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Spatial Reconstruction and Cultural Practice of Linear Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Meiguan Historical Trail, Guangdong, China

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Abstract: Linear cultural heritage is a unique and emerging type of large-scale heritage primarily located in rural areas. Despite the fact that much literature has concentrated on the importance of heritage to rural revitalization and development in Western countries, linear cultural heritage production has remained largely absent from accounts of rural studies in the context of China. This article aims to address this neglect by examining the spatial reconstruction process of the Meiguan Historical Trail. Based on the theory of the production of space, this article reveals the cultural practice of local ruling elites in mobilizing linear cultural heritage to promote regional competitiveness and how ordinary people question the official space reconstruction policy. The article finds that residents are obedient to government's efforts, while tourists are suspicious of the superficial cultural restoration. The findings further deepen the understanding of linear cultural heritage production as a rural development location policy. In addition, as an important dynamic force, culture participates in the spatial production of linear cultural heritage, which enriches the cultural dimension of spatial production to a certain extent. The findings offer theoretical direction and policy recommendations for the development and sustainability of linear cultural heritage worldwide.

Keywords: linear cultural heritage; production of space; cultural practice; Meiguan Historical Trail; cultural heritage protection project

1. Introduction

As a precious treasure of human beings, linear cultural heritage (LCH) is referred to as the cultural heritage agglomeration in the linear geographical space with features of wide spatial span, prominent theme and diverse cultures, among others. With the continuous expansion of the protection concepts of the European cultural route [1,2] and the American heritage corridor [3,4], people have gradually realized the vast economic benefits of heritage, and the world has set off a boom in the protection and development of LCH [5–7]. The Camino de Santiago in Spain and Route 66 in the USA are well known, but there are many lesser-known examples in developing countries. Protecting cultural heritage is a challenge for developing countries, particularly where heritage sites are widely spread in rural areas and may not include impressive buildings and monuments.

The large-scale spatial pattern has led to many problems in the tourism development of LCH and villages that classify as linear [8]. For example, the destruction and disappearance of some heritage sites have led to the loss of the theme of LCH [5]. Moreover, the assimilation of tourist landscapes that classify as linear have cut off the historical background [9]. In addition, the tourist landscapes that classify as linear are fragmented,

which makes it challenging to form regional solid tourism competitiveness [10]. A potential solution adopted by a growing number of these countries is to link small sites of mainly local significance into a cultural heritage route and market them as a package while also improving the management and conservation of heritage assets [11]. Although much literature has focused on the centrality of heritage to rural revitalization and development, the production of LCH has remained largely absent from accounts of rural studies.

China's 5000-year-old culture has given birth to many linear cultural heritage sites, such as the Silk Road, the Grand Canal, the Great Wall, the Tea-Horse Historical Trail, the South China Historical Trail, and the Central Axis of Beijing. The South China Historical Trail is an important channel for connecting home and abroad to the Maritime Silk Road on land. It is also a critical cultural practice for the Guangdong Province to realize regional economic development. In China, the central government accelerates national economic development by giving the local government a certain degree of autonomy in developing the local economy. Spatial reconstruction is often included in the growth engine [11]. In order to enhance the region's image, large-scale restoration projects are becoming more and more common. For decades, the government has been packaging its historical landscapes or other heritage sites into heritage products to improve the region's competitiveness in the global tourism industry [11,12]. Its primary purpose is to help the region effectively realize the economic transformation from traditional to more profitable service industries. In particular, during the economic transition period, tourism is the leading force in promoting rural construction and revitalization. Many rural tourist destinations have conducted tourism development based on heritage resources [13], which has promoted changes in the rural landscape, infrastructure, and lifestyle and brought social, economic, and environmental benefits to the local area [14,15]. The exploration of the spatial reconstruction process of LCH based on cultural value is related to the sustainable revitalization and utilization of LCH and the villages that classify as linear.

This paper takes Lefebvre's spatial production theory as the fundamental analysis framework. It combines the follow-up research of Harvey and Foucault to effectively connect "culture" as the core element of spatial production theory. The case study of the Meiguan Historical Trail (Figure 1) aims to reveal that LCH is integrated into locational policies to accrue rural competitiveness and promote rural revitalization. Through this analysis, the article will shed light on how local governments in China mobilize LCH for economic growth and political control and how culture plays a role in the spatial reconstruction of LCH. Placing cultural heritage at the core of regional economic strategy, this paper understands it as the key to "regional economy and social wealth" [16].

Taking the Meiguan Historical Trail in Guangdong as an example, this paper aims to put forward new thoughts about the development of LCH. In particular, it includes the following objectives:

1. To illustrate the local government's efforts to reconstruct the LCH to promote the development of the villages that classify as linear.
2. To analyze the dynamic role of culture in this process and explain how residents and tourists react to the reconstruction project of LCH.
3. To deepen the understanding of linear cultural heritage production as a rural development location policy. Based on the above objectives, this study not only deepens theoretical research about space production and LCH reuse but also provides a reference for the sustainable development and policy making of LCH.

Figure 1. The location of Meiguan Historical Trail. Source: Google Maps.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Linear Cultural Heritage

Concepts similar to LCH include the ideas of "cultural route" and "heritage corridor". However, these three concepts originate from different social backgrounds and have strong time and place characteristics [6]. The cultural route mainly originates from European countries, and this concept is accompanied by the political and cultural demands required for developing European integration. As the world's first cultural route heritage selected for the "World Heritage List", the routes of Santiago de Compostela are regarded by the European Commission as a carrier for carrying collective memory, as well as crossing borders and language barriers, to seek cultural identity for different countries and nationalities in Europe [17]. After more than 30 years of development, related research has gradually been enriched, focusing on the classification of cultural routes, such as railways [18], canals [19], and pilgrimage routes [20], as well as tourism-related research, such as economic promotion [21], ecological protection [22], and sustainable development [23,24].

The heritage corridor is rooted in the vast natural environment of the United States. It has neither political demands for "identity" at the national or international level nor the meaning of "national symbol". It manifests itself as "a linear landscape with a collection of special cultural resources" [25]. The heritage corridor emphasizes the overall understanding of the historical and cultural value of the corridor, uses heritage to achieve economic revival, and solves problems, such as landscape similarities, the disappearance of community identity, and economic recession [6]. This shows that the core goal of the heritage corridor is to help the economic development of the areas that classify as linear through heritage protection. This approach's spillover effect beautifies the natural environment, enriches the cultural landscape, and forms a community identity. By protecting cultural elements along the heritage corridor, the linear space, not originally known as "heritage", has become increasingly cultural. Overall, compared with the cultural route, the heritage corridor has more grassroots characteristics. It is used as a strategy or planning method for local development rather than starting from heritage protection, such as cultural routes, as an objective type of heritage.

Judging from the research, the cultural route and heritage corridor are important theoretical references for the study of LCH in China. Due to the spatial distribution and the quantitative advantages of heritage types, most scholars believe that LCH belongs to cultural heritage agglomeration [10,25]. The morphological characteristic of LCH is another crucial point emphasized, and it is always expressed in terms of "belt", "edge", "strip", and "corridor" [6]. In terms of vocabulary composition, LCH is a cross-cutting concept composed of three words: "linear" refers to the extension of space; "culture" is its essential attribute; "heritage" corresponds to the value identity of modern society. It suggests that LCH is a vital link formed for the specific purpose of humanity. It connects some originally unrelated towns or villages to form a chain-like state of cultural heritage [25]. The connotation of LCH can be explained by subject, completeness, and authenticity. The cultural background of the linear space reflects the subject [6,26,27], while the geographical characteristic reflects completeness [22,28] and authenticity is the fundamental attribute of cultural heritage [29,30].

2.2. Space Production and Cultural Practice

Following Marx's idea of "spatial criticism", Lefebvre's theory of spatial production set off a research boom in "spatial transformation" [31]. Space production refers to the process by which space is produced, constructed, and reshaped under various political, economic, and social forces. In the process, space broke through the rigid constraints of the physical form, extended from materialized entities to the spiritual and social realms, and gradually spread to the entire social structure. Space became a mapping of social relations and social practices [32,33]. Since the 1990s, the theory of spatial production has become an essential perspective for explaining China's contradictory relationship between people and land and the binary structure of urban and rural areas. It is worth noting that the "visible hand" of the government has a significant position in China's socioeconomic development. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine the social relations in the process of spatial production from a liberal perspective and outside the framework of the market economy [34].

Harvey used and disseminated Lefebvre's view earlier. He believed that spatial organization and structure are the needs and products of production [35]. He constructed the "triple cycle of capital" model, arguing that the three elements of spatial production theory are capital, class, and superstructure [36]. In practice, capital and class always appear together. However, in the context of Chinese society, it is necessary to focus on the role of political factors in space production. In particular, in many practices, such as rural reconstruction, heritage restoration, and utilization, relevant legal systems and planning skills must give legitimacy to certain types of space production. In addition, the production of a series of pieces of "knowledge", such as expert discourse and public opinion, also affects the direction and mode of spatial production [37,38]. That is, the state and representation work together.

In addition, Foucault believes that power is the prerequisite and condition for space to be produced, and space is a necessary tool for power operation [39]. His analysis of power relations provides a new perspective and method for spatial production. Unlike Harvey, Foucault emphasizes micro-scale practice and the importance of power. On the one hand, the ways of granting power are rich and diverse, including capital and knowledge; on the other hand, the different types of power possessed by different subjects are also very different, which echoes the problem that "class" is difficult to define by a single standard. Therefore, this paper replaces "class" with "power subject" and tries constructing a theoretical framework of spatial production with capital, power subject, and superstructure as the core.

Since the 1990s, culture has received increasing attention as an important driving force for promoting rural development. In the process of cultural-oriented rural revitalization, economic and political purposes are often hidden but permeate the process of cultural heritage brand construction with cultural elements as the carrier [40]. In the extension of

the space field, the spatial production caused by tourism has gradually received attention. Moreover, attention as a representative method outlines a new research paradigm for deconstructing the social and natural space [41], reflecting the design and shaping process of various production methods and social elements of the destination in the tourist space. It more intuitively shows the concept and pattern of space production.

In summary, the theory of spatial production shows the characteristics of multiple intertwining perspectives in the field of discipline and research, and the research direction provides a theoretical reference for explaining the mechanism of the rebirth of heritage. The theory of space production overemphasizes the dominant role of capital and power in space production and, to a certain extent, ignores the critical role played by cultural factors in it [42]. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine how to embed cultural factors in spatial production rather than limiting it to a means or tool. Multiple forces will regulate cultural forms, but culture will also dynamically shape people's identity and imagination through various forms of representation [43]. This research uses the course of time as the clue and embeds culture around it based on the spatial production analysis framework of capital, power subject, and superstructure; explores the spatial production mode and mechanism of LCH in the process of its restoration and utilization; and further extends and expands the theory of spatial production.

3. Research Context and Methodology

3.1. Description of the Study Area

As an important part of the South China Historical Trail, Meiguan Ancient Road is located in Nanxiong, Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. It originated in the Tang Dynasty and spatially starts at Zhuji Ancient Lane in the south and ends at Meiguan Guanlou in the north. With a length of 18km, it passes through Shitang Village, Lingtan Village, Zhongzhan Village, Meiling Village, and other villages. As the only land passage in the Jingguang Historical Trail, the Meiguan Historical Trail is also known as the landmark of the ancient Silk Road on land and has played an essential role in trade and cultural exchanges. After various periods of repair and maintenance, Meiguan Historical Trail is full of plum blossoms, and the natural ecological landscape is of outstanding value. However, since 1949, the highway connecting Dayu and Nanxiong opened to traffic, and the Meiguan Historical Trail was gradually replaced by the Xiongyu Highway, experiencing silence for nearly 40 years.

In 2004, the Nanxiong Government issued the "Nanxiong Tourism Development Master Plan", which involved the tourism plan for Meiguan Historical Trail. However, the ancient villages and historical sites that classify as linear were scattered around, which made it difficult to activate and use. After the activation and utilization project of the South China Historical Trail covering 1320 villages within 5 km that classify as linear, the Meiguan Historical Trail received financial support from the provincial government in 2016. With the cooperation of the government and the Guangdong Volunteer Association of Planners, Architects, and Engineers (professional and technical personnel represented by planners, architects, and engineers, referred to as the "Third Division Professional Volunteer Association"), the restoration and utilization of the Meiguan Historical Trail was fully launched. Meiguan Historical Trail has gradually transformed from its original residential space to a cultural consumption space integrating leisure tourism and sports. Tourism revenue has also multiplied from CNY 6.46 million in 2016 to more than CNY 200 million in 2018, and tourism has developed rapidly.

3.2. Research Design and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders were mainly applied to collect data. From September 2019 to June 2021, the authors went to Meiguan Historical Trail six times to conduct fieldwork for 35 days. These interviews with residents were mainly carried out after the authors lived in their guesthouses or consumed at their restaurants and established interpersonal relationships with those people, ensuring sufficient inter-

view time and depth. Access relied on the introduction via local government, directly approaching villagers, and snowball sampling processes. The purpose is to reveal various actors' agency in the spatial reconstruction process and their perception of LCH. In total, we conducted 46 interviews in Mandarin with government officials, residents, and tourists. The in-depth interviews lasted from 30 min to one hour. Some respondents were interviewed twice or thrice for clarification. They were taped with permission and subsequently transcribed. All names are fictitious to ensure anonymity. Additionally, the interviewees are initially coded according to the coding rules of "interviewee identity - interviewee order" (Table 1). Among the main types of interviewees, R represents local villagers, G represents government administrators, V represents volunteers of the "Three Teachers Association", and T represents tourists. The last number is the order in which people of the same identity are interviewed. This paper used 46 interview samples from the field survey database, and the interview data were transcribed into more than 98,000 words in Chinese.

Table 1. List of interviewees.

Number	Gender	Age	Identity	Number	Gender	Age	Identity
R1	M	45	Resident, Meiling Village	G7	M	42	Village Committee, Lingtan Village
R2	M	84	Resident, Meiling Village	G8	M	46	Management Committee of the Scenic Area, Nanxiong
R3	M	50	Resident, Meiling Village	G9	F	37	Management Committee of the Scenic Area, Nanxiong
R4	F	47	Resident, Lingtan Village	V1	F	24	Volunteer, Guangzhou
R5	F	52	Resident, Lingtan Village	V2	F	46	Volunteer, Guangzhou
R6	M	41	Resident, Lingtan Village	V3	M	22	Volunteer, Guangzhou
R7	F	49	Resident, Lingtan Village	V4	F	39	Volunteer, Nanxiong
R8	M	61	Resident, Lidong Village	V5	M	52	Volunteer, Nanxiong
R9	F	39	Resident, Lidong Village	V6	M	34	Volunteer, Guangzhou
R10	M	46	Resident, Lidong Village	T1	F	41	Tourist, Shaoguan
R11	M	49	Resident, Lingtan Village	T2	F	32	Tourist, Shenzhen
R12	F	46	Resident, Zhongzhan Village	T3	M	45	Tourist, Shenzhen
R13	M	50	Resident, Zhongzhan Village	T4	M	40	Tourist, Guangzhou
R14	M	49	Resident, Zhuji Village	T5	M	38	Tourist, Dongguan
R15	F	62	Resident, Jiaowan Village	T6	F	41	Tourist, Huizhou
R16	M	57	Resident, Congbei Village	T7	F	38	Tourist, Huizhou
R17	F	42	Resident, Congbei Village	T8	M	35	Tourist, Guangzhou
G1	M	40	Government staff, Tourism Sector	T9	M	54	Tourist, Shenzhen
G2	M	38	Village Committee, Meiling Village	T10	F	47	Tourist, Foshan
G3	F	42	Village Committee, Lingtan Village	T11	F	53	Tourist, Jiangxi
G4	M	29	Cadres Staying at Villages, Lingtan Village	T12	F	40	Tourist, Jiangxi
G5	M	64	Government staff, Tourism Sector (retired)	T13	M	25	Tourist, Shaoguan
G6	F	37	Village Committee, Lidong Village	T14	F	48	Tourist, Shaoguan

The analysis reveals the cultural experience and perception of various actors' production of the Meiguan Historical Trail space. It summarizes the various representations of culture in restoring and utilizing the Meiguan Historical Trail and the cultural practice behavior of each subject in the space. To ensure the comparability and scientific nature of research data, during the data collection process, researchers collected and analyzed literature, Nanxiong County records, policy texts, planning texts, and news reports related to the restoration and utilization of the Meiguan Historical Trail. Regarding the use of interview data in this article, one point deserves elaboration. Considering the need to summarize the changes to the Meiguan Historical Trail and the villages along it, the presentation of the interview results is predominantly not a format of direct quotes; more often, they are organically integrated into the narrative and analysis of the findings. This fits with Russell Hitchings and Alan Latham's conclusion that interviews are a major qualitative method of human geography, wherein indirect quotes are also one of the conventions [44].

4. The Cultural Value of LCH in the Government Planning Plans

4.1. Omission of Cultural Value

From the historical development, the excavation of the Meiguan Historical Trail is inextricably linked to the political and economic development of the Lingnan region. Since the opening of the Grand Canal in the Sui Dynasty, material exchanges between the north and the south have significantly changed in Chinese history. In addition, the economic and cultural exchanges became more frequent, especially in Guangzhou, a trading port with closer exchanges with the interior, making it necessary to open a significant transportation route connecting the south and the north in the Lingnan region. Since the Tang Dynasty (716 AD), the Meiguan Historical Trail, as a medium for trade, military, and cultural exchanges, has experienced the prosperous stage in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the transition from prosperity to decline at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and the transformation of cultural and leisure functions in the modern period. Since the silence for more than 40 years, Meiguan Historical Trail has been protected from 1989 to 2010, but the protection planning of LCH is still at a relatively macro level. It has not explicitly covered specific cultural relics and monuments at all levels of the historical trail. The plans show that the local government did not realize the overall value of the Meiguan Historical Trail and the villages and cultural resources along it. However, they equated it with a common monolithic cultural heritage for tourism. Residents' recognition of local culture and sense of belonging is not strong.

We also know that cultural heritage needs to be repaired and protected, but the government lacks funds and does not pay special attention to it. The resources are all scattered, one here and one there. The value of a single point is not high, and tourism cannot be developed after it is repaired. It is not easy to apply for special funds. So, we kept it there and did not advance much. At most, it is the ones that are the focus of protection, the ones that are of higher value, and the others who are powerless. (G1)

The old houses in the past were useless and dilapidated. Other people have made money outside, and they have all built a new house, which is big, beautiful, and comfortable. (R5)

The protective actions before 2015 show that the fragmented resources of the Meiguan Historical Trail have weakened the local government's judgment on its cultural value. During this period, the cultural value of the Meiguan Historical Trail was limited to the Nanxiong Government level. It did not involve the cultural value of the South China Historical Trail at the Guangdong level. The ruins of villages and historical buildings that classify as linear have not been well restored and utilized. From the cognition of the local government and residents of places that classify as linear, the cultural value of the Meiguan Historical Trail is lacking, driven by the demand for modernization. Due to the temporary lack of necessary funding sources and scientific planning plans by local governments, the restoration and utilization of the Meiguan Historical Trail lack attention to the overall cultural value of LCH. The omission of cultural value caused the Meiguan Historical Trail to experience a long period of silence.

4.2. Weighting of Cultural Value

In China, economic, social, and cultural development mainly stems from guidance and support at the national level, especially in remote cultural heritage sites and poor villages [45]. As a spatial carrier of historical evolution, the South China Historical Trail shows the characteristics of the country's regional culture. It is an essential carrier for the integration and interaction of urban and rural economies [17]. Based on national strategies, such as rural revitalization and coordinated regional development, the restoration of the South China Historical Trail has carried new tasks and has become a political practice symbol for implementing these national strategies. Under the rendering of developmental doctrine words, such as "cultural heritage protection", "greenway construction", and "rural revitalization", the value condensed in the body of the Meiguan Historical Trail was separated and transformed. The modern function underwent a massive transformation through implementing policies at the grassroots level and investment attraction. The

Meiguan Historical Trail has gradually shown a way of rural revitalization, with the vital meaning of connecting the remains of old stations that classify as linear, historical villages and towns, cultural relics and monuments, and natural landscape resources to meet the needs of the public in modern life [11]. Figures 2 and 3 show the changes to the Meiguan Historical Trail.

Figure 2. Meiguan Historical Trail before the project. Source: the authors.

Figure 3. Meiguan Historical Trail after the project. Source: the authors.

The South China Historical Trail revitalization was carried out after comprehensive research and demonstration by experts and the government. The South China Historical Trail has essential value and significance for constructing a solid cultural province in Guangdong. Moreover, there are many cultural heritage resources scattered around the linear. A single point may be of little value, but it differs from stringing these points together with a unified theme. There are also many poor villages along the South China Historical Trail. Meiguan Historical Trail is not an exception. It is widely present in Guangdong Province. Guangdong's economy is uneven, with the wealthiest cities and poorest villages. Therefore, all revitalization and utilization are promoted based on the cultural heritage and cultural value of the South China Historical Trail. In 2016, the Government of Guangdong proposed to repair the South China Historical Trail, and the province's efforts were used to promote this matter. (V2)

The original function of the Meiguan Historical Trail in the linear space is as a land medium for north–south communication. The South China Historical Trail now shows the characteristics of the country's regional culture and is an essential carrier for the integration and interaction of urban and rural economies. The proposal for the revitalization and utilization project of the South China Historical Trail redistributes and weights the cultural value:

1. Cultural and ecological restoration transformed the historical trail and the village landscape along it into the initial linear landscape value, integrating it into the linear space of the entire province.

2. The restoration and utilization project of the South China Historical Trail strips the value of the Meiguan Historical Trail from a single resource. It is integrated into the entire South China Historical Trail. It is weighted and overlaid, and the value of the Meiguan Historical Trail is best presented in the form of cultural reproduction.

3. Part of the value of the historical trail was transferred to the community and tourists. Residents and tourists sensed the cultural value in their experience and practice and even felt they were the heritage owners [46].

After the start of the South China Historical Trail project, municipal governments at all levels have corresponding tasks to complete. There is exceptional funding support from provincial finance every year. The province has issued many standard documents, including protection and restoration guidelines, identification system design guidelines, protection and utilization master plans, and management and maintenance mechanism research. The provincial government has financial support, but there are also work requirements. The province has unified standards, and the restoration of every ancient road must be carried out following the requirements. It is not by temperament but by doing whatever you want. (G1)

As an essential demonstration section of the South China Historical Trail, the local government of the Meiguan Historical Trail, under the norms and guidance of various plans of the higher-level government, excavated cultural characteristics through various means. In addition to protecting cultural heritage, cultural production is realized more through activation and utilization. In the spatial reconstruction of LCH, local governments have played a vital role in the authoritative certification of cultural values [47]. Accordingly, specific spatial reconstruction activities are also embedded in the planning framework of higher-level governments for local governments [48]. The revitalization and utilization project of the South China Historical Trail represents the weighting and transfer of the cultural value of the Meiguan Historical Trail. The accompanying planning plans determine the content and standards of the spatial reconstruction and guide the practices. Figures 4 and 5 show the changes to the Lingtan Village along the Meiguan Historical Trail.

Figure 4. Lingtan Village before the project. Source: the authors.

Figure 5. Lingtan Village after the project. Source: the authors.

5. Cultural Practice in the Spatial Reconstruction of LCH

5.1. Government-Led Cultural Production

Restoring integrity is an essential practice in the spatial reconstruction of LCH. The cultural production of the Meiguan Historical Trail is not "produced out of thin air". The local government focuses on the repair and revitalization of the main body of the Meiguan Historical Trail and the village buildings that classify as linear. Based on the overall plan for the protection and utilization of the South China Historical Trail, the local government has adjusted the plan to meet the protection requirements and satisfy the market demand. Specifically, the local government has implanted the design of modern elements in the restoration of the historical trail, and its positioning has also been adjusted from the original "traffic route" to the "cultural route". In order to build the Meiguan Historical Trail into a cultural consumption space, the local government has implanted tourism, sports, festivals, and other elements based on restoration and connecting the cultural content and natural landscapes on the Meiguan Historical Trail.

The restoration of the Meiguan Historical Trail was conducted for sustainability. Our primary starting point is protection, so we restore as much as possible. Many roads of the Meiguan Historical Trail are incomplete. All of them are grass. What we see now is restored, and the materials are based on history and local stones. (V2)

Although historical materials provide an imaginary entity for the restoration of the South China Historical Trail to be copied, in the planners' view, this authenticity was constructed by them [49]. Regarding local image construction, the Meiguan Historical Trail relies on theme festivals to realize cultural representations, such as the Plum Blossom Festival, the Surname Culture Festival, and hiking activities. Local governments consciously make selective use of the culture of space and invent creatively to enrich the content and significance of culture with festival activities [50]. At the same time, the integrity at the core of the Meiguan Historical Trail culture is constantly emphasized. It is worth noting that modern cultural elements are not mechanically embedded in the spatial production of the Meiguan Historical Trail but are placed by local governments and planners. Furthermore, after being given cultural significance for consumption by tourists, the South China Historical Trail, with its surrounding villages, has also been branded with commercialized symbolic features [51].

The restored Meiguan Historical Trail is essentially embodied as a cultural product, and its commercial value lies in the tourism market. For example, a direct economic return from the Meiguan Historical Trail is tickets costing CNY 40 per person for the tourist attraction. The villages also enjoyed the dividends of tourism in the construction of living environments and income. In order to cope with the increasingly fierce competition between places, the government authorities have adopted local policies to enhance the "economic competitiveness of specific places, regions, or related scales" [11]. As a direct result, these authorities have consolidated the logic of profitability and economic growth within their political jurisdiction to create or restructure their territory, population, built environment, and competitive advantages of economic subjects [52]. Although the policy background is not the same, this theory has been confirmed in the practice of spatial reconstruction of the Meiguan Historical Trail. For example, each section of the Meiguan Historical Trail will be repaired following the unified standard of repairing the old as the old and maintaining the authenticity so that the LCH will consolidate its competitiveness in the tourism market. Therefore, this article echoes Brenner's argument [53] that local policies may try to "enhance local advantages in the division of consumption space by creating or strengthening localized infrastructure for tourism and leisure functions". In addition to being a commodity of the tourism industry, the South China Historical Trail also represents an important historical and cultural source in Guangdong.

The South China Historical Trail has witnessed the changes and development of the history and culture of Guangdong, which cannot be ignored. Without the South China Historical Trail, Guangdong's history would be inconsistent. The role of the South China Historical Trail is to

condense the culture of Guangdong. The culture of the Meiguan Historical Trail is an integral part of the South China Historical Trail and is Guangdong's historical and cultural accumulation. (G5)

For the government, restoring the Meiguan Historical Trail can protect cultural heritages and connect resources that classify as linear to enhance the competitiveness of the villages in the tourism market through the construction of significance. In addition, the South China Historical Trail represents the long-established southern Guangdong culture. It has enhanced the sense of pride and identity of Guangdong, the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area, and other places. The connection between heritage sites and national pride is a symbolic means by which the local ruling elite interprets the culture and South China Historical Trail and national core. The Meiguan Historical Trail has provided tangible evidence of the prosperous economic exchanges between the north and the south in history. Through this symbolic connection, the local ruling elite hopes to revive the cultural heritage of the Meiguan Historical Trail and add meaning so that both residents and the tourism market can accept it. For this group, Meiguan Historical Trail is such a localization project that it is a booster for rural revitalization. It aims to portray the South China Historical Trail in a positive and even eye-catching image to attract more tourists and accelerate the development of villages along the route.

5.2. Cultural Identity of Local Residents

In the process of spatial reconstruction, the ecological mechanism of traditional culture and the cultural values of local subjects all play an essential role [54]. The cultural atmosphere represents regional culture, which is of great significance to the formation of the core attractiveness of tourist destinations and the deepening of the local identity of residents [55]. In the context of rural revitalization, LCH gives full play to its cultural advantages to drive the development of villages that classify as linear. It should be pointed out that in the process of spatial reconstruction, the culture of the Meiguan Historical Trail was re-recognized and produced by residents.

In the past, Lingtan Village was called "Mud Pool Village," with dilapidated houses and mud roads. Thanks to the Meiguan Historical Trail, the government has paid attention to us. After the transformation, life slowly got better. Now we can also attract some people to travel here and make some money by selling local specialties. We will not be embarrassed to talk about Lingtan Village to others. People outside envy us. (R11)

In addition to the expression of words, the residents' cultural identity with the spatial reconstruction of the Meiguan Historical Trail is also manifested in their direct participation in cultural production through business activities. Influenced by local history and culture, residents "invariably" have evident local cultural orientations when choosing business content, such as long cigarettes, Meiling goose king, and other commodities. These characteristic products are subjectively active by residents and an essential factor in the production and expression of Meiguan Historical Trail culture. On the one hand, Nanxiong has been a place where tobacco leaves have been produced since ancient times. Today, the villagers' homemade extended versions of earthen cigarettes are sold along the Meiguan Historical Trail and in ancient houses. Lengthened cigarettes have also become one of the local characteristic commodities. At the same time, the villages along the Meiguan Historical Trail have also developed the local dish Meiling Goose King into a specialty dish. The signs of Meiling Goose King can be seen everywhere, and it has become one of the iconic foods of Nanxiong. In addition, most tourist souvenirs are peripheral products with the theme of surnames, further strengthening Zhuji Ancient Lane's surname culture. The reconstruction of space has not only brought tourists but also brought tourism income to the place. The original poor village has become a bright and beautiful countryside. Local subjects participated in the planning and design process of the revitalization and utilization project of the Meiguan Historical Trail. With the benefits of tourism development, local culture has been re-recognized and produced by the locals. Under the government-led cultural production, the residents' active recognition and practice of the spatial reconstruc-

tion of the Meiguan Historical Trail in their consciousness reflect the cultural identity and cultural production in the spatial reconstruction of linear cultural heritage.

After the Meiguan Historical Trail began to develop tourism, the environment in the village became much better. Many old houses in the past were dangerous. The new house is spacious and beautiful and much more comfortable to live in. We hope tourism will improve so that there will be more tourists and income, and the children at home will be guaranteed to go to school. (R16)

5.3. Cultural Consumption of Tourists

Of course, the restoration and utilization of the Meiguan Historical Trail are culture-oriented. However, government publicity and marketing by residents will encourage tourists to consume culture here to achieve profitability. Therefore, the perception and experience of tourists have become a necessary reference basis for the government and residents to carry out spatial reconstruction [56,57]. Although tourists do not directly interfere in the spatial reconstruction of the Meiguan Historical Trail, the identity of cultural consumers makes them a member of the subject of power and participate in the cultural construction of the Meiguan Historical Trail in the form of a familiar presence.

In order to cater to the diversified cultural consumption needs of tourists, the Meiguan Historical Trail connects the surrounding greenways and integrates the resources of traditional villages that classify as linear. Based on diversified cultural resources, such as red culture, Guangfu culture, and Hakka culture, the Meiguan Historical Trail is combined with orienteering events, resulting in the Meiguan Historical Trail showing a situation where traditional culture and modern culture are mixed [58]. The multicultural cultural landscape has led to the negative cultural experience of some tourists.

I do not get an intense atmosphere of culture. However, the government has done much, from the changes in villages and the publicity columns. However, I can't feel any cultural heritage. The cultural atmosphere of Zhuji Ancient Lane is slightly better, mainly based on ancestral hall culture and surname culture. However, it feels like nothing is directly related to Meiguan Historical Trail. (T1)

Some tourists also believe that the cultural representation of the Meiguan Historical Trail has not been fully highlighted. In recent years, scholars have continuously reflected on the tendency of "cultural commercialization" and "commercialization" in the process of globalization. They have gradually realized that local culture can use individual reflection to fight against global cultural hegemony [59]. The local government tried highlighting the local advantages and used the Meiguan Historical Trail to package and develop all the resources that classify as linear. On the contrary, it led to a negative cultural experience for some tourists. On the contrary, various representations of the local culture are more popular and favored by tourists.

It feels like this is an ordinary road. It has not been fully developed, so it is not convenient to do anything. The experiential nature is not enough, just look at it, and it has gone. I feel that the culture has not been excavated much, and the experience is not very good. (T6)

The cultural experience needs of tourists are closely related to the activation and utilization of LCH, and the original cultural elements of local society are generally considered valuable. However, constructing a more attractive LCH requires injecting more current local culture and art [60]. If LCH is only restored, the lack of connection with tourism needs in its utilization may reduce it to an empty physical space, making it challenging to obtain the cultural identity of tourists and then lose the inherent motivation for sustainable development [40].

6. Conclusions and Discussion

6.1. Academic Implications

The aim of this article has been to further the understanding of LCH production as rural local policies through a focus on the process of reconstruction and interpretation in Meiguan Historical Trail. Based on the theory of spatial production, this paper critically examines how the Guangdong provincial government incorporates linear cultural heritage

production into the regional policies formulated by the local government. At the same time, it also emphasizes the compliance of local residents to national efforts and the doubts of tourists to national efforts, further explaining the dynamics of heritage production. Along with the return process of authenticity, alienation, and the construction of heritage, the value and significance of LCH transcend themselves in the reconstruction [61,62]. From the perspective of the market logic of tourism development, the ancient bridges, fences, and other single resource units scattered in the villages along the Meiguan Historical Trail cannot achieve independent commercial value. In order to enhance local competitiveness in the tourism market, the government has made an alternative interpretation of the character of the dispersion of LCH, which represents a strong concatenation and local cultural pride. After officially recognizing this cultural value, revitalization, and utilization projects are advancing rapidly. This discovery confirms the argument of Winchester [63] that the landscape plays a leading role in the naturalization of the ideological system because "the landscape dominates in daily life and has a very tangible and visible material nature, making the things constructed by society seem to be the natural order of things". Therefore, the interpretation of cultural values in line with the ruling elite's interests means that "a process of intentional selection and connection provides historical and cultural recognition of the contemporary order" [11]. As Brenner suggested, the government authorities took action to mobilize space as productivity [53]. More specifically, LCH has been widely incorporated into China's rural political economy, and heritage products are produced through the government to "promote and encourage local development and employment growth" [35,64]. This function is similar to cultural heritage corridors [25]. Therefore, this article clarifies the critical role of linear cultural heritage production in China's rural political economy. Consistent with the recent research on the politics of heritage production in other cases, this research has shifted from the linear theorization of heritage as a means of control and exclusion to the more complex conceptualization of heritage as a dispute and negotiation of capital, memory, and identity.

Our research also contributes to expanding the analytical dimension of space production. This study further effectively links "culture" as a core element with the theory of space production and expands the cultural dimension [41]. The transformation of LCH and cultural consumption space is a contested terrain in which its production is continuously negotiated and reworked with the associated practices of dominance and resistance to transform place and space. Culture and power dominate the space production of the Meiguan Historical Trail, and the spatial practice of the current residents' re-identity has also added many grassroot elements of local culture to the Meiguan Historical Trail. However, the government's choice is not entirely undisputed. A series of cultural packaging decisions by the government caused part of the Meiguan Historical Trail to deviate from the market. The surface restoration and utilization made it difficult for some tourists to experience the local culture of LCH, and they questioned the project. The government-led practice of cultural production stems from the judgment of the overall cultural value of LCH, which is similar to the cultural route [17] and reflects the political appeal and cultural symbolism of "identity" at the local level. In addition, in the context of the spatial production of the "absolute power of discourse" of LCH, local subjects give feedback on actions that are "consistent" and that "agreed" and "conformed" with the government in terms of the relative lack of funds, discourse, and other resources. For tourists, what they care about is not cultural pride but the pleasure and depth of cultural experience. They affirm the efforts of the project but question the experience. Therefore, the spatial production of LCH produces "material manifestations of the operation of global capitalism found in specific locations" [65] and allows differences between different groups. At the same time, this paper expands the time dimension of space production and believes that the starting node of space production is not the moment when material changes occur. The concepts and plans related to space production will affect the direction and process of space reconstruction.

6.2. Managerial Implication

The enlightenment and significance of this article on practice also deserves elaboration. With the renewal of the heritage protection concept from a single site to the entire environment, people pay more and more attention to the integrity of LCH [6,27]. Therefore, balancing the relationship between comprehensive development and partial reuse has become an urgent problem, especially for large LCH [66]. The case of the Meiguan Historical Trail shows that LCH tourism is a feasible solution for the integration of culture and tourism. By deepening the understanding of this special heritage type, this study provides theoretical guidance for the existing large-scale heritage management and further policy adjustment. In addition, most of the early studies focused on LCH itself, but a few studies revealed the impact of the overall tourism utilization of LCH on residents and tourists that classify as linear. Supported by multidisciplinary theories and various methods, this study focuses on and attempts to analyze the response of the general public. As far as the global linear cultural heritage is concerned, the discipline and compliance state of "consistency" and "identification" presented by residents in the Meiguan Historical Trail case is universal. In fact, residents along the Meiguan Historical Trail show an optimistic attitude of "supporting tourism development", but they seem not to care about cultural pride, which shows the obvious difference between the local government and residents. Therefore, in the practice of global linear cultural heritage restoration and utilization, we should attach importance to the cultural identity of residents and guide residents that classify as linear to actively participate in the protection of cultural heritage and stimulate the subjectivity of residents. In the marketing and publicity of linear cultural heritage, we should pay attention to the cultural experience of tourists; strengthen the atmosphere of ancient post roads by relying on festival activities, such as Plum Blossom Festival and Surname Festival; and further promote cultural tourism consumption.

6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

The Meiguan Historical Trail case informs us about the trend of the restoration and utilization of the South China Historical Trail, which is distributed in a mesh in Guangdong with 202 roads, and covers 1320 villages within 5km that classify as linear. In order to meet the needs of cultural heritage protection and coordinated economic development, the restoration and utilization of the South China Historical Trail have shown the characteristics of political and economic functions under the guidance of culture. The spatial reconstruction of LCH reflects its connectable overall cultural value rather than the individual cultural value of a single resource [6]. It also reflects the vital role of cultural heritage production in China's rural political economy [11,25]. The project of utilization of the South China Historical Trail is not only a cultural heritage protection project but also a cultural symbol selection project. Therefore, future research can further investigate what the consequences could be of the government effects in the LCH and cultural aspects of the MHT once the surveyed residents are submissive to the government's efforts. In addition, the tourism development of the revitalization and utilization project of the South China Historical Trail still needs to be built, especially since the sense of identity representing regional cultural symbols has not been fully established in the market. Future research can use more in-depth scales, such as local identity, to further research and deepen the further discussion of tourists' response to the results of spatial reconstruction.

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