “defense and circulation,” special types of old villages were identified in Shanxi province, China. Military-castle-type structures are present along the Great Wall of China. Businessmen's-courtyards-type structures are present in Fenhe Basin; settlement clusters of castles are present in Qinhe Watershed; port-type settlements are present along Yellow River, and mountain-pass type towns and villages are present along Taihang Mountain. Geographic space, humanistic space, and administrative space were taken into consideration. This study takes a further step to claim “four areas and two lines” as spatial pattern of old villages in Shanxi province of China. Thus, a “clustering” protection framework was developed.

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Shanxi province has an important position in China's defence deployment, rivers and mountains form a barrier to keep away outsiders in the ancient times. Especially in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the development of iron and silk business made Shanxi an early economic opening area in China. Ancient villages and towns have developed to a peak under this background of “Defence and Circulation” and formed a complete spatial system. The existing traditional villages include 36 military-castle-types villages along the Great Wall, 27 businessmen's-courtyards-types villages in the Fenhe River Basin, 31 settlements clusters of castles in Qinhe Watershed, and other characteristic clusters. These villages form ferry crossings along the Yellow River and gateways of Taihang Mountain, and carry the social memory of Shanxi in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

1. Regional model of ancient villages and towns in Shanxi

There are about 1258 ancient villages and towns with traditional features in Shanxi Province. The distribution within the province is spatially coupled with the geographical space. As a whole, it has the regularity of “concentrating along the edge of the basin” and forms the “four areas and two lines” rural heritage unit in Shanxi Province. Those ancient villages and towns has regional characteristics of high spatial concentration, strong cultural connection, and distinctive regional characteristics.

1.1. the military-castle-types villages along the Great Wall: City-like structure, barracks organization

The military-castle-type villages in the north of Shanxi Province, including Guanpu, Tunpu, and Xiangbao, is the product of the military deployment under the country's geopolitics. The distribution of these ancient villages and towns is located along inner and outer lines of the Great Wall, with Datong town and Shanxi town as the core, and barriers as the node. The stretched Great Wall, densely packed abutments, thick walls, and gateways and passages scattered inside and outside the Great Wall preserve the historical environment of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The current appearance is completely the result of natural weathering. After the defensive function disappeared, the military system between such frontier settlements was deconstructed and each settlement was involved in the development of local urban and rural areas: some became cities such as Datong, some became counties such as Zuoyun and Youyu, and many of them became townships. Most of them are fixed in the villages. Overall, this difference in development path is similar to the administrative level of "Du, Si, Wei, and Suo" and the defence level of "Zhen, Lu, Bao, and Zhai". The history of the ancient villages and towns is mostly at the level of "Wei" and "Suo" and exists in the form of "Bao". The military-castle-types villages along the Great Wall is located within the country's overall defence system, as an ideal military strategy deployment, it has unified construction regulations from top to bottom, manifesting itself as a basic model of "City-like structure, barracks organization".

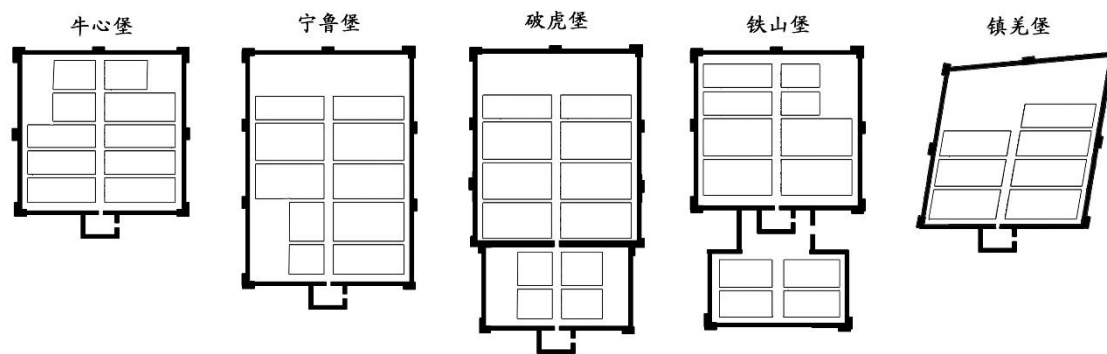


Fig.1. City-like structures of military-castle-type villages in the north of Shanxi Province

1.2. The businessmen's-courtyards-types: Castle-courtyard Structure, Lifang Style

The businessmen's courtyard in Centre of Shanxi Province is called Jiabao and is mainly concentrated in the Fenhe river basin of the Taiyuan Basin. The development of Jiabao relied on the developed agricultural economy of the Taiyuan basin and the traffic hubs connecting the north and the south. It developed in the social environment of the border trade in the early Qing Dynasty. Shanxi ticket traders who have made their fortune in the international trade of tea have built a large number of family-owned courtyards in Taigu, Jixian, Pingyao and Jiexiu. These courtyard's bases are connected in layers. They are spread around Middle Street. The latitude and longitude are clearly arranged in an orderly manner, forming a castle-style family courtyard, such as the Hongmen eight-castles at Wangs of Jingsheng Village in Lingshi County, old and new three-castles at House of Jia Village in Jiexiu City, Hexun six-castles at Duan Village in Pingyao County, the basic mode is castle-courtyard structure, lifang style.

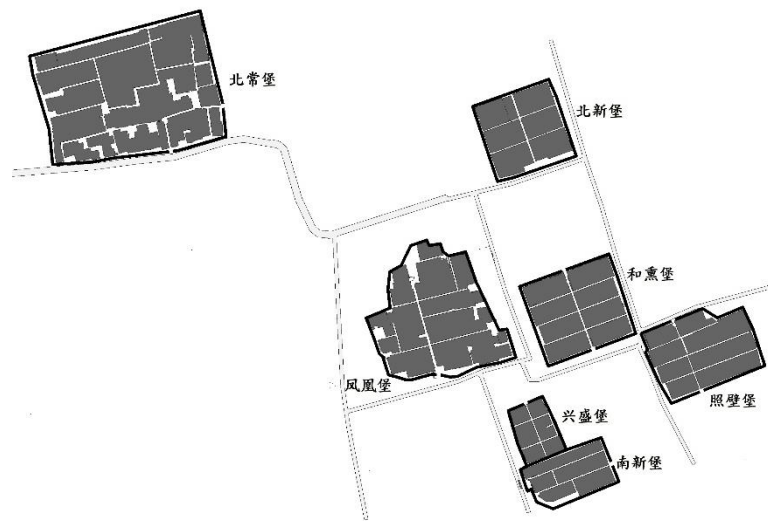


Fig.2. "One Village Six Castle" Castle-courtyard Structure at Duan Village in Pinyao County

1.3. Commercial towns of Qinghua ancient road: Channel Structure, Town Style

The land resources in southeastern Shanxi are poor, but rich products, especially coal and iron resources provide the material basis for the development of commerce and trade, which has spawned the rise of Zelu merchants. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the prosperity of the commodity economy in the Zelu region, the flow of goods and materials in the region developed. As a result, a number of well-regulated commercial towns have emerged on the convenient traffic lanes, known as the town economy. Qinghua Avenue promotes the development of horse caravan and camelback team. "...the west of the Qinghua Grain transporter is like a water line. In Taihang Mountains, people stayed up all night. The bazaar of the small town (Run City) was very prosperous. Every day, two or three thousand animals were sent for sale. There are more than 30 douhangs, each of whom has more than a dozen fellows." These commercial towns, unlike farming settlements, are the result of a flourishing development after the intervention of the regional traffic. These villages and towns have a loud street name, whose status is much higher than that of the villages and towns, such as Hangshan Town – Zhoucun Town, Sanli Long Street - Shangfu Village, Wuli Long Street - Guobi Village, Sanmen Ancient Street - Runcheng Town, etc. channel structure and town style is the basic model.



Fig.3. Channel Structure at Shangfu Village in Yangcheng County

1.6. Guancun of Taihang Eight Trails: Gateway-City Structure, Precipitous Scenery

Taihang Mountain in the east of Shanxi separates Shanxi and Hebei provinces. It is difficult to climb over each other. The ancients explored a mountain road that could be opened to traffic and became the only way for Shanxi, Hebei, and Henan provinces to cross the Taihang Mountains, which is called Taihang Eight Trails. Because of the existence of mountain trails, there are passages for exchanges and trade between the hinterland of Taihang Mountains. The military builds a large number of gates at the throat of the trails to guard country, such as the famous Niangziguan, Dongyangguan, Hongtiguanguan and Tianjingguan. "Everyone must pass the gate and never open it". In addition to the garrison defensive, gateways also have official functions such as letter transmission, traveller inspection and customs duties, etc. It has fixed houses and staffs, needs a corresponding supply system. Therefore, gateways are the node in the Taihang Mountains. A series of "Guancun" appeared in the ancient road, and its basic model was "Gateways-City Structure and Keeping It Secure" (Fig. 6).



Fig.6 Gateway-City structure of Zezhou city Tianjingguan Village

2. Characteristic features of ancient villages and towns in Shanxi

In Fei Xiaotong's "local China", there are two types of society in China: one is the village where the peasants live, and the other is the controlled by the empire's government. "On the one hand, it is a top-down imperial power, and on the other hand, it is the bottom-up squire power and clan power. These two societies operate in parallel and interact with each other, form a rural governance model that emperor didn't act but the country achieved governance. The unique and uniquely 'two-track politics' model that describes the logic of traditional Chinese politics is established." [3]

2.1. Nine borders System and Defence Situation

Shanxi is a unique province in the country's geopolitics. It is located west of the Taihang Mountains and east of the Yellow River, and is named "Shanxi" and "Hedong". The mountains and rivers forms a natural defense barrier for the military. Gu Xiaoyun said: "The world must be taken from Shanxi." With an average altitude of about 1,000 meters, Shanxi poses a condescending trend to neighboring provinces and regions. In the cultural axis of Central Plains in China for more than 2,000 years, Shanxi has been the main battlefield for the collision and integration of agricultural culture and nomadic peoples. It is a defensive center of the Central Plains regime at the northern border. Especially in the Ming Dynasty, the military situation in Ming and Meng escalated to form a confrontational military situation. The

Ming government turned from a strategic offense to an active defense, abolished the state administration of the Yuan Dynasty in the border zone, and established a military-government ruling agency — Du, Si, Wei, Suo, and established the strategic thinking of founding nine borders to defend the country.

2.2. Kaizhong System and Circulation Pattern

“Kaizhong” is a system of investment promotion that was created by the rulers of the Ming Dynasty for military purposes [2]. Under the nine borders defense system, a huge consumer market has emerged in northern Shanxi. In order to ensure the frontier supply, the Ming government uses its salt monopoly privilege to attract traders to provide food for the frontier, and it becomes a major way for merchants to gain profits. For ancient villages and towns, the influence of “Kaizhong” system is comprehensive and profound. It has extensively changed the form of villages and towns, has transformed the farming society into a commercial society. On the one hand, relying on local resources and traffic conditions, a large number of commercial towns and customs markets have emerged. On the other hand, many families have become wealthy businessmen through wealth accumulation, which has spawned a large number of Shanxi businessmen's courtyard.

3. Clustered protection measures for ancient villages in Shanxi

Ancient villages and towns in Shanxi Province as a "rural environment that can witness a certain civilization, a meaningful development, or a certain historical event" is not a simple sum of settlements, but a series of overall relationships expressed through history, landforms, and regional societies. Therefore, starting from the special status of Shanxi Province in the historical process of China, ancient villages and towns are regarded as the carrier of social memory and the materialized form of social memory, characteristics are identified in the formation motivation and historical evolution, and protection is achieved in an overall manner. Here, the concept of “clusters of ancient villages and towns” proposed in this paper will historically be called “clusters of ancient villages and towns” that are culturally related, similar in characteristics, and geographically similar due to some common mechanism.

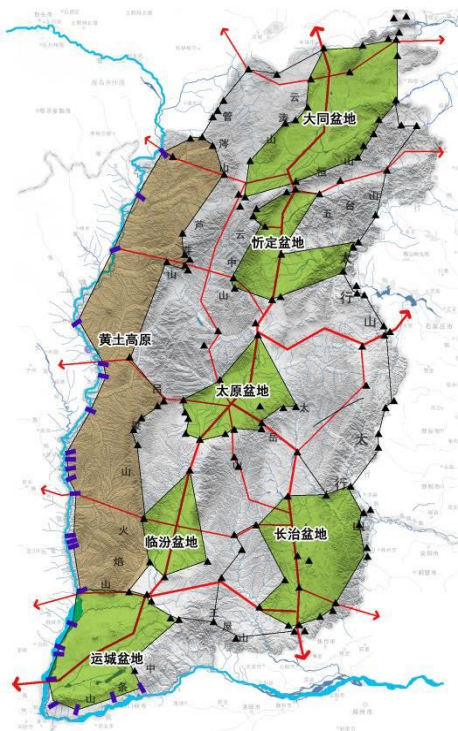


Fig.7. Shanxi Gateway - Basin distribution map

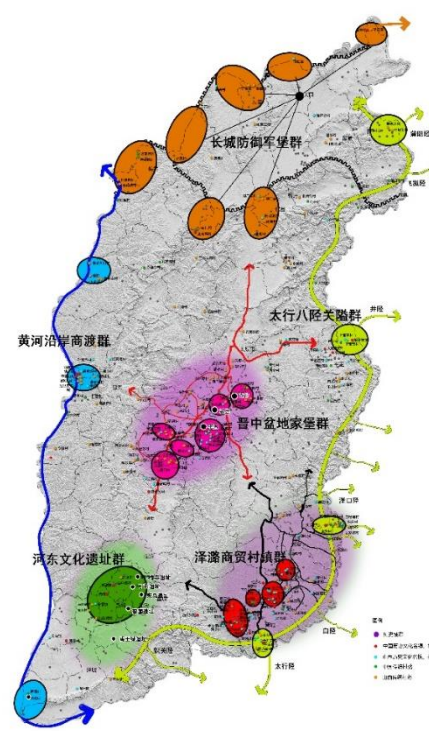


Fig.8. map of Shanxi ancient village and town cluster protection system

First of all, the construction of ancient villages and towns clusters includes several levels, in a cluster system of regional space, there should be multiple clusters. Based on the natural geographical environment and regional social background, ancient villages and towns of Shanxi formed six cluster systems, including the military-castle-type along the Great Wall, businessmen's-courtyards-type in Fenhe Basin, settlements clusters of castles in Qinhe Watershed, port-type settlements along Yellow River and mountain-pass type towns and villages along Taihang Mountain. They are further divided into 25 clusters based on local terrain units and administrative affiliations (Fig. 8).

Secondly, the cultural connotations of ancient villages and towns clusters come from different external actions. They are assembled under external intervention to form a cluster structure. The greater the force, the stronger the correlation between villages, and the more prominent the type characteristics. Such as the Yellow River bank commercial wharves clusters, with Qikou as the center. Labor resources, financial resources, and storage power around this commercial town, make the surrounding villages clustered into an interconnected whole, the involvement of flood and drought wharves is the dynamic mechanism of cluster formation.

The purpose of constructing clusters is to reorganize the ancient villages and towns that have their own politics as a whole, thus form a complete historical commentary system, and participate in the development of regional urbanization and cultural tourism in a collaborative manner.

Acknowledgements

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