

Research on Frontstage-Backstage in Rural Tourism: A Case study of Hongcun Village, Anhui Province, China

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ABSTRACT

Increasing attention has been paid to traditional Chinese villages with historical and cultural significance in recent years. Rural tourism has been recognized as an important way to promote rural revitalization. The protection and utilization of traditional rural culture are two key issues facing tourism development. The Frontstage-Backstage Theory offers a unified framework for tourism planning and practices from an interdisciplinary perspective. This paper explores an ideal rural tourism development model, which offers a better understanding of rural physical spaces' overall planning, the relationship between tourism development and cultural protection, and the interactions between villagers and tourists. Taking Hongcun Village as an example, this model's three physical spaces (frontstage, waiting area, and backstage) balanced the contradiction between tourism development and cultural protection through the negotiations on industries, activities, and physical spaces. The frontstage, waiting area and backstage are positioned and cooperate, constituting a holistic rural tourism destination organization.

Keywords: Frontstage, backstage, rural tourism, case study, China

1. INTRODUCTION

The most distinguishing feature of mature capitalist systems over recent decades has been the recreation of economies around the symbolic value of culture(s) [1]. The significance of culture for economic life has come to rival its intrinsic importance. In its broadest sense, rural culture provides a series of material and symbolic resources based on rural tourism and has facilitated its growth. With the rise of interest in intangible heritage and the burgeoning development of tourism consumption, rural tourism has been booming worldwide since the 1950s. At present, rural tourism has become an important way of inheriting rural culture, enhancing economic development, promoting the farmers' employment in higher-paid non-agricultural work, and offering a sustainable rural development that diversifies the economy from agriculture. However, the rapid development of rural tourism has a tremendous impact on rural culture, leading to the decline and even partial disappearance of traditional culture as part of everyday life.

The material and spiritual culture created in rural historical development is the source and a significant part of cultural heritage globally, lending unique traits to places. If cultural values shaped the heritage of rural areas, then the value of their culture may shape the future of them. By the selective creation and displaying cultural heritage based on the value orientation of space and

history, the tour companies have transformed the traditional villages from 'natural villages' of local interest into 'modern scenic area' with immense historical value [2]. In the process, large companies and government agencies jointly control the village and produce a set of cultural items that were out of touch with the villagers' daily experience. As the creator of rural culture, the rural community is excluded from the primary beneficiaries of cultural production and is forced to assume the obligation of rural cultural preservation at the same time [3]. Moreover, besides the conflict between cultural traditionalism and state-sponsored corporate capitalism, rural folk life's instability increases under tourists' gaze.

China boasts vast territory, long history, and numerous villages celebrated for having traditional Han or minority cultural characteristics. In the context of rapid urbanization and the creation of new insecure, and individualized lives, many have pointed to recent trends in China to revalorize rural tradition as offering a more straightforward and more 'holistic' form of living. There has been a trend of constructing historical and cultural villages and towns in rural tourism, especially in areas away from large cities, reshaping rural practices' meanings. Others find themselves compelled to compete in offering the 4 H's demanded by Chinese tourism promoters (Heritage, Habitat, History, and Handicrafts) [4], sometimes creating a theme park of village life [5] literally.

Facing China's new situation and problems, the traditional rural tourism development model is challenging to sustain. The Frontstage-Backstage Theory provides a unique

perspective for solving those above issues. Villages create a stage for tourism practices, in which different groups play different roles and exert influence on local culture and society through a series of direct or indirect interactions. Under the influence of tourism development, once organic cultural activities have become 'performances,' tourists and aboriginal people have been given the character of 'audience' and 'actor.' In contrast, the village itself has become the 'stage.' The production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of rural tourism products are carried out in turn on the 'stage,' as well as the cultural protection activities. Under the Frontstage-Backstage Theory, tourism development and cultural protection can coexist through the negotiations on industries, activities, and physical spaces. This paper explores an ideal rural tourism development model, which offers a better understanding of rural physical spaces' overall planning, the relationship between tourism development and cultural protection, and the interactions between villagers and tourists. It also provides a unified framework for tourism planning and practices from an interdisciplinary perspective. This paper uses Hongcun Village in Anhui Province as a case study to test this model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In sociology, the terms 'frontstage' and 'backstage' refer to different behaviors in people's daily lives. Proposed by Erving Goffman, they formed part of the Dramaturgy within sociology, which explained social interaction from the dramaturgical perspective. Goffman argued that social life is a theatrical performance [6] carried out by different groups of participants in two places: frontstage and backstage. Frontstage provided a place for purposeful performance, where people played their social roles by specific routine procedures (scripts) during the interaction. In the backstage, people prepared for the performance and rest after the performance. Backstage hid specific facts that cannot be exposed to the outsiders. Therefore, control measures must be taken to prevent others from suddenly breaking into the backstage, such as close the entrance from frontstage to backstage or hide the entire backstage. Dean MacCannell introduced Goffman's theory into tourism. The interaction between tourists and the hosts was part of social life, and it was also theatrical. Backstage was related to mystery and was regarded as a place of intimacy and privacy, maintained the tourist destination's real life, which was pursued and obsessed with tourists. Some tourists will involuntarily break into the backstage or be allowed to 'snoop' the real-life backstage [7]. However, according to Goffman's theory, the backstage is a place closed to tourists. Therefore, MacCannell divided the tourist destination into the following six stages:

(1) Stage One: the frontstage that tourists supposedly seek to penetrate and overcome, that is, what Goffman calls the frontstage;

(2) Stage Two: the frontstage that has been decorated to resemble the backstage superficially;

(3) Stage Three: the organized frontstage that represents the backstage;

(4) Stage Four: the backstage opens to outsiders;

(5) Stage Five: the backstage that allows tourists to enter occasionally;

(6) Stage Six: the backstage that can arouse tourists' curiosity, that is, what Goffman calls the backstage.

The frontstage and backstage are a whole based on social interactions in the tourist destination. Once the distinction between frontstage and backstage emerges, the authenticity of the destination has become mysterious. Consequently, MacCannell led the research about Frontstage-Backstage Theory in another direction; that is, why tourists pursue authenticity.

MacCannell argued that tourism agencies always tend to create non-authentic tourist spaces to benefit those unsuspecting tourists, who tend to regard it as authentic without thinking. Nevertheless, he ignored the tourists' impression of the scene and the desire for authenticity. Therefore, Cohen proposed four types of touristic situations [8]: (1) Authentic, (2) Staged authenticity, (3) Denial of authenticity, (4) Contrived (Table 1).

Table 1 Types of Touristic Situations

		Tourists' Impression of Scene	
		Real	Staged
Nature of Scene	Real	(1) Authentic	(3) Denial of Authenticity (Staging Suspicion)
	Staged	(2) Staged Authenticity (Covert Tourist Space)	(4) Contrived (Overt Tourist Space)

Following Cohen, Moscardo extended the front-back distinction to the actors in tourist destinations. In the tourist destination, front-stage people refer to those who consciously create displays for tourism interest, while backstage people are not in the tourist spotlight [9]. Backstage people, including those who support frontstage people and those who make frontstage scenes work. Then, all tourist scenes were classified into four types (Table 2):

(1) "Authentic people in an authentic environment, defined as backstage people in a backstage region";

(2) "Authentic people in the inauthentic environment, defined as backstage people in a frontstage region";

(3) "Inauthentic people in the inauthentic environment, defined as frontstage people in a frontstage region";

(4) "Inauthentic people in an authentic environment, defined as frontstage people in a backstage region."

According to the interaction between visitors and locals, John Urry and Jonas Larsen proposed that frontstage focused on 'performance,' while backstage focused on 'gaze,' based on the combination of Goffman's performance paradigm and Foucault's gaze paradigm.

Moreover, they classified the tourism destination into enclaves space and heterogeneous space [10]. National development agencies and local governments controlled the enclave space and strictly managed the boundaries, locals, landscapes, and tourist activities. Direct contact between tourists and local people was usually cut off, aiming to provide tourists with independent consumption. The heterogeneous space was an open space composed of streets, bazaars, and other small spaces. Tourists could have extensive exposure to native life in the destination. Their tourist activities were accidental and dramatic.

Table 2 Types of Tourist Scenes

		Nature of People	
		Authentic	Inauthentic
Nature of Scene	Authentic	(1) Backstage People in A Backstage Region	(3) Frontstage People in A Frontstage Region
	Inauthentic	(2) Backstage People in A Frontstage Region	(4) Frontstage People in A Backstage Region

However, interactions between tourists and natives were not always pleasant. The presence of tourists also caused trouble for the private lives of locals. It is vital to classify where tourists can go (public space) and where they can not go (private space). Public space and private space can coexist through physical or temporal compartmentalization [11]. Through compartmentalization, the physical space can be alternately used as the frontstage or the backstage. This physical space was the pseudo-backstage proposed by Karoline Daugstad [12], similar to Stage Five proposed by MacCannell. The pseudo-backstage blurred the distinction between frontstage and backstage and broke the original dualist notion of frontstage-backstage. Essentially, the pseudo-backstage was usually temporary and situational. After deprivation, the living room opened to the tourists, and the cheese cellar opened to small groups of tourists, which was both pseudo-backstage.

The reconstruction of authenticity in cultural tourism had aroused people's attention. In China's minority areas, the ethnic and indigenous people were displayed as commodities to tourists [13]. The obsession with commercial interests made tourism developers excessively cater to tourists' cultural consumption demands, which led to the astray of tourist activities and tourism development. Some displays showed signs of 'fake,' 'staged,' or 'symbolic,' which caused the tourists to doubt or even reject the authenticity of the tourism destination's culture. In this context, the frontstage-backstage theory was used as a tourism development model to reconstruct the practices of tourism displays and spaces. Based on ethnic tourism development in China, Yang Zhenzhi proposed the frontstage-curtain-backstage development model [14].

The frontstage was a tourist space for cultural performances and a place for tourists to visit, consume, and interact with natives. The curtain was a buffer that separated the frontstage and backstage, and a barrier that hid and protected the backstage. The backstage was a cultural preservation space that enables tourists to experience the authentic culture through a 'double gaze' with the locals.

However, the construction of frontstage and backstage occurs on specific cultural atmosphere and interaction activities. There seem to be no tangible physical spaces for frontstage and backstage in tourism development. Later, some scholars had divided the physical space of frontstage and backstage from different spatial dimensions such as tourism facility, tourist destination, and the larger area centered on tourist destinations. Firstly, some researches focused on specific tourism facilities. Taking live performance as an example, space where visitors watch the show, was defined as the frontstage, while space where actors rested after the performance and prepared for the backstage [15]. Like the inn, the inn owner conducted effective practices was the front stage, while the owner's living and resting space was the backstage. The inn owner's life and activities are different in frontstage and backstage [16]. Secondly, the entire tourist destination was divided into frontstage and backstage. According to the distribution of tourism resources and development intensity, the scenic fringe area was determined as the frontstage, the scenic fringe area as the curtain, and other areas with high cultural protection value and low tourism development value Backstage [17] [18]. Thirdly, the physical space division of frontstage and backstage was extended to a group of villages. Taking Lijiang as an example, Yang Zhenzhi proposed to define Dayan Village as the frontstage for tourism economic development, and Baisha Village as the backstage for cultural protection, while Shuhe Village as the curtain for the transition from tourism development to cultural protection [19]. The history of cultural change, economic development, and the abundance of tourism resources are the main factors influencing the frontstage-back stage classification. However, the classification was case by case. Taking traffic conditions into consideration, Xu Yan proposed that Zhaoxing Dong Village, which has the most convenient transportation, should be defined as the frontstage, and other nearby villages with less accessibility should be defined as the backstage [20].

With the enrichment of theoretical research, the spaces and scenes of Frontstage-Backstage Theory are more abundant, and the binary opposition between front-back, private-public, conscious-unconscious, and reality-illusion had broken. Due to differences in theoretical perspectives and foundations, there are different ways of space classification about frontstage-backstage. Nevertheless, two consensus have been reached. First of all, authenticity is not the only factor that influences the space division of frontstage-backstage. In the practice of tourism development, factors such as traffic conditions, tourism resources, and cultural characteristics need to be considered. Secondly, there is a particular space between

the apparent frontstage and backstage. However, its term has not yet received recognition. This paper is reasonable and appropriate to define this specific space as a 'waiting area.' In rural tourism, the waiting area is a region that is waiting to be developed, and its development degree is affected by the practice of rural tourism and cultural protection. The development intensity of the waiting area will increase when tourism development is insufficient in frontstage.

In contrast, the waiting area's cultural protection measures will be strengthened if the native culture receives too much negative impact from external cultures. The waiting area can be regarded as a flexible transformation space, where tourists wait to transform from cultural consumers to cultural communicators when they enter the backstage from frontstage. Simultaneously, the locals are waiting to transform from cultural creators to tour participants and cultural performers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research context

Hongcun Village is located in the northeast of Yixian County, Anhui Province, about 11 kilometers away from the county seat of Yixian County. The total area of the Hongcun is about 19.11 hectares. Hongcun is a typical representative of the ancient Huizhou culture. This village has one of the most well-preserved ancient buildings in the Ming and Qing Dynasties in southern Anhui. It embodies ancient villages' residential characteristics in south Anhui and has extremely high historical, cultural, and scientific value. There are 138 well-preserved ancient buildings in Ming and Qing Dynasties. In 2000, Hongcun Village was included in the World Cultural Heritage List by UNESCO. And then, Hongcun became one of the fifth batch National Key Cultural Relics Protection Units in 2001. Two years later, Hongcun was included in the fifth batch of National Historical and Cultural Villages.

The establishment of the Tourist Attractions Management Office in 1986 marked the official start of rural tourism. Over the past 30 years, rural tourism has achieved rapid development in Hongcun Village. From 1991 to 2017, the number of tourists in Hongcun Village increased from 16,100 to 2.27 million, and ticket revenue increased from less than 60,000 yuan to 129.92 million yuan. Currently, Hongcun Village has become the leading destination of rural tourism in Anhui Province and has become a travel brand for rural tourism in China.

3.2. Methodology and data collection

The choice of methodology is closely related to ontology and epistemology [21]. This study's selection of methods is influenced by symbolic interaction theory, especially Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which focused on

interpersonal dynamics. Whereas quantitative methods dominate in tourism research [22], qualitative research methods have been widely used in recent years. Because scholars deem qualitative methods most suitable for studying the dynamics and complexity of the tourism phenomenon [23], this study mainly adopted the case study method, one of the five qualitative methods [24]. According to the case study method, the investigator explored one or more bounded systems through various information sources to better understand tourists, locals, and native communities in the tourist destination. Data were mainly collected from primary and secondary sources through two field investigations: a seven-day investigation in October 2019 and a fourteen-day investigation in November 2019. During those investigations, the village committee (that is, the leading group) was built first. Some data and documents were collected from the village committee, including tourism income over the years, cultural policies, tourism planning, regulations, etc. Then, unstructured interviews were conducted with village leaders to understand the village's changes and the leaders' attitudes toward these changes, current problems, future aspirations about rural tourism, and native cultural protection concerns. After that, a natural observation was performed, including every landscape, cultural heritage, building, and street. Finally, the most important work was completed: conducting face-to-face in-depth interviews with different groups to better rural tourism development and their attitudes and activities. These groups include native residents, immigrant residents, tourism operators, employees, performers, and tourists. Those interviewees were selected randomly; the gender ratio of them was also taken into consideration. Both open and closed questions were used, and notes, photos, or videos were flexibly chosen to record the interview process according to the interviewees' wishes. All the research materials were transcribed for content analysis.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Formation of frontstage-backstage

4.1.1. Exploratory phase: before 1986

Before 1986, Hongcun had no formal tourism development. The frontstage-backstage model was also formed unconsciously. At first, people did not have a clear purpose and route when they travel in Hongcun. As the number of tourists increased, locals began to provide tourist guide services. Under their recommendations and explanations, some representative buildings and scenes with relatively high cultural value have become the 'necessary places' for tourists. A small area centered on these places is the initial frontstage. Since these places are scattered, the frontstage's spatial form is also

discontinuous and distributed in a 'point' shape. At this time, there is no essential difference between the waiting area and backstage. The two are mixed into one, covering the entire Hongcun except for the frontstage.

4.1.2. Growing phase: 1986-1996

In 1986, the establishment of the Tourism Management Office marked the start of rural tourism in Hongcun. The 'Frontstage-Backstage' model has also entered the growth stage. In the beginning, Yixian Tourism Bureau invested 80,000 yuan for the tourism development of Hongcun. Part of the funds was used to develop Chengzhitang, which was the first attraction in Hongcun. Since then, Yixian Tourism Bureau has continued to expand the amount of investment. The number of tourist attractions opened to tourists has also increased. Furthermore, a relatively clear travel route was generated gradually. Scattered tourist attractions and continuous tourist routes constitute a new frontstage. At this time, the frontstage scale has been expanded, and the spatial continuity has also been enhanced, distributed in a 'point-plane' shape. The waiting area began to break away from the backstage. Its scope roughly includes a particular area around the frontstage, distributed in a 'plane' shape. The backstage scope is reduced but still includes all areas except the frontstage and the waiting area. Moreover, it is generally distributed in a 'plane' shape.

4.1.3. Mature phase: 1997 to present

Since 1997, the spatial integration of the Frontstage-Backstage model has been strengthened. While preserving the original tourist attractions, it extends eastward to include the parking lot and the tourist reception center. 'Tourist Reception Center—Painted Bridge—Nanhu—Nanhu Academy—Jingdetang—Former Residence of Wang Daxie—Yuezhao—Wang's Ancestral Hall—Chengzhitang—Deyitang—Shurentang—Taoyuanju—Old Trees at village entrance' has become the main tourist route in Hongcun. At the same time, a sketching route around Nanhu has been formed by painters. The tourist route and the sketch route overlap, forming a closed loop. The area within this closed loop is the frontstage. The frontstage's spatial distribution finally realized the transformation from 'point' to 'plane.' With tourism developing, many restaurants, hotels, and shops have moved to the east of Hongcun. The waiting area's original spatial structure is continually being broken, and its position has also been shifted. Finally, a 'plane' distribution based on the central and eastern regions of Hongcun was formed. The backstage scope tends to be stable, mainly concentrated in the northern area of Hongcun, which is distributed in a 'plane' shape.

4.2. Frontstage

The division of frontstage and backstage aims to distinguish tourism space and living space in rural areas. The frontstage is planned as the rural tourism space that provides appropriate places for cultural performances, meeting mass tourists' demands to explore and understand the rural culture. The frontstage has a high degree of openness and is open to everyone, mostly tourists. This space has features and symbolic connotations that are different from daily living space. It is a prerequisite for obtaining tourism experience and a product of the construction of tourism experience, with the abstract and theater features of subjective construction. Simultaneously, it is also a tourism product intentionally produced by tourism planners by expanding the quantity and improving the quality. In this sense, the frontstage is the core area of tourism resources development and tourism economic development. Commercial facilities and tourist service facilities are mostly concentrated in this area.

To a certain extent, the frontstage is a window for rural culture display. The performances in frontstage are based on real rural culture and daily life. It could satisfy the tourists' demands for a cultural experience. Therefore, landscapes and events in frontstage strive to maintain the 'authenticity' of rural life. In participating in rural tourism, practitioners pay more attention to their words and deeds. They usually wear local traditional costumes to make their images conform to tourists' imagination or psychological expectations.

4.2.1. Tourist as consumers

Frontstage is the place where all the necessary tourist activities are realized. Necessary actions refer to activities that tourists will inevitably implement during their travel. Generally speaking, it mainly consists of two parts. One is daily activities that could meet tourists' basic life demands, such as eating, resting, traveling, shopping, entertaining, etc. The other is tourist activities that could meet tourists' basic tourism demands, such as understanding the customs, experiencing different lifestyles, sightseeing the cultural landscapes, etc. These activities' realization depends on perfect tourist facilities, including necessary living facilities and specialized tourist facilities, such as restaurants, hotels, transportations, tourist reception centers, cultural exhibition spaces, souvenir shops, etc. The realization of tourists' necessary activities will inevitably bring about large-scale construction and commercial development in rural areas. Simultaneously, because these activities are indispensable to tourists, their occurrence is rarely affected by the external environment and is difficult to control. Therefore, to avoid irreversible damage to the entire village and its culture, these activities should be concentrated in a specific area as much as possible: the front stage.

Frontstage is also a place where social tourist activities take place. Social activities refer to the various interactions that tourists actively or passively produce with others in rural cultural tourism. This also means that social activities will naturally occur as long as people are in the same space. These activities at the frontstage are comprehensive, manifested in the diversity of interactive objects, forms, and topics, such as bargaining with vendors, listening to tourist guides, watching folk performances, etc. Tourists will passively receive information sent by others during the travel process, such as conversations between unrelated persons in the tourism environment. That means most social activities take place unconsciously, just as tourists will become the 'scenery' in other tourists or locals' eyes without knowing it.

In frontstage, cultural tourists are generally regarded as consumers of tourism products and services and the main contributor to rural tourism income. Although a series of cultural experiences and participation activities will gradually deepen tourists' understanding of rural culture, this understanding is still superficial and not deep enough. There are subjective and objective reasons for this fact. First of all, rural culture is complex and expansive, but tourism resources are limited. They can only embody certain representative aspects of rural culture. Secondly, tourists have limited time, energy, and interest. Their cultural accumulation is also different in depth. Thus, tourists do not have sufficient opportunities or the ability to understand rural culture deeply in frontstage. Since tourists cannot truly integrate into the rural community, their necessary activities are 'a little taste' of rural culture. Although their activities have cultural experience and communication elements, they cannot contribute to rural culture protection. So tourists' activities in frontstage are essentially cultural consumption activities. To the village and its locals, tourists are cultural consumers and pure outsiders.

4.2.2. Locals as producers

Frontstage is the main area for the commercial development of rural tourism resources. Locals usually design and create tourism attractions that reflect rural culture's characteristics following tourists' consumption demands. The tourism resources are transformed into products and services after mining, integration, design, and other reproduction links—eventually, complete marketing and sales at the frontstage. This commercial process has transformed the culture of tourist destinations from resource value into economic value. The activities of the locals at the frontstage are essentially marketing activities for tourism products and services.

On the one hand, it is marketing tangible tourism products, such as traditional food and crafts. On the other hand, it is the marketing of intangible tourism products, such as folklore show. The production process is usually directly shown to tourists in performances, which has become an essential part of the tourists' cultural

experience. However, the rehearsal of tourism performances still demands to be done backstage.

The locals participate in developing the tourism economy with tangible or intangible capital such as land, house, labor, money, management skills, etc. During this process, they have acquired other identities such as shareholders, lessor, operator, manager, or employee, based on the farmer. Locals have transformed from creators of rural culture into tourism practitioners in frontstage. This transformation has a positive significance for culture protection and tourism development. Compared with tourism practitioners from other places, they are more aware and familiar with their own culture. Whether at work or after work, they can better show their own culture to tourists and have more motivation to protect their own culture.

4.2.3 Frontstage as tourism space

Cultural experience is the core value of tourism space. To give tourists an unforgettable cultural experience, Hongcun divides the frontstage into three parts: cultural leisure space, cultural education space, and cultural participation space. Cultural leisure space mainly includes restaurants, hotels, snack bars, craft shops, and souvenir shops. In terms of architectural style, cultural leisure space combines traditional cultural elements and modern cultural elements. On the one hand, it represents the evolution of modern cultural leisure activities under traditional rural culture, which conforms to the 'urban dimension.'

On the other hand, it reflects the 'authenticity' of rural culture and gives tourists a cultural experience called 'anti-urban dimensions.' Cultural education space mainly includes museums, exhibition centers, and village history halls. They provide necessary opportunities for tourists to learn about the destination's history, art, and customs. At the same time, they also play a role in cultural propaganda and education for locals. The cultural participation space includes folklore performance venues and cultural experience halls, allowing cultural tourists to participate in festivals, folklore activities, and traditional production activities.

The cultural protection of the frontstage is mainly reflected in two aspects: landscape restoration and style coordination. From the perspective of style coordination, Hongcun paid full attention to style coordination during the construction of tourist facilities and the renovation of shops along the street and strived to make the tourist project's appearance and style consistent with its surroundings. From the perspective of landscape restoration, Hongcun uses the original materials as much as possible and carry out minor repairs to preserve the ancient buildings' original cultural value. Besides, Hongcun also regards tourism development as an effective means of cultural protection. Making full use of local culture, Hongcun created a series of characteristic cultural activities at the frontstage, such as traditional cultural promotions, folklore exhibitions, and festival celebrations.

Frontstage is the most concentrated area of the tourism industry. Many commercial facilities and tourism facilities are distributed besides the tourism route, main roads, and street corners. Frontstage has the largest number of restaurants, hotels, and shops. There are 38 shops, accounting for 92% of the total; 59 restaurants, accounting for 78% of the total; 212 hotels, accounting for 36% of the total (Table 3). Most of the residents at the frontstage participate in rural tourism. Most of the houses along the street have been commercialized and built along the street. Only a small part of the private space for rest and living is reserved in those houses. Signs were installed on the walls to attract tourists.

Table 3 The quantity and spatial distribution of commercial facilities

Name	Sum	Frontstage		Waiting area		Backstage	
		No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Shop	38	35	92%	2	6%	1	3%
Restaurant	59	46	78%	9	15%	4	7%
Hotel	212	76	36%	66	31%	70	33%

4.3 Waiting area

The waiting area is a transitional space between the frontstage and backstage. It was set up to prevent the commercialization from sweeping the entire tourist destination and avoid the influx of the external culture from impacting the countryside's original ecological culture. On the other hand, it can alleviate the external culture's impact as a barrier to original culture protection. On the other hand, as a barrier to original culture protection, it can alleviate the external culture's impact. Therefore, the waiting area takes protection as the primary orientation and considers development at the same time. The waiting area is a relatively closed space. Appropriate control of the number of tourists and the scale of tourism has begun. Over-commercial activities such as large-scale tourism real estate development projects are prohibited. Tourist destination regulates the number of tourists by controlling the number and scale of tourism projects and supporting facilities.

The waiting area's function and spatial scope are flexible and can be adjusted according to actual demands. This adjustment mainly depends on the scale of the tourist destination. When the tourist destination is small, the waiting area should reduce its scope or increase development intensity to ensure enough tourism development resources—Vice versa. The waiting area should reserve undeveloped areas to support commercial development in frontstage or strengthen the culture protection backstage from a functional perspective. When the frontstage is over-commercialized, the waiting area's cultural protection should be enhanced, and tourism development should be strictly controlled.

4.3.1 Tourists as explorers

The activities carried out by tourists in the waiting area are spontaneous activities, depending on tourists' wishes, rather than external stimuli. Compared with the frontstage, the waiting area's tourist reception capacity is relatively low, and the places prohibited to tourists have increased significantly. Therefore, not all tourists have the willingness or interest to explore the waiting area. Although there is still a continuous influx of tourists, the number has been dramatically reduced. From the perspective of tourism demand, mass tourists can be satisfied at the frontstage. Those unsatisfied tourists have a strong desire to explore the waiting area if objective conditions such as time, physical strength, and energy permit. In addition to spontaneous activities, some social activities will also occur in the waiting area. However, their cultural communications and interactions with locals are passive, one-dimensional, and representational.

The strong motivation that prompts visitors to enter the waiting area is usually related to the spirit of exploration, curiosity, and thirst for knowledge. They focus on little-known but exciting tourist attractions. At the same time, they are well prepared. These tourists often learn about the destination's culture through various means in advance, such as traveler guides, online ticketing websites, social media, etc. Of course, some accidental factors cause may cause tourists to enter the waiting area. Generally speaking, tourists act as cultural explorers in the waiting area. They are eager to obtain original, unique, and novel cultural experiences. For tourists, traveling in the waiting area is more like an adventure in a heterogeneous cultural field. The cultural interaction between tourists and locals has often been based on 'gaze.' This kind of gaze shows the initiative and strength of tourists and implies the locals' passivity and weakness. Therefore, it is not easy to establish a trust relationship between tourists and locals, let alone generate equal cultural exchanges. As a result, tourists can only appreciate the rural culture and its landscape as bystanders. They cannot participate in the construction of rural culture.

4.3.2 Locals as candidates

For cultural protection, the waiting area implements controlled development. The development intensity has decreased compared with the frontstage. The number of commercial places, such as hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops, is strictly controlled. The business activities that indigenous peoples can engage in are reduced accordingly. With the disappearance of large-scale cultural performances in this area, the locals' tourism service activities have also decreased. Since the waiting area is a space where the traditional industry and tourism industry are equally important, the locals still retain their original industry. So, their daily activities are still dominated by traditional agricultural production and family breeding. In this sense, the locals' production and

life scenes in the waiting area partly have the characteristics of 'authenticity.' Farming is truly a part of their lives, not a part of the performance. This is different from the frontstage.

The villagers in the waiting area are neither pure outsiders nor pure tourism practitioners. These two roles are unified and can be flexibly switched according to actual demands. Locals are the reserve force for the development of rural tourism, that is, candidates. Under normal circumstances, they maintain their original lifestyles. When the frontstage demands them, they can 'show on stage' after necessary and straightforward preparations. In the peak tourist season, these people can participate in tourism development to make up for the shortage of front-stage personnel. When the peak season is over, they regained their status as ordinary people. In interacting with tourists, locals are not passive recipients of 'gaze.' They will also 'gaze' on tourists in turn. The locals' gaze is formed based on long-term observation and interaction. They know the gaze behavior and its concerns of tourists and will use this to seek benefits. Locals usually modify their words and deeds to cater to tourists as much as possible to convince them that 'what you see is what you expect.'

4.3.3 Waiting area as transition space

The waiting area is a transition space that connects the frontstage and backstage. On the one hand, the waiting area is a continuation of the frontstage, but its function is different from the frontstage. Tourists hope to get some unusual cultural experiences in the waiting area. They look for symbolic rural impressions based on the attitude of 'gaze.' They do not care about whether they understand the rural culture. Therefore, Hongcun has built the waiting area into a symbolic cultural experience space. Hongcun uses the static display and aesthetic construction to create the waiting area. The static display focuses on the 'signifier' of rural culture and emphasizes that 'meaning' is more significant than 'form.' In the waiting area, Hongcun makes necessary interpretations of rural culture through travel brochures, guide plates, and introduction cards. The aesthetic construction focuses on the 'signified' of rural culture and gives tourists the pleasure of 'beauty.' In the planning of the waiting area, Hongcun proposed to reduce the interference of external factors and try to preserve the native aesthetics of the countryside.

On the other hand, the waiting area is a barrier to the backstage. It has the same function of cultural protection as backstage. Controlling commercialization is the primary way that Hongcun protects its native culture in the waiting area. To prevent excessive commercialization from causing irreversible damage to native culture, Hongcun strictly controls commercialization penetration into the waiting area and backstage. Vendors can only carry out business activities in the specified area. Administrative penalties shall be imposed on commercial activities outside of the prescribed area.

The density of the tourism industry in the waiting area has been reduced. The accommodation industry dominates,

while the number of catering and commercial facilities has decreased significantly. There are two shops, accounting for 6% of the total; 9 restaurants, accounting for 15% of the total; 66 hotels, accounting for 31% of the total. Moreover, their distribution is dense in the east and sparse in the west. This is because the east is closer to the tourist reception center. Most residents in the waiting area have an individual tourist reception capacity and can provide 2-4 rooms and small-scale meals. They still retain their original livelihood, and rural cultural tourism is generally regarded as a family sideline. Therefore, it is possible and convenient for tourists to visit.

4.4 Backstage

The backstage is the space for survival, protection, and conservation of rural culture, which has essential cultural significance. The backstage retains traditional industry, continues daily life, and maintains the 'authenticity' of rural culture. Contrary to the front office, the back office takes cultural protection as its primary purpose and conducts strict administrative management on tourism development. The backstage is relatively closed and generally not open to tourists. Only tourists related to the backstage or permitted by the aboriginals can enter. Based on cultural protection, backstage also has the function of foreign cultural exchanges. The backstage creates opportunities for cultural dialogue between tourists and indigenous people. This kind of dialogue is based on the equal status of both parties. It is active and proactive, rather than submissive and reluctant. Therefore, tourists and locals can better understand each other and learn from each other. The backstage usually refers to other areas except for the frontstage and waiting area from the spatial scope perspective. It is worth noting that there are also areas not open to tourists in the frontstage and waiting area. These areas can also be considered as backstage. In this sense, the backstage is inclusive and malleable.

4.4.1 Tourists as culture disseminators

The number of tourists entering the backstage is significantly reduced, and their types are relatively fixed. They are usually family affairs type tourists and cultural knowledge type tourists. The former has a strong emotional connection with tourist destinations, mainly to visit ancestors, relatives, and friends. The latter has a strong interest in tourist destination culture, primarily to experience folk customs, increase knowledge, and conduct scientific research. The tourist activities backstage are social. Moreover, it is deeper and more purposeful than the social activities that take place on the frontstage.

Backstage is a place where tourists and locals have a cultural dialogue based on equal status. Tourists come from external cultural circles, representing foreign culture, urban culture, and rural culture in other regions. They enter the backstage, not for superficial visits, but for better

understanding the tourist destination's heterogeneous cultural traditions and customs. In the backstage, tourists eat and live with the aborigines, conduct in-depth observations of local social and cultural life, and personally participate in it. These activities directly or indirectly spread the outside culture and promote the exchange, conflict, and acculturation between the outside culture and the local culture. It enables tourists to understand rural culture truly and stimulates cultural consciousness and self-awareness of locals.

4.4.2. Locals as villagers

Backstage is a productive and living space for villagers. As a productive space, backstage is a functional area formed by people in the village for productive activities. It shows the interaction between people and land. Different villages have different productive activities. Generally speaking, it usually contains agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and aquaculture. The productive activities carried out by locals backstage maintained the state before tourism development. This does not mean that the production activities of local people are restricted. However, it is necessary to minimize the intervention and influence of tourism development on the background. As a living space, the backstage shows locals' daily life scenes and conveys the locals' life feelings. Livability and happiness are its essential meaning. Birth, aging, sickness, and death all unfold here.

As rural tourism development is strictly restricted, villagers usually do not participate in tourism operations or services backstage, whether subjectively unwilling or objectively not allowed. Compared with the frontstage villagers, they are also relatively less affected by tourism development. Some of them do not participate in tourism. They are mainly ordinary farmers or migrant workers who go out to seek jobs. Another group of people is tourism practitioners who live backstage and work in frontstage. Once they return backstage, their identity as tourism practitioners will temporarily disappear. Their lives will become the same as other backstage villagers. However, when conducting cultural exchanges with tourists, both villagers will become the rural culture's disseminators.

4.4.3. backstage as cultural protection space

The frontstage is a protected space for the village's native culture. Its main feature is that it still retains the original state before tourism development. Based on respecting the residents' reasonable rights and demands, Hongcun adheres to the principle of minimum development to preserve authenticity as much as possible. The local government did improve the living environment in terms of garbage removal, sewage purification, and village greening. The second thing is to rectify the style and appearance of houses and courtyards. The local government adopts the 'acupuncture-type' reform method,

trying to be the same as before. Tourism development has transformed, embezzled, and occupied some public cultural spaces in the frontstage and waiting area. Tourist activities also have produced a spatial crowding-out effect on the public cultural activities of the locals. To avoid a decline in the villagers' cultural living standards, the local government restored some rural facilities such as bookstores, squares, and auditoriums.

The backstage insists on the authenticity protection of rural culture, with the basic concept of 'seeing native people, objects, and life.' This kind of protection emphasizes community participation. The rural culture is produced and contained in the locals' daily life. Therefore, the local government attaches importance to community participation, provides opportunities for the public to participate through social organizations, enhances villagers' participation ability through skills training, and enhances villagers' participation enthusiasm through standardized organization and guidance.

The tourism industry backstage is the most sparsely distributed. Except for some hotels, large shops and restaurants have almost disappeared. There is one shop, accounting for 3% of the total; 4 restaurants, accounting for 7% of the total; 70 hotels, accounting for 33% of the total. Villagers backstage have relatively few opportunities to participate in rural tourism. Many young adults still insist on going to the cities nearby for work, and some young adults are driven by economic interests to operate agritainment and family hotels. In this sense, the backstage has shown a trend of transforming into the frontstage.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Academic implications

The Frontstage-Backstage Theory is a comprehensive tourism planning and orderly development idea that can satisfy the tourists' pursuit of heterogeneous rural culture and avoid the entire village's indiscriminate development. First of all, frontstage is a tourism space for cultural displays, aiming to satisfy the general requirements of mass tourists. The display was a kind of staged reproduction of rural culture based on the selective expression and artistic creation. It compensates for the communication asymmetry between the locals and tourists and eases the relationship between native and external cultures: inequality in communication. Simultaneously, tourism development at the frontstage was also a modern expression of rural culture. As a result of directly or indirectly participating in cultural expression, the residents had more profound knowledge and understanding of their culture. They re-established their cultural identity in exchange and collision with tourists. Some forgotten cultural memories had been brought back in the expression process, and the rustic flavor of traditional rural culture. Secondly, the waiting area serves as a buffer

against external cultures' negative impacts. It protects the original ecological culture backstage and satisfies some tourists' curiosity and desire to "spy" on rural culture. The backstage is the living space of residents and the haven of the original culture, which to no small extent, alleviates the anxiety and tension of the locals about the harmful consequences caused by cultural conflicts. It enhances the cultural security of the indigenous residents. Finally, backstage provides a place for equal exchanges between tourists and the natives. External culture and original rural culture reach 'reconciliation' by seeking common ground while reserving differences. All in all, the cultural exchanges under the Frontstage-Backstage Theory are hierarchical, forming a gradient of cultural conflict, gaze, and integration, effectively reconciling the conflict between external cultures and the original rural culture.

5.2 Practical implications

The frontstage-backstage model clearly defines the relationship between rural tourism and cultural protection by reshaping the functional space, controlling the development intensity, adjusting the tourism formats distribution, and refining cultural protection objectives. The tourism development in rural areas based under the model of Frontstage-Backstage is the dynamic protection and activation of rural culture without destroying the culture itself. In other words, tourism development has a clear bottom-line. In terms of implementation, the frontstage-backstage model is a gradual development strategy that can re-divide the rural functional spaces according to landscape endowment and tourist activities and formulates different cultural objectives for different areas. The model ultimately realizes the unification of tourism resources and the protection of the original rural culture. In general, the frontstage-backstage model restricts the spatial scope of cultural tourist activities and the spatial intensity of rural cultural tourism resources development. Under this model, rural tourism utilizes representative cultural tourism resources, and the original rural culture remains in the most extensive backstage area. However, rural tourism's holistic development under the frontstage-backstage model depends on the redistribution of tourism income. This model is adopted to manage rural tourism resources' excavation, protection, development, and operation. Therefore, rural tourism income should be redistributed as a whole. On the one hand, tourism destinations should pay attention to the integrity of the distribution of interests in the front stage and highlight the backstage feeding-back. This is to make up for the backstage sacrifices for restricting rural tourism development and prevent the backstage from being converted to frontstage under the temptation of economic interests. Specifically, the feeding-back methods mainly refer to direct or indirect economic compensation such as income dividends, job creation, and infrastructure construction. On the other hand, the distribution of tourism income should emphasize community participation to mobilize villagers' enthusiasm to

participate in rural tourism and to ensure them to share the achievements of tourism development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by the Hongcun Village Committee and many interviewees. With their help and support, this research was carried out smoothly.

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