

# The Study of Integrated Conservation of four Villages in Mian Mountain

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**Keywords**

*Mian Moutain; fortress; historical villages; conservation*

**Abstract**

The current study on the micro level of single-building protection and repair is relatively complete, however, the discussion about elements of cultural heritage and their relevance among the ancient villages is comparably insufficient. The protection work is strongly influenced by tourism development and cultural gimmick, thus resulting in low protection efficiency and many omissions. Historical village as the cultural settlement patterns bears a large number of heritage relics. They were regionally scattered with a clear characteristic of gathering. The article takes these four historical villages in Mian Moutain as an example, relying on the historical time period theory, then tries to look for the association and similarities of the forming mechanism between villages. The article discusses the integrated conservation from three levels: the regional heritage conservation, the cultural line shaping, and the featured brand building.

The development of culture is diverse. Commonly, there are some alternative cultures in a kind of culture and together with the main culture, they form the complexity and diversity of the cultural circle, authentically recording the rich history and regional culture. HongShan Village, NanZhuang Village, ZhangBi Village, LengQuan Village at the foot of the Mian mountain, TaiYuan Basin of China. The four historic cultural villages were built to defend and were made prosperous by the Jin business. They are an ancient village -group bearing the function of residential life and defense (Fig.1). Take the Qing dynasty as a time node, the four historic villages almost keep their continuous rampart before the Qing dynasty and their courtyard pattern after it, which can reflect the social life of multiple periods.

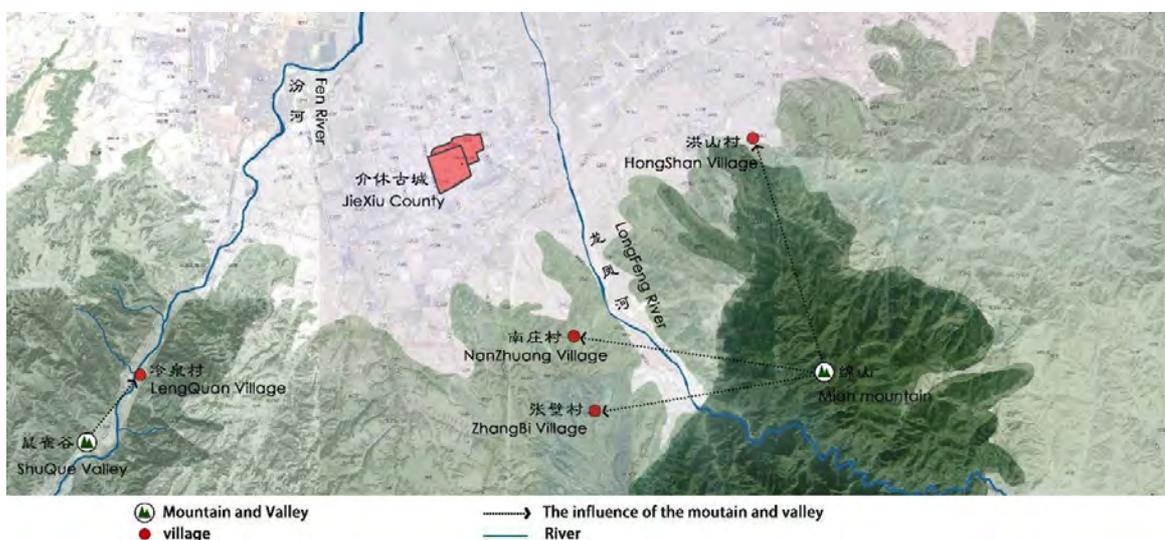


Figure 1 Four villages' location

## 1. The forming background of four villages

### 1.1. The influence of the geographical relationship by Mian Mountain and the Fen River in Shanxi Province

The long period of time is a history of stability and rarely change of all sorts of structure and the structure group (Fernand Braudel 1993). The core concept of "Long time" is the intrinsic connection between geographical environment and social structure such as mountains, plains, geography, climate, nature and social organizations, cultural traditions, which seems to be stationary through time. The formation and evolution of the traditional villages are also affected greatly by the diverse surrounding geographical environment. The four ancient villages are located in the northern part of Mian mountain, the Fen River helps defense on the north, southeast is the Guanziridge channeling to Shangdang, southwest is the Shuque valley which is on the way towards south. The Mian mountain is a branch of the TaiHang mountain, which is elevated more than 2000 meters. This geographical landscape existed for a long time, impacting the space of surrounding villages holistically.

### 1.2. The change of regional social economic form in Ming and Qing Dynasties

The Ming and Qing Dynasties, as a time unit during the long history in the middle of Shanxi Province, have impacted the four villages' current situation beyond any time periods because of the limited land but convenient transportation, numerous people seek out for business, which led the economy to develop rapidly with the rise of a wide range of commercial trading activities. The evidence can be found in the "County Annals (1819)". After the Qing Dynasty, the business routes were expanded based on the traffic routes, the people expand routes (Fig.2). Large amount of merchants relied their business on the routes.

Villages also gradually developed into commercial-service-oriented villages. Thanks to the good business environment, the villagers also gradually grew from poor to wealthy celebrities. There were so many merchants gathered at the foot of the Mian mountain for that moment.

ZhangBi village had only someone to go out to do business at the beginning of the Qing dynasty. It has become a businessman village during the middle period of Qing dynasty. There were four big families named Jia, Zhang, Wang and Qi. The temples, stages, roads, houses, gates, which are sponsored by the big families, still stand until today. Hongshan village was an important trading town during the Ming and Qing dynasties. With the rise of the business, the village Banks were also gradually formed. The most famous bank was Qiao Shijie's Baofenglong Piaohao (Bank). The existing building type, including housing, commerce, sacrifice and other kinds of buildings of the village, are all important material evidence.

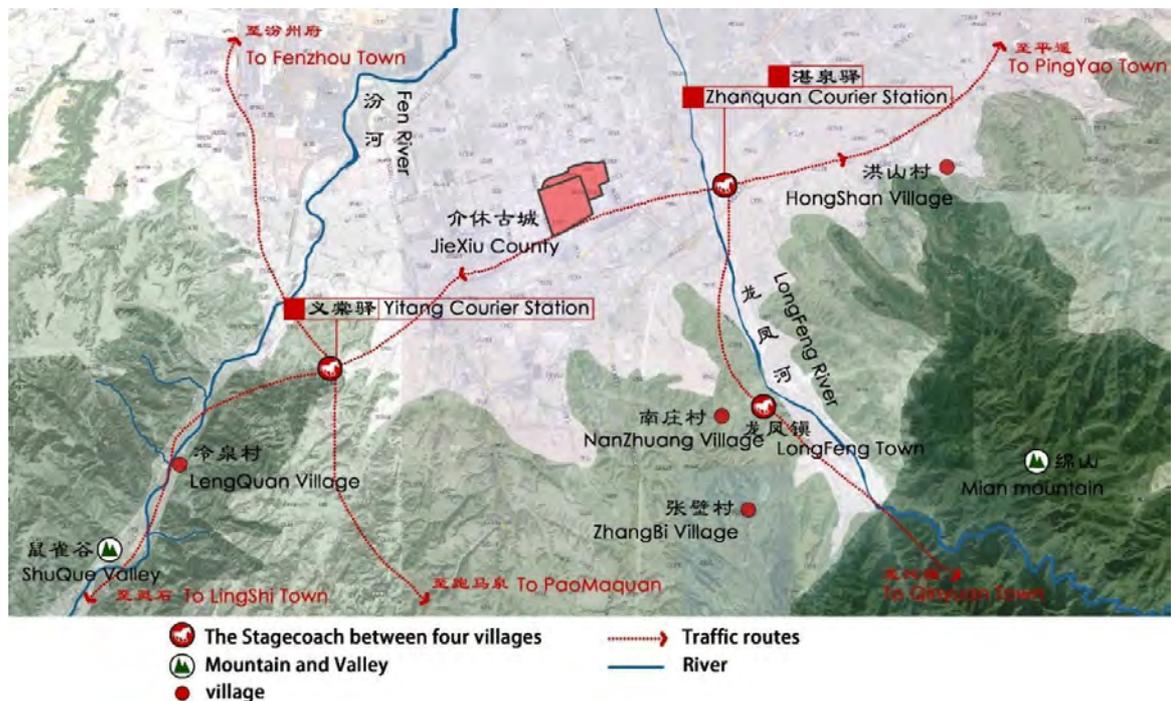


Figure 2 Business lines in the late Qing Dynasty

### 1.3. The impact of the historical war

Sudden major historical events in a short period affected not only the ancient villages directly, but also strengthened the cultural connection between these villages. The influence has locked the village's spacial evolution in a particular historical period. The ancient war between the villages and outside happened frequently. His Royal Highness Li Shimin leading soldiers chased Song Jingang here in 2nd year of the reign of Tang Emperor Wude (619 A.D). A few months later, Li Simin fought eight battles in one day and then occupied the Bing state. The tunnel in ZhangBi village hoarded grain for Song Jingang.

## 2. The defensive elements of villages' pattern

Defense is the functional characteristic of the four villages, which has obvious features of space. The significant factors of the cluster of these villages are strategic pass, blind pass, walls, also other village defense facilities, which influence the villages' integral space pattern.

### 2.1. The strategic pass against the Huns

LengQuan Pass was built by Emperor GaoZu to defend against the Huns, named after the cold spring in it. LengQuan pass is located at the arteries of the northern frontier to the central plains. The left of the pass is a mountain; the right is the river. A number of emperors deployed combat troops to the pass, setting a fortress here (Fig.3). The pass has been the foundation of LengQuan village from the Ming dynasty.

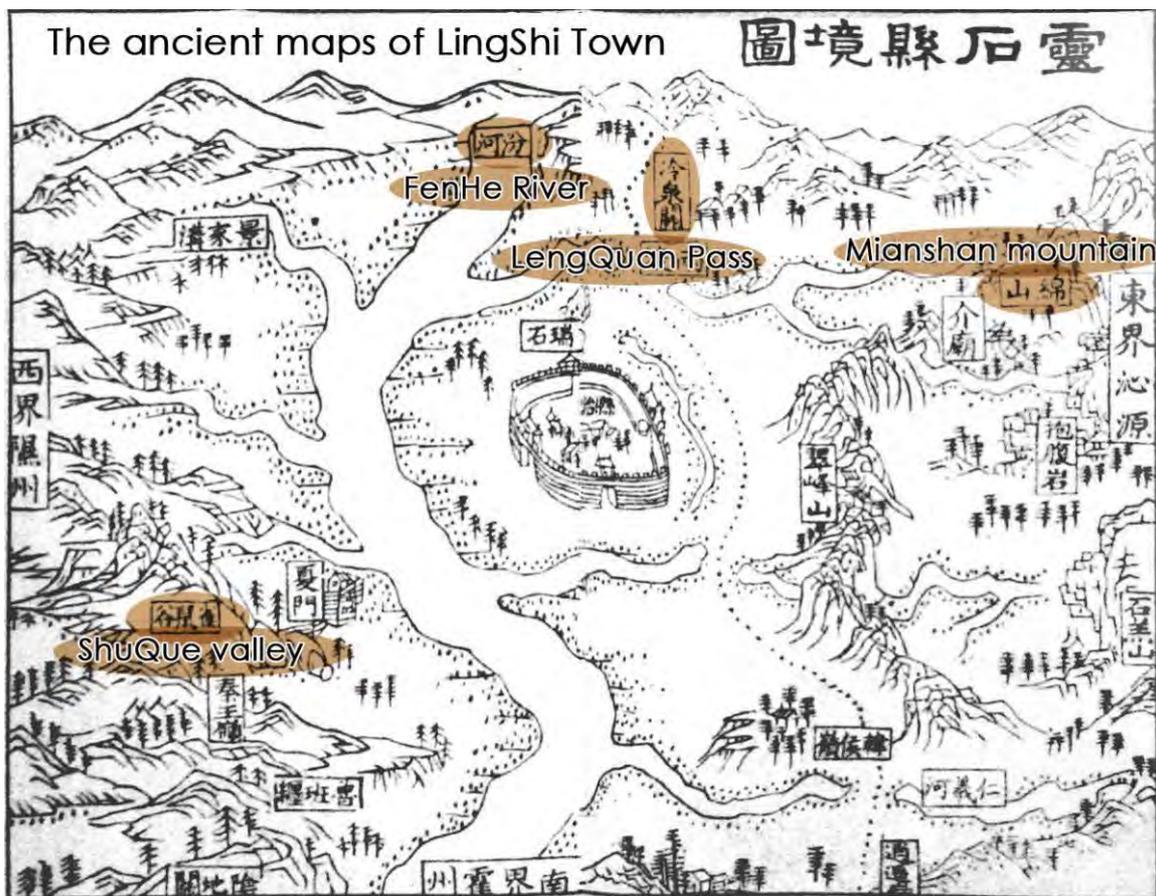


Figure 3 LengQuan village's ancient position

LengQuan village's frontier pass culture is a special cultural form, which embodies the the frontier village's defensive settlement pattern in a turbulent society atmosphere. This pattern the continuous relations between defensive culture and fortress culture that living under the social situation full of dynasties vicissitudes, peasant uprising and bandits infest and so on. The pattern of the village belongs to the specific age stage, as time goes by, more and more social culture adding up to the village itself, now it shows in front of our eyes the rich and colorful remains of several dynasties.

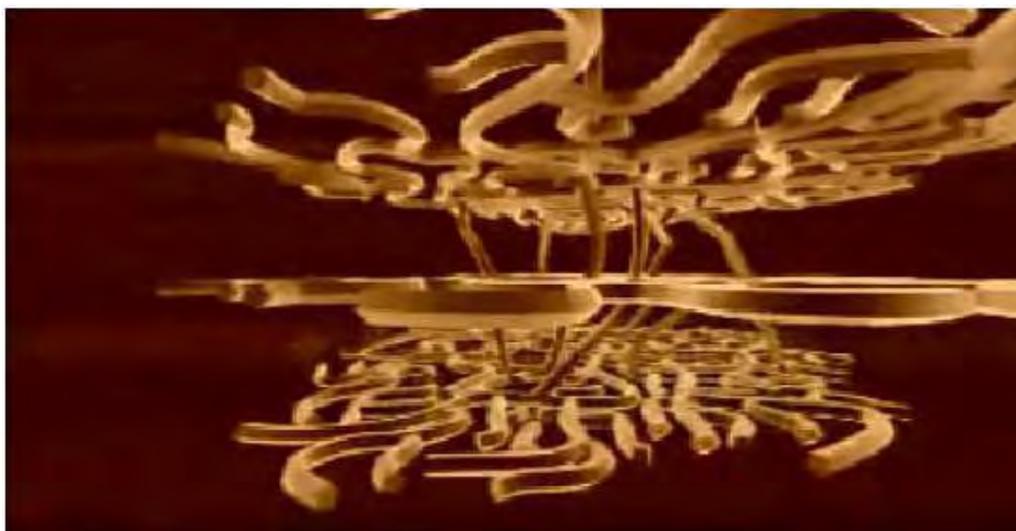


Figure 4 The underground passages' model of ZhangBi Village

## 2.2. The underground passage for military food storage

ZhangBi village is located on the high ground with mountains surrounding its three sides. It is easy to defend but difficult to attack and it also has retreating roads. The geographical advantage of this village is obvious in those years. The initial purpose behind building ZhangBi Village was as a military fortress. In order to meet the needs of the army, the troops of Sui Dynasty dug a huge system of underground passages and stored grain there. The passages formed an "S" shape that is thousands of miles in length and freely crisscrossed. It has approximately three layers underground, the top is about 1 meter beneath the surface; the middle layer is 8 to 10 meters far from the surface; the bottom layer is 17 to 20 meters from the surface. Each layer is about two meters high (Fig.4). The passages were built with facilities of surveillance, command, drainage systems, ventilation with stable, granary, station troops in it. Outside the valley is the mouth of the cave, which can be used as the entrance and exit and also can be used as a sentry. The whole tunnel system constituted complete underground military defense facilities belonging to the "Garrison Besieged" military tactics facilities, according to the fort "back channels" in the ancient art of war.

## 2.3. The mountain barrier as ground defense

Mountains and hills are commonly seen in this area. Many villages here are located on the hills with natural barriers as boundaries. For example, NanZhuang Village is located on a high mountain, the north and the west a big ditch, east and south is a slope so the villagers built a fort gate and walls in the east and south, and the other places all use natural terrains as barriers. All of these formed a safe enclosure space and there were also two attics at the fort gate, villagers can watch out for the situation of the enemy. The mountain ridge, the scarp and the artificial fort walls together formed NanZhuang Village's boundaries. HongShan Village is located in the high hinterland of Mian mountain away from the Fen River. The north and west of HongShan Village are cliffs, elevation difference reaching dozens of meters, forming a natural barrier. Like NanZhuang Village, HongShan Villagers use steeps to build up the castle walls, constructing the security defense system.

## 3. The differentiated characteristics of villages' space

The village space is not a short-term achievement, it formed shape through the multiple cultural evolution, as well alternately stacked influenced each other and then derived a temporal composite expression. The villages' defensive needs caused by the war before the Qing Dynasty led to many remains as villages' fort gate, fort walls, hidden hole, gate houses, etc. After the Qing Dynasty, wars decreased and there were many commercial trades. These trades pushed the defensive villages to have many typical characteristics of commercial towns, such as the main streets, commercial facilities along the streets, etc.

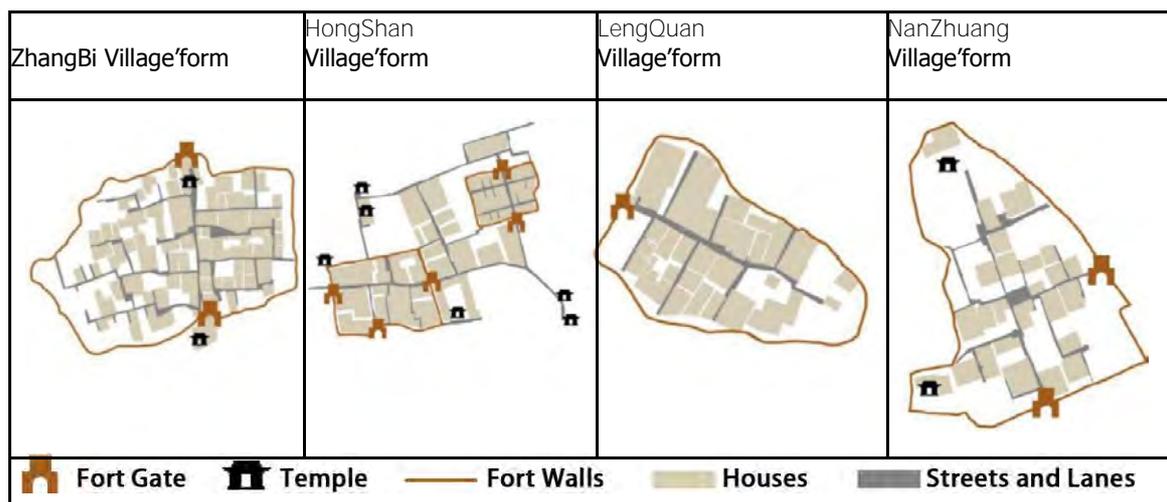


Figure 5 Four villages' spatial patterns

### 3.1. A street, eight lanes and two gates in ZhangBi Village

ZhangBi Village was surrounded by a continuous fort wall. There were two fort gates each in the south and north of the village made of stone arch and brick structure. The north gate has a barbican. There was a main street connecting the two gates. The main street has four lanes on each side, the only exit was at the J junction. The street system looks like a dragon spine, so the main street, also known as "Dragon-Spine Street". ZhangBi Village's architectural layout is clear: temples were built near the south and the north gate while housing distributed on both sides of the streets.

### 3.2. Two forts in HongShan Village

Mountains and the river were the boundaries of HongShan Village. The pattern remains intact basically. There are two forts in the village named BaoZe and XitouBao with the Yuan Temple and KuiXing building in the southeast corresponding at a distance. BaoZe Located in the highest point of the alluvial plain on the east and the west is gully cliff. The south and north are connected to the outside through gentle slopes. The houses lined up on both sides of the main street with huge fortress walls around. Two gates were set at the north and south walls; another gate is set at the southwest. The artificial fortress walls and natural valleys gave the village the best safeguarding of the internal security. XitouBao's location is exquisite, turning into mutual horns towards BaoZe. Through the remaining walls of the north and the west sides the southern steep cut and fort gates we can clearly determine the boundaries. The internal is in the "back" glyph as backbone, remaining the traditional herringbone streets.

### 3.3. LengQuan village: A Majestic shut and an important node at the north of Fen River

LengQuan village has been relying on the traffic advantages on the pass during the Sui and Tang dynasties becoming a famous commercial town in addition to its military defense function. LengQuan Pass's military defense function weakened gradually after the Ming dynasty. The pass area became the first choice to build houses based on its natural defense. The gate tower was very tall, built during the Ming Emperor's Jiajing period. The street in front of the gate was a straight line along the slope towards the mountain. There are a lot of relics on both sides of the main street such as street shops, banks, schools, memorial arch, drama stage, ancestral temple and so on.

### 3.4. NanZhuang Village: A street, three lanes and two gates

NanZhuang Village was a "castle" mainly built as defense against the enemy. The village's function was complete as a military stronghold. The castle walls, streets, courtyard, residence formed a defensive system together. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the village became a commercial town because of its geographical advantages. The main street was the center of the trade and assembling. There were many shops on both sides of the main street, the important public architectures were strung into a line. Three transverse streets were built according to the topography, at the same time, undertaking the business trade, transportation, communication, folk culture activities and other functions together with the main street presenting a "丰(Feng)" glyph.

As a summary, the four villages present an exclusive character towards outer space, the internal street spaces are circuitous and changeable, privacy is strong. To meet the transportation needs in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the main street was built throughout the village combining trading facilities and space together. Villages are the carrier

of culture; its spatial characteristic is the core content reflecting the characteristics of culture. The impenetrable defense system, the unique village layout, the courtyards all over the village have been remains here showing the defense and business culture during the hundreds of years.

#### 4. The integrated conservation of the four Villages in Mian mountain

Unlike the up to down formation cities, most of villages are formed from the bottom up due to the natural terrain. Its forming process is very slow and influenced by both nature and the social environment. Because of the large quantity of villages, their scattered distribution and the lack of funds, the protection of ancient villages in China is often out of puff. For example, this study involves more than four ancient villages needing measures of protection. High efficiency and more systemic group covered protection methods are particularly important.

##### 4.1. The integrated conservation of the "material evidence"

First of all, the base of the village site selection and construction is the natural environment including the mountain, water, ravines and trees, etc. There is a contact between the cultural history information and monuments, from the ancient reads, battlefield handed down to the mountain temples, tombs and other historical witnesses. The last remaining are common in these villages. We can find the typical defensive facilities such as the big gate and the towers from the inside and outside walls. The texture components such as the dwelling houses and commercial street absorbing social structure change for a long time of local-style, to the cultural village ancestral temple, temples and other public buildings to maintain normal continuation of non-material.

##### 4.2. The cultural routes –Event system protection through the” material evidence”

The Macroscopic ancient village association system is the guarantee of the protection work’s persistence and integrity. These four ancient villages contain the similar historical background, presenting pieces culture characteristics under the series of historical events in different times. Excavating the cultural relationship between villages, and planning all kinds of historical factors as a whole are the focus of this level’s protection. The war before the Qing Dynasty had a strong impact on these villages. Business culture in the Middle and Latter Periods of Qing Dynasty also impacted on the whole Taiyuan Basin hugely. Thus, the ancient war and ancient trade route station became the important clues throughout all kinds of remained"material evidence" (Fig.6).

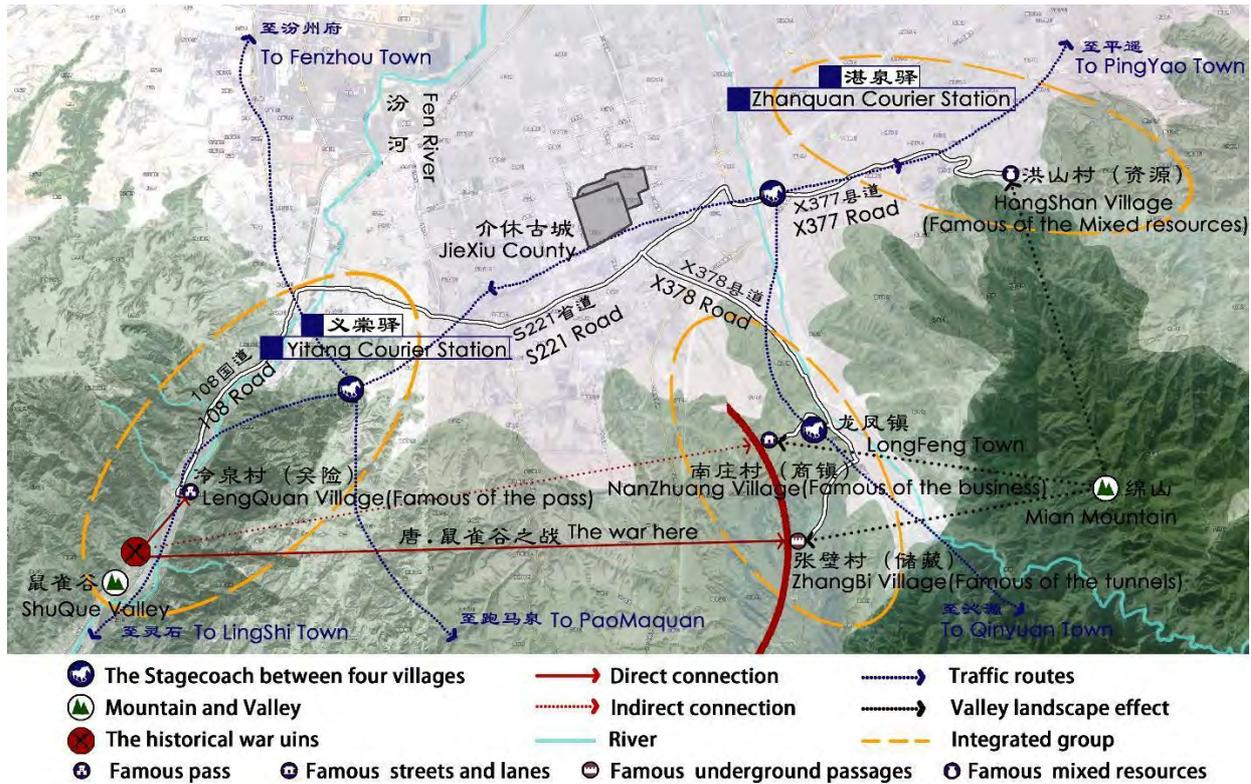


Figure 6 Four villages’ development clues

##### 4.3. Branding the characters - Discovering and protecting villages’ own features

Focus of the historical origination has implicit difference, which led to the villages' characteristic different in dominant form of expression directly. Each ancient village has its cultural independence. We create a cluster architecture and centrally associate cultural characteristics on these multiple villages, at the same time, what we should avoid is its culture identical and manufacture imitation in a rough way caused by the similar characteristics.

## 5. Conclusions

In this case, HongShan Village was greatly influenced by business in the Ming and Qing Dynasties due to its moderate natural geographic location which is significantly different from LengQuan Village and ZhangBi Village under the influence of the war. In addition to the one-thousand-year-old water culture formed by the HongShan spring, there are also pottery and porcelain cultures due to rich forestry resources and climate conditions of cultural achievements in HongShan Village. The rich intangible cultural heritage is particularly valuable. NanZhuang Village as an old town in the past, has a more cautious building structure and form and is joined with the Chinese traditional theory of environment like "nature and humanity". The value of the architectural remains is more worthy of scrutiny. Given its serious damage, the village needs to limit its development. LengQuan Village and ZhangBi Village all have their defense characteristics. The difference is that LengQuan Village's villagers have relocated overall and the village has become a "site" village, as Brokeback Venus, need not to be repaired deliberately. The loss of natural environment after the hollow broken beauty is very attractive. On the other hand, because of the ancient underground passages in ZhangBi Village that have been developed, the village has been a well-known tourism site. We should avoid excessive development that leads to the loss of the authenticity.

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