

## Article

# Formation Process and Spatial Representation of Tourist Destination Personality from the Perspective of Cultural Heritage: Application in Traditional Villages in Ancient Huizhou, China

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**Abstract:** Tourism destinations are cultural heritage and spatial landscape systems of organic coexistence between humans and the Earth, and are formed through the long historical evolution of a specific geographical environment. With the development of large-scale cultural and tourism projects and the construction of scenic areas, many tourist destinations face conflicts between people and the environment and the crisis of discontinuity in the landscape and the cultural context. The concept of tourist destination personality provides a perspective for studying the interaction between humans and the environment in tourist destinations. However, existing research has not delved into the mechanisms of temporal–spatial interaction and spatial representation of regional cultural heritage in regional systems. Therefore, from the perspectives of geography and urban–rural planning, this study selects traditional villages in ancient Huizhou as the research object and employs relevant theories from cultural ecology to construct a paradigm for analyzing the formation path of tourist destination personality based on a cultural core from a regional systemic perspective. Building on this, this study develops a coupling analysis framework for the “accumulation anchoring” of heritage landscape representation in traditional villages in ancient Huizhou based on a cognitive understanding of tourist destination heritage landscape and a ‘time–space’ interactive model. The research reveals that the formation of personality in traditional villages in ancient Huizhou centers around cultural cores such as production methods, social organizations, construction mechanisms, and social beliefs. It is driven by basic forces such as resource endowment vitality, a social structure driving force, and a historical choice regulatory force, with the logic of forming dominant functions and obtaining expected benefits such as the core. The spatial representation of traditional village heritage in ancient Huizhou exhibits a synergistic evolution mechanism between ‘culture and landscape’. The research process and conclusions provide a basic framework and methodological system for the study of tourist destination personality and heritage revitalization, expanding the understanding of the process of human–environment interaction and spatial patterns in tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** human–land relationship; historical evolution; spatial representation; cultural core



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## 1. Introduction

“Personality” refers to “a unique integrated pattern of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that an individual develops and evolves through socialization. This pattern includes the individual’s distinctive, different from others, stable, and unified traits and characteristics” (Xinhua Dictionary, 11th Edition, Beijing: Business Publishing House, 2013, P4). Therefore, personality is the unified essence of a place based on the historical evolution of the lifecycle, focusing on the spiritual and external representations. Personality delves into the deep-seated and abstract characteristics rooted in local features. The organizational

structure possessed by the personality subject needs to indicate the mutual relationships, arrangement order, spatial positions, modes of connection, and states of aggregation of the internal components of things. The resulting representation and form ultimately demonstrate the outcomes and goals of the long-term, uninterrupted integration and collaboration processes of the various components. For tourist destinations, personality primarily refers to the functional utilization results of various elements within the regional system after the interaction between people and places. This result is dynamic and typically manifests through the occupation of functional spatial structures. Personality constitutes the initial conditions for tourist destinations to generate specific types and establish outward radiation functions. It is also the reliance for tourist destinations to respond to historical evolution and conduct regional marketing. Personality forms the identification basis and subsequent development impetus for tourist destinations. In the current context of large-scale cultural and tourism development and scenic area construction, many tourist destinations face problems such as homogenization of environmental and spatial construction, excessive emphasis on brand characteristics, neglect of background mechanisms, and endogenous dynamics. How to excavate and clarify the mechanisms of personality formation and spatial organization patterns from the evolutionary process of tourist destinations and then propose development and conservation strategies from a heritage perspective has become the key to enhancing the regional value and competitiveness of local tourist destinations. This has become a consensus in the fields of tourism, related disciplines, and the industry itself.

Currently, research on the personality of tourist destinations is mainly focused on the field of brand personality. Numerous scholars attribute personality traits to tourist destinations and apply brand personality scales to measure the personality of tourist destinations. The tourism destination brand personality measurement scale constructed by Ekinici (2006) and others based on Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale is a typical academic approach [1,2]. However, most current research on the personality of tourist destinations lacks systematicity. Research dimensions are still confined to areas such as defining the dimensions of personality perception, determining the relationship between personality perception and destination image, and analyzing the misalignment of brand personality space. It has not delved into the fundamental issues of the 'generation process–internal mechanism–external path' of personality ontology in tourism [3–5]. In fact, local personality is an important content of local spirit, and the personality of tourist destinations under specific regional conditions is closely related to local culture. However, the current tourism academic community lacks targeted research on the combination of the cultural evolution of tourist destinations and the laws of evolution and spatial changes of tourist destinations. Although related disciplines such as history, geography, and sociology have formed a relatively extensive research system on the formation process, value characteristics, and landscape pattern of tourist destinations, as a complete regional cultural ecosystem [6,7], tourist destinations need to be further understood from the perspective of cultural development. This includes the process, mechanism, and spatial representation of the formation of tourist destination personality [8–10].

Western countries' attention and emphasis on the preservation and tourism development of historical small towns and ancient villages can be divided into three stages. (1) The Classical Period: The first Historic Monuments Commission (Commission Des Monuments Historiques) was established in France in 1837. During this period, historical monuments mainly consisted of relics, medieval religious buildings, and medieval palace architecture. (2) Pre and Post-World War II: In 1930, France enacted the "Scenic Sites Protection Act", expanding the scope of historical monuments to include "sites" with historical, scientific, and artistic features, including historical small towns and ancient villages. In 1961, the Netherlands introduced the Monuments and Historic Buildings Act, followed by the French Loi Malraux in 1962. After the 1964 International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments, the protection of architectural heritage expanded and deepened to encompass neighborhoods, towns, and larger human habitats. Subsequently, countries

such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and Japan initiated the planning, preservation, and construction of historical small towns. In 1967, the UK introduced the Civic Amenities Act, and Italy enacted the Urban Planning Act, legislating to protect the core values of cities—the uniquely characteristic historical districts and ancient buildings formed over different eras—and embedding preservation issues of historical areas into urban planning legislation. (3) After the turn of the century: After entering the new century, most European countries regarded heritage preservation as the cornerstone of their development strategies, leading to significant changes in the concept of cultural heritage. The scope of heritage was expanded to include designated heritage and appropriated heritage, encompassing carriers such as urban landscapes, spatial patterns, living spaces, production methods, and foundational building groups that do not have unified boundaries. Based on the relatively small scale and clear spatial structure of historical small towns and ancient villages, “holistic” and “sustainable” value evaluations, preservation methods, and tourism development strategies have been proposed for them. Villages are studied as “living organic systems”, emphasizing the interrelationships between natural resource forms, spatial organizational relationships, social–cultural networks, and economic structures. In the process of sustainable tourism development, the continuity of the original functional structure and social relationships of historical villages is highlighted, respecting the origin implications and spatial authority of historical towns.

In conclusion, this study achieves the research objectives of tourist destination personality using cultural ecology and historical landscape methods. Firstly, based on the cultural ecology method, a model of the historical evolution of tourist destinations is constructed, centered around cultural cores, to distill the evolutionary mechanisms and logic. The use of landscape heritage methods helps build a “time–space” interactive model for tourist destinations, outlining the historical accumulation processes and uncovering and clarifying unique core values, namely personality characteristics. Secondly, this study elucidates the mediating mechanisms between historical evolution and spatial accumulation, unraveling the puzzle of the formation of the spirit of tourist destinations. This deepens the research into the essence of tourist destinations, providing decision support for understanding the cultural inheritance and innovation of tourist destinations. Ultimately, the basic concept of tourist destination personality is proposed from a historical evolution perspective. The research conclusions can offer theoretical guidance for regional protection, product development, and tourism route planning based on the personality of tourist destinations.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Study on the Personality of Tourist Destinations

The concept of tourism destination personality derives from the brand personality concept in management. In marketing, brands emphasize “artificial shaping”, conveying the practical functions and target audience of a product through material symbols. The goal is to establish emotional trust and usage loyalty between consumers and products. With the background of tourism globalization and large-scale development after 2000, scholars have applied the brand personality concept from management and marketing to the study of tourism destinations. It is widely believed that effective perception of the personality of tourist destinations contributes to enhancing consumers’ imagery of the destination, thereby influencing consumer choice behavior and the benefits of tourist destinations [11–13]. Current research on tourism destination personality mainly focuses on the perception of destination personality and the optimization of brand personality space, including the construction and measurement of personality perception dimensions [1,11,14,15], the relationship between personality perception and the imagery of tourist destinations [16–19], as well as the attitudes of tourists [20–24] and the construction of personality space dislocation models [25–27].

Research has found that tourists tend to attribute personality traits to tourist destinations. Based on the projection of destination personality, space dislocation models are constructed, opening up avenues for the study of the spirit and attributes of tourist destina-

tion places. However, it is important to note that while the concept of tourism destination personality originated in management, as a localized space with significant temporal evolution and overall characteristics, the personality of tourist destinations is not only influenced by human intervention, commercial marketing, and material brand mapping but also more significantly by the mutual connections and interactions between people and places in a specific regional environment over a long period. As tourism rapidly develops, localized space, as a core element of tourism development, has shifted the focus of research on destination personality towards process interpretation and spatial significance analysis. Only through a comprehensive analysis framework of “people-time-space” unity can the full meaning of ‘localized space’ be constructed [28–30]. From a historical evolution perspective, the analysis of tourism destination personality, based on the context of “dynamic territorial systems”, emphasizes the analysis of the internal cultural core composition and spatial structure evolution process in the formation of the tourism destination territorial system and distinctive pattern. This includes the analysis of the composition of tourism destination system elements, the analysis of the coexistence mechanism of elements, and the spatial changes of constituent elements in different periods of the evolutionary process of tourist destinations [31–34]. The historical evolution perspective emphasizes the integrity and dialectics of the study of the relationship between tourists and destinations, applying human behavioral norms and ethical standards such as natural perspectives, ethical perspectives, practical perspectives, and systemic perspectives to explore the evolution and regulation mechanisms of the human destination system. This achieves a coherent and in-depth knowledge system construction for the study of tourism destination personality [35–37].

## 2.2. *Tourism Destination Territorial System*

The regional system perspective emphasizes the coordination between people and the environment. The human–environment regional system is a dynamic structure formed by the mutual association and interaction of people and the environment within a specific geographical context. Within the human–environment relationship, material cycles and energy transformations constantly occur, utilizing external inputs to sustain and develop themselves while striving to establish a certain order. The tourism destination regional system is composed of interconnected and interactive elements in the realms of culture, economy, resources, and the environment. It possesses a specific spatial structure, functionality, and interregional connections, reflecting the distribution of human understanding and utilization of nature—a comprehensive process involving the economic and socio-cultural development of the tourism destination. In the tourism destination regional system, ‘place’ is constituted by the interweaving of natural and human elements in the geographical environment, while ‘people’ possess social and biological attributes, endowed with the capacity to understand, modify, protect, and utilize the geographical environment. The aggregation of different elements in the tourism destination’s human–environment system expresses the resource foundation, developmental stage, and trends of the system. The organization and distribution patterns of internal elements in the human–environment regional system express the composition of specific regional human–environment relationships, forming the dominant functions and overall structure of the regional system [38], which is the personality of the tourism destination.

The various elements within the tourism destination’s human–environment regional system interact and entwine with each other. These elements are not only quantitatively but also qualitatively independent and significantly diverse. Therefore, the tourism destination’s human–environment regional system is a non-linear dissipative structure. The various exchanges, both internal and external, stimulate the stability of this dissipative structure, influencing the future trends of the regional environment, namely the formation trends of the tourism destination’s personality. Under certain conditions, through non-linear interactions, coherent or synergistic phenomena may emerge among internal elements in the tourism destination, enabling the human–environment regional system, as a non-stable entity, to manifest a certain functional orientation at the macro level. This

results in the creation of a specific spatial structural system under certain temporal cross-sections, leading to the ordered presentation of the tourism destination's personality in the spatial landscape.

### 2.3. *Tourism Destination Historical Evolution and Spatial Representation*

#### 2.3.1. Historical Evolution: A Cultural Ecological Perspective

The adaptation of tourism destinations to their environments exhibits significantly different performances. Throughout the historical evolution, distinct groups have developed unique ways of life and social organizations. Therefore, adaptive studies require comparative and dynamic research methods. Early anthropologists Boas [39] and Kroeber [40], drawing on the ecological concepts of 'mechanical culture' and 'environmental determinism,' considered the environment as a potential resource for human development. They asserted that humans, within the framework of historical determinism, could adapt to the environment. Thus, the relationship between the essence of tourism destinations and the regional environment is characterized by a "mutual adaptation and entanglement", and the open concept of "adaptation" laid a positive theoretical foundation for explaining the significance of tourism destinations themselves. Later, cultural anthropologist Rapport [41] expanded further on the interaction between humans and the ecological environment, initiating reflections on the significance of the environment for individuals. This perspective incorporated insights from information science, psychology, and semiotics to explain cultural change and individual differences. At this point, the theoretical tools focusing on the individual's own meaning provided a paradigmatic inspiration for measuring the personality of tourism destinations.

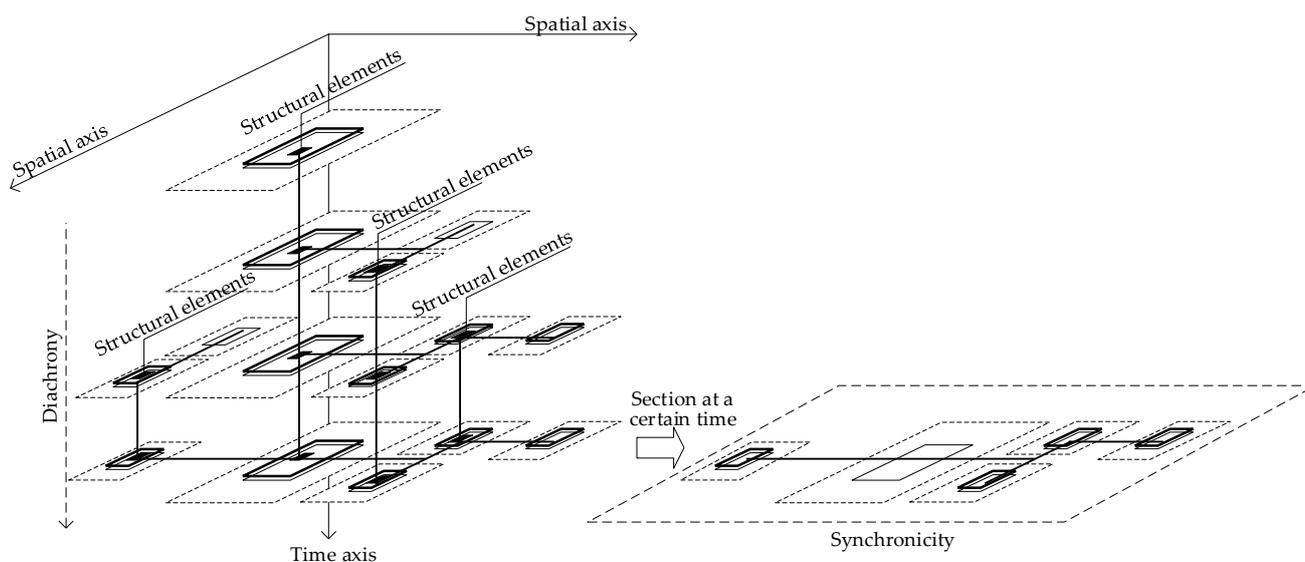
Cultural geographer Sauer [42] clarified the combinatory relationship between the temporal development evolution of culture and its spatial distribution. Sauer emphasized the process-oriented perspective of cultural landscapes and the driving role of technological innovation. Building on these explorations, American anthropologist and representative of the new evolutionary paradigm, Steward [43], proposed the scientific methodology of 'cultural ecology'. He defined cultures that are most relevant to survival and production within social structures as 'cultural cores' and established an organic connection between 'adaptive evolution' and 'cultural cores.' Sahlins [44] further refined the complex relationships among nature, society, and culture in Steward's cultural ecology. He pointed out that the unique behavioral patterns in regional systems are determined by the culture of the region dominated by technology and environment.

Therefore, from the perspective of cultural ecology, different regions are seen to possess distinct cultural characteristics and patterns, considered as a set of behavioral practices reinforced by a combination of attitudes and values. The degree of correlation between the personality of a tourism destination and its cultural aspects requires extensive empirical evidence and manifestation.

#### 2.3.2. Spatial Representation: Heritage Landscape Perspective

In the process of historical evolution, the cultural significance formed by tourism destinations is projected onto the material environment, constituting spatial expressions. The spatial structure relationships, morphological features, internal textures, etc., all embody the production methods, behavioral habits, social order, and cultural accumulation that people have developed over long periods of life. The subject of spatial representation is the collective organization of objects on a larger scale of land. This organizational relationship is related to sociocultural significance, embodying certain symbolism and continuous meaningful connotations, revealing the complex formation process of the tourism destination. How does the organic entity of a tourism destination integrate with the spatial structure through evolutionary processes and meanings? Long-term evolution and the abundant material remaining in Huizhou villages and towns have endowed them with distinct historical heritage characteristics. In the formation process of tourism destinations, the role of the organic community has far surpassed that of a mere material environment. Therefore,

the symbolic and continuous meaningful connotations of space align with the pursuit and discussion of the organic entity significance of tourism destinations [45]. After 2000, the international heritage conservation community extended the study of urban heritage from the ‘spatial level’ to the ‘temporal level’ and emphasized the interaction between people and landscapes during the process of temporal evolution from the perspective of ‘cultural landscapes’. The concept and methods of ‘historical landscape’ highlighted the temporal dimension of heritage objects, emphasizing the historical significance of heritage objects, including the entire process from inception to maturity to decline, forming a holistic assessment of heritage historical value. The concept of ‘landscape strata’ was introduced in the ‘heritage landscape approach’, positioning the spatial landscape of tourism destinations as “a symbiotic area where cultural and natural values and attributes have accumulated in history”. At this point, space is endowed with a broader background and environmental significance. The “heritage landscape approach” groundbreaking established a “time–space interaction” model for the study of tourism destination spatial landscapes. The term ‘strata’ refers to the cumulative sum of various events and historical layers in specific landscape spaces and places [46]. In this model, the horizontal plane represents the spatial dimension, and the vertical axis represents the time dimension. The more layers overlaid, the stronger the degree of spatial strata change. The structural elements in the model refer to elements with node connectivity and genetic stability, accumulating key information in the spatial pattern construction during the formation process of tourism destinations, referred to as the ‘anchoring grid’ (Figure 1).



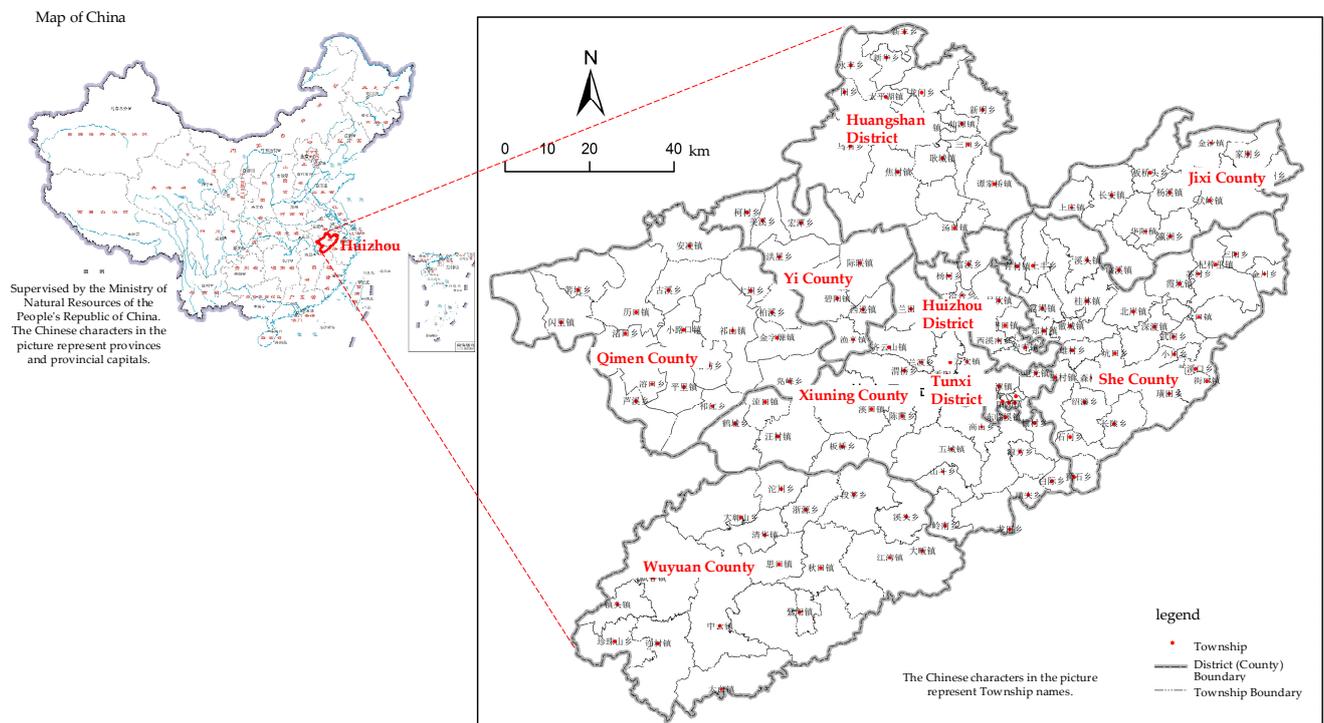
**Figure 1.** Temporal–spatial interactive accumulation model of tourist destination spatial landscape.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Overview of Case Study Locations

This article selects villages in the ancient Huizhou region with complex geographical environments and a long history of accumulation as the empirical research boundary (Figure 2). Huizhou boasts abundant cultural, ecological, and agricultural resources. For rural tourism destinations within specific areas, whether in terms of historical evolution analysis, spatial representation analysis, or potential analysis of rural tourism destinations, the regional characteristics are quite evident. Simultaneously, most rural tourism destinations in Huizhou are considered underdeveloped in the peripheral environmental context, facing the dual pressure of cultural preservation and vitality stimulation in tourism development. It is necessary to break through the ‘sample limitations’. This study selected 99 villages for detailed research, with most of them located in the XiuNing County–She

County Basin and the Yi County Basin. Some of these villages, including HongCun, are designated as World Cultural Heritage sites.



**Figure 2.** Scope of this study (base map source: Ministry of Natural Resources of China).

From the perspective of the personality of tourist destinations, the case study location of Huizhou villages is typical and representative for several reasons: (1) In the process of promoting rural revitalization through cultural tourism, Huizhou villages are widely spread economic and social bases in the southern Anhui region, constituting fertile ground for the sustainable development of rural areas. (2) Encompassing various types of villages, such as historic and cultural towns, traditional villages, distinctive scenic tourist towns (villages), beautiful rural demonstration villages, and rural revitalization pilot villages, Huizhou villages reflect the comprehensive and compound characteristics of various distinctive elements in the era of tourism. (3) Huizhou villages generally possess a rich history and typical scenic layouts. Reviewing their historical development context and landscape spatial structure holds important academic value and practical significance in vividly carrying the local way of life and inheriting the spatial patterns of people and land during the tourism development process.

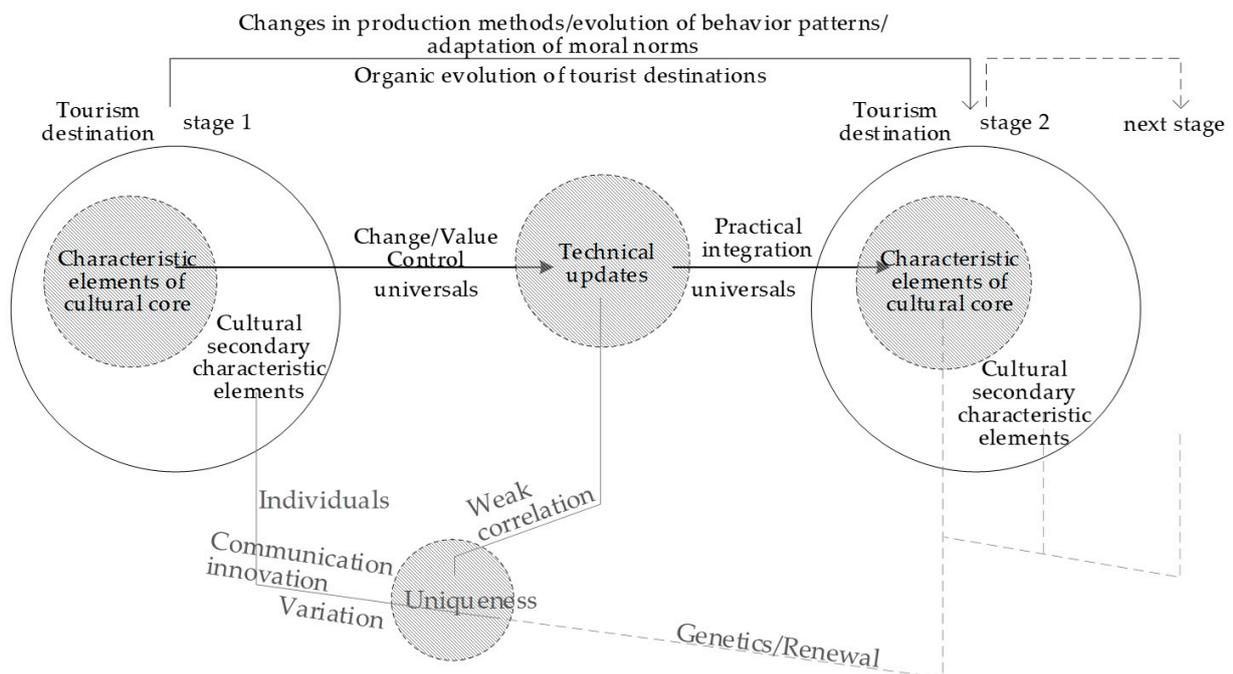
### 3.2. Research Approach

Expanding from the ontological content of tourist destinations and the transformational demands of the foundational theoretical paradigm of tourist destination personality, this paper advocates a comprehensive framework for the cognitive understanding of tourist destination personality based on both substantive and procedural theories. Focusing on the challenges faced by the villages in the ancient Huizhou region in the context of urbanization and tourism development, with the goal of restoring the rupture in the territorial landscape context and mitigating conflicts in human–environment relationships, this study adopts a methodological approach that combines cultural ecology with landscape heritage. The research begins by explaining how tourist destinations respond to the regional environment in the process of evolution, providing a substantive theory. It then progresses to spatial semantic construction, ranging from the identification of performance characteristics and metaphorical recognition to information dynamism, forming a procedural

theory. Ultimately, it establishes a progressive cognitive structure for tourist destination personality, namely ‘Cognition of the Evolutionary Laws of Tourist Destination History—Cognition of the Core Values of Tourist Destination—Cognition of the Spatial Strategies of Tourist Destination’.

### 3.2.1. The Theoretical Form of Tourist Destination Environmental Adaptation from the Perspective of Cultural Ecology

From the perspective of cultural ecology, a tourist destination is an organic entity formed by the interaction of natural ecology, modes of production, and social organizational structure. These three factors interact over the long term, constituting regional culture. Regional culture becomes the predominant force controlling the trajectory of tourist destination evolution. Among the elements of regional culture, those closely associated with social production and economic activities are considered the cultural core elements, possessing significant environmental characteristics that drive the emergence of shared features in regional culture. On the other hand, elements with weaker associations to social use are considered cultural secondary elements, characterized by minor environmental traits, leading to the display of distinct characteristics or unique features in different regions of regional culture within the tourist destination. In the evolutionary process of the tourist destination organism, the cultural core characteristic elements play the most significant role. They control the extent of changes in technological updates and their adaptive value, thereby causing new technological updates to have a substantial societal impact. This, in turn, results in the reintegration of social and cultural levels, ultimately leading the tourist destination to evolve from Stage 1 to Stage 2 (Figure 3).

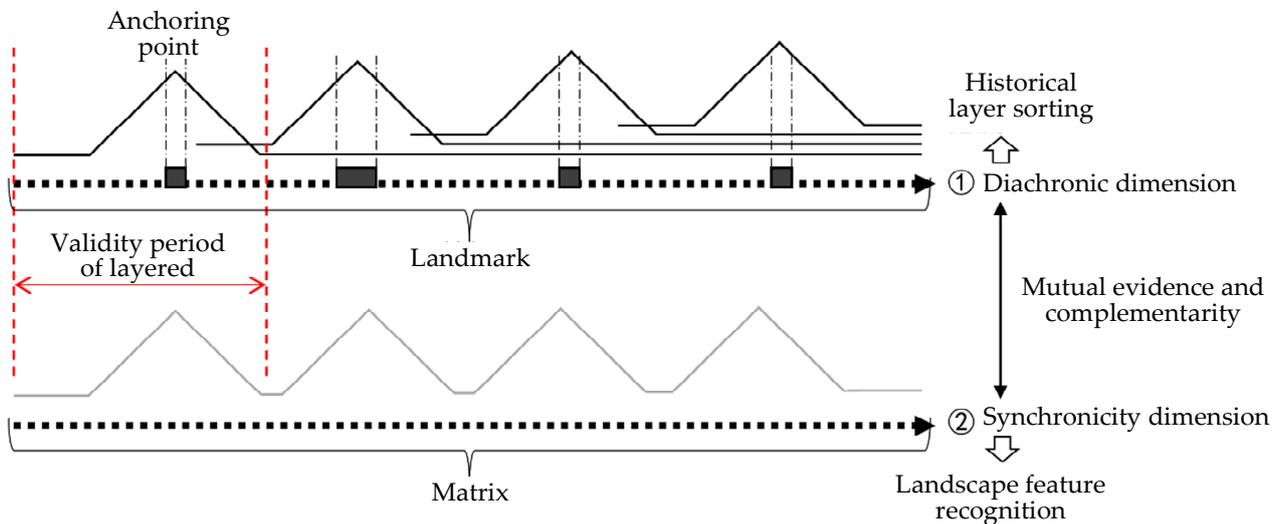


**Figure 3.** The theoretical expression of tourist destination environmental adaptation.

### 3.2.2. Exploration of the Core Values of Tourist Destinations Based on ‘Accumulation-Anchoring’

The true significance of a tourist destination lies in its embodiment of unique values and attributes, and historical accumulation is a necessary process for the formation of the spatial structure of a tourist destination. Therefore, only through a deep understanding of the historical accumulation process of the spatial landscape of a tourist destination can one accurately assess the value characteristics exhibited throughout the entire lifecycle of the tourist destination. Initially, a comprehensive understanding of the historical accumulation

in the temporal dimension of the tourist destination is essential. This involves identifying anchor points and their states at different periods and uncovering and clarifying their unique core values. Subsequently, from a synchronic perspective, recognition and refinement of the 'synchronicity' displayed by the current accumulation of the tourist destination are achieved in the spatial dimension (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Schematic representation of the interactive effects between anchoring points and spatial accumulation in tourist destination spatial landscape.

### 3.2.3. Methodological Features

This paper intends to view villages and their cultural cores as integral ecosystems. It employs dynamic and continuous research perspectives to integrate the cultural core into specific historical contexts and environments, emphasizing the interaction and positive stress analysis between cultural cores and village constituent elements. By examining the evolutionary process and mechanisms of traditional Huizhou villages within a macroscopic narrative, it is evident that Huizhou villages have accumulated abundant cultural heritage and material wealth through a long, continuous, and high-quality development process. Therefore, their personalities exhibit a strong heritage landscape attribute. On one hand, the heritage landscape attribute forms a new perspective for understanding the cognitive personality of Huizhou villages. It can uncover the regional environmental order and constituent elements of Huizhou villages, as well as their spatial landscape characteristics and patterns. On the other hand, stratified analysis from a heritage perspective can provide guidance for capturing key carriers of Huizhou tradition in subsequent tourism development and spatial renewal.

Huizhou villages are products of interactions between land and land, people and people, and people and land. Villages are the overall response to the spatial distribution of these three types of relationships, exhibiting complex and gradual evolutionary patterns. In this paper, the relationships of 'people–land', 'people–people', and 'land–land' are incorporated into the theoretical framework, where the evolutionary process, mechanisms, and spatial stratification anchoring all reflect these three interaction relationships (Figure 5).

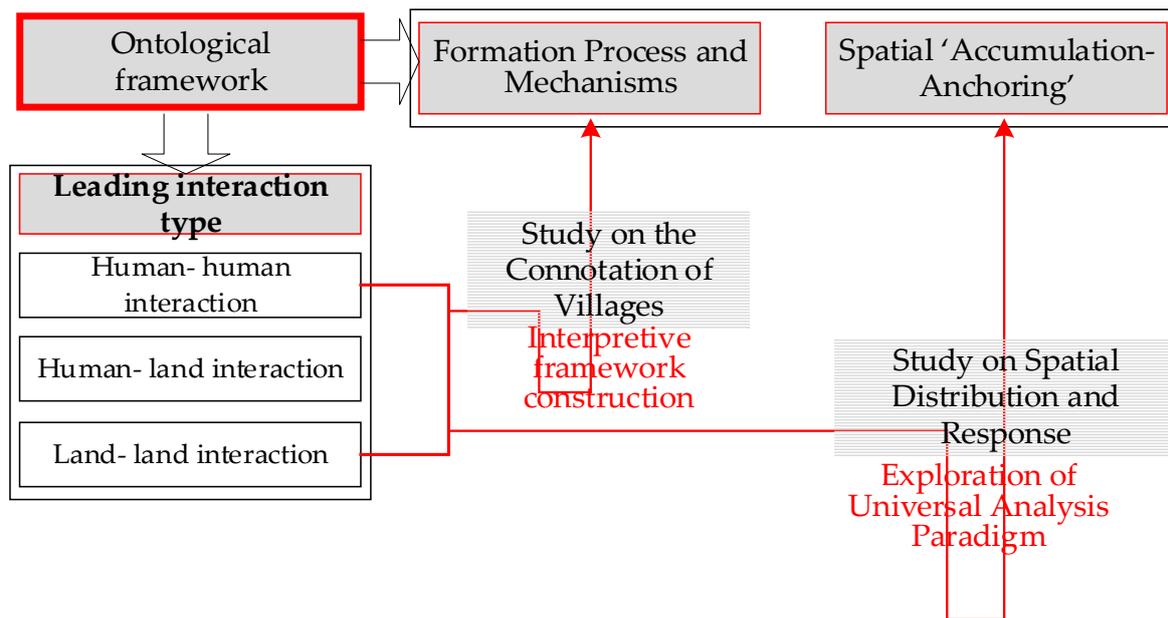


Figure 5. Research methods and ideas.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Formation Process and Mechanisms of Huizhou Villages and Towns

#### 4.1.1. Historical Evolution Process

Under the support of cultural ecology theory, the interaction of three factors—natural ecology, modes of production, and social organizational structure—constitutes the regional culture that serves as the primary force guiding the trajectory of villages' evolution. Among these factors, the regional cultural core elements that have significant associations with social production and economic activities play the most crucial role in the evolutionary process of the villages' organic development. Based on the unique characteristics of Huizhou villages and towns, including the naturally isolated geographical environment, challenging agricultural production foundation, long-term stable surrounding political environment, unified internal cultural environment, and profound external exchanges, this paper proposes the cultural core components of Huizhou villages and towns: (1) Agricultural production methods that adapt to the ecological environment. (2) Social organizations that adapt to the political and natural environment. (3) Village construction mechanisms that adapt to livelihoods and material foundations. (4) Social beliefs that support institutions and adapt to the environment. This paper uses the 'Cultural Core Advancement' in Huizhou villages and towns as the time division framework. Combined with three significant population migrations in Huizhou's history, the formation process of Huizhou villages is divided into four stages: nascent, development, maturity, and decline. Through an analysis of the evolutionary progression of the 'cultural core' that considers both form and function, the paper delves into the elements and symbiotic patterns in the formation process of Huizhou villages and towns.

#### (1) Understanding the Evolutionary Trajectory of Huizhou Villages

This paper draws on the anthropologist Alfred Gell's theory of temporal mechanisms, which distinguishes between a practical linear time view and a ritualized non-linear time view. The former is considered tense, and the latter is considered time, forming a dual time cognition theory [47]. Combining the complexity of the village and town organism, the paper integrates these two views to create an analytical approach to understanding the evolution of villages and towns—Dual Temporal-Spatial Cognition Theory. The linear time view serves as the basis for analyzing the practical carriers of village and town evolution, while the non-linear time view forms the basis for analyzing the non-substantial carriers of village and town social culture. Research on the cognitive evolution of villages and towns

should be based on the universality of temporal cognition mechanisms, emphasizing the exploration of the social-cultural reasons for the content differences in temporal maps. The universality-linear aspect is reflected in the detailed description of the formation process of Huizhou villages and towns, which defines a unified cultural framework as an analytical template, analyzing the generation of villages and towns based on temporal evolution. Non-linear social scenes are interspersed in the analysis of universality but have not been refined from a cognitive perspective. However, the cognition of non-linear social scenes is the theoretical core of cultural ecology. Table A1 roughly explains the cognitive results of the evolutionary trajectory of Huizhou villages.

(2) The Evolutionary States of Huizhou Villages and Towns

Combining linear and non-linear temporal-spatial perspectives, the overall system and spatial structure of Huizhou villages exhibit four states at various stages of development: Initial State, Equilibrium State, Disequilibrium State, and Re-equilibrium State. In the initial stage, villages are in the Initial State with small settlement sizes and limited human intervention in the natural environment. This forms a village spatial pattern primarily constrained by natural resources, reaching the first Equilibrium State. In each subsequent stage, the town undergoes a transition from Equilibrium State to Disequilibrium State, followed by adaptive adjustments to regain equilibrium, achieving the Re-equilibrium State (see Figure 6).

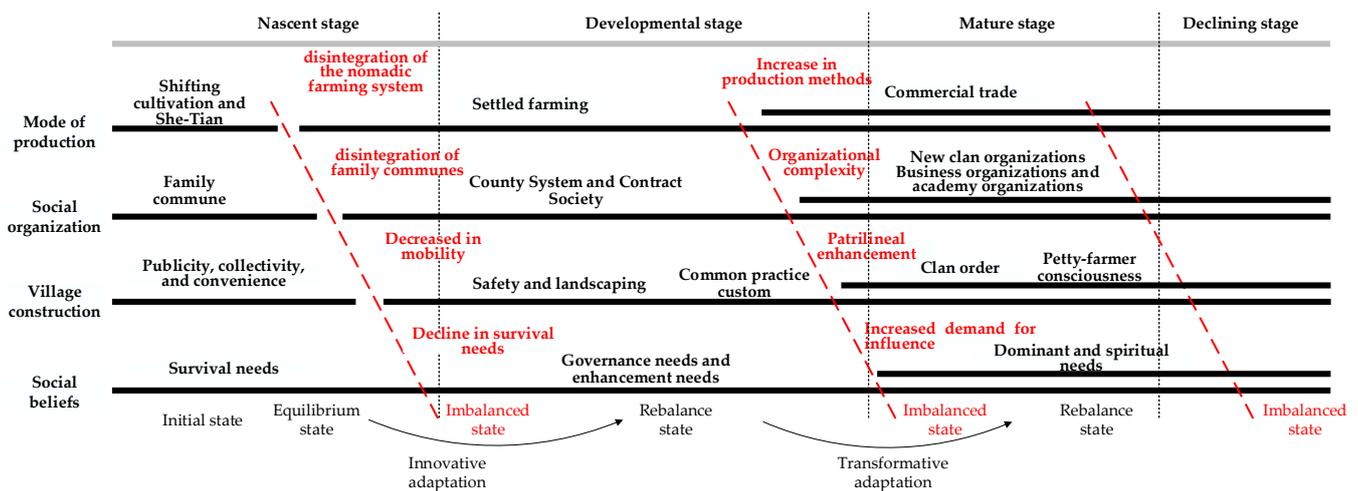


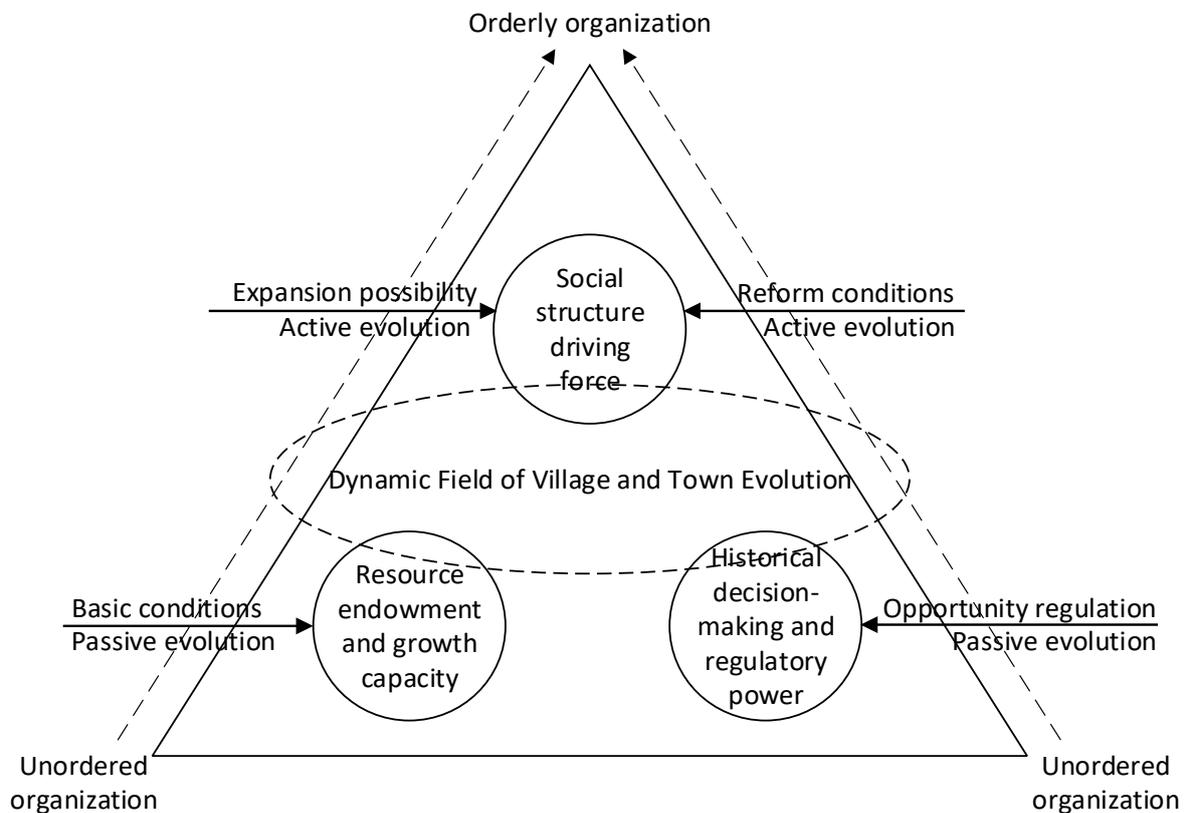
Figure 6. State transitions in the evolutionary process of Huizhou villages.

4.1.2. Formation Mechanism of the Individuality of Huizhou Villages and Towns

(1) Dynamics of Huizhou Villages and Towns Evolution

Based on the formation process of Huizhou villages and towns, the driving forces of their evolution can be categorized into resource endowment productivity, historical choice regulation, and social structure driving forces (see Figure 7). In the context of relatively underdeveloped agricultural productivity, the evolution of villages and towns is primarily driven by resource endowment growth and historical choice regulation. This includes the natural ecological environment and historical events, influencing the generation process and basic patterns of villages. The evolutionary process is rapid and prone to disjointed progression, characterized as passive evolution. As productivity improves, the evolution of villages and towns is mainly driven by the social structure generated based on residents' initiative. This primary driving force includes the influence of the humanistic environment and economic structure. The evolutionary process is slower, easily forming a continuous historical heritage, characterized as active evolution. The active evolution process and driving mechanisms are the focus of this study. For instance, many villages and towns in Huizhou reached their development peak during the Ming and Qing periods, with substantial spatial and population scales. The prosperous lifestyle of these villages and

towns did not align with their natural resources and agricultural production capacity. It can be inferred that these villages had already deviated from the traditional agricultural development trajectory and shifted towards commercial villages, especially evident in larger clan settlements where this transformation and accumulation of elements were more significant.



**Figure 7.** Fundamental dynamics of the evolution of Huizhou villages.

1) Resource Endowment: Growth Historically. Most renowned tourist destinations worldwide have been built on their distinctive resources. Through years of accumulation, they have formed tourism industry chains based on these unique resources, creating a regional tourism culture and becoming major nodes in the global tourism network. Ancient Huizhou is situated in the southern mountainous region of Anhui, characterized by complex terrain, limited transportation, abundant forestry resources, scarce agricultural land, and a rich water system. These unique natural and ecological resources have shaped a relatively conservative yet stable spatial pattern for ancient Huizhou villages and towns. Forestry and water resources initially provided essential survival materials, while the terrain molded the form and scale of villages and towns. Resource endowment forms the foundational driving force for the evolution of villages and towns.

2) Historical Choices: Historical Regulation. Choices are primarily reflected in the regulatory impact of historical events on villages and towns. Population migration plays a decisive regulatory role in the development of traditional Huizhou villages. The background of three population migrations and their direct impacts on the formation and development of Huizhou villages was discussed earlier. The kinship system and agricultural technology brought about significant transformative power to Huizhou, directly influencing the subsequent development trajectory of villages and towns. From a nationalist perspective, population migration was one of the policy implementation paths under the centralized rule of the Han ethnic government from the Eastern Han period onwards. The regulatory power it brought provided institutional support and cultural guidance for the subsequent development and growth of Huizhou villages and towns.

3) Social Structure: Driving. The composition and form of social structures in different historical periods directly impact the development and evolution of settlements. The development and prosperity of traditional Huizhou settlements are closely linked to the commercial economy and clan organizations. The seamless connection between commercial activities and the social structure that regulates clan order played a decisive role in making Huizhou villages the most developed towns in the late feudal society. At this time, the social structure of Huizhou villages and towns not only included the commercial foundation (mainly referring to commercial input, industrial structure, economic weight, and economic behavior) but also encompassed social organizations (mainly referring to clans and other systems, social relationships, and social networks). This formed a dynamic symbiotic network system covering all elements of villages and towns (subjects, objects, commerce, and culture). The social structure strengthened the comprehensiveness and directional shift of economic development in Huizhou villages and towns [48]. The construction of social structures helped promote the initiative and planning of resident behaviors. After migration, Huizhou residents carried out adaptive transformations of the natural environment, adaptive construction of living places, and adaptive construction of social structures based on regional resources and their own cultural accumulations. The establishment of social structures represented residents' consensus on production methods, lifestyle, and ideology. Village and town development entered a self-aware and introspective stage, reinforcing the regional characteristics of villages and towns.

#### 4) Formation mechanism of traditional villages in Huizhou

Based on the historical evolution process, it can be understood that the driving forces behind the formation of the individuality of tourist destinations include three main aspects: resource endowment, historical choices, and social structure. Ancient Huizhou is located in the mountainous area of southern Anhui, with a complex terrain, poor transportation, abundant forest resources but scarce agricultural land resources, and a rich water system. These unique natural ecological resources have shaped the relatively conservative but stable spatial pattern of ancient Huizhou villages. The abundance of forest and water resources provided the initial survival materials for the villages, while the terrain shaped the form and scale of the villages. The distinctive resource endowment constitutes the fundamental driving force for the evolution of villages. Historical choices are mainly reflected in the influence of historical events on villages and towns. From the perspective of nationalism, population migration is one of the policy execution paths under the centralized rule of the Han ethnic government during the Eastern Han Dynasty and thereafter. The regulatory power brought about by this historical event provided institutional support and cultural guidance for the subsequent development and growth of Huizhou villages. The composition and form of social structure in different historical periods directly affect the development and evolution of settlements. The development and prosperity of traditional Huizhou settlements are closely linked to the commercial economy and clan organizations. The social structure that perfectly combines commercial activities with clan order plays a decisive role in making Huizhou villages the highest developed towns in the late feudal society. The construction of social structure helps to promote the initiative and planning of residents' behavior. After the migration of Huizhou residents, they adapted to the natural environment, adapted their living places, and constructed the social structure according to regional resources and their own cultural accumulation. The establishment of social structure represents the consensus reached by residents in terms of production methods, lifestyle, and ideology, leading to the self-awareness and introspection stage of village development, and strengthening the regional characteristics of towns.

#### (2) Logic of Evolution in Huizhou Villages and Towns

The evolutionary process of Huizhou villages and towns revolves around humans as key actors, forming a network of actors that address relevant development issues based on the utilization of internal and external resources. Therefore, the Actor-network Theory [49] is introduced for the analysis of the evolutionary mechanism of Huizhou villages and towns. The Actor-network Theory provides a holistic logical model structure

for village and town evolution, using actors, forces, problems/opportunities, evolutionary paths, expected benefits, and development directions as logical concepts. It identifies the ‘problems/opportunities’ in the evolutionary logic, determining the evolutionary paths and outcomes of villages and towns. Based on the Actor-network Theory, with natural ecological resources and internal core needs as basic elements (endogenous forces), and regional opportunities and competition as supporting elements (exogenous forces), a logical model for the evolution of Huizhou villages and towns is constructed by focusing on the actors most likely to guide evolution, incorporating Obligatory Points of Passage (OPP). The actions of key actors ultimately pass through (OPP) [50], attempting to solve problems and achieve expected benefits or goals (driving village and town evolution). This forms the evolutionary logic of Huizhou villages and towns (see Figure 8).

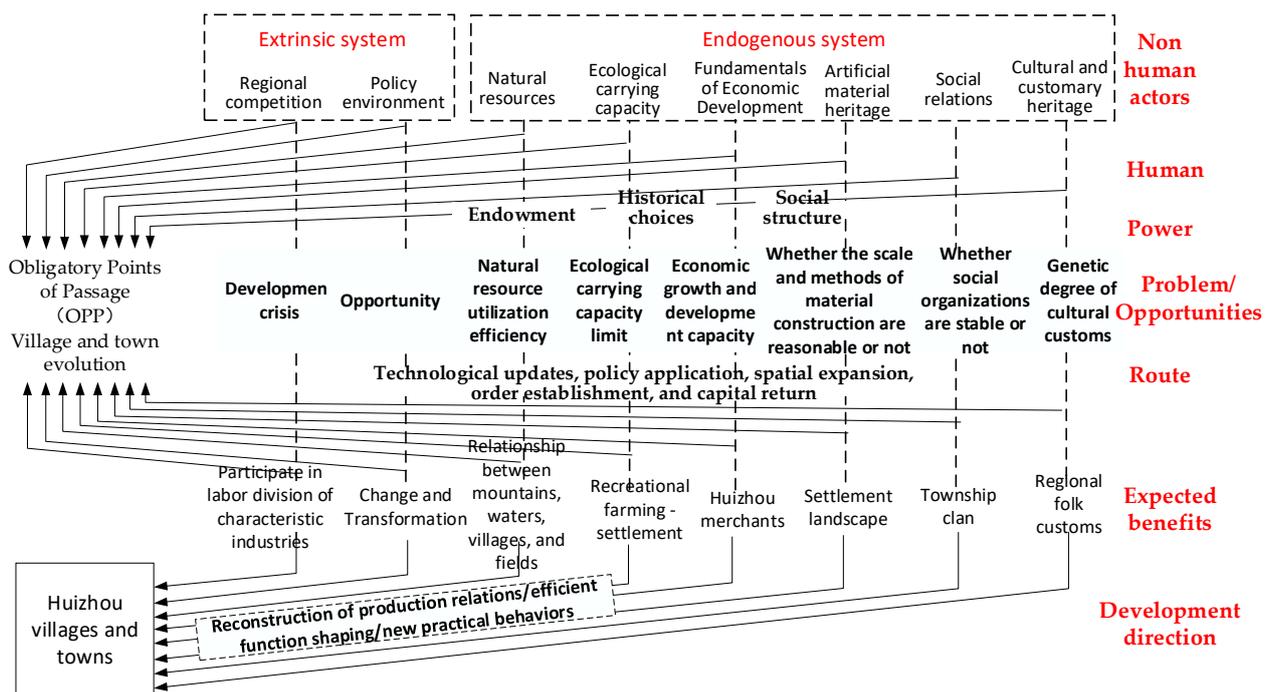


Figure 8. Evolutionary logic of Huizhou villages and towns based on OPP.

#### 4.2. Huizhou Villages Spatial ‘Accumulation-Anchoring’ Representation

Chronological descriptions based on cultural ecology are not the focus of village analysis. The interpretation of villages and their associated human phenomena is the purpose of historical research. Villages are dynamic and organic entities, and their physical dimensions represent a true synthesis of a society’s historical development. Therefore, studying the physical dimensions and spaces of villages, which represent the lifestyle, production techniques, and cultural core of the villages, can lead to clearer results in historical analysis from an event perspective and accumulate empirical experience. Based on the stages of embryonic form, germination, development, maturity, and decline in the lifecycle of traditional Huizhou villages and the theory of historical landscape accumulation, this study summarized the evolutionary characteristics of the cultural core, production methods, village patterns, etc. It further identified the dynamic evolution laws of the physical dimensions of traditional Huizhou villages and analyzed and ‘decoded’ the overlapping regional environments with different historical orders and structures.

##### 4.2.1. Patterns of Spatial Formation

###### (1) Patterns of Accumulation-Anchoring and Differential Representation

Villages and towns form self-organizing systems, and as the elements of production and life continuously update and optimize, the external space of the village and town

system changes due to the functional changes in the village during socio-economic and cultural transformations. The analysis of the spatial formation patterns of Huizhou villages and towns in this study is based on the lifecycle patterns (initial, development, mature, and decline) and focuses on the spatial mechanisms during these periods. By summarizing the evolution characteristics of Huizhou villages and towns, including functional structure, morphology of anchoring points, and type differentiations, at various stages, characteristics of different phases in the spatial formation process of Huizhou villages are identified (see Table A2).

As the cultural traits evolve, there is differentiation in village spaces. Some villages experience centralization of power, giving rise to economic centers or clan organization centers. The core culture of the village undergoes changes, leading to a transformation in the village type. Villages organically disperse, and large production units differentiate into several smaller units. Mature phase: integration and system. The functional and spatial structures stabilize, highlighting dominant functions and landscape features. Functional units are juxtaposed, and the cultural core and spatial structure become homogeneous. Various driving forces interact, presenting a combined form of spatial elements, with significant correlations. The driving forces remain stable, and there is a noticeable correlation and orderliness in spatial elements. Decline phase: dissolution and hollowing. With declining dynamics, functional units disintegrate, leading to spatial alienation. The core values of villages experience a cliff-like decline. Functional carriers collapse, and spatial order disintegrates.

(2) Analysis of the Evolutionary Process of Village and Town Spatial Landscape Nodes

1) Village Site Selection: Riverside on Both Sides → River Valley Basin → Mountain Valley Basin → Oasis in Front of the Mountain

For the convenient and efficient use of land and water resources, timely and appropriate site selection and layout have been crucial for the specific historical development, expansion, and prosperity of Huizhou villages and towns. The varying functions and spatial differences of villages and towns at different stages can be observed as follows:

① In the initial stage of villages and towns, the focus of site selection was in the Xiu Ning and She County basins, where the Xin'an River and Lian River flow through, and the Yi County basin, where the Xin'an River and Heng River flow through. At this time, the predominant economic form was small-scale agricultural production. ② In the development stage of villages and towns, due to the insufficient level of productivity, site selection continued to prioritize water resources for agricultural and domestic use. Settlement sites expanded to the river valley basins of tributary systems. ③ In the peak period of villages and towns, with a significant increase in agricultural productivity and mature irrigation technology, settlement sites expanded to mountain valley basins. ④ In the decline phase of villages and towns, there were no major breakthroughs in site selection. The evolution of village and town site selection reflects the adaptability transformation of the production mode, further driving the multifaceted development of Huizhou villages and towns.

2) Village Morphology: Concentric Circular → Concentric Belt → Dispersed Irregular Combination

Most Huizhou villages and towns have irregular geometric shapes, and their morphological patterns vary during different periods due to different functions. However, a distinct "function-driven orientation" in the evolutionary process of village and town morphology can still be identified. From the representation of historical landscape features:

① Villages and towns with a relatively concentrated overall pattern, whether circular or belt-shaped, have a more singular and prominent central landmark for traffic organization. The internal functional arrangement of the village and town is clear, and territorial expressions are distinct. ② Villages and towns with a looser overall pattern have more complex and comprehensive internal functions. During the evolution, concentrated forms and single-function villages and towns gradually integrate other functions, such as a single clan settlement gradually incorporating commercial trade or hydraulic agriculture, further developing into a dual or mixed and diverse settlement pattern.

### 3) Typical Landmarks: Physical Space → Dual-core Coexistence in Physical Space → Virtual-Physical Multiple Equilibrium and Coexistence

In the early stages and initial development period of settlements, although different villages and towns had different core elements in their generation and evolution, most settlements would develop around a certain core element (traffic, land, ancestral hall, etc.). As the historical development environment of villages and towns constantly changes, their typical landmark landscapes will gradually shift to dual-core or multiple composite forms. ① Before the Southern Song Dynasty, Huizhou villages and towns were mainly centered around clan settlements and small-scale agriculture, with the village and town landmarks being educational and spiritual spaces. ② From the Southern Song to the Ming Dynasty, hydraulic agriculture gradually developed, and the village and town landmark evolved into a dual-core existence of “educational and agricultural facilities”. ③ After the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Huizhou villages and towns entered a period of vigorous commercial development. Clan culture firmly controlled the spiritual connotation of the village and town, and, at the same time, folk customs and residential culture also entered a period of vigorous development. Therefore, the village and town landmarks reflected a situation of the coexistence of education, commerce, and folk customs.

#### 4.2.2. Synergetic Evolutionary Relationship between Spatial Landscape and Culture in Huizhou Villages

Spatial landscape includes both the tangible material forms and the intangible functional structures. From a dynamic development perspective, the landscape of villages and towns gradually takes shape in response to the development of their functions and social culture. Changes in the dominant cultural mechanism of villages and towns can lead to the gradual loss of meaning and practical value in the existing spatial patterns, anchoring states, and landscape expressions. This, in turn, gives rise to new stages of landscape characteristics. Village and town culture serves as the fundamental driving force for the renewal of their forms and functions. The material expression of cultural significance in village and town landscapes and the dynamic interpretation of cultural connotations through the functional structure of landscapes contribute to the synergy between culture and landscape. Throughout the entire evolutionary process, considering the factors influencing village and town development and evolution, and combining the perspective of cultural ecology, the cultural connotations of Huizhou villages and towns are systematically divided into different levels, including functional culture, production culture, residential culture, and spiritual culture. Based on the carriers of cultural accumulation, the organization of village and town spatial landscapes is classified into overall patterns and microstructural elements. Culture and landscape are interdependent and mutually influential, organically unified in the evolutionary process of Huizhou villages and towns at different developmental stages, ultimately forming the current appearance, form, and texture of Huizhou villages and towns (see Figure 9).

#### 4.2.3. Insights into Adaptive Development of Tourist Destinations Based on Layered Analysis

Firstly, there is a cognitive understanding of the layered accumulation in tourist destinations from spatial accumulation, value accumulation, and background mechanisms. Spatial accumulation should be based on a regional spatial perspective, extracting elements and patterns for maintaining stable development and adaptive changes in tourist destinations at different stages through the analysis of layered carriers. The extraction of these patterns involves a spatial series analysis from macro to micro. After clarifying the layered order of tourist destinations, value is extracted based on element correlations and functional differentiation, revealing the results of the accumulation. Combining the accumulation process, accumulation patterns, accumulation values, and accumulation results, along with the current transformation and development needs of tourist destinations and environmental conditions, adaptive control and adjustments are conducted (see Figure 10).

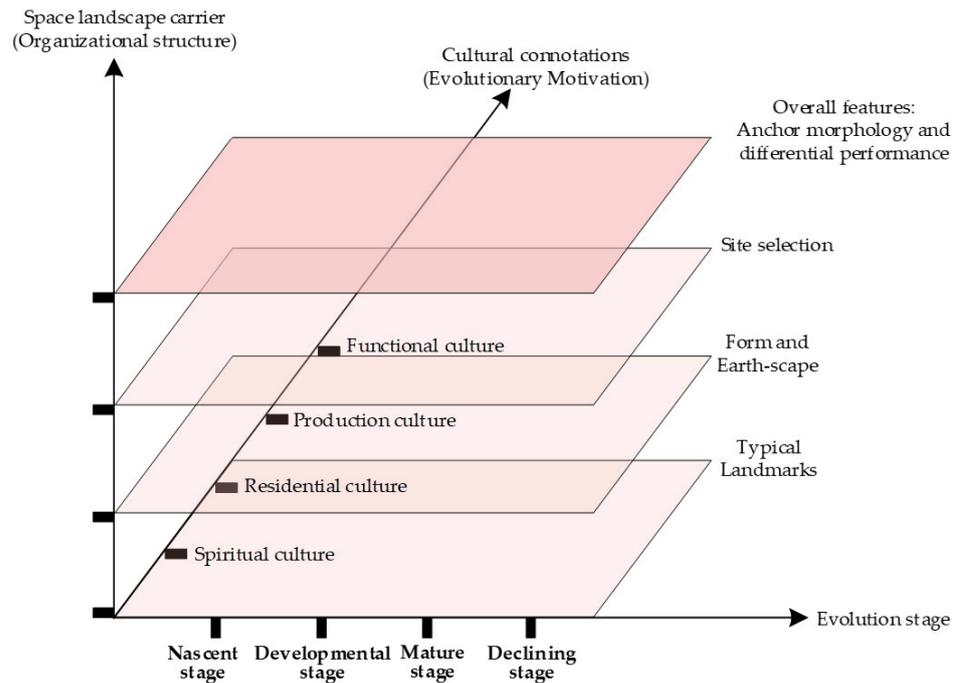


Figure 9. Relationship between culture and spatial landscape in the formation process of Huizhou villages.

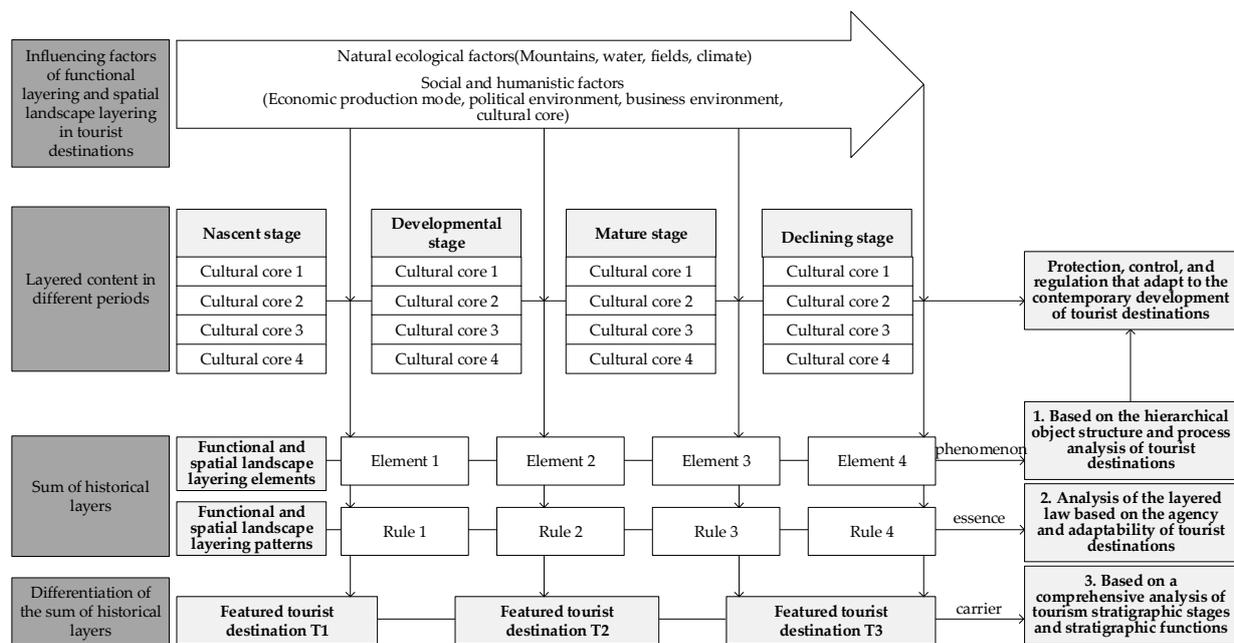


Figure 10. Layered analysis process and adaptive development of tourist destinations.

### 5. Discussions and Limitations

Due to limitations in the empirical case and constraints on the length of the paper, there are still some issues that need further consideration.

(1) The scope and scale of the selected case study area need to be expanded. The Huizhou villages and towns are prone to forming clustered features in geographical patterns, and distinctive villages and towns between different regions exhibit differences in types and spatial patterns, each having its unique development path. Due to the impact of the pandemic and limitations on research possibilities, this study focused on key villages and towns in the Huizhou region without extending to the broader base villages and towns in the larger Huizhou area. The selected typical villages and towns in this study have a

rich cultural heritage, good economic development, and a mature agricultural production pattern. Their topography covers a complex terrain from hills to basins and then to mountainous areas, and functionally, they encompass diverse types of village and town development. They serve as a microcosm of rural tourist destinations in the Huizhou region. If the research could be expanded to cover a larger area, its practical guiding significance would be more prominent. Additionally, when analyzing the spatial landscape patterns of villages and towns, this study primarily focused on individual villages and towns. In the next step, a more scientific understanding of spatial representation patterns could be formed from a systemic perspective.

(2) The mechanisms behind the formation of tourist destination personalities need to be expanded. The analysis of the mechanisms in this study mainly focuses on the current state scale of villages and towns, primarily considering fixed resources such as regional culture, natural geography, and historical context as driving forces. It does not delve into the new driving forces and limiting factors faced by distinctive villages and towns in their future development and protection processes, such as industrial transformation, protection and renewal, and landscape tourism. There are questions about the grasp of the development trends of tourist destinations. Building upon the existing models of tourist destination mechanisms, future research should adopt a future development perspective, expand the system of tourist destination driving forces, thoroughly investigate the relationship between fixed and non-fixed driving factors and model parameters, and accurately identify the driving forces behind the development of specific regional tourist destinations from a comprehensive perspective.

(3) Insights from planning and the correlation between the formation of tourist destination personalities and spatial representation need further development. Although the planning method proposed in this study intervenes and guides based on the historical evolution and spatial structure characteristics of tourist destinations, with the continuous advancement of tourism development as a widespread model for rural revitalization, future rural tourist destination planning needs to be based on historical context. It should establish a long-term mechanism for urban–rural integration development that involves resource sharing, industrial complementarity, factor mobility, and landscape connectivity.

## 6. Practical Inspiration, Conclusions, and Possible Contributions

### 6.1. *Enhancing Traditional Huizhou Village Tourism Planning and Design Method Based on Functional Structure Base*

Traditional Huizhou villages are the product of symbiotic interactions between land–land, people–people, and people–land interactions, constituting a composite of subjects and objects. These three interaction modes have different types, selected based on resource endowment and the pursuit of interests. Therefore, traditional Huizhou villages represent a social structure shaped through the subjective influence of objective and subjective interactions, demonstrating a regionally distinctive functional orientation and pursuit of benefits. Moreover, they shape the main direction of future development for Huizhou villages. From a holistic perspective of protection, the functional structure base serves as the soil for the sustainable development of tourism in traditional Huizhou villages. Therefore, achieving the transformation and updating of tourism development methods based on the enhancement of the village’s functional structure base is a feasible path for Huizhou village tourism to respond to the driving force of new productivity. Based on the stratified excavation to identify dominant functional differences, Huizhou villages can be divided into three categories: agriculture-dominated, transportation and commerce-dominated, and life and education-dominated (Figure 11).

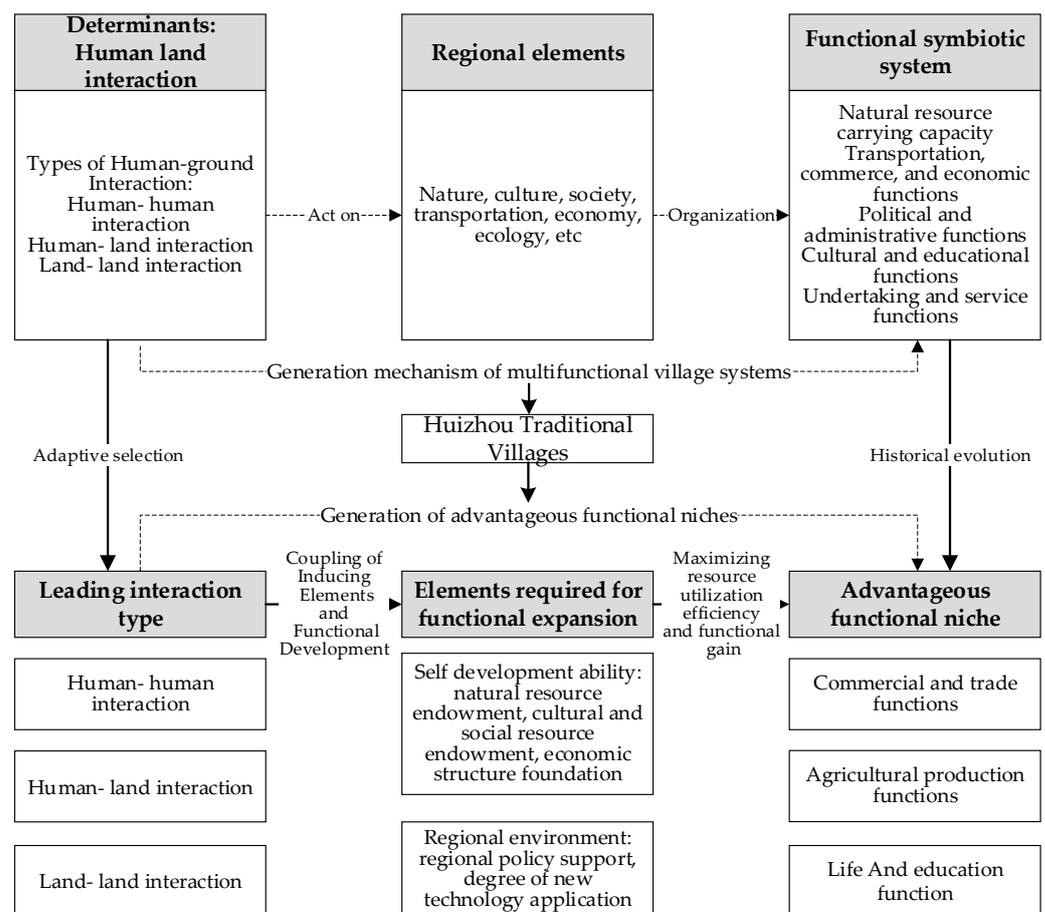
The specific tourism planning and design methods are as follows:

(1) Tourism activities in agricultural villages should maximize the realization of the region’s ecological security function. From the perspective of the spatial distribution pattern and characteristics of agricultural production activities in this type of characteristic village, decentralization and uniformity are the basic characteristics of the spatial distribution of

agricultural production-dominant village clusters. In the planning process, first, based on the ecological resources such as mountains, rivers, forests, and fields within the village cluster, an interconnected and linked network ecological spatial structure is constructed using ‘patches, corridors, matrices’ as the analysis framework. The second step is to delineate ecological functional zones, ecological sensitive zones, and ecological fragile zones for ecological protection. The third step is to ensure the interface division between tourism living space and agricultural production space. The fourth step is to construct ecological tourism connecting corridors between villages.

(2) The spatial structure of transportation and commerce villages exhibits obvious industrial zoning characteristics and strong flexibility. In the process of tourism development, spatial location advantages and existing industrial pattern characteristics should be fully utilized to promote the construction of tourism industry facilities and integrate surrounding villages into a networked layout structure. By updating spatial functions, strengthening basic facilities, and industrial structure configuration, the tourism service function of villages is enhanced.

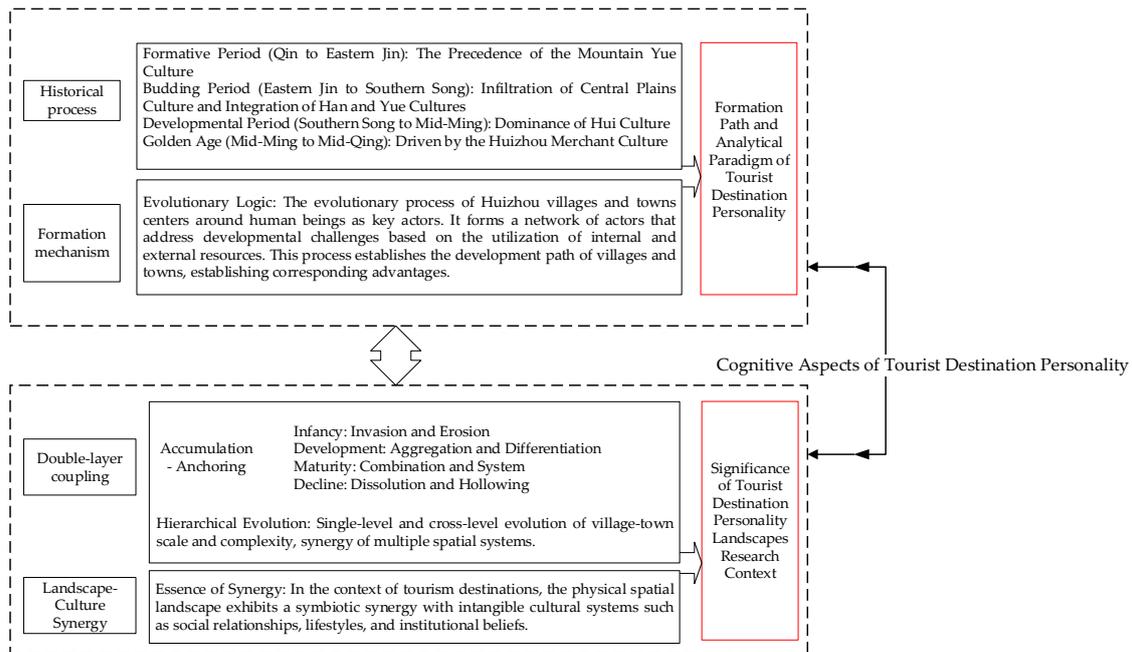
(3) The spatial characteristics of life and education villages include decentralization and uniformity. This type of village has a relatively strong independence and is less influenced by regional heterogeneity. In tourism planning, functional zoning should be carried out to maintain the original landscape environment and characteristic features of the village. Achieve flexible connections between original micro-node landscapes, mid-range landscape elements, and peripheral macro-landscape coordination areas, and protect the continuity and integrity of village landscapes in tourism development.



**Figure 11.** The mechanism of generating ecological niche of dominant functions in Huizhou traditional villages.

## 6.2. Conclusions

This study focuses on Huizhou villages and towns as empirical objects, utilizing qualitative research methods. Based on the perspective of the organic symbiotic system between humans and the environment in tourist destinations, this research explores the paths and perceptual characteristics of the formation of tourist destination personalities from the dimensions of historical evolution and spatial landscape representation. A research framework for the personality of tourist destinations is formed based on the cognitive understanding of the spirit of place and the exploration of inherent patterns. The main conclusions are as follows (see Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** Main research content and conclusions of this study.

(1) The evolutionary process of tourist destinations is essentially a mapping of the cultural core onto the relationship between humans and the environment. By analogizing Huizhou villages and towns to organic organisms and studying them in the context of cultural adaptive evolution, this study constructs a coherent understanding of the development of Huizhou village and town culture from the perspectives of cultural dissemination and evolution, as well as cultural exchange and sublimation. The “cultural core simulation evolution” belongs to a long-term perspective, which highlights the key roles played by certain constitutive elements in the evolutionary process, determining the cultural structure, landscape pattern, and stable form of villages and towns. These elements leave imprints at each stage of village and town development, defining the unique personality DNA image of Huizhou villages and towns.

(2) The spatial representation of tourist destinations is the feedback, response, and adaptation result of the material carriers of tourist destinations to the evolutionary process. Based on the theory of historical landscape accumulation, this study summarizes the evolutionary characteristics of cultural cores, production methods, and village and town patterns, and analyzes and “decodes” the overlapping regional environments with different historical orders and structures. Villages and towns are dynamic and evolving organic entities, and their physical scale forms represent a true synthesis of the historical development of a society. Studying village and town physical scales and spaces that represent the way of life, production technology, and cultural core of villages and towns can yield clear results in understanding the personality of tourist destinations from an event perspective and accumulating experiences in historical analysis methods.

(3) Drawing on the holistic and dynamic concept of accumulation, based on the sorting of the tourist destination evolutionary process and the analysis of spatial landscapes, this study proposes adaptive development strategies with a focus on the cognitive understanding of tourist destination accumulation and holistic protection.

### 6.3. *The Possible Theoretical Contributions of This Study*

(1) Provide an explanatory framework for the formation process of tourist destinations' personalities.

This study proposes that the personality of tourist destinations is an organic entity within a region driven by a cultural core. The purpose is to acquire advantageous functions and construct development directions. It is characterized by a series of spatial structures and anchoring points with temporal accumulation, and it is always in a dynamic and changing process of regional organization, integration, and collaboration. The generation environment of tourist destinations determines their regional characteristics, that is, personality. Therefore, "personality" constitutes a perspective for studying tourist destinations and does not necessarily imply that tourist destinations have significantly unique inherent features. The interpretation of the formation of tourist destination personalities based on historical evolution is not about perpetuating historical significance but rather about constructing an explanatory knowledge framework for the tourist destination itself. The focus of this study is on analyzing the laws of tourist destination formation and spatial landscape characteristics from the perspective of historical evolution.

(2) "Personality" constitutes a perspective for studying Huizhou villages, and analyzing universal patterns from a characteristic perspective is the logic of this paper.

The dynamics are extracted from the cultural core during the evolutionary process, value assessment is based on the advantageous functions generated during the evolutionary process, and the dissemination of meaning is analyzed through the construction of landscape patterns and the efficiency pattern of resource allocation. Spatial representation of tourist destinations involves a four-dimensional knowledge system of "historical evolution—dynamic analysis—value judgment—meaning dissemination". Traditional Huizhou villages form regional personalities through phased evolution, making "personality" a perspective in the study of Huizhou village tourism.

(3) The evolutionary process of traditional Huizhou villages essentially reflects the mapping of cultural cores onto the relationship between people and land.

Culture is the phenomenon and behavioral pattern through which individuals handle their multiple realities with the objective world. It is a product of the interaction and influence between people and their environment. This paper studies villages and towns from the perspective of cultural ecology, which allows us to observe the interaction process between "people" and "land" from a mechanistic standpoint. Based on field surveys and literature reviews, this paper interprets the organic cultural aspects of Huizhou villages through the lens of cultural ecology. By examining the evolution of Huizhou village's "cultural core" and its correlation with cultural adaptation, it argues that the production methods, social organizations, village construction mechanisms, and the existence of ideological beliefs in Huizhou villages have their inevitability. It further proposes that the evolutionary process of Huizhou villages reflects the mapping of their cultural core onto the relationship between people and land.

By incorporating the relationships between "people-land", "people-people", and "land-land" into an ontological theoretical framework, this paper enriches the understanding of planning at the village level. Villages are the overall response to the spatial distribution of these three types of relationships, exhibiting complex and gradual evolutionary patterns. Through the interaction between natural geographical environments and humanistic social environments, Huizhou villages continuously enrich and accumulate during their formation, development, and inheritance. They preserve and highlight key natural and cultural features from different historical periods, forming a regional cultural landscape that integrates settled farming culture, military defense culture, lineage Confu-

cian culture, and transportation and trade culture. This regional cultural landscape can be analyzed layer by layer according to the passage of time, reflecting the interaction and changes between “people”, “land”, and “culture”.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, K.R. and J.X.; methodology, K.R.; software, J.X.; validation, K.R. and J.X.; formal analysis, K.R.; investigation, K.R.; resources, K.R.; data curation, J.X.; writing—original draft preparation, K.R.; writing—review and editing, K.R.; visualization, K.R.; supervision, J.X.; project administration, J.X.; funding acquisition, K.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Appendix A

**Table A1.** Cognitive recognition of the evolutionary trajectory of Huizhou villages.

Stage	Initial Stage	Development Stage	Mature Stage	Decline Stage
	Eastern Jin—End of Tang—Southern Song	Southern Song—Mid Ming	Mid Ming—Mid Qing	Late Qing
Universal Linear Temporal–Spatial Concept	Production activities and village construction  In the initial stage, when the Central Plains large clans first migrated to Huizhou, village sites were selected based on topography and Feng Shui, aiming to create ecologically secure spaces for production and daily life. The villages were in a relatively primitive development stage, with natural ecological elements as the main distinctive features.	During this time, villages tended to stabilize, and there was a close and organic interaction between Central Plains culture and technology with the Huizhou regional environment. Villages aimed to establish more efficient agricultural production environments. Simultaneously, there was an emphasis on creating a commercial atmosphere based on kinship relationships, and the construction of various roads connecting with the outside world began. Typical distinctive elements included water facilities, transportation infrastructure, and the beginning of settlement patterns. Villages showed signs of budding diversified development.	By the mature stage, after five or six centuries of development, villages had fully formed and demonstrated clear adaptability to the regional environment. Towns had matured water systems, commercial patterns, social organizations, settlement landscapes, and had developed into various types.	In the decline stage, due to the decline of Huizhou merchants, the return to a closed culture, and the impact of wars during the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom period, Huizhou villages experienced a rise and fall. The villages essentially saw no further development.
	Village characteristics	Settling in, the beginning of challenges, Bu Zhu Mountain Village, living together as a clan	Reading strengthens the fields, emphasizing simplicity, the culture of farming and reading, pastoral villages	Living areas becoming gatherings, inhabited areas becoming cities, resembling city walls, scattered like a chessboard

Table A1. Cont.

Stage	Initial Stage	Development Stage	Mature Stage	Decline Stage
	Eastern Jin—End of Tang—Southern Song	Southern Song—Mid Ming	Mid Ming—Mid Qing	Late Qing
Social rituals	Bloodline clans—Scholar-officials—Humanism—Breaking of aristocratic gates	New kinship groups—Commoner-based kinship system—Local elites	Increased political influence of Neo-Confucianism—three bonds and five constants—Confucian ethics	Rituals continue to be reinforced until the Republic era

Non-linear Temporal-Spatial Concept of Social Scenes

Influence of social rituals

Diagram of the composition and evolution of social rituals and their impact

Table A2. Summary of spatial change patterns in distinctive Huizhou villages.

Evolutionary Stages	Layer Accumulation Common Features	Anchor Point Morphology	Type/Stage Classification	Differential Performance
Primordial stage: invasion and ablation	The collision and fusion of the Mountain Yue culture with Central Plains culture led to a transition of villages from a state of nomadic and migratory cultivation to a settled agricultural state.	Dotted	Encroachment	Implementation of a county system in Huizhou.
			Assimilation	Reduction in nomadic activities and an increase in settled agriculture
			Homogenization	Improvement in living environments and sinicization of lifestyle customs.

Central plains city- soldier formation village

Shan-Yue Mountain and forest style villages

Central plains-Shanyue mixed village

Hui-culture village

Table A2. Cont.

Evolutionary Stages	Layer Accumulation Common Features	Anchor Point Morphology	Type/Stage Classification	Differential Performance
	Gathering and developing around the primitive core dynamics.	Dotted → planar	Resource nucleus	Settlement clusters formed near agricultural water facilities.
			Transport nucleus	Passes, docks, and market towns formed at strategic points, water transport nodes, and land transport nodes.
			Confucian nucleus	Clan settlements formed in areas where clans reside.
Developmental stage: aggregation and differentiation		Dotted → planar		
			Range differentiation	Some villages experience centralization of power, giving rise to economic centers or clan organization centers.
			Heterogeneous differentiation	The core culture of the village undergoes changes, leading to a transformation in the village type.
As the cultural traits evolve, there is differentiation in village spaces.		Dotted → planar	Parallel fission	Villages organically disperse, and large production units differentiate into several smaller units.

Table A2. Cont.

Evolutionary Stages	Layer Accumulation Common Features	Anchor Point Morphology	Type/Stage Classification	Differential Performance
Mature phase: integration and system.	The functional and spatial structures stabilize, highlighting dominant functions and landscape features.	Planar	Derived structure	Functional units are juxtaposed, and the cultural core and spatial structure become homogeneous.
			Composited structure	Various driving forces interact, presenting a combined form of spatial elements, with significant correlations.
			Organic structure	The driving forces remain stable, and there is a noticeable correlation and orderliness in spatial elements.
Decline phase: dissolution and hollowing.	With declining dynamics, functional units disintegrate, leading to spatial alienation.	Planar → Dotted	Power digestion	The core values of villages experience a cliff-like decline.
		Functional loss	Functional carriers collapse.	
		Structural alienation	Spatial order disintegrates.	

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