

Rural Heritage Governed as Commons: A Case Study of a Chinese Heritage Village from the Cultural Capital Perspective

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Abstract

The concept of commons in economics and management has been positioned within the heritage field to emphasise their characteristics like Common Pool Resources. Rural heritage governed as commons means building a new understanding of its values, which extends beyond consumerism or state identity to embrace the local community, and implicating dynamic governance processes towards a more sustainable, equal and inclusive development in rural areas. Under the framework of 'Resources-Governance Community-Governance Systems' in heritage commons governance and the perspective of transformation of cultural capital, this paper re-examines the two typical eras governance process of a centuries-old village in southwest China. This study first reveals tensions between community heritage versus official heritage and commercial heritage. Secondly, 'governance community' is more complex than common sense, particularly, local government has different hierarchies and departments with multiple targets. Besides, an effective conservation and development planning with appropriate mechanisms is the core of coordinating heritage management system, tourism development system, rural revitalisation campaign system, and community self-governance and social-engagement system. Lastly, two cases show that social power and community have the vitality to cover the shortage of physicalised cultural capital, constituting an alternative path towards common benefits and inclusive development of rural heritage communities.

Keywords

rural heritage; governance; commons; cultural capital; heritage community

1 Introduction

Popularised by Elinor Ostrom's pioneering work on natural resource community-based management systems (Ostrom,1990), the term 'commons' has been traditionally used in economic analysis to define physical resources which are subject to overuse and appropriation dilemmas, as well as property and governance regimes over resources that are owned in common. More recently, a growing recognition has emerged that important types of humanly constructed shared resources, such as information, knowledge, infrastructures, or urban landscapes, could be appreciated and analysed as new forms of commons (Gould, 2017). It has been observed that while much attention is given to natural resource management, the field of heritage studies lacks sufficient discussion on the relationship between heritage and community, and there are only a few accounts that explore this topic. It is possible to apply the principles of commons governance to the cultural heritage field (Lekakis, Shakya and Kostakis, 2018).

Heritage commons are not only an academic issue but an emerging reality in the field of heritage management. Recently, the cultural heritage conservation approach has shifted from 'object-centred' to 'people-centred' methods, the latter emphasises the concept of 'Living heritage' and 'continuity', which means the core community is responsible for the continuous care of the heritage through traditional or established paths (Wijesuriya, 2015). This trend makes it particularly important to view the relationship between rural heritage and its community from the commons governance perspective to create the necessary tools to develop a community-based approach to conservation and management.

Heritage commons highlights the necessity of analysing heritage as shared resources by a community even a country in terms of tangible and intangible dimensions towards public interest and sustainability principles, constituting an alternative path towards safeguarding heritage and communal benefits (Bertacchini, 2020). Furthermore, it extends the collective action problem to a wider array of social dilemmas involving the conservation of heritage. There is mounting evidence to suggest that this approach can empower user communities, leading to a more democratic distribution of managerial control and fostering reciprocity and social values (Lekakis and Dragouni, 2020).

Ostrom's research (2002) focuses on two main questions related to the commons, which also happened in the heritage field. Firstly, why are heritage resources often exploited, and how can we accurately define their value? Secondly, what circumstances enable heritage resource users and communities to create effective management rules? In this paper, we draw on an analytical framework applied to the case of China, which is informed empirically by our longitudinal fieldwork research on the area, in order to explore how the resources governance process has happened in the rural community from the past to the present and how cultural capital has transformed in a centuries-old heritage community.

The paper is structured as follows: The primary section discusses a general conceptual analysis of the commons and the specificities of heritage commons. The second section comprises an analysis of two key governance eras and the transformations that occurred in Nuodeng's rural heritage in terms of its economic, social, and cultural capital within a theoretical framework. Lastly, the final section delves into the tensions among resources system, communities and governance systems when rural heritage governed as commons, and presents the possibility of commons-based sustainable development strategies through two social and community engagement actions, highlighting some important issues that deserve the attention of future scholars and researchers.

2 Rural Heritage Commons Governance Theoretical Framework

Hardin's research(1968) on the 'tragedy of the commons' brought the commons into the forefront vision of public resources governance problem. Commons, also known as Common Pool Resources (CPRs), according to the classification of public goods by Ostrom (2002), commons are a kind of public goods that are non-exclusive but competitive at the same time. Commons is understood as any natural or manmade resource that is or could be held and used in common to obtain social wealth and organise social production (Berge and van Laerhoven, 2011; De Angelis 2005). It encompasses not only goods and products but is also conceived as a productive force or dynamic process that is necessarily established and maintained by social groups, which control for their accessibility and use on regulated but equal terms (Hardt and Negri, 2012).

In this sense, commons governance is believed to be an effective avenue for protecting resources. Similar to the peasant lands a few centuries ago, cultural heritage can be formally defined as a Common Pool Resource based on the traits that the commons can be used and disposed of by anyone under certain formal or informal rules (Gonzalez, 2014; Dragouni, 2020). The scholars discuss this issue to respond to the three major contradictions in rural cultural heritage management.

- *Heritage commodification or Disneyfication.* Many rural cultural heritage have turned turn into 'monuments' for state identity and 'products' for tourism consumption under the

obsession for growth push and economic rationalism, and excessive development of heritage tourism demand in villages has threatened the local and traditional community. However, unlike other standard economic goods, which could gain direct income from their real estate value or tourism revenue, cultural heritage as commons may also generate non-market and non-use benefits, given the component of collective use and significance expressed by its recognition (Bertacchini, 2020).

- *Government-led heritagisation.* This type of dilemma entails a conflict over the heritage values between public authorities and communities. Heritage commons is a concept situated in community and identity contrast to treat heritage as a universal global endeavour (Gonzalez, 2015). When a village becomes heritage recognised by the office, too strict conservation approaches may hinder other heritage values that are more likely to express local traditional practices (Bertacchini, 2020).
- *Unequal distribution of benefits and costs among heritage stakeholders.* Both cultural and natural capital have been inherited from the past and will deteriorate or degrade if not maintained (Throsby, 2016). However, a wider group of stakeholders (i.e., local community, tourists, private business owners) do not directly pay for its preservation and maintenance (Bertacchini, 2020) while they enjoy the benefit of the common cultural brand. The authority and right to govern heritage resources are rarely aligned with community organisations, even when they are obvious candidates for managing that heritage (Gould, 2017). Heritage governed as commons provides a possibility to help bridge some gaps among various stakeholders in rural heritage, and it is a treasury of the community's imagined identity, part of the aspired and yet utopian democracy of the commons.

Getting back to the core of the commons conceptualisation, the present study references related analytical frameworks inspired by Ostrom (2009), Dellenbaugh et al. (2015), and Lekakis and Dragouni (2020). Ostrom proposed the Social-Ecological Systems Framework (SES) of common resources, which focuses on 'resources system and resources units', 'actors and governance system', and 'governance interaction and output'. In terms of heritage common governance, Dellenbaugh and Lekakis understood the commons through the tripartite constituent elements: the resources, the communities that manage them, and the regulatory framework for the management process, which Lekakis call it 'commoning' to analyse rural heritage governance and reproduction process.

Furthermore, when discussing the public goods character, cultural heritage such as monuments, museums, and historic buildings may be considered as a form of cultural capital that embodies both economic, social and cultural values (Throsby, 2001). Bourdieu (1984) proposed the concept of 'Cultural Capital' to strengthen elitism and the role of culture as a social distinction mechanism, and cultural capital, economic capital and social capital can be transformed and reproduced under certain conditions. Tsongkha and Wang (2021) reveal the three forms of cultural capital in Tibetan heritage villages in China based on Bourdieu's research: one is the physicalised form, as culture is ingrained in the human body and spirit, like local language and place identity, which is inherited through family, community and school education; the second is object form, such as vernacular architecture and manmade tools; the third is institutionalised form, such as village regulations and non-governmental agreements, particularly in acquiring recognised qualifications, identities, and status. By establishing mechanisms conducive to sustainable resource utilization in heritage communities, the accumulation and reproduction of cultural capital can be achieved (Zhu and Min, 2021).

In this study, we conduct a theoretical framework of ‘Resources-Governance Community-Governance Systems’ to delve into how rural heritage is governed as commons (Fig.1). The governance process promotes the formation and transformation of cultural capital. Under the framework, we consider the following points in the empirical case:



Fig.1 Rural Heritage Commons Governance Theoretical Framework
Source: the authors.

- *Resources*: In this section, we will examine how natural resources turn into economic-social-cultural capital through traditional governance process and how they have changed in heritagisation. Heritage regarded as commons means to explore how resources are maintained sustainably and how immaterial value or public interest is produced and captured not only under a market consumption regime and will of the state, but also for its surrounding communities.
- *Governance Community*: While the main stakeholders of rural heritage communities are commonly understood through a model of government-residents dichotomy, such understanding tends to neglect the variety composition of intra-government and intra-community. These agencies, often with different goals, create a complex heritage common governance network.
- *Governance Systems*: As Gonzalez (2015) said, the construction of heritage as a social object is a complex process involving many objects and subjects. Heritage must be seen as a terrain of struggle where certain forces tend towards disciplining, segmenting and reconstructing the community. It is necessary to consider how stakeholders construct different governance systems to use and maintain the resources and how the governance output influences the reproduction of cultural capital. Rural heritage governed as commons also points to a polycentric governance model.

3 Commons Governance in the Salt-Industry Era and Heritage Era

3.1 The Case Study of Nuodeng Village

This study takes Nuodeng Village, a historic salt industry village in Yunlong County, Yunnan Province, southwest China, as an empirical example. Since cultivation is the economic foundation of most rural heritage communities in China, there is a lack of research on

settlements that rely on other public resources, such as the salt industry settlements. Traditional salt manufacturing villages have developed a human–nature interaction paradigm based on salt wells instead of agriculture, which indicates specific public resource governance characteristics.

The salt industry played a crucial role in the birth, growth, and fall of Nuodeng Village. With a history of more than 1,300 years, the inhabitants have been mining salt well since the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), and the industry has contributed to the village's thriving economy and culture. However, societal changes and the popularisation of sea salt during modern times have caused the salt industry to stagnate and the hamlet to collapse. It wasn't until the last 30 years that the village regained its status as an officially designated cultural heritage, and tourism has since become its primary industry. The salt-producing era has left abundant tangible heritage for Nuodeng Village, which still retains the relatively complete rural scape and fabrics (Fig.2), ancient architectural groups of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), including more than 20 temples and over 100 vernacular dwellings (Fig.3). Meanwhile, intangible heritage is also preserved in the community (Fig.4), such as the Dragon King Festival, the Confucius Ceremony, salt-making crafts, and the Dongjing Taoist music. Nuodeng Village has been officially designated as the 'National-level Cultural Heritage Sites', 'National Historic and Cultural Village', and 'Chinese Traditional Village' in the last decades. The heritagisation also brings rural gentrification and commercialisation. In the process of tourism development in Nuodeng Village, local residents and migrants join heritage tourism by opening homestays and selling agricultural products.

The authors have been conducting heritage education activities with a social organisation and long-term field investigations in Nuodeng village Since 2014. During the past 10 years, the authors observed the changes in the village continuously and interviewed more than 30 stakeholders in order to obtain firsthand information, including the county government officials from planning, constructing and tourism development departments, indigenous and migrant residents of different ages and jobs, local organisations and elites, enterprises and related academics and technical experts.



Fig.2 Aerial Photo of Nuodeng Village
Source: the authors.



Fig.3 Vernacular Dwellings in Nuodeng
Source: the authors.



Fig.4 The Resident made salt for tourism
Source: the authors.

3.2 Salt-industry Era: The Formation and Accumulation of Cultural Capital

3.2.1 Resources: Natural Resources in the River Valley

Nuodeng Village's salt brine resources originate from the Bi River, which is a tributary of the Lancang River. About 50 metres below the surface of the Bi River Valley, salt brine from the Ancient Yunnan-Guizhou Sea formed veins of potash due to geological tectonic processes, and these veins erupted out of the surface to produce salt wells. The Bi River Valley is a significant resource system that contains not only brine but also rivers, mountains, forests and land, which

produces additional resources such as the fuelwood needed to boil salt brine and the logs and raw earth for building salt wells and dwellings.

Overall, the brine resource is competitive, non-exclusive, and limited, which is consistent with the qualities of CPR. Individuals acting irrationally by over-exploiting the resource will decrease its availability to other members of the community and the output of the resource. As a result, a governance community is formed through official and local forces, and regulations for the resource's sustainable usage are created.

3.2.2 Governance Community: Production-based, Bloodline-based, and Geography-based Communities

A social network jointed by the salt industry was progressively established, involving salt-producing households, labours that maintaining salt wells and carrying brine, artisans, farmers, footmen transporting salt packages on the ancient roads, merchants in the salt trade, etc. In the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the central government established *wujing yanke tijusi* (tax collecting institution on five salt wells) in Nuodeng Village in order to reinforce its authority over the southwest border region, particularly with regard to the salt business. As a result, the officials from the Central Plains moved their entire family to Nuodeng Village and brought Confucian culture to the southwest border. The clan force became a dominant social group in the village after hundred-years of solidification of Confucian values.

During the salt industry era, Nuodeng village saw the steady development of a governance community based on salt production, bloodline and geography. Rural clan statutes managed and restricted the behaviour of the community members.

3.2.3 Governance Systems: Community–Authority Cooperation

Public resources with potential economic value attract more individuals seeking to exploit them. However, due to the limited supply of these resources, it is necessary to establish governance regulations to restrict irrational behaviours and ensure sustainable utilisation of these resources. Hence, the primary objective in establishing a governance system for the commons is to ensure fairness of resource distribution, optimise resource flow without causing harm to the resource system, and facilitate a sustainable exchange with external resources. Furthermore, the formation of a governance system is influenced by the social and cultural environment of the time, including factors such as the level of social productivity, tool-making technology, ethnic customs, and political order. During the salt-industry era, three distinct governance systems were established:

- *Brine Distribution Regulation*

The brine resources were the most significant means of production in Nuodeng Village in the early days. The community distributed all of the brine resources independently and adopted the decentralised family workshop production mode. To avoid over-exploitation, approximately 200 households in the village were divided into 16 ‘stove groups’, each of which possessed 30 barrels of brine (Zhu, 2007). The amount of barrels allocated to each household determines how many days in a month they can produce salt. During the rest of the month, they are not permitted to use the water for salt production. The distribution unit was established based on a lunar month of 30 days, which accounted for the distinct production patterns and measuring techniques of the salt-producing society that differed from the agricultural society.

This spontaneously organised production system operated organically for millennia until the central government implemented a system of salt taxation and established certain zones for selling salt in the Ming and Qing dynasties. However, it primarily adhered to this distribution system and allowed communities to determine their own governance regulations autonomously. For instance, the 'stove manager' was given the authority to administer salt resources with the consent of the government and acted as a representative for the salt-producing households to negotiate with the government. Another example is *longgong*, a group of highly skilled labourers responsible for constructing and repairing wells. Typically, they were hired and remunerated by the government to ensure the welfare of the community. This profession was then passed down from one generation to the next, ensuring the inheritance of these skills. The distribution system as a whole exemplifies the intricate governance relationships between human and the natural world, interpersonal connections, and the individual and the government.

- *The Organisation of Salt-producing Households*

Due to the impact of Confucian culture, the clans held significant importance as community units in salt settlements. The prestige elderly villagers and local elites took the responsibility to establish stove managing association, and set up social norms and regulations to manage public affairs within the community. The association both exhibited the traits of industrial organisations and fostered a strong sense of identity and belonging. Since association members were entitled to the income from production, they had to engage in community discussions, public welfare initiatives, religious activities, and other public matters. Simultaneously, the community also preserved the 'public brine', the profits from which were used towards communal services including building infrastructures and temples, conducting festivals, celebrations and village education, etc. This exemplified the principle of equitable distribution of benefits and expenses in the governance of public resources.

- *Beliefs and Identities*

Community beliefs and identities were strengthened by the compound effect of nature and culture. The Bai minority group had a primitive nature belief, worshipping the mountain rock formations and the water flows where the brine resources come from. The indigenous residents burned incense in the well house every day, and held the Dragon King Festival once a year, in order to pray for the abundance and continuity of the brine. This demonstrated how the resource was kept spiritually intact and demonstrated how the belief in the salt god was in harmony with the natural world. The customs reaffirmed to the villagers the importance of protecting valuable resources while managing public resources sustainably.

Cultural exchanges among the salt well settlements increased after the scale of the salt industry reached a certain level and the economic and cultural level developed accordingly. The Bai culture of the Erhai region, the Buddhist culture of the Indian region, the Confucian culture of the Central Plains, and the Taoist culture merged with the local belief system of Salt Gods to form a distinctive wellsite cultural circle, further strengthening the cultural identity bond within the governance community.

3.2.4 Governance Output: Formation and Accumulation of Rural Cultural Capital

In the heritage community, the formation and accumulation of cultural capital stemmed from the ongoing use and management of salt, a shared resource during the salt industry era. A governance community based on production, bloodline, and geography was formed by salt-

producing households, officials, merchants, horse gangs, etc. Natural resources were converted into economic and social capital through the mechanism of public governance, and eventually accumulated into cultural capital, forming the initial accumulation of rural tangible and intangible heritage resources(Fig.4).

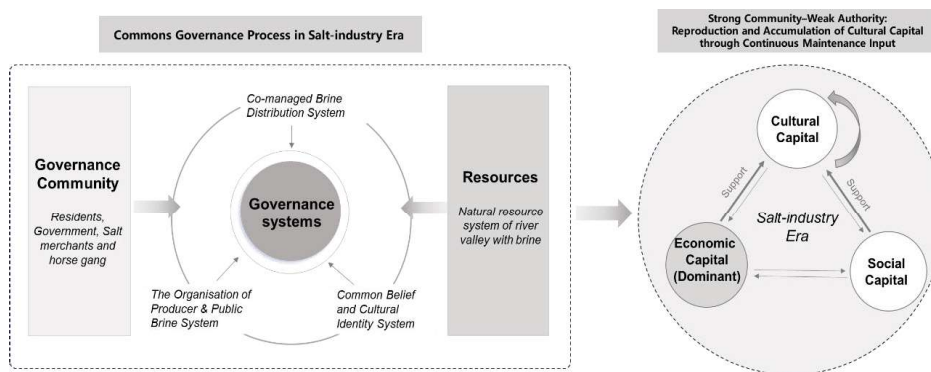


Fig.5 Commons Governance Process in The Salt Industry Era
Source: the authors.

Cultural capital was embodied in three different forms: institutionalised, objectified, and physicalised (Fig.5). The commons governance system that created the cultural capital exhibited a model of community–authority collaborative governance. It reflects the wisdom of sustainable utilisation of public resources in the historic village of Nuodeng, and can still provide insight into the sustainable conservation of heritage resources in the present.

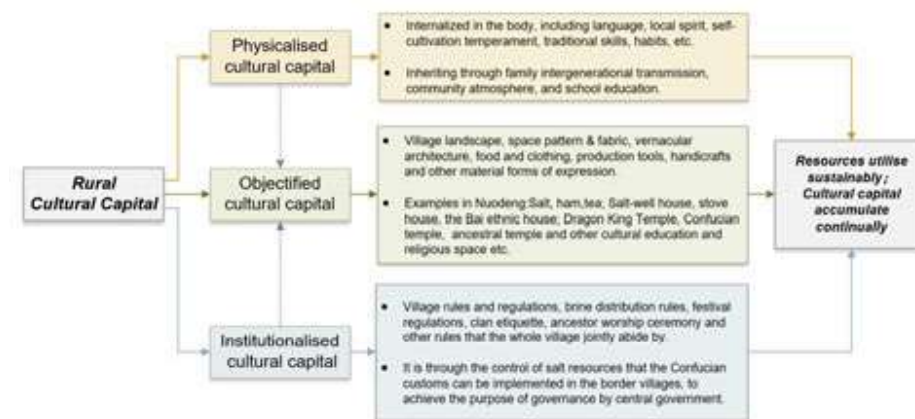


Fig.6 Three Forms of Cultural Capital in the Salt Industry Era of Nuodeng
Source: the authors.

3.3 Heritage Era: The Recession and Transformation of Cultural Capital

3.3.1 Resources: From Natural Resources to Cultural Heritage

Salt production persisted until the 1960s and 1970s, when traditional family-based production gave way to collective production centred on salt factories. However, the traditional system of villagers governing the public commons vanished as a result of the nationalisation of brine rights. The salt factories eventually stopped operations in the 1980s and 1990s due to the advancement of mechanical manufacturing processes and the popularisation of sea salt.

The absence of intentional communal care caused the salt wells to progressively silt up and collapse over the course of the next three decades. Simultaneously, with the rapid growth of urbanisation and globalisation, Nuodeng village, like plenty of other Chinese villages, was facing the issue of aging and hollowing out.

Since the turn of the 21st century, the Chinese government has established and improved national heritage conservation systems, including the World Heritage Sites, 'National Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns, and Villages', and 'National-level Cultural Heritage Sites'. Social projects like the 'Beautiful Countryside', 'Characteristic Small Towns', 'Poverty Alleviation', and 'Rural Revitalisation' have also been implemented at the national level, pushing rural heritage conservation further.

Despite the village's abandonment of salt resource development, local elites have been constantly excavating Nuodeng Village's cultural capital, which attracted the attention of the government and media. With the approval of the Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Culture, and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, Nuodeng Village was designated as 'National Historic and Cultural Village' in 2006, 'Traditional Village of China' in 2012, and 'National-level Cultural Heritage Site' in 2013.

3.3.2 Governance Community: Hierarchical Local Government and multiple stakeholders

The previous production-based, bloodline-based and geography-based communities have been replaced by hierarchical governance communities with the primary goal of conserving and utilising heritage resources. A variety of actors, including governments and related functional departments at all levels, market forces, communities (e.g. new residents, indigenous residents, and autonomous organisations within the communities), and social forces (e.g. academics from universities, technologists, and social organisations), have replaced the original actors, who were primarily residents and local governments. The primary mode of governance also shifted from community-led and official participation into government-led and community-supported.

Even in the modern and contemporary era, key members of the original governance community, such as cultural elites and prestige people, continue to be involved in the governance of public cultural affairs and preserve cultural heritage. Local elites who work in government will draw greater official attention and obtain resources for the heritage community. For instance, Mr. Y, a cultural elite of the famous local clan, has placed high value on protecting Nuodeng Village's cultural heritage and implemented relatively strict tourism regulations during his time as the county tourism bureau's director. In order to encourage government-community collaboration in heritage conservation and cultural tourism development, he established a leading group within several governmental departments, and also instituted a Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development Association in Nuodeng Village.

3.3.3 Governance Systems: Multi-objective and Absorptive Governance Systems

The governance systems evolve along with the change of resources and the composition of the governance community. In the heritage era, four governance systems have emerged in the communities and are nested within each other: a system aimed at conserving the legal heritage, a system aimed at developing cultural tourism, a system aimed at carrying out national political tasks like Poverty Alleviation and Rural Revitalisation, and a governance system of community self-governance and participation of social forces, which is aimed at community development.

- *Heritage management System*

The 'heritageisation' process has given the community's legacy a legal identity and, along with it, the national standards for the preservation of the legal cultural heritage. The various departments within the county government have been collaborating with specialists, academics, and planning institutes to manage heritage sites, including formulating conservation planning, setting up daily monitoring systems, and developing townscape guidelines. Actually, the conservation plan has not truly been implemented because of the disagreement between the departments, leaving the rural scape protection in an empty talk. Furthermore, the management of national heritage properties is frequently standardised, which causes the neglect of local public demands. For instance, the county government has chosen to adapt the national heritage site Salt Bureau in Nuodeng Village into a bookstore and café for the outsiders, with doors opening and closing on a regular basis. This decision has limited the Salt Bureau's original function to serve as a public venue for the elderly's cultural activities.

- *Tourism and Development System*

Gaining national recognition increases institutionalised cultural capital, which indirectly raises the village's popularity in the eyes of the general public. Cultural capital may transfer into economic capital with the momentum of tourism. In order to profit from the cultural brand, local people, both native-born people and recent immigrants, have spontaneously opened hotels and sold regional specialties; on the other hand, the government has partnered with businesses to enact a comprehensive tourism development with administrative will. The county government wants to turn Nuodeng Village into a national scenic spot, so it has given permission for two tourism investment companies to move in. It has also attempted to raise money from higher levels of government and social capital in the name of building tourism facilities. However, the government has encountered challenges in establishing a mechanism for sharing benefits with the local community, and the residents have shown limited interest in participating. As a result, the progress of the development project has been hindered.

- *Rural Revitalisation Campaign System*

The rural areas of China serve as the place for the national large-scale social initiatives, reflecting the government's goal of modernising agricultural practices and rural administration. Within this objective, the central government carries out top-down political initiatives such as Poverty Alleviation and Rural Revitalisation. These state-initiated social engineering often involve a focused allocation of resources and policy direction for a specific duration (Scott, 1998). They possess a significant ability to mobilise local governments due to the evaluation mechanism of government officials. The discourse on how to maintain and utilise cultural heritage as resources has become a means for local government authorities to meet the goals of rural revitalisation. Due to its abundant heritage assets and widespread popularity, Nuodeng

Village is highly likely to attract attention and secure fund from higher authorities when applying for various rural revitalisation projects.

- *Community Autonomy and Social- engagement System*

The initial three governance systems mostly exhibit a government-driven, top-down governance mode, although the formal and informal community self-governance organisations continue to exist in Nuodeng village. In the village, there is an Elderly Association established by local cultural experts apart from the officially-led Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development Association. These associations are primarily composed of highly esteemed elderly individuals who are responsible for organising and executing various ceremonies, including the Dragon King's Festival and ceremonies dedicated to Confucius.

Furthermore, the Women's association led by Ms. H, who holds community respect due to her establishment of the village's first homestay and her lineage as a descendent of the Huang family, plays a significant role. She collaborated with other women to coordinate other smaller celebrations throughout the town. Additionally, she urged the villagers to contribute financially towards the restoration of the San Chong Temple and the repainting of the statue of the Goddess of Mercy. Although the San Chong Temple is an unofficial heritage site, it holds significance as a cultural symbol that is highly valued by community members, who are internally driven to preserve it.

3.3.4 Governance Output: Depletion and Transformation of Cultural Capital

In the salt era, the management of public resources involved the preservation and use of natural resources such as brine, mountains, forests, and fields. On the other hand, in the heritage era, the management of public resources refers to the cultural resources, the physicalised, objectified, and institutionalised cultural capital that was amassed during the salt era, in both tangible and intangible forms. The previous production-based, bloodline-based and geography-based communities have been replaced by hierarchical governance communities with the primary goal of conserving and utilising heritage resources, thus forming a governance mechanism aiming at various objectives.

In contrast to the salt era, which focused on economic capital and later evolved into social and cultural capital, the heritage era centred on the accumulated cultural capital as a core to foster the reproduction of all three types of capital. Indeed, the cultural capital has diminished due to insufficient investment in resources and maintenance, particularly driven by tourism. This has resulted in the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital on a large scale, leading to the commodification and gentrification of rural heritage. As a result, a positive cycle has not been established (Fig.7).

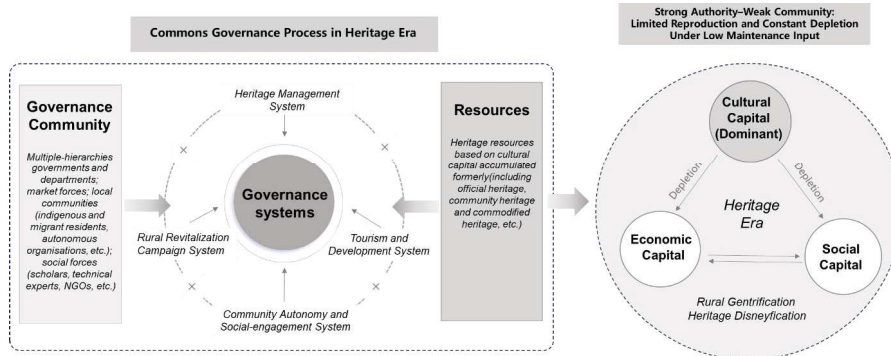


Fig.7 The Governance Process of Heritage Era
 Source: the authors.

The implementation of this mechanism has led to the initial transformation and reproduction of the cultural capital in rural heritage communities. However, there are challenges in ensuring sustainable governance. The absence of family education, community education, and school education has caused a significant depletion of physical cultural heritage, of which the core of inheritance is the ‘human being’. This also demonstrates that the public management of cultural assets not merely involves the physical artefacts, but also exhibits a multifaceted challenge of governing a social system (Fig. 8).

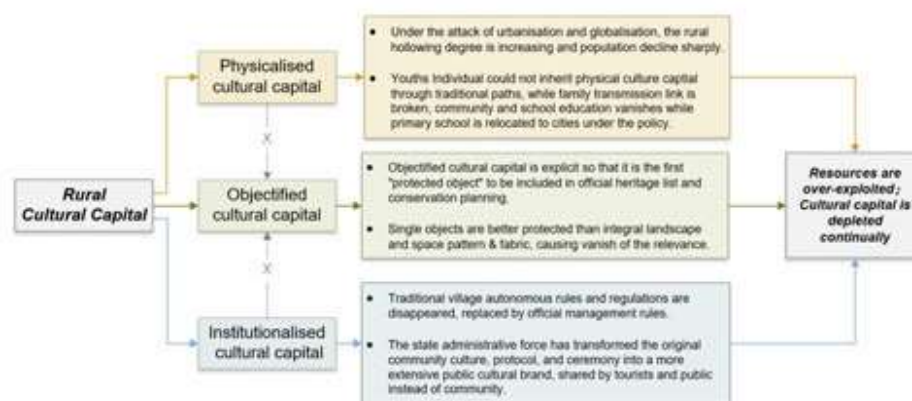


Fig.8 The Change of Cultural Capital in Heritage Era
 Source: the authors.

4. Governance Dilemma and Potential Solutions

4.1 Governance Dilemma

4.1.1 Tensions between Community, Official, and Commodified Heritage

The process of heritagisation has resulted in a dual contradiction between community heritage and official heritage in terms of evaluation and administration. While culture is an integral asset for the entire community, the official value-based protection focuses primarily on tangible cultural assets such as buildings and relics. Unfortunately, little attention is given to the preservation and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, such as social norms, rituals, and ceremonies that used to play a crucial role in rural society. This has resulted in the ‘hollowing out’ of heritage communities.

At the same time, the official heritage designation highlights the public attribute of heritage and the government’s obligation to manage it. As the protection level of heritage increases, the primary responsibility for management and rights for development rests with the county and township governments, limiting the community’s initiative to participate in governance. During the field survey, the villagers initially blamed the government for the silted salt wells and decaying buildings, rather than taking responsibility themselves. This passive attitude demonstrated a lack of active participation, and the community’s awareness of the need to maintain resources and continue their public use vanished.

Furthermore, the original village full of locality has turned homogenised and gentrified due to the neglect of physical cultural capital. The aborigines of the community, particularly the younger generation, lack a sense of identity and belonging to their hometown cultures and are highly vulnerable to the influence of the ‘imaginary countryside style’ popularised in social media. New immigrants who have opened upscale lodgings in the countryside that cater to urban tourists have strengthened this imagination. Consequently, numerous recently renovated residences fail to adhere to the townscape preserving regulations, leading to damage to the vernacular architectural style. To some extent, the original ‘living community’ has evolved into a ‘performing community’ and a ‘commercialised community’.

4.1.2 Management Vacuum Caused by the Expansion of Governance Community

The governance community is comprised of multiple actors who exhibit distinct purposes, resulting in complicated behaviours. Local government departments and technical experts prioritise heritage preservation, while private owners and enterprises focus on economic gains from the cultural brand. The goals of the community’s aboriginal people are more multifaceted. On one hand, they have a strong emotional attachment and identity to the community. Particularly, the older generation believes that cultural heritage is of utmost importance and should not be sacrificed for development. However, on the other hand, they also need to earn a living in response to the evolving social and cultural context, attempting to reap the advantages of their cultural legacy by opening accommodations and selling agricultural products.

It is worth noting that in previous studies, the ‘local government’ is often regarded as a single entity. However, in this particular example, we observe that there are multiple levels and aims of actors inside the government. From a hierarchical perspective, the vertical structure of government involved in heritage governance consists of five levels: national department, provincial department, city-level department, county-level government and corresponding offices, town-level government and village committee. Additionally, there are various

horizontal departments such as planning and construction, culture and tourism, and agriculture and rural affairs, each with distinct requirements for heritage conservation. This results in the challenge of overlapping management for heritage conservation.

County-level government and its corresponding offices take the initial responsibility for local public affairs. The application for national heritage declaration, conservation management, funding allocation, and tourism development are all primarily carried out by the county-level government. The higher-level departments prioritise heritage conservation, but county and sub-county governments have multiple responsibilities and must strike a balance between social stability, economic development, and public services. In order to effectively implement heritage conservation, it is necessary for these governments to incorporate it into their governance tasks. However, this integration can sometimes lead to a distortion of the objectives of heritage conservation.

Contrary to the traditional salt era, the governance community of public resources has now expanded. The previous model of a strong community and weak government has shifted to a strong government and weak community model. This means that the government now has more influence in the heritage commons governance, while the participation of the community and social forces has been hindered. Additionally, the government entity has become more complex with multiple layers, making it difficult to coordinate and work together and finally causing a vacuum in the specific management role.

4.1.3 Lack of Coordination between Four Governance Systems

The primary factor contributing to governance failure in rural heritage communities is the absence of effective coordination across the four governance systems: heritage conservation, tourism development, rural revitalisation, and community autonomy and social engagement. 'Heritage conservation' has become a discourse when county-level governments tend to apply for national projects such as cultural tourism and rural revitalisation, since it is more likely to be taken seriously by higher-level government departments. Actually, there is a patchwork of projects and inconsistent use of funds in the name of heritage conservation. The allocation of funds is mostly directed towards infrastructure improvement since the governments prioritise short-term outcomes, thus there is a deficiency in the development of sustainable systems for comprehensive conservation. Although the advancement of cultural tourist services and products has enhanced the local economy, there is now no distribution mechanism for allocating the benefits and costs among the community, which can result in unfairness.

Cultural, social, and economic capital in the bottom-up community autonomous system translates into the 'prestige' of local elites, which is crucial for community self-government. But as the cultural elites of the community get older, the younger and middle-aged generations have not been able to acquire enough prestige in the altered governance environment. Additionally, the government's heavy involvement in the cultural heritage management has resulted in a lack of participation by village associations and social organisations, leaving a void in the community.

More significantly, as Fig.9 illustrates, the cooperative operation of the four governmental systems depends on conservation and development planning and the related mechanism. As regulated by the documents of higher government departments, conservation planning should include the following aspects: a multisectoral synergistic management mechanism; guidelines for the control of townscape; fire safety; improvement of infrastructure and living conditions;

and reasonable use and development of cultural legacy. The conservation and development planning is expect to be the statutory authority for approving new constructions, the guide in tourism development, the source of project in the rural revitalisation movement, and the result of community and social forces' participation. However, the current conservation planning has been stranded because of disagreements within the governance community, which obliquely results in the lack of a dominating department to manage the approval of new constructions, modifications, and additions. A fundamental characteristic of rural governance in China is the project-based governance mode, which also serves as a means of investing funds, attracting government attention, and other aspects of governance. Conservation and development planning should have initially aimed at achieving sustainable development for rural communities and then proceeded to formulate project plans. Nevertheless, in practice, there is a deficiency in addressing pertinent aspects, leading to the heritage community projects that primarily focus on fragmented infrastructure construction. This approach places excessive emphasis on short-term, observable outcomes, which hinders long-term development.

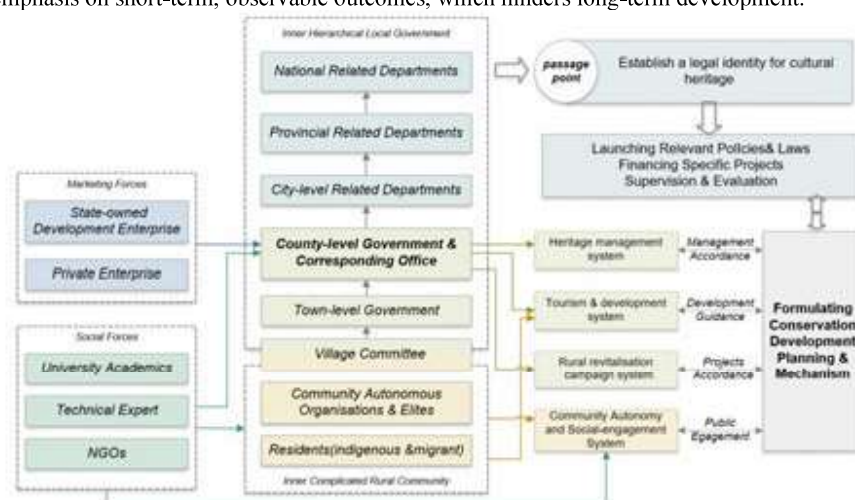


Fig.9 Interactive Analysis of Governance Behaviour in Governance Community
Source: the authors.

4.2 Reconstruction of Common Governance Exemplified by Two Cases

The government-led governance prioritises the objectified and institutionalised cultural capital, while neglecting the transmission of physical cultural capital of the heritage community, which is the core of living heritage that focuses on the well-being of people. Despite the implementation of a strong government and weak community model in Nuodeng Village, the community's spontaneous participation demonstrates the vitality and potential for rebuilding public governance through tactical resistance.

4.2.1 Revitalisation of the Traditional Dragon King Festival

The Dragon King Festival was a significant celebration in Nuodeng during the salt industry era. People would worship the Dragon King who was responsible for the brine vine to impetrate the abundance of the salt brine since it was the main income for the hamlet. Nevertheless, following

the decline of the salt economy era, the festival was halted for over three decades. The revival of the festival was the outcome of a collaborative effort between the local community and the government.

The government, with the support of the local elites, aimed to establish a festival sightseeing project as part of its heritage tourism initiatives. The community responded favourably to the signal, with the respected elderly villagers leading the way. The organisers consist of the Elderly People's Association, the Dongjing Taoist Music Band, and the Association for Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development of Nuodeng Village. Through interviews with the elderly, the ceremonial details of the festival were documented (Fig.10). The revival of this event fulfilled both the governmental and community's objectives, while also revitalising the cultural ambiance of the community, drawing in tourists, and preserving the salt culture in a more dynamic manner.



Fig.10 The Dragon Festival in Nuodeng Village
Source: the authors.

4.2.2 Heritage Education for Community Held by the NGOs

The Beautiful Nostalgia Social Organisation is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to promoting local cultural inheritance and providing cultural heritage education. For almost a decade, it has been actively engaged in heritage education initiatives in Nuodeng Village. The university student volunteers have published *Nuodeng Vernacular Culture Reader* and arranged annual summer camps in the village, where they collaborate with local teenagers to design project-based learning (PBL) projects that aim to investigate and comprehend the community's culture (Fig.11). The curriculum incorporates the content of the natural environment, cultural characteristics, and community involvement, highlighting the landscape, salt industry traditions, rehabilitation of traditional dwellings, and the design of guided tours.

Starting from the children, a greater number of family members were connected, eventually involving the entire community. Various public cultural events were held, such as creative bazaars, cultural exhibitions, and villagers' tea parties. Furthermore, members of the community actively contributed to the programme through musical performances, material provision, participation in activities, involvement in interviews and discussed the protection of community heritage. These new cultural festivals have garnered significant interest from the local government, social media, and the general public.

By combining heritage education activities with community cultural creation, the community residents' physical cultural capital was effectively enhanced. As a result, the case won the 2022 'Global Awards for World Heritage Education Innovative Cases'. This achievement highlights the potential for social forces to engage in heritage governance actively.



Fig.11 The Heritage Summer Camps for Local Teenagers and Community
Source: the authors.

5 Conclusions

In the context of the double failure of the bureaucratic government governance of public resources and the pure market mechanism governance, Ostrom showed empirical studies that people in many communities can successfully implement appropriate governance of certain resource systems through the independent governance and rule-making of communities. We could also find the successful commons governance traditional experience in the traditional salt-industry village in China. However, the community now is facing challenges in protecting and reproducing heritage resources.

This paper proposes a theoretical framework to analyse the process of commons governance and transformation of cultural capital, suggesting that heritage commons can serve as an alternative reality approach in the field of rural heritage management. Governing heritage governed as commons means building a new understanding of its values which extends beyond consumerism or state identity to embrace the local community. Furthermore, ‘commons’ implicates dynamic governance interaction processes towards more sustainable, equal and inclusive development in heritage communities. It can also facilitate the creation of a shared vision and bridge the gaps in perceptions and behaviours, while it could help to build a common vision and bridge some perceptions and behaviour gaps among the various stakeholders, such as different hierarchical local governments, academics, local residents, market forces, and NGOs, and making. This, in turn, leads to a more democratic decision-making process.

From the cases, we can observe that the introduction of the cultural capital perspective can help better understand how heritage resources, as commons, are formed, accumulated, and transformed. During the era of traditional small-scale natural resource governance, each form of cultural capital was strengthened and the public interest was promoted, thus facilitating sustainable resource utilisation and community development. However, in today's trend of heritagisation and commercialisation, stakeholders focus more on objectified and institutionalised cultural capital, while neglecting the transmission of physicalised cultural capital, which is the core of ‘people-centred’ dynamic heritage conservation. The community’s self-governance and social participation show the possibility of addressing this deficiency.

Currently, there exist four governance systems in the heritage commons of Chinese rural areas—heritage management system, tourism and development system, rural revitalisation campaign system, and community self-governance and social engagement system—that have yet to be coordinated and unified. This is also the cause of the current dysfunction in the governance of public affairs in rural heritage communities. By drawing on traditional governance experiences and establishing a community-led model with multi-level government

coordination, enterprise negotiation and social forces participation, we could achieve a more inclusive, equal and sustainable development in rural heritage communities.

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