

Symbolic Performance and Spatial Game: A Study on the Spatial Production Mechanism of Internet-Famous Rural Spaces from the Perspective of Media Geography

-- A case study of Caijiapo Village, Huyi District, Xi'an

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Abstract: Digital UGC-driven social media reshapes tourism human-land relations. Many villages gain internet-famous popularity via short-video platforms, yet some fall into the paradox of “media-driven boom, spatial alienation and declining tourist experience”. Taking Caijiapo Village of Xi'an as a case, this paper adopts media-geography perspective and integrates Lefebvre's tri-dimensional spatial production, internet-famous tourism gaze and symbolic consumption theories. Based on online-text analysis, open-ended interviews, participant observation and single-case study, this paper explores the formation of rural symbolic performance, reveals the whole process of media-driven spatial production, and analyzes disciplinary effects of multi-layer internet-famous gaze on tourist check-in behaviors as well as spatial-alienation mechanisms caused by multi-agent conflicts. Results show that: firstly, digital media acts as a core actor in rural spatial production following the path of “representations of space - spatial practice - representational space”. Media-led symbolic performance precedes physical onsite experience, with constant mutual construction between online narratives and offline realities. Secondly, a four-layer gaze system including platform algorithmic gaze, influencer-demonstration gaze, group-conformity gaze and tourists' self-presentation gaze governs tourist check-in practices, and tourist-generated UGC further reconstructs local symbolic space. Thirdly, interest tensions among government, capital, platforms, tourists and local residents are amplified by traffic logic, triggering excessive spatial symbolization, cultural superficialization, business homogenization, seasonal imbalance and host-guest conflicts. To avoid traffic overdraft and realize sustainable cultural-tourism development for Guanzhong art-empowered internet-famous villages, four countermeasures are proposed: optimizing media narratives, balancing tri-dimensional space, building multi-agent collaborative governance and guiding rational tourist gaze.

Keywords: Media geography, internet-famous village, spatial production, symbolic performance, spatial game.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Against the background of deepening cultural-tourism integration, China's rural tourism has stepped into a new phase featured by symbol production, scene reconstruction and traffic monetization[1]. UGC social platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu have subverted traditional tourism marketing modes and reshaped human-land relationships in tourism, forming a distinctive logic where media imagination emerges before physical visits. A large number of ordinary villages gain popularity online and become internet-famous check-in destinations. Nevertheless, quite a few such villages fall into practical dilemmas after sudden fame, such as over-stacked landscape symbols, erosion of local indigenous culture, excessive commercial expansion and short industrial life cycles, forming the prominent “boom-and-bust” paradox for internet-famous cultural-tourism destinations[2].

Traditional tourism geography mainly focuses on how material resource endowments, power and capital shape tourism destinations, while insufficient attention has been paid to how digital media participates in spatial construction. Media geography regards media as an important force for local construction, offering a feasible theoretical perspective for interpreting how virtual traffic transforms real-world rural space. Relying on the Guanzhong Harvest-Ending Art Festival, Caijiapo Village in Xi'an Huyi District has become

a well-known internet-famous village around Xi'an through social-media dissemination. Although online popularity brings passenger flow and economic benefits, landscape renovation, commercial settlement and massive tourist inflows also bring spatial restructuring, host-guest contradictions and sharp seasonal gaps. Accordingly, this paper takes Caijiapo Village as the case to investigate the internal mechanism of symbolic performance generation, spatial production and alienation driven by digital media.

1.2. Research Questions

First, how does digital media intervene in internet-famous villages, promote symbolic performance and reconstruct the whole tri-dimensional spatial production process? Second, how does multi-layer media-constructed internet-famous gaze shape tourists' spatial perception, check-in behaviors and online communication? Third, how do games among government, capital, platforms, tourists and local residents produce spatial alienation in internet-famous villages? Fourth, from media-governance and spatial-reproduction perspectives, how can internet-famous villages balance symbolic performance and local life to achieve sustainable development?

1.3. Research Significance

Theoretically, this paper combines media geography, Lefebvre's tri-dimensional spatial production, internet-famous tourism gaze and symbolic-performance

theories, and builds an analytical framework for media-intervened rural spatial production[3]. It compensates for the deficiency that existing internet-tourism studies focus on phenomenon description without adopting media-geography as leading perspective. This study incorporates UGC-media practice into tourism spatial-production analysis and enriches relevant empirical research. It also supplements cases of northern Guanzhong art-revitalized villages to balance the over-abundant southern-China cases in existing literature.

Practically, this paper sorts out hidden spatial contradictions behind symbolic performance in Caijiapo Village. Targeting over-symbolization, traffic dependence and host-guest conflicts, it puts forward operable suggestions. The results can provide practical references for similar art-empowered villages at the northern foot of Qinling Mountains to avoid traffic overdraft and realize long-term cultural-tourism revitalization within rural revitalization.

1.4. Research Methods

Literature Analysis Method: Sort out monographs and journal papers about media geography, tourism spatial production, tourism gaze and symbolic consumption, clarify theoretical contexts, identify research gaps and establish theoretical foundations.

Case Analysis Method: Take Caijiapo Village in Huyi District, Xi'an as a single case. Analyze the complete logical chain of symbolic performance, spatial production and multi-agent game-playing under media intervention, and reveal the generation mechanism of spatial alienation for internet-famous villages.

Participant Observation Method: Conduct fieldwork in different tourism periods, record rural physical landscapes, tourists' check-in behaviors and on-site spatial conflicts, and compile field notes to obtain first-hand field materials.

Open-ended Interview Method: During field investigation, conduct open-ended communication with tourists, local villagers, village merchants and grassroots cultural-tourism administrators. Record perceptions and demands of different groups towards rural internet-famous transformation to enrich multi-dimensional case understandings.

Online Text Analysis Method: Browse tourist-shared public contents on short-video and social-media platforms, summarize tourists' media imagination and real-site experience, and provide references for analyzing internet-famous gaze and tourist behaviors.

1.5. Research Innovations

Perspective innovation: Adopt media geography as leading perspective, treat digital media as a core spatial-production actor rather than merely a marketing tool, and reveal media's constructing and dominating influence on rural space.

Theoretical innovation: Construct the complete mechanism chain: *digital-media intervention* → *symbolic-performance generation* → *tri-dimensional spatial production* → *internet-famous gaze shaping* → *tourist behavioral response* → *spatial alienation caused by multi-agent game-playing*, realizing multi-theory coupling analysis.

Case innovation: Carry out in-depth case study on northern Guanzhong art-revitalized internet-famous villages, supplementing existing researches which mainly focus on southern and southwest China.

2. Literature Review and Research Commentary

2.1. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1. Internet-Famous Check-in Destination

Internet-famous check-in destination refers to a new tourism space empowered by digital social media[4]. Its local image is jointly built by platform algorithms, content influencers and ordinary UGC users. Tourists' travel motivation closely links with check-in photographing and social-sharing needs. Rural internet-famous check-in destinations mostly gain popularity via scene creation and visual-symbol output instead of high-grade traditional resources. Caijiapo Village in this paper is a typical art-revitalized internet-famous rural check-in destination[5].

2.1.2. Tourism Spatial Production

Lefebvre argues space is not a neutral physical container but a product of social practice and social relations, and puts forward the tri-dialectical framework of "representations of space-spatial practice-representational space"[6]. Tourism spatial production means the process where multiple agents including capital, power, media and communities jointly transform tourism destinations' physical landscape, symbolic meaning and social-life relations[7]. In the digital era, media traffic becomes a new driving force for tourism spatial production. Researches should cover not only physical landscape renovation but also symbol narration and daily-life reproduction[8].

2.1.3. Internet-Famous Tourism Gaze

Urry proposed classic tourism-gaze theory which holds media images shape tourists' destination imagination and sightseeing activities[9]. Under UGC digital background, the traditional one-way gaze evolves into internet-famous tourism gaze: a multi-layer system formed by platform algorithms, travel influencers, group opinions and tourists' self-presentation[10]. It shapes tourist expectations and pushes destinations to adjust landscapes for online aesthetics, forming two-way interactions among media, locality and tourists[11]. Check-in shooting and online sharing constitute the closed loop of gaze-related behaviors.

2.1.4. Symbolic Performance

Symbolic performance represents an important tourism-development form in consumer society[12]. Tourism destinations create visually consumable symbols through landscape installations and scene construction. Tourists realize symbolic consumption and self-presentation via visiting, photographing and social publishing. For internet-famous villages, symbolic performance adapts to short-video communication logic. When symbols override local cultural background, risks of cultural superficialization and spatial alienation will emerge.

2.2. Relevant Theories and Domestic-International Research Progress

2.2.1. Media Geography Theory and Tourism-Space Researches

Media geography holds media goes beyond simple information transmission; it deeply participates in local-image construction and reshapes relations between virtual-media space and physical locality[13]. Early foreign studies discussed how images and newspapers shape public place perception[14]. With social-media prevalence, scholars further study digital media's influence on place perception.

Domestic scholars introduce media geography into tourism research and analyze how short-videos reshape destination media images and tourist travel decisions[15]. But most existing papers treat media only as a marketing tool and seldom regard it as a core spatial-production actor. How media reconstructs rural physical space still needs further exploration.

2.2.2. Lefebvre's Spatial Production Theory and Its Tourism-Scenario Application

Lefebvre's tri-dimensional spatial-production theory is widely applied in tourism-destination studies. Foreign scholars adopt it to analyze social-spatial changes and community-right reconstruction brought by capital-led tourism development[16]. Many domestic tourism geography papers apply this framework to ancient towns, traditional villages and cultural-tourism blocks, analyzing how government power and commercial capital transform physical landscapes and local social relations. Most empirical researches focus on capital and power while ignoring digital-media and UGC effects. Virtual-content production should be incorporated into tri-dimensional-space analysis.

2.2.3. Evolution of Tourism Gaze Theory and Researches on UGC-based Internet-Famous Gaze

Urry's traditional tourism-gaze emphasizes media images' one-way guidance for tourists. In the UGC internet age, gaze evolves from one-way observation to multi-party mutual gaze[9]. Domestic researches expand gaze theory and propose concepts such as platform gaze and influencer gaze. Algorithm recommendation becomes an important factor shaping public travel expectations.

Current domestic empirical studies on internet-famous gaze mainly focus on urban cultural-tourism blocks. Empirical cases for northern rural areas remain insufficient. More cases are needed to interpret how internet-famous gaze disciplines rural tourists' full set of check-in behaviors.

2.2.4. Symbolic Performance, Spatial Alienation and Internet-Famous-Village Researches

From Baudrillard's symbolic-consumption theory, consumers pursue symbolic value rather than pure material entities in consumer society[17]. Scene-building becomes an important cultural-tourism development measure. Internet-famous villages build performative spaces with art installations and landscapes to meet tourists' symbolic-consumption demands. Traffic-driven excessive symbolic performance will cause spatial alienation including cultural superficialization, business homogenization, squeezed community-living space and short destination life cycles[18].

Art-rural-construction researches by Zhang Jingxiang and other scholars point out that imported art symbols may disconnect from local reality and trigger internal rural social contradictions and spatial games[19-20]. Zhu Hong defines tourism-destination spatial alienation as social-spatial deviation from original functions and social appeals under tourism development, which offers theoretical support for analyzing internet-famous-village conflicts. Most existing internet-famous-village empirical cases are from southern and southwest China, so in-depth analysis for Guanzhong art-revitalized internet-famous villages is insufficient.

2.3. Commentary on Existing Researches

Abundant domestic-foreign literatures on media geography, tourism spatial production, digital tourism gaze and symbolic

consumption provide solid theoretical foundations, while three research gaps remain.

First, perspective gap: many internet-tourism studies adopt tourism-management perspective and simplify media as a marketing tool. There lacks a complete analytical framework taking media geography as leading perspective and treating media as core spatial-production actor.

Second, theoretical-coupling gap: researches on spatial production, tourism gaze and symbolic performance are mostly independent. Few couple them to sort out the full mechanism chain: media intervention-symbolic performance-space reconstruction-gaze generation-behavioral response-spatial alienation.

Third, empirical gap: existing internet-famous-village empirical cases concentrate in southern regions. Empirical studies on Guanzhong art-revitalized internet-famous villages at northern foot of Qinling Mountains are insufficient; the generation mechanism of spatial game-playing and alienation behind symbolic performance still needs exploration.

Against above gaps, this paper selects Caijiapo Village in Xi'an Huyi District. Guided by media geography and combined with tri-dimensional spatial-production, internet-famous tourism gaze and symbolic-performance theories, it analyzes internet-famous-village spatial production, tourist-behavior interaction and alienation mechanism and supplements northern-China empirical cases.

3. Theoretical Adaptability and Analytical Framework

3.1. Theoretical Adaptability Analysis

3.1.1. Media Geography: Explaining Media's Constructing Power over Rural Space

The core logic of media geography lies in media's deep involvement in constructing local imagination. Media is not merely an information carrier but can reversely reshape physical local space[21]. Caijiapo Village does not gain its reputation purely depending on physical landscape endowments. Massive UGC content on Douyin and Xiaohongshu first constructs the media imagination of "artistic wheat field village at the foot of Qinling Mountains" and attracts tourist visits. Traffic media pushes the government and capital to renovate physical villages according to online aesthetic preference, and media imagination in turn shapes physical space appearances. Media geography can well interpret how virtual traffic intervenes in real world villages.

3.1.2. Lefebvre's Tri dimensional Spatial Production: Interpreting Triple Generation Logic of Caijiapo's Internet Famous Space

Tri dimensional spatial production theory provides a three layer analytical tool of "conception perception life", which fits the generation process of internet famous villages well[22 23]. Media dominated online symbolic narration corresponds to representations of space (conceived space); traffic driven renovation of village roads, landscapes and business forms corresponds to spatial practice (perceived space); tourists' on site experience, UGC secondary creation, as well as conflicts between tourists' internet famous aesthetics and villagers' daily life reality correspond to representational space (lived space). Tri dialectics can fully decompose the whole procedure of media intervened rural spatial production and capture changes in symbol, material and daily life dimensions.

3.1.3. Internet Famous Tourism Gaze Theory:

Explaining How Traffic Disciplines Tourists' Check in Behaviors

Internet famous tourism gaze theory explains tourists' check in behavior formation[24]. Platform algorithms push wheat field and No.8 Highway check in templates, and travel influencers produce photographing paradigms to form multi layer internet famous gaze system. After arrival, tourists preferentially choose high frequency media sites for check in photographing; their travel behaviors are disciplined by online gaze. Tourists release notes and short videos to produce new gaze templates and complete cyclic reproduction. This theory reasonably explains Caijiapo tourists' feature of gathering at internet famous spots and valuing photographing more than in depth experience.

3.1.4. Symbolic Performance Theory: Interpreting Scene Reconstruction and Contradiction Risks Driven by Traffic

Caijiapo's wheat field theater, No.8 Highway murals and large scale art installations are essentially traffic oriented symbolic performance scenarios. Tourists consume not only

rural scenery but also the symbolic value of "artistic countryside". Symbolic performance theory explains villages' motivation to build photograph friendly aesthetic scenarios. Meanwhile, it helps analyze risks including cultural superficialization and symbol local reality disconnection caused by excessive pursuit of visual effects.

3.2. Identification of Research Elements and Causal Logic

Multi agent + digital media intervention → symbolic performance generation → tri dimensional spatial production → internet famous gaze diffusion → tourist behaviors → spatial alienation → multi dimensional governance.

Digital media and symbolic performance act as starting points. Internet famous gaze serves as the intermediate variable linking spatial reconstruction and tourist practices. Tourist behaviors in turn reshape rural space and eventually lead to contradictions requiring governance interventions.

3.3. Integrated Analytical Framework of This Study

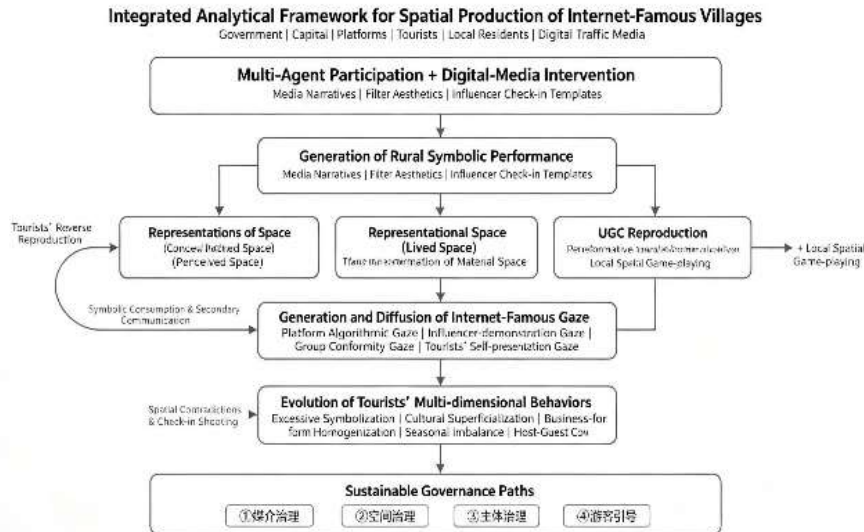


Figure 1. Integrated Analytical Framework for Spatial Production of Internet Famous Villages from the Perspective of Media Geography

See Figure 1. Starting from multi agent and digital media intervention, the framework proceeds through symbolic performance, tri dimensional spatial reconstruction, internet famous gaze diffusion and tourist behavioral evolution. Its output is spatial alienation and its end point lies in multi dimensional sustainable governance paths. Tourist behaviors form feedback loops for media symbol reproduction.

4. Case Profile and Data Processing

4.1. Selection Basis of the Case Site

Caijiapo Village of Xi'an's Huyi District is selected for four reasons: typical media driven online popularity, remarkable spatial reconstruction features, typical Guanzhong art revitalization mode, and accessible field research conditions. Four key research zones are defined: Zhongnan Wheat field Theater, No.8 Highway Art Block, old village residential area and century old apricot orchard.

4.2. Basic Overview of Caijiapo Village

Caijiapo Village lies at the northern foot of the Qinling

Mountains with nearly 4 000 residents[25]. Since 2018, it has hosted the Guanzhong Harvest Ending Art Festival jointly with Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts. Art installations, No.8 Highway and Zhongnan Wheat field Theater have been built, attracting artists and rural creators. Some old houses are transformed into cafes and cultural creative stores. While online popularity brings tourist inflows, seasonal congestion, parking pressure and resident tourist contradictions keep emerging.

4.3. Data Sources and Preprocessing

Qualitative case study materials include: multi period participant observation field notes from 2024 2025; publicly shared tourist texts from Douyin and Xiaohongshu; onsite records from open ended communications with villagers, merchants, tourists and administrators; secondary materials including local cultural tourism documents, festival planning papers and news reports. This paper conducts qualitative induction and comprehensive case interpretation based on above materials.

5. Media Intervened Tri dimensional Spatial Production and Symbolic Performance

5.1. Representations of Space: Imagination Construction of Symbolic Performance Dominated by Media

Representations of space belong to conceived level. It is media-imagination space jointly constructed by official narration, platform topics and influencer creation[26]. Tourists form village cognition through short-videos and Xiaohongshu before onsite visits.

Village and art-festival officials build the “artistic village at the foot of Qinling Mountains” narration, taking harvest-ending folk custom and large-scale art works as core cultural symbols and setting rural aesthetic orientation. Short-video-platform algorithms amplify wheat-field, Zhongnan Theater and No.8 Highway footages; filter-aesthetics strengthen wilderness, art and leisure visual symbols to complete media-level symbolic performance. Travel influencers produce standardized check-in templates and imitable photographing modes for wheat-field sculptures, No.8 Highway and Qinling-backed theater. Ordinary users form fixed local imagination before arriving by browsing online contents. Many tourists travel not for real Guanzhong-countryside-daily-life experience but for pursuing online-seen artistic landscapes. Media-conceived space exists prior to tourists’ onsite experience, marking an important difference between traffic-driven internet-famous destinations and traditional tourism destinations. This subsection’s media-symbol construction mainly corresponds to Zhongnan Wheat-field Theater zone and No.8 Highway Art Block online-communication contents.

5.2. Spatial Practice: Performative Transformation of Material Space Driven by Online Traffic

Spatial practice means perceivable material-practice space. Online-traffic popularity pushes physical villages to carry out material-space renovation according to media symbolic-performance requirements and restructures landscape and business-form structures.

No.8 Highway represents typical material-space reconstruction. Originally an ordinary rural road, it is transformed into artistic highway with large-scale Guanzhong-themed wall paintings, artistically-upgraded public facilities and added check-in signposts[27]. Idle old houses are rebuilt into cafes and cultural-creative shops to build internet-famous business-form chains. Zhongnan Wheat-field Theater is directly reconstructed from wheat fields as open-air theater equipped with large-scale art sculptures; its landscape design prioritizes short-video-shooting requirements. The village builds supporting parking lots and tourism signposts for check-in tourists[28].

The whole reconstruction shows traffic-oriented feature: landscapes with strong short-video-communication-suitable visual impacts are constructed preferentially[29]. Material space undertakes media-performance functions besides villagers’ production-and-living service. Nevertheless, commerce is rapidly implanted during renovation. Some business forms cater to tourist aesthetics and mismatch local villagers’ daily-consumption demands. This subsection’s

empirical materials mainly come from No.8 Highway Art Block field observations.

5.3. Representational Space: UGC Reproduction and Local Spatial Game-Playing

Representational space is users’ real-living space, intertwining tourist experience, online secondary creation and local residents’ daily life. It is also the key field where spatial game-playing breaks out[30], mainly reflected in old Caijiapo Village residential-living zone.

After onsite arrival, tourists take photos-videos according to personal experience, publish contents on social platforms to finish UGC reproduction, continuously generate new-version local symbols for outward dissemination and sustain symbolic-performance circulation. Meanwhile, massive external tourists pour into native-living space. Sightseeing, parking and noise disturb villagers’ daily-life order and arouse residents’ spatial-exclusion sense. Conflicts emerge between tourists’ pursuit of wild artistic landscapes and villagers’ practical production-and-living needs.

The century-old apricot orchard reflects traffic-brought temporal contradictions: spring apricot-blossom short-videos go viral and attract massive short-term tourist inflows; after blossom period, the site quickly falls into desolation, showing traffic-caused seasonal imbalance. Representational space embodies internet-famous-villages’ inherent contradictions: the same physical village serves both as villagers’ living homeland and tourists’ performance-check-in tourism space; two sets of space-use logics keep conflicting and interacting.

5.4. General Characteristics of Spatial Production in Caijiapo Village

Reviewing the whole tri-dimensional spatial-production process, three general characteristics can be summarized. First, media priority: media-constructed symbolic performance and representations of space come before material renovation and tourists’ onsite experience; traffic media acts as important spatial-production initiating force. Second, virtual-physical mutual construction: online-media imagination continuously reshapes offline physical space, and onsite-tourist-experience produces new online contents to realize constant online-offline mutual construction. Third, internal contradictions: tri-dimensional-space layers are not fully coordinated. Media-conceived ideal-village image, performative-renovated material space and villagers’ real-life space keep game-playing with each other and lay hidden dangers for spatial alienation.

6. Construction of Internet-Famous Gaze, Tourists’ Behavioral Response and Mechanism of Spatial Alienation

6.1. Multi-layer Construction of Internet-Famous Gaze under Traffic Environment

Combined with field-investigation records and multi-subject communication information, Caijiapo Village forms four-layer superimposed internet-famous-gaze structure. First, platform algorithmic gaze: Douyin and Xiaohongshu algorithms preferentially push high-traffic wheat-field and No.8 Highway footages, amplify traffic-aesthetic-conforming landscapes and filter ordinary

rural-daily-life scenes. Second, influencer-demonstration gaze: travel bloggers output standardized check-in sites and photographing angles and provide directly-imitable tourist templates. Third, group-conformity gaze: massive user notes shape group consensus that “you must check-in wheat fields and No.8 Highway when visiting Caijiapo Village”. Fourth, tourists’ self-presentation gaze: tourists arrive partly to produce social-platform-published images for self-image shaping. Superimposed four-layer gaze disciplines tourists’ complete travel behaviors.

6.2. Multi-dimensional Check-in Behaviors of Tourists Driven by Internet-Famous Gaze

6.2.1. Tourists’ Spatial Behavioral Characteristics

Constrained by internet-famous gaze, tourists’ spatial selection shows high concentration[31]. Field observations and online texts show most tourists gather at No.8 Highway and Zhongnan Wheat-field Theater two high-frequency-media sites; old residences and Village History Museum receive far fewer visitors. Tourist movement routes serve photographing priority, searching Qinling-background framing views for satisfying photos. Their activities are dominated by check-in shooting; they leave right after onsite shooting and show low willingness for in-depth Guanzhong-culture experience. The century-old apricot orchard presents obvious seasonality: tourists flood in blossom season while visitor volume drops sharply in other periods.

6.2.2. Tourists’ Consumption and Communication Behavioral Characteristics

Consumption-wise, symbolic consumption dominates. Tourists mostly consume rural-artistic-landscape symbolic value plus internet-famous-store products such as cafes and cultural-creative shops, while in-depth local-agricultural-product and Guanzhong-folk-custom consumption remains limited. In communication dimension, many tourists take onsite photos and publish texts-images-short-videos on Xiaohongshu-Douyin after departure to finish secondary communication. Tourists are not merely tourism consumers but also local-symbol-reproduction participants. New check-in contents continuously shape subsequent-tourist media imagination and form complete closed loop.

6.3. Reverse Reshaping Effect of Tourists’ Check-in Behaviors on Rural Space

Tourists’ check-in behaviors continuously reshape Caijiapo Village spatial appearance. On one hand, high-traffic check-in sites get further strengthened; the village keeps adding installations and new business forms in high-tourist-flow zones while low-check-in sites become increasingly marginalized. On the other hand, tourist-fed-back pain-points such as insufficient parking-rest facilities push local authorities to improve infrastructure. Tourist aesthetic preferences continuously guide merchant operation orientation and promote further internet-fication of business forms.

6.4. Manifestations of Spatial Alienation in Caijiapo Village

Under traffic circulation and multi-agent game-playing, Caijiapo Village gradually presents internet-famous-destination-common spatial-alienation risks.

First, excessive symbolization of space: village image is simplified into several visual symbols including wheat fields and art installations, and diverse Guanzhong-countryside indigenous culture gets reduced.

Second, cultural superficialization: although Guanzhong Harvest-Ending Art Festival originates from Guanzhong farming folk custom, online communication mostly highlights art-installation visual effects while farming-folk-custom deep connotations are insufficiently disseminated.

Third, potential homogenization risk for business forms: cafes and cultural-creative shops increase rapidly and the village may fall into nationwide-internet-famous-village homogenized-business-form trap.

Fourth, high traffic dependence: tourist volume heavily relies on short-video popularity. Tourists surge in art-festival and blossom peak seasons while few tourists arrive in non-peak periods, leading to severe peak-off-peak imbalance.

Fifth, host-guest spatial conflicts: peak-season passenger flow squeezes villagers’ living space, producing contradictions between tourists’ performance-oriented demands and villagers’ daily-life needs.

6.5. Multi-agent Game-Playing and Underlying Mechanism of Traffic-induced Spatial Alienation

Internet-famous-village spatial alienation originates from five-agent logical conflicts: government, capital, platforms, tourists and local residents. Government pursues rural revitalization via cultural tourism; capital chases traffic-monetization commercial benefits; platforms pursue content-traffic and user-activity; tourists seek aesthetic-matching check-in landscapes; local residents demand undisturbed daily-life order

Digital-traffic media amplifies multi-agent contradictions. Guided by traffic logic, platforms give priority to pushing strong-visual-symbol landscapes and weaken local-daily-life narration. Capital pours in following online traffic and preferentially lays out internet-famous business forms. Government needs to balance cultural-tourism development and villagers’ rights-and-interests. Internet-famous-gaze-driven tourists chase check-in landscapes. Local residents’ daily-life interests are easily squeezed by traffic-development logic. Multi-party benefit logics cannot be fully aligned and eventually produce spatial symbolization, cultural superficialization and host-guest-conflict phenomena.

7. Sustainable Governance Paths, Research Limitations and Prospects for Internet-Famous Villages

7.1. Optimization Paths for Sustainable Rural Space in the Traffic Era

Targeting above-identified practical contradictions including imbalanced symbolic performance, misaligned tri-dimensional space, multi-agent benefit conflicts and internet-famous-gaze anomie, this paper abandons simple-marketing-propaganda thinking and puts forward targeted practical governance paths from media, space, agent and tourist four dimensions, realizing one-to-one correspondence among problems, mechanisms and countermeasures.

7.1.1. Media governance: Optimizing local media narratives and restraining one-sided symbolic performance

Internet-famous-village media narratives should not be fully dominated by commercial-platform algorithms. Local governments, village collectives and art-festival operators should actively construct local-media images and build diversified-narration systems balancing artistic aesthetics and local-rural background[32]. While continuing to promote wheat-field theater and No.8 Highway art IPs, actively excavate Guanzhong harvest-ending folk custom, farming tradition, villagers' daily-life and local-handicraft-skill contents. Spread these contents through official accounts, local self-media and art exhibitions to change Caijiapo's one-sided online impression of merely being "check-in-photography site".

Build platform-collaboration-communication mechanism. Moderately guide excessive-filter-beautified and posed-shooting false-rural contents together with platforms to reduce distorted-media-imagination-caused tourist expectation-onsite-experience gaps. Meanwhile, encourage local-villager content production, support villager short-video accounts and incorporate villager-perspective real-rural-life into media-communication system to break external-influencer-only local-image-definition pattern. Besides, implement media-content dynamic monitoring, restrict traffic-hyping and internet-famous-gimmick-deliberate-creation marketing behaviors and avoid villages' vicious-cycle of continuously creating novelty-seeking symbols for attracting attention.

7.1.2. Spatial governance: Balancing tri-dimensional space and safeguarding local cultural context of Guanzhong

Tri-dimensional-space imbalance constitutes internet-famous-villages' various-contradiction material root-cause. During spatial renovation, comprehensively coordinate representations of space, spatial practice and representational space and reject pure-check-in-performance-oriented renovation modes[33]. At spatial-practice material-renovation level, adhere to "villagers-first" principle. Infrastructure-public-space construction should first meet local-residents' production-and-living demands, then consider tourist check-in functions. For No.8 Highway and wheat-field-theater internet-famous-performance spaces, implement scale-control, avoid blind massive-homogenized-art-installation addition and prevent artistic-symbol overflow from squeezing local-rural texture.

For old-village residential-zone representational space, demarcate living-area protection scope, strictly control disorderly commercial-business-form invasion, protect traditional residential courtyards and rural street-lane patterns, maintain villagers' native-living field and prevent tourism-commerce from fully swallowing native-living space. In view of severe peak-off-peak imbalance, do not merely rely on art-festival and apricot-blossom short-term traffic. Develop Guanzhong-farming-culture-based four-season normalized rural-tourism projects, expand non-festival-period tourism contents and balance tourist-flow temporal distribution. Meanwhile, improve peak-season passenger-flow-control plans through reservation, diversion and temporary-parking-management to reduce tourism-activity direct disturbance towards villagers' daily life.

7.1.3. Agent governance: Building multi-agent collaborative-governance mechanism and balancing multi-party benefit appeals

Internet-famous-village spatial alienation essentially derives from multi-agent benefit misalignment. It is necessary to build collaborative-governance mechanism participated by government, village collectives, rural-construction capital, local residents and tourists, and change original "government-in-charge, capital-execute, residents-passively-accept" development mode. Guarantee village-collective core-subject status. For major cultural-tourism projects, business-form-introduction and landscape-renovation schemes, set up villager-hearing-session and opinion-collection procedures, fully absorb local-resident appeals and safeguard villagers' rights to know, participate and make decisions.

Establish business-form access-management-control system. Carry out access evaluation for settled merchants and rural-construction teams, avoid simple cafe-cultural-creative-shop duplication-stacking and prioritize business-forms driving local-agricultural-product sales and absorbing local-villager employment. Design benefit-sharing mechanisms: let local residents truly share traffic-brought cultural-tourism dividends through collective dividends, villager-priority-employment posts and villager-self-operated stalls to eliminate residents' spatial-exclusion sense. At the same time, restrain capital's profit-chasing behaviors and prevent capital from unilaterally-dominating spatial-renovation and fully-transforming villages into commercial-performance sites. In addition, build regular-communication platforms, hold merchant-representative, villager-representative and cultural-tourism-administrator symposia periodically to timely resolve host-guest and labor-capital contradictions emerging in tourism-development process.

7.1.4. Tourist guidance: Fostering positive internet-famous gaze and eliminating single-oriented check-in logic

Targeting tourists' photograph-prioritizing-over-in-depth-experience behavioral characteristics brought by four-layer internet-famous gaze, carry out positive tourist-cognition guidance and eliminate "only-come-for-good-photos" single travel logic. Implement onsite local-based popular-science work. Set-up explanatory boards and guide-systems in wheat-field theater, Village History Museum and old-village streets to introduce Harvest-Ending Art Festival folk-custom origin, Guanzhong-farming history and village local-development history, instead of merely marking optimal photographing spots. Deliver information to tourists through official public accounts, short-videos and onsite lectures[34]: Caijiapo Village is not merely artistic-tourism check-in destination but ordinary-villagers' multi-generation-living homeland. Guide tourists to respect villagers' production-and-living order.

Online-side, cooperate with influencers and self-media to encourage cultural-experience-oriented content output, advocate in-depth rural-experience and weaken pure check-in-photographing content templates to gradually revise platform internet-famous-gaze paradigm. Through joint online-onsite guidance, promote tourists to shift from symbolic-photograph-based shallow sightseeing towards rural-culture-understanding in-depth experience, and reduce traffic-logic-brought excessive rural-space squeeze from demand side.

7.2. Research Limitations

Restricted by case-study attributes, this paper carries out qualitative interpretation mainly relying on field observations, public-media texts and open-ended-communication materials. Its conclusions mainly reveal this-specific-internet-famous-village spatial-production internal mechanism. Future research can carry out further multi-case comparison and large-sample-data-supported empirical verification for this paper's analytical framework. This paper focuses on spatial-production and behavioral mechanism without cultural-tourism-industry economic-benefit quantitative analysis. Follow-up research can expand multi-case comparison and supplement quantitative data to improve study completeness.

7.3. Research Prospects

Digital media keeps iterating and internet-famous-village space stays under dynamic evolution. Future researches can carry out comparative studies on different-type northern-China internet-famous villages, distinguish spatial-production differences among art-revitalized, natural-landscape-based and folk-custom-based internet-famous destinations. It is also worth exploring how AI-generated contents and new-form short-videos reshape rural-media images and spatial-production processes, so as to provide more theoretical supports for rural cultural-tourism high-quality development in digital era.

8. Conclusion

Taking Caijiapo Village in Huyi District of Xi'an as a typical case of art-empowered internet-famous village in the Guanzhong region, this paper constructs an analytical framework of rural spatial production from the perspective of media geography, and couples Lefebvre's three-dimensional spatial production theory, internet-famous tourism gaze theory and symbolic performance theory to unpack the complete logical chain of "digital-media intervention-symbolic performance generation-three-dimensional spatial reconstruction-multi-layered gaze shaping-tourist behavioural responses-multi-agent spatial games-spatial alienation-sustainable governance".

This study demonstrates that digital media is no longer merely a marketing communication tool for rural tourism; instead, it acts as a core actor participating in rural spatial production. Following the path of *representations of space-spatial practice-representational space*, media-led symbolic performance precedes tourists' on-site physical experience. Online media imagination continuously reshapes offline material landscapes, while tourists' on-site UGC practices in turn feed back to reconstruct virtual symbolic narratives, forming persistent mutual construction between virtual media space and real-world rural space. A four-layer internet-famous gaze system, consisting of platform algorithmic gaze, influencer-demonstration gaze, group-conformity gaze and tourists' self-presentation gaze, exerts disciplinary effects on tourists' check-in behaviours, resulting in spatially-concentrated sightseeing, symbol-oriented consumption and large-scale secondary online reproduction of destination images. Driven by traffic logic, benefit tensions among the government, capital, digital platforms, tourists and local residents are further amplified. Conflicts among multi-agent stakeholders trigger a series of

spatial alienation phenomena including excessive spatial symbolization, cultural superficialization, commercial homogenisation, severe seasonal tourism imbalance and growing host-guest contradictions, which constitute the core risk hindering the long-term development of media-popularised internet-famous villages.

To resolve the paradox of "media-driven boom followed by spatial alienation", internet-famous villages should break the single-dimensional thinking oriented purely toward traffic and check-in performance. From the dimensions of media governance, spatial governance, multi-agent collaborative governance and tourist-gaze guidance, local communities need to optimise diversified media narratives, balance the three-layer structure of conceived, perceived and lived space, safeguard the authenticity of local rural life and indigenous cultural context, build multi-stakeholder benefit-sharing mechanisms, and guide tourists to transform from shallow symbolic check-in to in-depth cultural experience. Only by reconciling symbolic performance value and everyday living value of rural space can art-revitalised internet-famous villages avoid traffic overdraft and realise sustainable cultural-tourism revitalisation.

As a single-case qualitative research, this paper takes Caijiapo Village as the research object to reveal the internal mechanism of media-driven spatial production in northern art-empowered internet-famous villages. Future research can expand multi-case comparative studies and quantitative empirical analysis, further exploring how emerging digital forms such as AI-generated content reshape the symbolic performance and spatial evolution of rural destinations, so as to enrich theoretical accumulation for high-quality development of rural cultural tourism in the digital age.

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