



# Exploring the Development and Protection Mode of Chengkan, a Bagua Village in China Renowned as the “Hometown of National Treasures”

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**Abstract.** In the conflict and reconciliation between traditional village culture and modern commercial civilization, Chengkan, a Bagua village in China and the “Hometown of National Treasures,” has developed a scientific and effective mode for the development and protection of ancient villages. Guided by the theory of “Yi,” the people of Chengkan adhered to Simplicity, Variability, and Persistency in planning the layout of the village and held the ideal of a tranquil home in the era of agricultural civilization, rejecting to be over-commercialized when building a beautiful village. They insisted on the model of “two actions and one concealment,” i.e., protecting ancient villages, operating cultural contents, and hiding commercial styles, and steered away from the wrong tendency of building their village into a city park. Committing to transforming Huizhou ancient buildings with Huizhou cultural elements while retaining the key features of Hui-style architecture, they have succeeded in safeguarding the authentic appearance of Huizhou culture while ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

**Keywords:** Chengkan · development and protection mode · “two actions and one concealment”

## 1 Introduction

A beautiful environment is beneficial to the people and national future, and building a beautiful China constitutes an important part of realizing the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. We persist with the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets. Integrating the city with its existing unique landscape allows city dwellers to enjoy pleasant scenery in the city and ease their homesickness. Hence, it is significant to preserve the original landscape rather than destroy its environment when improving the living conditions of the ancient villages, so as to inherit the culture and develop beautiful towns with historical memories and regional and ethnic characteristics.

Bagua (八卦): eight combinations of three whole or broken lines formerly used in divination. Sometimes this has been translated as “Eight Trigrams.”

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Chengkan serves as an epitome of the development and preservation of ancient villages. The development and protection of ancient villages have always been controversial in the academic community that focuses on Huizhou culture. It represents the cycle of conflict and unity between traditional village culture and modern commercial civilization. As an ancient village in Huizhou, Chengkan is not as famous as Xidi and Hongcun (the two are included in World Heritage Sites), but it is larger and more ancient. Boasting the largest number of houses built in the Ming Dynasty in Huizhou, the village is billed as the “Hometown of National Treasures.” “Like Xidi and Hongcun, it is situated at the foot of Mount Huangshan. Except for the high ticket price, the location does not possess the typical features of a scenic spot; it maintains a peaceful ambiance throughout the week, reminiscent of its more than 1000-year-old history” [1]. This is the impression of the reporter of Legal Daily about Chengkan, which is owed to the scientific tourism development model explored by the people in Chengkan.

## 2 Adhere to the Combination of Simplicity, Variability, and Persistency [2]

Chengkan was named Longxi in the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms Period. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, the two brothers of Luo Chan in Qiuyin and Wenchang from Nanchang Prefecture in Jiangxi Province moved their families to Longxi and changed its name to “Chengkan” after “choosing a suitable place to build their houses.” This village, with a history of more than 1800 years, was located and planned according to the Feng Shui Bagua Theory, emphasizing “Unity of Yin (Kan) and Yang (Cheng)<sup>1</sup>, and Unity of Heaven and Humanity” in I Ching. The village has three streets and ninety-nine lanes, just like a maze. It is the only model of building a village based on the innate Bagua in China and is also the oldest ancient Bagua village found in China today. It has over 180 ancient buildings built in the Eastern Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, and 49 major historical and cultural sites protected at the national level.

Chengkan enjoys many good reputations, such as “The first village of Fengshui in China,” “The town of China’s ancient architecture,” “The town of China’s national treasure,” “China’s best tourism village” “The art museum of ancient Chinese architecture,” and “Chinese historical and cultural village.” It has been reported by China Architecture Fengshui Network many times in a comprehensive and in-depth manner and has gradually become a Fengshui cultural practice base. The staff of *Chinese Culture of Feng Shui* (《风水中国》) and *Chinese Mysterious Culture and folk* (《中国神秘文化》) culture film crew rushed to explore Chengkan with their cameras in succession. With the publicity of the Fengshui culture, Chengkan has become the favored place of many directors. Many films and TV works have been shot in Chengkan, such as *The Wind and Moon* (《风月》), *The Sky of History* (《历史的天空》), *Out of the Blue Water River* (《走出蓝水河》), *Walking Chicken Feather Duster* (《行走的鸡毛掸子》), *The Great Ancestral Hall* (《大祠堂》), *The Xin’an Family* (《新安家族》), and so on. Zhu Xi, a famous thinker,

<sup>1</sup> Yin (阴): (in Chinese philosophy, medicine, etc.) the feminine or negative principle in nature.  
Yang (阳): (in Chinese philosophy) the bright active male principle of the universe.

educator, and scholar of the Song Dynasty, once commented, “As the hometown of two wise men, Chengkan is the unique village in the south of the Yangtze River.” Liu Haisu, a Chinese painter known for helping to modernize art education in China, exclaimed, “One should visit Chengkan if you intend to climb the Yellow Mountain.” Bi Shumin, a famous female writer, said, “Chengkan is a living, breathing place, and one of the most desirable places in China.” Many politicians and celebrities were impressed by the landscape of Chengkan. Many experts in Chinese cultural relics have visited Chengkan many times and praised from the bottom of their hearts that “Huizhou dwellings are the best in the world and Chengkan dwellings are the best in Huizhou.” [3].

To capitalize on its advantages, Chengkan must embark on a unique development path. Under the guidance of the local government and the cultural relics protection department, the wise Chengkan people worked with Mount Huangshan Huizhou Chengkan Bagua Village Tourism Company, making most of the characteristics of Chengkan’s architectural geomancy concept and exploring a protection model that adheres to the combination of Simplicity, Variability, and Persistency according to the “Yi” theory.

*I Ching* tells us that everything in the world has its reason, and the Tao<sup>2</sup> is the simplest. No matter how complex a thing is, once we understand its mystery, we feel that it is simple and easy, which is called Simplicity. Nothing in the world is invariant, and the only constant thing between heaven and earth is changes itself, which is called Variability. Everything in the world is changing all the time, except for the basic principle behind the change of things, which is eternal and unchangeable, and this principle is known as Persistency. When we grasp the concept of Simplicity, we will have the wisdom to extract the essence from dazzling complexity, reaching the level of seeing the mountain as a mountain while seeing the river as a river. If we understand the concept of Variability, we will have the courage and ability to innovate and find out that the mountain is no longer just a mountain; the river is not just a river. And when we achieve the state of Persistency, we can see that the mountain is still just a mountain, and the river is still just a river, which means we learn to respect nature and tradition and embrace the “unchangeable things” that “never change without departing from their ancestors.”

The people of Chengkan have deeply understood the essence of Yi and applied it to the protection and development of Chengkan. First of all, people in Chengkan keep Chengkan’s original layout of Feng Shui. Feng shui played an important part in building ancient Chinese architecture, which is influenced by the idea of “conforming to the law” in *I Ching*, and the architectural structure theory in *The Artificers’ Record*. It also incorporates reasonable elements that can be found in today’s environmental science, such as a sense of security and landmarks. Regarding demolishing old houses and building new houses are taboos for Fengshui, the layout of Chengkan will not be easily changed. Pursuing good fortune and avoiding evil is a human instinct for survival. The unknown things often boil down to some mysterious forces and form some kind of superstition. Therefore, it can be said that Feng Shui is scientific, reasonable, and superstitious. Chengkan is backed by mountains and faces the water, embodying the idea of choosing the location of *Guan Zi*, which means that a city must be built beside a river instead of a mountain [4]. The ancient Longxi River, like a jade belt, flows

<sup>2</sup> Tao (道): doctrine; body of moral teachings; the Way of Nature which cannot be given a name; principle.

through Chengkan from north to south in the shape of an “S,” forming a boundary between the Eight Trigrams<sup>3</sup> of Yin and Yang Fish. Around the village stand eight mountains, naturally representing the eight directions of the Eight Trigrams, which together constitute the natural layout of the Eight Trigrams. The people of Chengkan are sensitive to this terrain and make a reasonable village layout according to the layout of the congenital eight trigrams and the main four trigrams. Such a layout suitable for living reflects ancient philosophical ideas and aesthetic pursuits, becoming a masterpiece in constructing ancient villages. Undoubtedly the most rational and intelligent choice is to preserve it. Secondly, people in Chengkan try their best to preserve the Hui-style elements. The main body of Hui-style architecture is simple in colors, black and white, but its inlay is complicated with three types of sculptures and colored paintings. In terms of layout, it has fireproof Ma Tau walls, pavilions, watersheds, gardens, etc. Hui-style architecture has reached a high artistic level, and preserving Hui-style architecture is considered to preserve the Huizhou culture. Hence, people in Chengkan all agree to protect the Hui element with the Hui element and change the Hui element with the Hui element. However, the people of Chengkan are not conservative in action, and they make efforts to make life in Chengkan more convenient, comfortable, and healthy. Without changing the overall layout and Hui elements, the people of Chengkan have changed the lighting and ventilation of their houses and installed tap water, air conditioner, fire protection equipment, and indoor toilets. The residents living in ancient villages are not hiding in a secluded place or isolated from modern life.

### **3 Adhere to the Ideal of Pursuing a Comfortable and Tranquil Home, Rejecting to be Over-Commercialized**

Since ancient times, Chinese people has a deeply rooted home complex. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the home complex gradually combined with secular art, forming an idealized and pastoral homeland dream. From the late period from the Middle Tang Dynasty to the Northern Song Dynasty, the psychological conditions and aesthetic tastes of landlords and literati were changing with the variations of the feudal society, and they were no longer ambitious or aggressive and satisfied with their life. They longed for long stability by idealizing and pastoralizing the rural areas of the entire feudal society and sought tranquility and spiritual harmony between man and nature, and worshiped relaxation and tranquility as the highest aesthetic paradigm. In traditional China, rural areas are soothing and peaceful, but since the reform and opening up, simple villages have disappeared in the commercial wave, and villages like city parks or market towns have emerged and flourished. The tranquil and natural scenery is already rare, and the village becomes empty for young people go out to work. In some developed tourist villages, flickering neon lights, shops, and restaurants abound; the whole village is overwhelmed by the sound of peddlers' hawking and tour guide's tweeter. Harmonious and tolerant neighborhood relations were replaced by fighting for petty profits. There was no free tea, no pavilion at the village entrance for rest, but the locked villagers' gates. The

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<sup>3</sup> The Eight Trigrams (八卦): eight combinations of three whole or broken lines formerly used in divination.

eagerness for quick success and instant profits has submerged traditional pastoral songs, and traditional values and aesthetic ideals have gradually been abandoned. As people become rich, they start to feel empty, disappointed, and dissatisfied.

People in Chengkan adhered to the ideal of a tranquil “home,” overcoming the impetuosity of commercial civilization at the beginning of development. In Chengkan, the original ancient buildings have been fully protected, such as Shuikou(水口)<sup>4</sup> Gardens, while the newly built buildings are limited in height and decorated with many elements of Hui-style architecture, with their layout in harmony with the original ancient buildings. Neon lights, shops, and restaurants are few here. Tour guides are not allowed to use loudspeakers at any time. The villagers still maintain the farming routine of going to work at sunrise and returning home at sunset. Chengkan stays gentle and peaceful. If it weren't for the expensive tickets and the tourists coming and going, there wouldn't be any commercial atmosphere at all.

It is particularly worth mentioning that people in Chengkan also pay special attention to the protection, development, and utilization of traditional folk customs. For example, in Chengkan, there is a legend that has been passed down for thousands of years—anyone who has traveled to Chengkan will no longer have any misfortune in his life.<sup>5</sup> During the era of agricultural civilization, Chengkan was a holy land for villagers and tourists. There is a slogan in Chengkan that “those who have viewed the landscape of Huangshan have no wish to visit any other mountains; those who have visited Chengkan will have no misfortune in their life.” Protecting Chengkan's culture is to protect the roots of farming culture and to provide a pure land for to baptizing the souls of people in the commercial society. Chengkan Bagua Tourism Company has sorted out the Bagua Banquet based on the daily diet of Zhu Xi, who has been popular among Huizhou people for eight hundred years, and it developed a “new Bagua Banquet”<sup>6</sup> consisting of eight different dishes, wonderfully showing Chinese food culture. Such development belongs to both Chengkan and traditional China, promoting rural indigenous dishes and elevating them to a new cultural level. Tasting the Bagua Banquet not only gives you the feeling of returning home but also gives you the experience of cultural return.

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<sup>4</sup> Shuikou(水口): Shuikou is an important aspect of geomantic omen (feng shui). The so-called Shuikou(水口) here refers to the place where people enters the village, which is often the place where water flows in or out.

<sup>5</sup> The word “Kan (坎)” for “Chengkan (呈坎)” is synonymous with the word “Kan” for “misfortune” in Chinese characters, so passing through Chengkan can symbolize getting rid of misfortune.

<sup>6</sup> New Bagua Banquet: it was created by the people of Chengkan based on Zhu Xi's “Bagua Banquet”. Bagua Banquet is a famous local dish in Mount Wuyi of Fujian Province, belonging to Fujian cuisine. It was a ritual created by the Neo Confucianism scholar Zhu Xi during the Southern Song Dynasty and used to entertain guests.

#### **4 Adhere to the Principle of “Two Actions and One Concealment,” Discarding the Erroneous Tendency to Build Rural Areas into Urban Parks**

In the process of building a new countryside, the traditional villages with grey bricks and black tiles have been demolished in succession and replaced by high-rise buildings made of concrete, which is an inevitable trend towards modernization. But blind demolition is not rational. With the development of the economy and ideological understanding, people gradually realize the significance of protecting and developing ancient villages. However, there has been a false tendency in some places to build rural areas into urban parks. Zhang Jianping, a photographer who recorded the changes in ancient villages in Huizhou with his camera, once pointed out in an interview that ancient villages in southern Anhui were well maintained before 2004. With the accelerating tourism development and backward protection methods, the village's protection and development became where is developed is destroyed. In 2010, he was surprised to find that some ancient villages were transformed into urban parks: the remnants of the Ming and Qing dynasties had been demolished or repainted; the bamboo fences in the vegetable garden were replaced by colorful seedlings; the original paddy field in front of Zouma Tower (西递走马楼) became a large parking lot; a modern hotel was built at the entrance of the village. In Zhang's view, many scenic spots are being developed only to serve tourism and maximize economic benefits rather than for the sake of protecting the original appearance of the village. As a result, the essence of the village has been destroyed, and the ancient village has become a lone and fake village surrounded by small towns. In contrast, at the beginning of development, the people of Chengkan consciously avoided transforming rural areas into urban parks and designed a development model of “two actions and one concealment,” protecting ancient villages, operating cultural contents, and hiding commercial styles. They realized that as a village, ancient villages should have an agricultural culture and cannot be over-modernized. Fang Shunlai, chairman of Mount Huangshan Chengkan Bagua Village Tourism Co., Ltd., pointed out in an interview with a reporter, “It is not hard to imagine how awful it is when a tourist visiting an ancient village and manor, peddlers are everywhere, chasing after you.” [1].

On this view, the people of Chengkan have chosen sufficient and sustainable protection and development and traditional root culture. They forbade modern street lamps and high-hanging commercial red lanterns. In Chengkan, Han-style courtyard stone lamps are arranged along the lake and streets. When the Huanxiu Bridge, built in the Yuan Dynasty, was destroyed in a rare mountain flood in 2013, the villagers retrieved nearly 80% of the washed-away wooden and stone components along the river and ultimately restored and rebuilt the Huanxiu Bridge in its original form [5]. Moreover, Chengkan was deeply influenced by I Ching, and the people of Chengkan planned to restore the “shi-gan-dang”<sup>7</sup> that had disappeared during the Cultural Revolution, Huizhou wedding customs, ancestral hall etiquette, grass dragon dance, Huizhou opera, and Nuo dance. In this way, some farmers with cultural heritage skills can become full-time promoters

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<sup>7</sup> Shi-gan-dang (石敢当): first appeared in Han Dynasty. And During Tang Dynasty, these three characters have been carved on stones and were used to protect houses from evil things.

of Huizhou culture, increasing their incomes. A walk in Chengkan involves appreciating ancient architecture, carved flowers, stone carvings in the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the wooden carving of Yuanbao<sup>8</sup>, window panels on the beams, and the Huizhou Three Carvings. The scenery is breathtaking, with the endless lotus pond in front of the village, and the food is delicious with the hairy tofu introduced by *A Bite Of China* and the Bagua Banquet in Bagua Village. Everything in Chengkan reflects the charm of traditional culture.

## **5 Protect and Transform Huizhou Ancient Buildings with Huizhou Cultural Elements, Taking Advantage of the Inherent Elements of Hui-Style Architecture**

Hui-style architecture, such as Chengkan, is the combined product of southern Ganlan-style buildings and northern quadrangle buildings [6]. They established their school by incorporating traditional Confucian cultural concepts and local characteristics, securing a place in the numerous residential architectural genres within the Chinese Han cultural circle.

Entering Chengkan, both ancestral halls and folk houses are elegant and light with their black tiles and white walls. Apart from that, these ancient village dwellings have gone through vicissitudes of life, with the original white limestone walls weathering to gray and the small green tiles becoming inky black, giving people a profound sense of history.

The most striking aspect of Hui-style architecture is the shape of the gray Ma Tau Wall, which incorporates raised gable walls on both sides of the house above the roof and ridge and horizontal gable eaves. To avoid excessive altitude differences between the gable and the roof and save building materials, the Ma Tau Wall slopes down along the roof to form a horizontal staircase at different heights. As it is built to prevent fire from spreading to neighbors' houses, the wall is also known as the firewall. In terms of architectural aesthetics, the Ma Tau Wall breaks the monotony of the general wall surface and adds charm. Since ancient village dwellings come in varying heights and sizes, the Ma Tau Wall is in different orientations and heights, creating richer spatial changes and becoming the main melody of the architecture of ancient villages.

Chengkan fully utilizes the rich wood resources in the mountainous areas of southern Anhui, with the main architecture being wood frames. Its ancestral halls mostly have huge beams and columns, bearing the legacy of the Tang Dynasty building—"fat beams and fat columns." The building practices have significantly changed at different times. Careful comparisons will show the development of Huizhou architecture.

The individual plane of ancient village dwellings is relatively simple, most of which are square or rectangular, with a patio as the center. The entire village is surrounded by mountains and rivers, with a natural layout that does not emphasize certain geometric forms.

The Hui-style architectures have a closed and compact exterior and an open interior. Its internal closed and open spaces are parted by internal patios and courtyards. The

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<sup>8</sup> Yuanbao (元宝): shoe-shaped gold ingot; shoe-shaped silver ingot.

courtyard is a minimized natural space, enlarging architectural space and embodying the traditional concept of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity in Hui-style architecture. In addition to lighting and ventilation, the patio can collect rainwater from the roof. The people of Huizhou call it “Si Shui Gui Tang” (The rainwater from all sides of the house flows into the courtyard of the hall), implying the accumulation of wealth.

The general appearance of Hui-style architecture is simple and concise. However, their gates and interior decoration are meticulously designed with exquisite brick, stone, and wood carving, reflecting the decorative style and skills of Hui-style architecture.

To sum up, when planning the layout of the village, the people of Chengkan adhere to the principle of “two actions and one concealment”—protecting ancient villages, operating cultural contents, and hiding commercial styles, the ideal of a tranquil home in the era of agricultural civilization, and the combination of Simplicity, Variability, and Persistency. When maintaining and developing ancient folk houses, the people of Chengkan keep the inherent layout and structure of the village unchanged and adhere to protecting and transforming Huizhou ancient buildings with Huizhou cultural elements and maximizing the inherent elements of Hui-style architecture. They deeply realize that abandoning the inherent elements of Hui-style architecture will cause it to lose its inherent aesthetic appeal and empty its original cultural heritage, leaving behind only fake antiques with hollow appearances. They try their best to hide the modern commercial atmosphere and sustain the original comfort and tranquility, creating a sense of time travel for tourists. This is their unremitting pursuit.

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