| RESEARCH ARTICLE

# An Exploration of the Time Element in the Linguistic Landscape and Reconstructing Culture: The Case of Langtou Village in China

**Jiali Zhong[1] and Huiping Wei[2]** ✉

**[12]***University International College*, Macau University of Science and Technology, *CHINA*

**Corresponding Author:** Huiping Wei, **E-mail**: hpwei@must.edu.mo

| ABSTRACT

The tourism industry has penetrated traditional Chinese villages, where the linguistic landscape reflects a dialogue between historical heritage and contemporary culture, thereby redefining the transformation of China's rural cultural ecology. The researchers gathered 475 images of the linguistic landscape through fieldwork in Langtou Village and conducted a qualitative investigation within the context of Chinese cultural history and village history. Based on Huebner's (2008) speaking model, researchers investigated the potential influence of time elements in the linguistic landscape on the cultural reconstruction of the village. We conclude that the linguistic landscape of Langtou Village encompasses seven types of time elements, which essentially observe content time, creation time, and feature time. The commonalities or differences among these elements give rise to time trajectories that influence the cultural reconstruction of Langtou Village. One is the cultural reconstruction of cherishing memory, which perpetuates historical information. Another is the cultural reconstruction of combining moments, which amalgamates contemporary culture and poses the risk of inauthenticity in historical villages. The study suggests that the distribution of time elements in linguistic landscapes exhibits hierarchy in real settings, which is related to the spatial regularity induced by the village's historical information. We believe that adopting a time-element-oriented perspective can deliver new recommendations for the linguistic landscape planning of traditional Chinese villages. This research inspires readers to comprehend the essence of the relationship between rural linguistic landscapes and cultural ecology, specifically: what is the smallest unit of interaction between historical and contemporary culture in the context of reconstruction?

| KEYWORDS

Linguistic landscape, Chinese traditional village, cultural reconstruction, time element, language ecology

## 1. Introduction

Despite the intrusion of modern culture and the reconfiguration of historical culture in traditional Chinese villages, the linguistic landscape (hereafter: LL) of these communities demonstrates a distinct preference for historical humanities. With the expansion of rural revitalization and the incorporation of cultural tourism policies in traditional Chinese villages, the time elements concealed within the LL appear to play an important role in the cultural reconstruction of rural regions.

Although developing LL research is relatively recent, LL has attracted widespread attention from scholars in the fields of sociolinguistics and eco-linguistics, as well as in the study of the relationship between language and culture (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Hult, 2003; Shohamy & Waksman, 2009; etc.). Not only does the LL encompass all texts situated and displayed in a changing public space that is being redefined, but LL also represents a complex construct situated in negotiated areas of ecology (Shohamy & Waksman, 2009, p. 329).

The LL of traditional Chinese villages contains the historical culture of China, playing a significant role in constructing the cultural ecology of these villages. As Lu, Li, & Xu (2020) state, "...traditional Chinese characters (in the LL) represent the Chinese traditional culture and show the cultural deposit and historical origin of China" (p. 8). In the late 20th century, research on the LL of rural areas was focused on the issues of language endangerment (Pietikäinen, 2011; Du Plessis, 2012), with no emphasis on the relationship between rural LLs and cultural reconstruction. In the past decade, Banda & Jimaima (2015) have demonstrated that rural LL transcends the material constraints of the landscape as well as expands the role of creating meaning. This capacity stimulates the audience's imagination (Webster, 2014), providing a possibility for exploring the impact of traditional village LL on cultural reconstruction.

This study's objective is to use fieldwork methods to investigate the influence of time elements in the LL on the cultural reconstruction of traditional Chinese villages. The researchers use Langtou Village as a case study, which may apply to other rural cultural destinations of a similar nature. This study addresses the limitations of previous research on rural LLs, which focused solely on linguistic dimensions. We seek to explore the impact of the LL on cultural ecology from the perspective of eco-linguistics. The researchers intend to combine the philosophical perspectives of interpretive research (Creswell, 2007), phenomenology (Husserl, 1913/1970), and symbolic interactionism (Patton, 2002) to address the following research questions: RQ1: What is the corresponding LL genre and purpose between different time elements in Langtou village's LL? RQ2: How do the time elements of the LL affect the cultural reconstruction of traditional villages? RQ3: What are the characteristics of LL's time elements placed in spatial observation, and what are the implications? The influence of time elements in the LL on the cultural reconstruction of traditional villages may reveal deeper aspects of the changing nature of cultural ecology, specifically the fluidity, interactivity, and catalytic effects between historical and contemporary culture within spatial contexts.

## 2. Literature review

Research on the LL of rural locations not only involves eco-linguistics (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Gorter, 2006) but also receives attention in cultural ecology (Pennycook, 2008; Aronin, 2012; Banda & Jimaima, 2015; Lu, Li, & Xu, 2020). These studies recognize the ecological properties of the LL and affirm the impact of the LL as a cultural component on natural ecology (Banda & Jimaima, 2015). They emphasize the close relationship between the material culture exhibited by the LL and the traditional and social life processes of human production (Aronin, 2012). Although these studies observe the characteristics of LL from an ecological perspective, they lack an exploration of the cultural and ecological essence of the LL projection, especially the potential significance of the time element of LL for cultural reconstruction.

On the other hand, a growing interest rose in the cultural reconstruction research of rural spaces (Sackley, 2011; Wang, Jin, and Feng, 2022; Zuo et al., 2022, among others). Zhang & Wu (2016) clarified that the locally meaningful heritage combination in Chinese villages is in a state of change and struggle in terms of protection. They suggest that villages use history to cultivate local identity and attract tourists. The process of heritage transformation is a negotiation process among stakeholders, including the state, local government, villagers, and major inheritors of cultural meanings, values, and traditions (Zhang & Wu, 2016). In addition, they point out that these heritages, whether mundane, grand, or hybrid, should be cherished and utilized to adapt to the current agenda of cultural construction in Chinese rural regions. The concept of cultural reconstruction, derived from the "Theory of Cultural Change" by Steward (1972), the founder of cultural ecology, was applied to reflect on the adaptability of rural culture and traditional production models to sustainably develop the rural culture. He further considered how the rural environment should adapt to the dynamic nature of cultural reconstruction. This places the study of the cultural reconstruction of rural places in an ecological context to observe how the historical symbols of villages interact with the contemporary environment (Barham, 1992).

Previous scholars who have researched the LL and cultural reconstruction in rural regions have essentially discussed the time element (Lou, 2009). For example, Lou (2009) regarded LL in Washington's Chinatown as a cultural text and traced its flow through multiple historical processes. He believed that the identity contradictions projected by this community were because of non-coherent historical processes and incongruous interactive places in the space. In such a cross-cultural space, the LL contains historical timelines in continuous biographies and reveals the emotional narrative characteristics of residents and local experts (Duizenberg, 2020). When discussing the historical landscape in the UK, Duizenberg (2020) asserts that the LL is a palimpsest (Blommaert, 2010). To fully understand these landscapes, not only should the physical remains of these "handwritings" be investigated, but also the social background and cultural history of the authors. A useful point that she concerns with is the relevance of understanding the "cultural landscape with authenticity as its center, which is describing the material landscape history, as well as a description of the social significance and personal thought world, grafted onto the landscape at different times" (p. 19). Additionally, Sepic, Biondic, and Delic (2005) believed that reconstructing the villages in Croatia after the war should consider the restoration and continuation of time on the spiritual level, especially in the process of reconstructing cultural heritage. Research on the cultural history of the village plays a key role (Brůha et al., 2020).

Building on previous research on LL and cultural reconstruction in rural locations, this paper will use the fieldwork method to examine the impact of the time element of LL on the cultural reconstruction of traditional villages, further explaining the potential for redefining the meaning of the time element in rural cultural ecology. In particular, we will conduct a case study on LL in a traditional village in China that manifests Lingnan culture. Based on Chinese cultural history, we will organize the historical timeline of this village to analyze in depth the social context and historical culture reflected by its LL. Furthermore, we anticipate that LL research on villages, a symbolically meaningful practice rich in historical humanities, will offer productive insights for our study of the rich dialogue between historical and contemporary cultural texts.

## 3. Methodology
### *3.1 Research site*
Langtou Village is a historic village located in Guangzhou's Huadu District, Guangdong Province, China. It was founded roughly 600 years ago, during the Song Dynasty. Huang Juzheng, Minister of Rites during the late Northern Song Dynasty, was the founding ancestor of the village (1125 AD). During the Yuan Dynasty, the seventh-generation ancestor Huang Shiming migrated south to build a village in Huadu County (1367 AD). The village has been passed down through the generations to the 27th generation as of 2016 (MTCV, 2016). Langtou Village showcases the integration of natural and cultural landscapes. The village is centered around the half-moon pond in front of the village, exhibiting a unique comb layout with Guangfu cultural characteristics. It also preserves over 388 blue-brick buildings from the Qing and Ming dynasties, including 34 ancestral halls, study rooms, academies, and 20 historic alleyways. It contains an abundance of historical details and cultural landscapes. As a village for imperial examinations, it represents the ancient Chinese examination system in miniature. The national government designated it as the second batch of traditional Chinese villages in 2013. The unbroken ancestral inheritance of Langtou Village was associated with the history of Chinese traditional culture. Despite being named a Famous Tourist Village in Guangdong Province in 2015, Langtou Village's tourism development has been slow due to insufficient funding and limited public relations efforts.

### *3.2 Fieldwork and data*
This study combined interpretive research, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism as its philosophical foundation. Interpretive research guided the researchers to assume that reality is not observable but socially constructed, acknowledging the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge (Creswell, 2007). Methodologically, this study integrated phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology is the opposite of natural science, as it does not seek to establish causal relationships behind phenomena but rather focuses on how humans describe things and understand our experiences through perception (Husserl, 1913/1970). Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, emphasizes the significance of symbols in comprehending the process of experiencing and human behavior based on presupposed interaction processes (Patton, 2002). This study adhered to Husserl's phenomenology to address the first research question, attempting to reconstruct the essence or basic meaning structure of the LL based on time elements (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11). Research question 2, centered on symbols, integrated Husserl's phenomenology and symbolic interactionism to observe the relationship between symbols and human behavior. The third research question adopted a more macroscopic perspective based on interpretive research to observe the insights brought by the cultural ecology constructing the Langtou Village.

Geographically, the Langtou Village case study included both new and old villages; all LLs along the road were easily accessible. The reason for selecting this village was that it had a high density of LLs that presented historical relics. Langtou village is a representative example of the imperial examination system culture and Guangfu cultural ecology. The researcher captured the photographs used in this study during fieldwork in Langtou Village in November 2020. Before the fieldwork, we browsed the local electronic museum website and read electronic news reports. We communicated with the villagers to determine the historical changes and ecological environment of the research site. Combining with the village guide map (see Figure 3.1), the researcher took a long walk and took photos, starting from Qingyun Bridge and ending at the Tourist Services Centre. On the day of the photo shoot, the number of photographs taken of each attraction in the village was recorded. In this article, a corpus of 475 LLs was labeled in February 2023 to answer RQ1, including (1) the time node corresponding to the LL (including historical and contemporary time), (2) the location of LL in the village, and (3) the specific language content presented. Afterwards, a detailed layout analysis of the LLs was conducted to identify typical layout samples at different time nodes. This approach can avoid overly focusing on patterned samples at a single time and deepen the analysis of RQ2. Furthermore, RQ3 was addressed by analyzing the distribution of time elements in the LL in the real environment.

*Figure 3.1. Langtou village location map (partial view)*
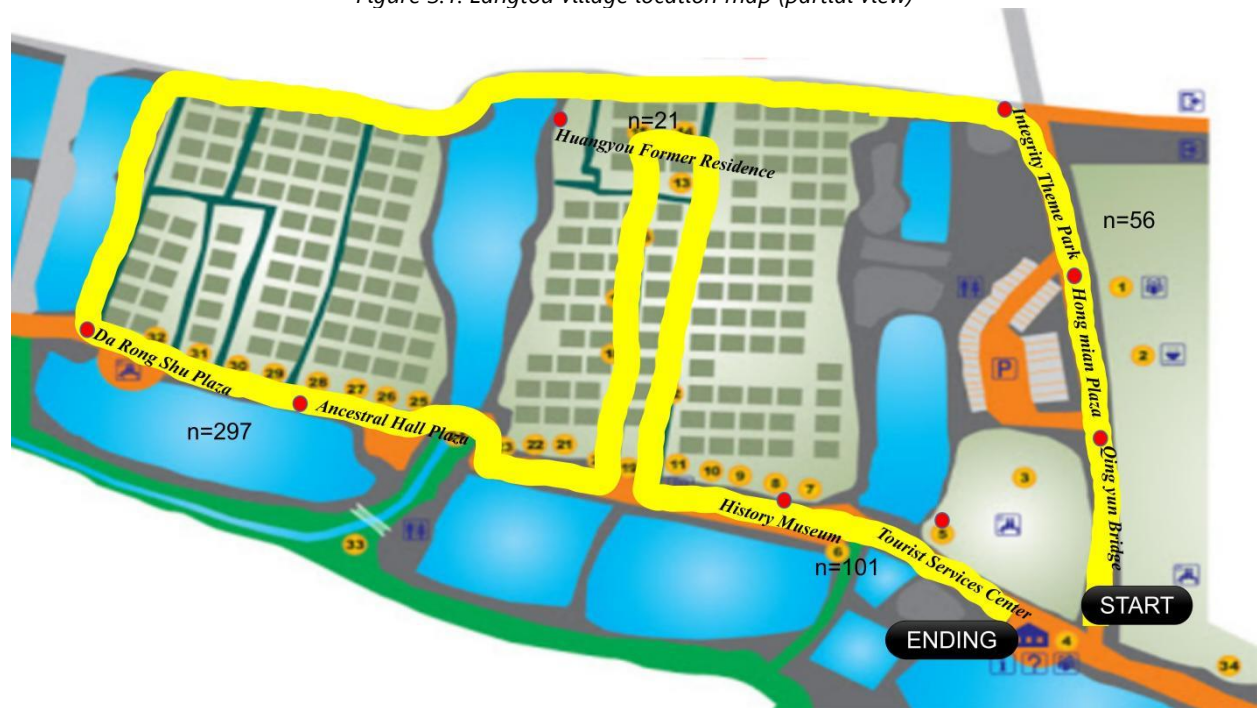


Note: LL's pictures have been marked with photo spots. Source:http://www.hdlangtou.com/tourjd.asp

In this study, we used "signs" as the unit of analysis (Reh, 2004) but only selected stationary objects for analysis (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). In addition to analyzing the content of LLs alongside Chinese cultural history and the history of Langtou Village, the researcher also considered other aspects of salience in the LL based on the speaking model (Huebner, 2008). Considering the differences in textual carriers between traditional Chinese historical and contemporary culture, we encoded the LL following this principles:1) The first-level encoding was based on Chinese cultural history (Liu Yizheng, 2015) and the history of Langtou Village. The researcher made a coding plan with three variables was developed, including the timeline of the village's ancestral succession, the timeline of Chinese cultural history in which the village's development occurred, and the corresponding socio-cultural events; 2) The second-level encoding primarily marked the LL genres corresponding to different time elements, which were combined with introducing cultural relics in Langtou Village's electronic museum to identify 31 genres of LL.

The second step of the analysis was to find an appropriate framework to explain the core issues. We selected the speaking model (Huebner, 2008) to demonstrate the interactive relationship between the characteristics of LLs and the sociocultural processes of Langtou Village. The speaking model was appropriate for this research because it could potentially answer RQ1 based on genres (G) and ends (E), solve RQ2 from the key (K), action sequences (A), and instruments (I), and answer RQ3 through setting (S), participants (P), and norms (N). Interestingly, although the speaking model tends towards qualitative analysis, it can still analyze the subtle differences in distributing LL genres and environments across different time elements from a quantitative analysis perspective. Specially, we can analyze the number of genres and their distribution of the LL in spaces. Then the quantitative results will deliver support for answering research questions and drawing more meaningful conclusions. To strengthen the argument of this study, we also referred to historical events in Chinese cultural history and the development history of the ancestral succession in Langtou Village. Specifically, considering the Chinese historical background and symbolic process of Langtou Village (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010), we will draw on Chinese cultural history research, covering the period from the end of the Song Dynasty (1125) to the Republic of China period (1912). At the same time, we will refer to the development history of the ancestral succession in Langtou Village, spanning from the first-generation ancestor Huang Juzheng (1125) to the 22nd-generation ancestor Huang Tingfu (1857) (information sourced from LL), to investigate the potential index links between the LL, history, culture, and social system of Langtou Village. We will further demonstrate the LL evolution process from the Song Dynasty to the present day in Langtou Village, attempting to identify the social significance created by the time elements of LL and the potential for culture reconstructing the traditional villages. Finally, we will offer pertinent planning recommendations for LLs in traditional villages.

## 4. Results

### *4.1 Interpretation of the language landscape in Langtou Village: Mapping of the Time Element*

According to Table 4.1, among the 475 markers in Langtou Village, the middle history time element contained 7 genres of LLs (the Ming Dynasty period, 1468–1600). The lintel (n = 17, 3.5%) and wall paintings (n = 21, 4.4%) have the highest quantity. At that time, Confucianism dominated society. The imperial examination system had reached its pinnacle. The LLs at that time recorded the achievements of the eleventh through seventeenth generations of Langtou Village in passing the imperial examination and pursuing candidates' official careers. During the Qing Dynasty or the Republic of China (1600–1949), however, the 18th generation of the village began to repair these LLs. The late history time element involved eight categories of LLs (Qing Dynasty period: 1600–1912). The Qing Dynasty's education system continued the Ming Dynasty's emphasis on education in academies. Therefore, many bookrooms appeared in the village, with flagpole clips erected in front of bookrooms to record the achievements of the 18th to 22nd generations of Langtou Village in passing the imperial examination. Additionally, a memorial gateway displayed the village's culture of loyalty and filial piety. These LLs indicate that although Langtou Village was founded in the late Song Dynasty (1125), LLs created before the 6th generation of the village (Song Dynasty to Yuan Dynasty) had already disappeared. The majority of the LLs created from the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty were repaired during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period. In general, these two genres of LLs unproduced in modern public spaces. These symbols reflect the ancient Chinese socio-cultural traditions. Only one type of LL with an early nostalgia time element occurred: the Village information board (n = 3, 0.6%), which was created by modern people to reproduce the deeds of the ancestral founder to the 6th generation during the late Song Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty. The location nameplates (n = 10, 2.1%), attraction information boards (n = 18, 3.7%), and artifact information boards (n = 14, 2.9%) have the largest numbers among the 7 genres of middle nostalgia LLs. Modern individuals designed these retro-style LLs to introduce the historical stories of certain locations and relics in the village during the Ming Dynasty. Similar to the middle nostalgia LLs, the late nostalgia LLs contain numerous ancient-style retro LLs, such as an ancient-style plaque, an ancient-style couplet, and an ancient-style fascia, which continue to convey historical information. However, some retro-style LLs excluded historical information. The nostalgia transition LLs transform some modern LLs into retro-style, such as ancient-style notices. This feature indicates that although the nostalgia time element LLs cover the historical and cultural information of the village from the late Song Dynasty (1125) to the Republic of China period (1912), these LLs with retro-style created by modern people (after 1949), except for the nostalgia transition period LLs. In addition, the modern transition LLs belong to modern LLs created by modern people, with a total of 10 genres, including advertising boards, warning signs, banners, and commercial signs, which were typical examples. This occurrence means that they corresponded to contemporary in terms of content time, creation time, and feature time.

*Table 4.1.Genres and ends of LLs based on time elements*

| Timeline of cultural history in China | Timeline in Langtou Village | Time elements in the LL | Genre | n | End |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ming dynasty(1368-1600) | Date: 1361-1600 From 11th to 17th generation | Elements of Mid history(after here: MHT) | Couplet | 8 | The couplets on the doors of the ancestral hall, study, and academy in Langtou village highlight the great achievements of ancient imperial officials. |
| | | | Lintel | 17 | The beams at the top of the doors of the ancestral hall, study, and academy extol the fine traditions of ancient villages. |
| | | | Plaques | 3 | The names of ancient buildings or outstanding figures and their deeds in the village were commemorated. |
| | | | Wall paintings | 21 | Themes depicting ancient daily life showcase the lives of ancient villagers. |
| | | | Relief carvings | 2 | Themes depicting ancient daily life showcase the lives of ancient villagers. |
| | | | Artifacts | 1 | The imperial edicts display the academic achievements of ancient villagers. |
| | | | Stone tablet | 2 | The fine traditions of outstanding figures in the village were promoted. |
| From the Qing dynasty to The Republic of China (1600-1949) | Date: 1400-1912 From 18th to 22nd generation | Elements of Late History (LHT) | Couplets | 2 | Ibid. |
| | | | Lintel | 11 | Ibid. |
| | | | Plaques | 1 | Ibid. |
| | | | Artifacts | 1 | Ibid. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Flagpole clips | 7 | These LLs commemorated those who passed the imperial examinations and honored the village's ancestors. |
| | | | Memorial Gateway | 3 | These buildings were erected to commemorate achievements, academic success, good governance, and loyalty in feudal society. |
| | | | Block name | 15 | The naming of ancient blocks |
| | | | Village information board | 1 | introduction of the lives of famous people in the village |
| From Late Song Dynasty to Yuan Dynasty (1125-1368) | Date: 1125-1312 From 1st to 10th generation | Elements of Early Nostalgia(ENT) | Village information board | 3 | Ibid. |
| | | | Ancient Style Couplets | 10 | same as the couplet |
| | | | Ancient Style Plaque | 2 | same as the plaque |
| Ming dynasty(1368-1600) | Date: 1361-1600 From 11th to 17th generation | Elements of Mid Nostalgia(MNT) | Location nameplate | 10 | Identifying location names to convey sightseeing information for tourists which creates a nostalgic atmosphere |
| | | | Village information board | 3 | Ibid. |
| | | | Attractions information board | 18 | Introducing historical information about the village will help tourists understand the historical origins of the village. |
| | | | Artefacts information board | 14 | introducing the daily items used by ancient people. |
| | | | Ancient Style Plaque | 2 | same as the couplet |
| | | | Ancient Style Couplets | 2 | same as the plaque |
| | | | Location nameplates | 8 | Ibid. |
| From the Qing dynasty to the Republic of China (1600-1949) | Date: 1400-1912 From 18th to 22nd generation | Elements of Late Nostalgia(LNT) | Attractions information board | 11 | Ibid. |
| | | | Village information board | 1 | Ibid. |
| | | | Road signs | 9 | The names of ancient blocks were used to indicate road names. |
| | | | Political posters | 6 | Usually, a painting of Chinese scenery, flora, and fauna created a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Ancient Style Couplet | 11 | Couplets on the sides of residential houses create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Ancient Style Plaque | 13 | Non-profit organizations' information is used to create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Ancient Style Fascia | 1 | Identify location names to create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Celebratory Couplets | 16 | Same as the Couplet |
| | | | Location nameplates | 11 | Ibid. |
| Modern(1949 to present) | Protected by policy, from 2008 to 2015 | Elements of Nostalgia in transition(NTT) | Window decorations | 1 | Showcase the village culture to create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Ancient Style notices | 1 | Notify villagers of folk activities in the village with traditional writing styles to create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Attractions information board | 1 | Ibid. |
| | | | Village information board | 29 | Ibid. |
| | | | Ancient Style billboard | 4 | attracting target audiences for commercial consumption to create a nostalgic atmosphere. |
| | | | Hanging pictures / Calligraphy | 18 | Ibid. |
| | | | Political posters | 16 | Promoting policies. |
| | | | Humanities posters | 39 | Promoting the village's own culture. |
| Modern(1949 to present) | | | Plaques | 4 | Identify modern attractions. |
| | | | Location nameplates | 22 | Ibid. |

| | | Road signs | 32 | Indicate contemporary road names. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Billboards | 3 | attract target audiences for commercial consumption. |
| | | Warning signs | 1 | reminding yourself of dangerous behaviors. |
| Protected by policy, from 2008 to 2015 | Elements of Modern in Transition(MTT) | Directional signs | 5 | Tourist service reminders |
| | | Wall paintings/calligraphy | 15 | Contemporary artistic creations by people describing the village promote the local culture. |
| | | Political posters | 23 | Ibid. |
| | | Banners | 2 | Identifying events that took place at a specific location |
| | | Signs | 13 | Identifying the names of public places |
| | Total | | 475 | |

As shown in Figure 4.1, The LL of EHT was entirely disappearing. And the LLs of MHT and LHT correspond to the Ming Dynasty and the period from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China in terms of LL's content and production time, respectively. In contrast, the LLs of the ENT, MNT, and LNT, respectively, present historical information from the end of the Song Dynasty to the Republic of China. Their designs were retro, but they were produced in modern times. Similarly, the LLs of the MTT, which also pertain to modern in terms of their content and features, lack any historical traits. The NTT LLs were distinctive in that their content and production time belonged to the contemporary, but their exterior characteristics were classical. Thus, the time elements of the Langtou Village LLs essentially involve three genres of time: the time interval during which the things presented by the LLs exist (i.e., content time), the time interval during which the designers created the LLs (i.e., creation time), and the time interval during which the LLs' external characteristics exist (i.e., feature time). Various time elements of the LLs correspond to distinct purposes, as shown in Table 4.1. In general, the LLs created by ancient villagers that simultaneously express historical content (such as MHT and LHT) (n = 95, 20%) emphasized the ancient villagers' academic achievements. The LLs created by modern villagers express historical content (such as ENT, MNT, and LNT) (n = 99, 21%) to attempt to restore historical information about the village. The LLs, which were created by contemporary people but with unexpressed historical content (such as NTT and MTT) (n = 279, 59%), repackage contemporary culture in a retro style. This phenomenon convinced us that the LLs of Langtou Village had facilitated three trajectories of time elements (Velásquez Urribarrí, 2020), including the history created by ancient people, the history restored by modern people, and the hybridization of contemporary culture. We attempt to explain the influence of LL's time elements on the cultural reconstruction of Langtou Village through a detailed analysis of specific LL cases.

*Figure 4.1. Categories of time elements in the LL.*
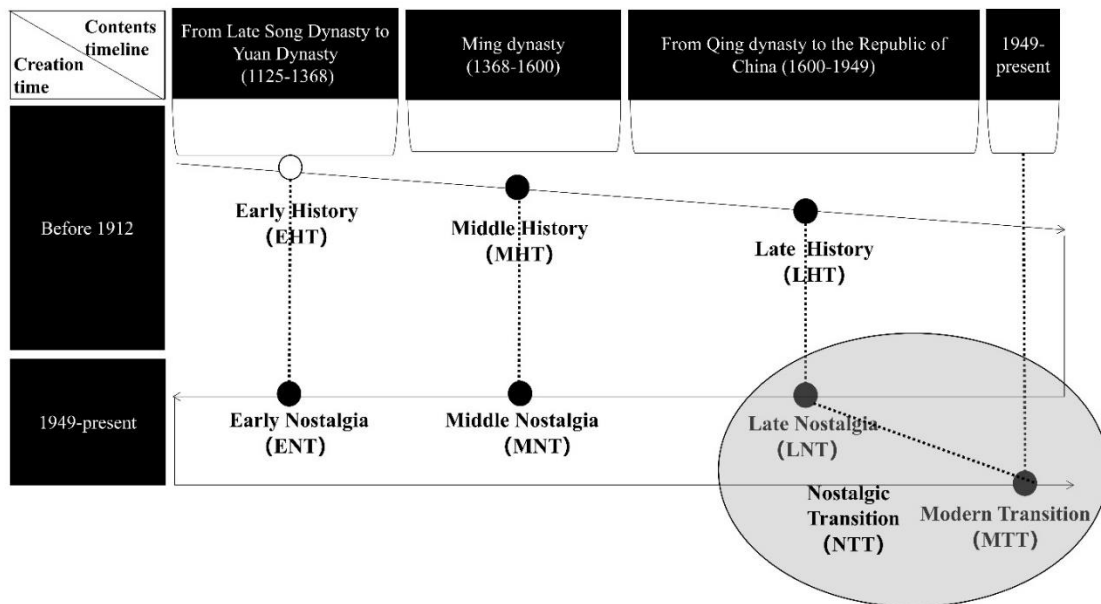


Note: ○ means none of the LLs created in this period; ● means the LLs created in this period existed.

### 4.2 Time element in the LL and cultural reconstruction in the space: illustrations example
### A. First trajectory of time element: A history created by the ancients

Although Langtou Village was established during the end of the Song Dynasty, only historical LLs constructed or restored during the Ming Dynasty for the Republic of China era remain in the village. These LLs generally displayed on the buildings of the ancestral hall and bookroom, as well as in their vicinity. Each generation, an individual from Langtou Village passed the imperial examination and became an official, displaying moral excellence throughout their career. Thereby their descendants memorialized their accomplishments on couplets and flagpole stones, which were offered for future generations to inherit (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). In the first trajectory of time elements, the LLs were singular codes. They were generally using traditional Chinese characters which adhered to ancient right-to-left reading practices (in horizontal writing). The majority of these LLs engraved on stone or wood. The ancient door couplets and flagpole clips in Figure 4.3 were all carved in stone. The ancients intentionally carved meaningful symbols into rocks. Huaxia's entire 5,000-year civilization history has been intertwined with Chinese stone carving culture. The ancients desired to present their thoughts to both heaven and earth through stone carvings, as well as leave them for future generations to read. The black characters on a red background generally display in the couplets of Figure 4.2, demonstrating the duality of yin and yang, which was the foundation of the ancient Chinese worldview.

*4.2. Couplets and Lintel of the Youlan Ancestral Hall Figure*     *4.3.Flagpole clips*



In the trajectory of creating historical records in ancient times, the density of LLs was lower than that of modern times. The ancients were adept at using simple couplets to convey profound meanings. They had some commonalities， including comparable character counts, consistent sentence structures, equivalent parts of speech, corresponding structures, and relative tones (pitch differences) (see Figure 4.2). Therefore, they impart a sense of musical rhythm to the reader. This LL commemorated the deeds of Huang Xueji (1468–1529), also known as You Lan (友蘭), during the middle of the Ming Dynasty. During his time, the emperor primarily elected officials through the imperial examination system. Huang Xueji was diligent in his studies. Ultimately he rose to become a prominent court official. In just 10 words, the couplet "Wéibùchéngxinzh韦布承先志, Zhnyngqhurén簪缨启后人" conveyed the message of inheriting the ancestor's legacy during times of poverty and drawing inspiration from their illustrious accomplishments to guide future generations. The second column of text in Figure 4.3 flagpole clips also lists the accomplishments of the village candidates who passed the imperial examination with low text density: "The emperor received the decree from heaven. He announced that the candidate Huang Tinghuai had attained the highest score on the highest level exam, and thus became an official." (11 words in Chinese ēn'zhào kǎoxuǎndìyīmínggòngshēng huángtínghuái恩詔考選第一名貢生黃庭槐).Compared to modern Chinese, the LLs of this trajectory present ancient Chinese in its entirety. Due to the grammatical differences, modern readers may feel as if they were conversing with the ancients when reading these LLs.

In conclusion, the LLs created by the ancients to record historical trajectories not only demonstrate the writing traditions and culture of ancient Chinese people in terms of keys (K), action sequences (A), and instruments (I) but also have been passed down for centuries. These LL accurately documented the outstanding performance of the candidates from Langtou Village in the imperial

examination system and their deeds as officials. They create a continuous historical narrative (Shohamy, 2008), focusing on the pursuit of human values at that time, i.e., the close connection between individual fate and the national system.

## B. Second trajectory of time element: A history created by the contemporary people

Even though the LL created by ancient villagers during the late Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty has simply vanished, modern designers in the second trajectory were attempting to reconstruct this LL's disappearing historical information. As illustrated in Figure 4.4, numerous village information boards in the Xiangxian Hall supplement visually the lost historical information of Langtou Village during the Song and Yuan periods by depicting portraits and biographical introductions of the village's ancestors. This information was primarily derived from village genealogies. Villagers of today have recreated LL to preserve the continuity of village history. Although the majority of the LL from the Ming Dynasty to the Republic of China period has been preserved, inevitably, there were gaps. Even though the lintel of the bookroom has been protected in Figure 4.5, the couplets have been destroyed. Thus Huangwenhuo, a modern villager who also is a descendant of the 27th generation, rewrote new couplets for the bookroom. Figure 4.6 also illustrates how today's villagers have used political posters to reconstruct the history of smoking bans during the Republic of China era through photographs and text. These three LL reflect the efforts made by modern individuals to restore or supplement the vanishing historical information of the village. These LL, designed by modern villagers, have historical roots. These LL appear to serve similar informational functions to those LL found in museums. Unlike LL from the museum, however, the LL designers in the village are descended from these ancient people. LL, as a nexus of practice, is the embodied history and circulating beliefs of modern villagers in their living environment (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023). This characteristic implies that village descendants not only use nostalgic LL from different eras to blend and supplement historical LL but also inherit the unfulfilled desires and traditions of their ancestors.

*Figure 4.4: Village information board*



*Figure 4.5. Couplets from the Yun Wu Gong Bookroom*

*Figure 4.6. Political posters*



This trajectory focuses primarily on ancient events, with these LL serving as a supplement to more comprehensive historical information about the village. Even though the couplets in Figures 4.5 and 4.2 were designed by modern and ancient people, respectively, they were comparable to the first trajectory in terms of text density, language arrangement, text emphasis, and grammar. This linguistic representation indicates that designers will maintain linguistic and aesthetic consistency when restoring historical LL. In the second trajectory, in contrast to the first, modern designers also use modern LL to present disappearing historical information, such as introduction boards and political posters (see Figures 4.4 and 4.6). These LL have a high text density with illustration and resemble an illustrated storybook in structure (Gallagher & Bataineh, 2020). Based on these observations, we believe that the LL in both trajectories has historical roots, but the presentation of historical information in the second trajectory was more flexible, particularly when dealing with lost historical LL. Combining images and text can improve the authenticity and scene-setting feel of historical information (Aronin & Laoire, 2013).

Another substantial change between trajectories 1 and 2 was the creators' social background. The purpose of modern designers in this second trajectory is to restore village historical information, which was more complex than in the previous trajectory. The village introduction boards in Xiangxian Hall (see Figure 4.4) not only preserve but also promote the village's culture. We cannot ignore the symbolic function behind the information function (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). LL, with a deliberately retro design, imitates the symbolic characteristics of the first trajectory to narrate the early stories of the village (Yao, 2020). This manner of intentionally creating nostalgia ultimately leads tourists to the object of observation. We must admit that as traditional villages enter the market, how their culture was protected has been quietly redefined in the process of promoting cultural and tourism integration by local governments. As Lu et al. (2020) pointed out, the LL is an informative trigger that inspires tourists to visit and explore the historical culture of Chinese villages. Consequently, we observe a form of cultural reconstruction of cherishing memory in the commonalities and differences between Trajectories 1 and 2. Although the second trajectory was created by modern designers, its content continues the history of the first trajectory. These LL were young, but they contained historical information.

### C. Third trajectory of time element：A mishmash of contemporary cultures

The two mentioned trajectories, LL, were imbued with historical information and contained the village's historical roots. However, the LL of the third trajectory lacks historical origins (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8). The designers of these LL were contemporary individuals. The former identifies the location by emulating the style of ancient plaques (see Figure 4.7), whereas the latter serves only as a modern tourism sign (see Figure 4.8). Both in terms of their content and creation time, these LLs belonged to the modern and were fundamentally distinct from the first and second trajectories. In other words, they entirely represented the contemporary culture that has permeated the historical and cultural space.

*Figure 4.7. Plaque in the Integrity Bookroom*



*Figure4.8.Signs*



Although the plaque in Figure 4.7 uses traditional Chinese characters and ancient fonts, unlike the LL in the first trajectory, the text in Figure 4.7 was read from left to right, indicating that modern people are the intended audience. This sign contains no historical information which merely identifies a place of education for modern individuals. The code depicted in Figure 4.8 is composed of simplified Chinese and English (with Chinese on top and English below). Its text was also read from left to right to identify a tourist-only location. The LL in the third trajectory was a transgressive practice (Pennycook, 2008) for a historical and cultural space. To some extent, such LL brings creativity and exclusivity to the cultural ecology of Langtou Village. Especially Figure 4.8, which deliberately departs from the unique effects that the ancient sociocultural system in the traditional village brings to the space (Li, 2015).

In the third trajectory, retro-style Figure 4.7 appears in historical buildings. This LL has a similar appearance to that of the second trajectory, and contemporary individuals consciously created a historical external symbol. In response to traditional villages entering the tourism industry, however, the LL in the third trajectory was not a supplement to historical information; rather, it added modern cultural content under the promotion of rural revitalization policies, as shown in Figure 4.8. Although the audience was modern people, the nostalgia transition LL was committed to creating a nostalgic atmosphere for tourists. In other words, the nostalgia transition LLs in this third trajectory follow history in feature, whereas the modern transition LLs do not, considering modern cultural participation as a whole. This occurrence has resulted in the cultural reconstruction of combining the moment. Although the nostalgic transition LLs were designed to evoke a sense of historical culture in their design, avoiding excessive damage to the overall historical and cultural ecology of the village caused by modern transition LLs, they both fundamentally belong to the mixing of contemporary cultural information into the cultural ecology of Langtou Village. Lacking historical information, this type of LL poses a risk of falsifying the historical culture of Langtou Village (Jamieson, 1996).

Overall, comparing the three trajectories of time elements reveals that the key to differentiating cultural reconstruction paths was whether LL contains historical information. In other words, LL was a method of cultural reconstruction that restores historical information about the village when the content time was from ancient times. It was a faithful imitation of historical information (such as the second trajectory). When the content time was contemporary, however, this cultural reconstruction path was essentially the destruction of historical culture by contemporary culture (such as the third trajectory). Particularly, the LL of NTT in Figure 4.8 was a variation imitation of historical information. The two cultural reconstructions thus abundantly demonstrate the distinctions in the manner the two approach the history of reversion.

### 4.3. Presentation in the environment and hierarchy of time

Lou (2009) positioned LL at multiple temporal and spatial scales to investigate the rich traditional Chinese culture of Chinatown. His research, unlike previous studies that just concentrated on spatial practice, acknowledged the interaction between time and space in LL. Placing the time elements of LLs in a real environment (see Figure 4.9) was not only an observation of the ecological properties of language but also an observation of the ecological attributes of village culture, resulting in a deeper understanding of the cultural reconstruction of Langtou Village. The distribution of time elements in the actual scene was related to the participants and norms of LL. Hence we can distribute new guidance for the planning of LL in traditional villages.

*Figure 4.9. The spatial distribution of the time elements of the LL*
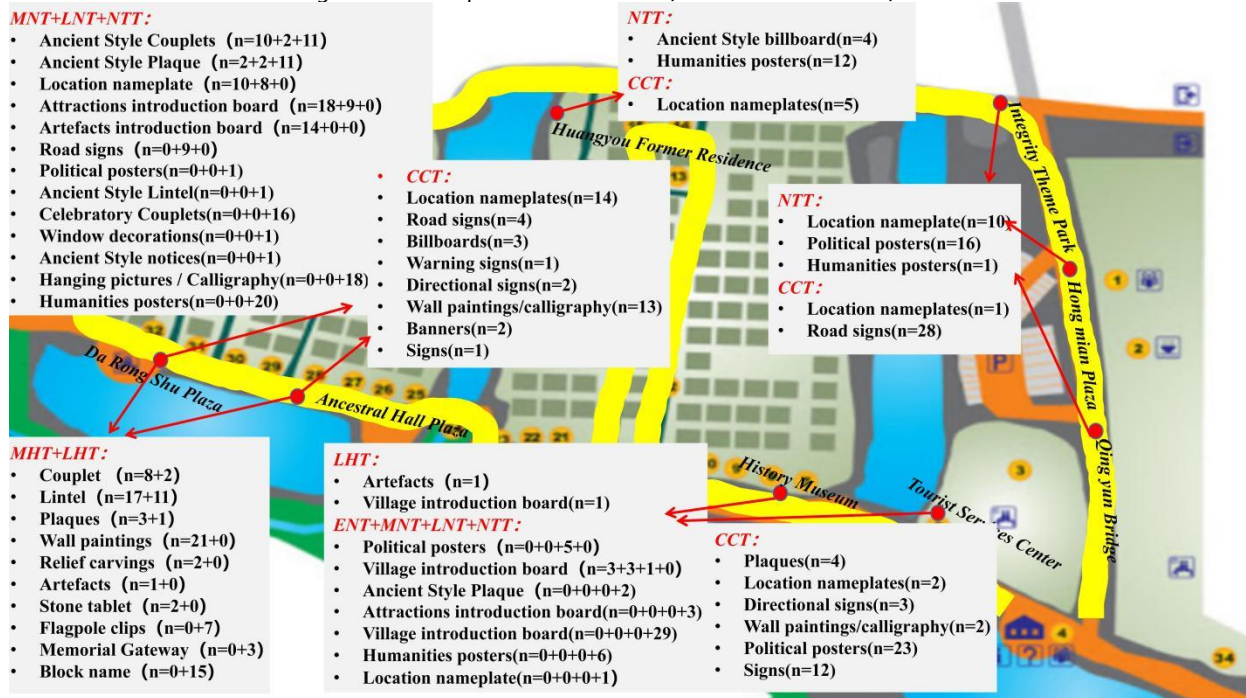


As depicted in Figure 4.9, the majority of the ancient LL of the first trajectory (i.e., MHT and LHT) is mainly distributed in DaRongShu Plaza and Ancestral Hall Plaza, with a small number appearing in the history museum and tourist services center. These zones, which were the primary locations for the display of Langtou Village's historical relics, have been dubbed historical concentration areas. The creators of LL in these territories were craftsmen who were commissioned by the emperor to repair LL during the Qing dynasty (as depicted in Figures 4.2 and 4.3), whereas their readers possess inter-time characteristics. These readers include both

ancient and contemporary villagers as well as tourists. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 4.1, the number of LL in the first trajectories (n = 95, 20%) that have been entirely preserved was small. Nonetheless, they were crucial in determining the historical and cultural value of Langtou Village, which determines whether Langtou Village was valued to protect by future generations. Considering the location of the time elements of LL in the place, the LL that focuses on historical culture in Langtou Village was located far away from the village entrance, creating a more pronounced ecological phenomenon of the accumulation of historical relics.

LL of trajectories 1 and 2 (i.e., ENT, MNT, LNT, and NTT) with a retro style were concentrated in the history museum and tourist services center. Some of them were also incorporated with LL in the historical concentration areas. We refer to this region as the tourism promotion area. Whether or not these LL contain historical information, their purpose was to deliberately create a retro atmosphere among modern people. In contrast to the historical concentration spaces, the creators of LL in the tourism promotion space were contemporary villagers. Their intended audience is tourists. These LL were associated with the growth of tourism in traditional villages. On the one hand, modern villagers in Langtou Village promote the protection of cultural heritage in traditional villages under the policy of protecting traditional villages. This situation demonstrated that more than half of historical information LL was restored from the second trajectory (n = 99, 21%). On the other hand, the emergence of NTT without historical information has expedited the influence of contemporary culture on the cultural reconstruction of traditional villages. The tourist promotion region was distributed in the central region, where close to the entrance of the village, forming a node connecting historical culture and contemporary culture. The LL of this second and first trajectory was spatially more intertwined, indicating that the cultural reconstruction of cherishing the memory forced cohesively in space and demonstrating the coextensiveness of LL's time elements and the local place (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009).

We discovered that LL of the third trajectory (i.e., NTT and CCT) appeared simultaneously in locations near the village entrance, such as the Integrity theme park plaza, Hongmian plaza, and Qingyun Bridge. They were an extension of the village's culture. The designers of these LL were the decision-makers of the village, who not only designed signs to improve the convenience of modern village life and illustrate the construction of village family customs but also designed signs to enhance tourist services. Overall, their target audience was modern villagers and tourists. Thus, we can see that the rural revitalization policy directs the villagers' cultural spirit and develops the third industry in the countryside to the village builders (Gao & Wu, 2017). Noting that LL clustered at the entrance of the village had no commercial signs other than tourism (see Table 4.1), this indicates that the driving force of contemporary culture participation in Langtou Village was a single force. They primarily drove the integrated development of cultural tourism, which would not lead to higher harmfulness to historical culture.

In conclusion, the various time elements of the Langtou Village LL exhibit clear trajectory clustering and patchy correlations in their geographic distribution. These LLs exhibit continuity in the dimension of time elements, whereas the time elements of LLs, in turn, exhibit a hierarchical structure in the environmental spatial scale. This condition indicates that the time elements of LL possess a hierarchy in the reconstruction of the village's cultural ecology. This situation supports Leeman and Modan's (2010) contention that LLs possess a "hierarchical" structure. The historical information of Langtou Village undeniably induces these phenomena, in which the LL of the first trajectory gave rise to the LL of the second trajectory. The LL of this second trajectory played a role in transitioning from historical culture to contemporary culture, attempting to rationalize the appearance of the LL of this third trajectory in traditional Chinese villages.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion
### 5.1. Discussion
This study aims to investigate the impact of the LL on cultural reconstruction in traditional Chinese villages. We focus specifically on how the time elements of Langtou Village's LL, supported by the speaking model, facilitate dialogue between the village's historical genes and contemporary culture. We deliver a philosophical foundation combining interpretive research, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism. Through the case study of the LL integrating Chinese cultural history and Lantou Village's history, this research conveys case support for the impact of LL's time elements on cultural reconstruction in traditional Chinese villages. More specifically, in the RQ1, we identified seven types of time elements in LL genres and purposes: early history, middle history, late history, early nostalgia, middle nostalgia, late nostalgia, nostalgia transition, and modern transition. These time elements involve different LL genres and purposes. The essence of LL's time elements includes observations of the contents time, creation time, and feature time.

RQ2 explored how the three-time element trajectories formed by LL affect Langtou Village's cultural reconstruction. We discovered that trajectory 1 created a break in the village's history due to the loss of the EHT's LL. Thus the time elements of trajectory 2 continued the historical information of trajectory 1 in LLs'contents. Especially, Village descendants as modern designers consciously promoted similarities between the keys, action sequences, and instruments of trajectory 2'LL and those of trajectory 1. Therefore Trajectory 2's LL is a return to honor that extends from the family to the entire village, or what Fei(1992) referred to as the differential mode of association( i.e., Chaxugeju). And the government also supported this action. Ultimately, Langtou Village

has resulted in a kind of cultural reconstruction of cherishing the memory in its cultural ecology. The overlapping content and creation time of the third trajectory's LL formed a combination-style cultural reconstruction, but this manner poses a risk of falsifying historical villages.

In addition, we revealed that the time elements of LL exhibit a clear tendency in Langtou Village's environmental distribution, forming a concentrated area of traditional culture that tends to display historical time elements, a tourist propaganda region dominated by nostalgia time elements. The entrance and exit places of the village are filled with modern time elements in the LL. These areas are not mixed but form an orderly transition from the village's head to tail, reflecting the hierarchical distribution of LL's time elements in the environment. The historical information about Langtou village induces spatial regularity, while the political promotion of the integration of traditional Chinese village culture and tourism allows contemporary culture to enter Langtou village's space in an orderly manner (Gao & Wu, 2017). Contemporary culture's involvement in the cultural ecology of traditional Chinese villages jeopardizes the authenticity of village history; however, Langtou Village's modern designers present the cultural reconstruction in the LL's external symbols, similar to a museum's LL, to reconstruct vanish historical information. We propose several suggestions for LL planning in traditional villages, which are oriented by time element. Firstly, contemporary creators should be aware of the power relationship between history and contemporary times. Government departments and village organizers should recognize the important role that standardizing the LL of traditional villages plays in the continuation of traditional culture. For LL on trajectory 1, restoration should be prioritized, while for LL on the second trajectory, the principle of restoring historical information should be followed in designing nostalgic elements in the landscape. For the LL on trajectory 3, it should be avoided from becoming the main component of the LL while harmonizing history and contemporary times. On the other hand, village decision-makers should improve the standardization of LL with new elements. LL on the second and third trajectories, as new LL adapts to cultural tourism integration policies, should consider the standardization of linguistic characteristics such as key tone, action sequence, and instruments. Even setting unified standards to avoid the formation of too many LL on trajectory 3, leading to negative cultural reconstruction. For some bottom-up LL, such as shop signs on trajectory 3, village planners need to supply relevant guidance on their commercial sign design and issue relevant commercial sign design specifications to reduce the appearance of numerous commercial signs with pictures and text in traditional villages. Consequently, planners must examine the connection between the function of the LL and social norms. The observers of the traditional village LL have gradually expanded from villagers to tourists. The injection of the tourism industry brings new readers to the cultural ecology of traditional villages. The degree of immersion in cultural tourism that tourists experience reflects the trend of cultural reconstruction in traditional villages. On the second trajectory, LL achieves not only an information function but also a symbolic function. It is worth thinking about how they can coexist with the symbolic function of this first trajectory. In the process of restoring historical information, LL on the second trajectory still involves the demand to link ancient and modern times.

### 5.2 Implications

This study enriches the research on the LL planning of Chinese rural regions by observing the cultural ecology of specific fields through the LL perspective in eco-linguistic, as well as expanding the focus on space practices of the LL. The core contribution of this study lies in the observation of the cultural reconstruction of rural places in both history and contemporary times through a time element-oriented approach, which distributes new insights into the cultural and ecological mechanisms of historical rural areas and the reasonable planning of their LL. Previous research has focused on contemporary development issues in historically rural places, but few studies have explored the cultural reconstruction phenomenon of these places in the context of the time element of LL. The latest exploration of digital cultural reconstruction mechanisms, such as the restoration of cultural landscapes (Wang, Jin, & Feng, 2022), essentially involves the interaction of different time elements.

This study broadens the perspective of LL research in rural regions from spatial to temporal dimensions, which is related to the historical continuity carried by traditional Chinese villages. It expands the observation of elements in LL, as well as sends case support for the investigation of the smallest unit in a specific space in cultural ecology. Although scholars have frequently discussed multilingualism (Gorter, 2006) and multiculturalism (Shohamy, Rafael, & Barni, 2010) in LL, it is still worthwhile to contemplate the essence of this diversity. From these perspectives, our research expands the scope of cultural diversity research. Specifically, we proposed the time element of LL, which is the interaction between historical culture and contemporary culture in smaller units called "elements". Additionally, we believe that "elements" can be observed more deeply within the existing theoretical framework of LL, such as this study placing the time element within the speaking model (Huebner, 2008), allowing for a more in-depth examination of the social practices and cultural values presented in LL.

Overall, this study conveyed a fresh perspective on the cultural ecology and cultural reconstruction of rural areas. Seven-time elements are proposed to help us comprehend how the LL, as an external symbol, influences the cultural reconstruction of rural locations. Even further, we discovered a museum-style approach to restoring historical information from the LL on trajectory 2, which appeared in a real historical field and is self-consistent as opposed to false. The results of these studies give inspiration for LL planning in traditional villages. The time element in the LL can serve as a guide for village planners and contemporary designers

seeking to improve the historical genes of villages. This study distributes extensive observation power for in-depth exploration of the smallest units between LL and culture, as well as case prompts for investigating the essence of cultural ecology.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research
Two limitations exist in this study. The first limitation is that the research corpus only involves static analysis of LL images. We suggested that future research can interview local villagers and tourists to explore their recognition and attitudes toward the time element in the LL. The second limitation is that this study emphasizes qualitative analysis more strongly. Future research is recommended to conduct data analysis based on contemporary online comments to observe tourists' ideologues oriented towards the time element.

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