

Scenario Construction of Rural Intangible Cultural Heritage Homestay Clusters: Core Dimensions and Implementation Pathways

Li Wanlian^{1,a}, Zhang Xinyun^{1,b}

¹School of Business Administration, Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Bengbu, Anhui, China

^aliwanlian2003@163.com, ^bzhangxinyun139@163.com

Abstract: Against the backdrop of coordinated advances in cultural-tourism integration and rural revitalization strategies, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) homestay clusters—functioning as key vehicles for activating rural cultural capital—play a critical role in enhancing tourism destination appeal through scenario construction. This paper systematically reviews scholarly developments in ICH-based tourism and the evolution of homestay clusters. Drawing on scene theory as a theoretical framework, it examines the theoretical foundations, developmental models, and core components of ICH homestay cluster scenarios, while analyzing how “scene power” contributes to destination attractiveness. The study identifies four core drivers of scenario construction: symbolic translation of cultural elements into scenographic forms, collaborative innovation in spatial experience design, technological empowerment for immersive engagement, and multi-stakeholder coordination. These dimensions operate synergistically through a four-part integrative mechanism—“culture-space-technology-stakeholder”—transforming fragmented resources into cohesive, systemic scenes. This integrative approach effectively addresses persistent challenges such as cultural symbol fragmentation and experiential homogenization in rural cultural tourism.

Keywords: Rural Intangible Cultural Heritage Homestay, Homestay Cluster, Scene Theory, Scenario Construction, Destination Attractiveness

1. Introduction

Under the national strategic framework of integrated cultural-tourism development and rural revitalization in China, the deep integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with the tourism industry has emerged as a central pathway for revitalizing rural cultural capital. As a composite entity that integrates cultural significance with accommodation functionality, ICH homestays fulfill dual roles: they carry forward the cultural mission of ICH protection and transmission while simultaneously advancing the economic objectives of rural revitalization and tourism growth. Although numerous exemplary cases of ICH homestays have emerged across China, they commonly confront practical challenges—including fragmented cultural symbols, experiential environment homogenization, and inefficient stakeholder collaboration.

As the global tourism industry transitions from a "resource endowment-oriented" model to one driven by "scene-based experiential engagement," traditional development approaches centered on isolated ICH projects or standalone homestays increasingly prove inadequate. Due to their lack of coherent cultural narratives and economies of scale, these models struggle to meet tourists' growing demand for immersive experiences and emotional resonance^[1], thereby limiting destination market competitiveness. To overcome these limitations, certain regions have adopted a clustered development strategy. Such models not only reshape the physical landscape of rural areas but also reinvigorate local cultural memory and ecological value, significantly enhancing regional appeal. A case in point is Mingyue Village in Chengdu, where pottery workshops serve as the nucleus for a cluster of over 30 ICH-themed homestays. Through a composite scenario model integrating "homestays + handicraft experiences + pastoral landscapes," the village attracted 100,000 visitors in 2021, generating annual revenues exceeding 30 million yuan from accommodations and dining^[2].

The emergence of ICH homestay clusters facilitates the integration of dispersed ICH resources, reconstructs spatial experiences, and innovates cultural storytelling, offering tourists a diversified and

immersive tourism environment. It has catalyzed a paradigm shift in cultural tourism—from basic accommodation provision to an emphasis on cultural immersion—positioning itself as a representative model of culture-led rural tourism and injecting sustained momentum into rural revitalization. Moreover, through their clustered structure, ICH homestays have become a key contributor to destination attractiveness. Nevertheless, academic inquiry into ICH homestays and their cluster-based development remains relatively limited. In response, this study employs scene theory to investigate the scenario construction of ICH homestay clusters. By integrating rural "ICH-space-industry" resources, it proposes a developmental pathway from "single-point operation" to "clustered synergy." This approach not only enables destinations to achieve a qualitative leap in attractiveness but also expands the applicability of scene theory within rural cultural and tourism research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ICH Tourism Development

As treasures of human civilization, ICH embodies profound cultural connotations, distinctive modes of expression, and strong regional and ethnic identities. During the tourism industry's shift from landscape-oriented development to the exploration of cultural depth, ICH resources have significantly enriched tourism offerings with authentic cultural heritage. The living transmission, cultural richness, and identity-building potential inherent in ICH grant it unique advantages for tourism development, closely aligning with tourists' growing demand for meaningful and high-quality cultural experiences. Consequently, ICH-based tourism has emerged as a pivotal trend in the evolution of the tourism sector.

Contemporary ICH tourism development is characterized by diverse models. Geographically, it includes both the integration of ICH elements into established scenic areas^[3] and the promotion of rural ICH tourism in ethnically distinct regions^[4]. In terms of presentation formats, it encompasses festival celebrations, stage performances, static exhibitions in ICH museums, themed tourism routes, hands-on experiential activities, and the creation of cultural and creative products^[5,6]. Despite these advancements, ICH tourism faces significant challenges, including the erosion of authenticity due to over-commercialization^[7], the dilution of cultural meanings^[8], and the risk of aesthetic alienation and the weakening of "sense of place" as ICH transitions from localized practices to broader spatial representations^[9]. To ensure sustainable development, scholarly research has proposed a range of strategic responses. These include designing innovative and participatory ICH tourism products to strengthen visitor engagement and cultural identification^[10], integrating ICH into rural cultural revitalization and artistic initiatives^[11], developing concentrated ICH tourism zones and industrial corridors in rural areas^[6], promoting synergies between productive and community-based safeguarding approaches^[12], building comprehensive digital systems for ICH documentation and immersive applications^[13], and establishing collaborative governance frameworks involving governments, scenic area operators, inheritors, and tourists^[3].

2.2 Homestay Development

Originating in overseas contexts, the homestay industry in China initially served as a provider of basic accommodation for tourists. As tourism market demands have become increasingly diversified, the sector has progressively transitioned toward specialized, thematic, and clustered development models. In the integration of homestays with local cultural resources, Wu et al.^[14] observed that tourism homestays have established distinctive industrial chains—such as "homestay + red culture" and "homestay + nature-based study tours"—by leveraging local cultural heritage and agritourism assets, thereby facilitating deep integration with rural economic and cultural systems. Chen and Yu^[2] further argue that homestays can achieve symbolic reconstruction and spatial re-production through differentiated landscape design and embodied experiential practices. For example, by incorporating traditional crafts such as pottery and tie-dyeing into their design and programming, culturally themed homestays significantly strengthen visitors' identification with local traditions. With regard to visitor perception within homestay environments, Huang et al.^[15] based on empirical research conducted in Shanghai, found that atmospheric, design, social, and symbolic elements in homestay scenes exert significant positive direct effects on customers' emotional identification and behavioral intentions. Moreover, higher evaluations of these scene components are positively correlated with stronger emotional attachment and greater engagement in product-related behaviors. As the homestay industry expands rapidly, scholarly attention has increasingly turned to homestay clustering. Homestay clusters are defined as industrial communities formed through the spatial concentration and organizational

coordination of homestay-related elements around core tourism resources, enabling resource sharing, cost efficiency, and service enhancement, and ultimately yielding dual improvements in economic performance and brand equity^[16]. Current academic research on homestay clusters primarily centers on their spatial aggregation patterns^[17,18] and evolutionary mechanisms^[19], their role in advancing rural revitalization^[20,21], and their broader developmental impacts^[22,16].

In summary, although substantial academic research has been conducted on the development of ICH tourism and the evolution of homestays, existing studies have significantly underemphasized ICH homestay clusters and their experiential environments. As an emerging homestay format that embodies distinctive cultural significance, emotional value, and consumption experiences, ICH homestays still possess considerable untapped potential in the dynamic construction of cultural authenticity, the innovation of display platforms, and the transformation of experiential paradigms. Particularly as scenario-driven development increasingly becomes a key driver in shaping cultural and tourism spaces, the question of how to deeply explore and effectively leverage local ICH resources to create diversified experiential clusters for ICH homestays—thereby more effectively showcasing regional cultural distinctiveness and enhancing visitors' positive emotional engagement and cultural identification with local heritage—remains a pressing research agenda that warrants systematic and in-depth investigation.

3. Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

In China, the emergence of ICH homestay clusters has become deeply intertwined with the rural revitalization strategy. The "14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development" explicitly advocates "promoting the deep integration of ICH and tourism, and developing ICH-themed tourism routes and experiential projects." Similarly, the "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Rural Homestays" emphasizes "unearthing regional cultural characteristics and cultivating distinctive homestay clusters." Exemplary cases have emerged, such as the ICH homestay cluster in Danzhai, Guizhou, and the "ICH workshops + homestays" agglomeration zone in Tonglu, Zhejiang. Practices in these regions confirm the central role of scenario construction in enhancing the differentiated competitiveness of ICH homestay clusters^[23,5].

3.1 Concept and Characteristics of ICH Homestay Clusters

ICH homestay clusters refer to industrial agglomerations formed by integrating ICH elements into homestay operations within specific geographic areas. They are characterized by three core attributes: cultural identity, clustering, and experiential value. Specifically:

Cultural Identity. Cultural identity is embodied through intangible cultural heritage as the core spirit, serving both to transmit and showcase local multicultural diversity. Heritage preservation theory emphasizes the living transmission and sustainable utilization of ICH. As significant cultural spaces, ICH homestay clusters open new arenas for the intergenerational transmission of ICH. By seamlessly integrating ICH elements into architectural design, interior decoration, dining services, and experiential programming, these clusters not only enrich the cultural depth of accommodations but also advance the productive safeguarding and dynamic continuity of ICH. For example, Hanyuan County has systematically explored ICH resources such as tea-horse culture and tribute pepper culture, actively implementing an "ICH into homestays" initiative. It has designed and launched ICH-themed creative products, thereby enriching the "homestay + ICH" business model.

Clustering. Clustering is manifested through optimized resource allocation and synergistic industrial development enabled by spatial proximity. The clustered development of ICH homestays is grounded in the principles of specialized division of labor and collaborative synergy from cultural industry cluster theory. It also integrates insights from tourism experience theory regarding visitor engagement and participatory practices, while responding to the urgent need in cultural heritage protection theory for the activation and transmission of ICH. For instance, in Yixian County, Anhui Province, a comprehensive industrial ecosystem has been established to maximize the integrated benefits of homestay development. This ecosystem spans mid-to-high-end homestays, scenic attractions, design firms, financial institutions, and green food enterprises. Within this network, "Yixian Local Treasures"—ICH-based cultural and creative products—are featured in homestay marketplaces. Renowned traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and live-streaming influencers have formed partnerships with homestays, while fifteen green food enterprises provide customized offerings for 300 homestays. This initiative not only strengthens the homestay cluster but also incentivizes local farmers to cultivate "Five Black" crops, enabling guests to experience the authentic "Yixian flavor" while

increasing rural incomes. This symbiotic model dismantles the boundaries between homestays and surrounding resources, fostering a virtuous cycle of industrial interaction.

Experiential Focus. The experiential dimension centers on delivering immersive and in-depth cultural experiences. Tourism experience theory focuses on visitors' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagements throughout their journey. As key carriers of experiential tourism, ICH homestays construct immersive cultural environments that enable visitors to gain profound appreciation of local culture through direct participation. For example, the fish-lantern ICH-themed homestay cluster in Shexian County transforms guesthouses and workshops into experiential venues within the ancient city. Under the guidance of master artisans, visitors engage in hands-on activities—such as weaving bamboo frames, pasting paper, painting designs, and crafting personalized fish lanterns. Simultaneously, the cluster in Huizhou Ancient City pioneers a new cultural tourism format centered on "ICH performances + night markets," adopting a strategy of "attracting visitors through folk performances and retaining them through consumption scenarios."

In summary, ICH homestay clusters integrate fragmented resources—including traditional crafts, folk rituals, and architectural techniques—into a tripartite network of "cultural symbols, physical spaces, and social interactions" through spatial concentration and operational synergy. This integration drives the evolution of folk industries and ICH development from isolated, point-based experiences toward a systemic leap into cluster-wide effects.

3.2 Scene Theory

The Theory of Scenes, introduced by Terry N. Clark, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago, and his research team, originates from the paradigm shift in urban development dynamics during the post-industrial era. Traditional urban development theories identified land, capital, and labor as primary production factors driving urban growth. However, with the decline of manufacturing and the rise of cultural and service industries in the late 20th century, theoretical frameworks centered on "production logic" became increasingly inadequate in explaining emerging urban phenomena. Through long-term empirical research on over 1,200 U.S. cities, Clark et al.^[24] found that cultural consumption scenes—formed by combinations of "amenities" such as cafes, museums, and art galleries—have emerged as new drivers for attracting the creative class and catalyzing urban economic transformation. In "Scenes: How Spatial Qualities Shape Social Life"^[25], it is argued that scenes are not mere physical aggregations but meaningful, socially constructed spaces that function as mechanisms of social identification through the encoding and decoding of cultural symbols. These spaces attract individuals who share similar values, thereby fostering collective identities and stimulating urban cultural-economic development. The emergence of scene theory marks a significant transition in urban studies—from a "production-oriented" to a "consumption-oriented" paradigm. Scene theory conceptualizes urban spaces as symbolic carriers of cultural values and lifestyles, emphasizing that scenes shape group identities and influence social behaviors by conveying core cultural values such as "authenticity," "drama," and "legitimacy"^[26].

When applied to cultural tourism, scholarly research indicates that "scene power" refers to the capacity to integrate cultural elements, spatial configurations, and technological support to construct compelling and immersive tourism experiences. Its conceptual dimensions include the scenographic representation of cultural symbols, the scenographic design of physical environments, and the scenographic orchestration of social interactions^[27]. In contemporary practice, immersive tourism scenes enabled by digital technologies—such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR)—significantly amplify scene power and deepen the experiential layers of visitor engagement^[28]. Chen and Yan^[29] further note that cultural scene construction in ICH tourism destinations involves the strategic combination of tourism symbols—including resources, consumer facilities, and spatial venues—to effectively uncover and present cultural connotations and distinctive characteristics, thereby meeting visitors' spiritual and cultural needs through deliberate spatial value orientation.

4. Core Dimensions and Constituent Elements of Scenario Construction in ICH Homestay Clusters

Building upon the preceding discussion of the defining characteristics of ICH homestay clusters and the theoretical framework of scene theory, this study posits that scenario construction in such clusters involves the deliberate configuration of specific combinations of "amenities" within the cluster's spatial domain. This process creates culturally infused spatial scenes designed to attract creative individuals

and consumer groups by conveying distinct cultural values. The core dimensions and constituent elements of this construction are elaborated as follows:

4.1 Core Dimensions of ICH Homestay Cluster Scenarios

Grounded in the principles of scene theory, the core dimensions of ICH homestay cluster scenario construction (see Table 1) are conceptualized as follows:

Authenticity. In scene theory, authenticity refers to the capacity of a setting to evoke identity recognition through the presentation of genuine cultural expressions. Within the context of ICH homestay clusters, authenticity manifests as the sense of cultural belonging and self-identification that individuals experience when observing and engaging with authentic ICH symbols—such as the faithful transmission of traditional craftsmanship or ritual practices. It reflects the perceived fidelity of cultural representation and serves as a foundational element for visitor trust and emotional resonance.

Drama. In scene theory, drama pertains to how environments shape modes of self-presentation and social interaction, involving the relational dynamics between self and other, subject and object. In ICH homestay clusters, drama is realized through intentional design strategies that stage cultural expressions—enabling immersive engagement and interactive participation between visitors (as subjects) and ICH elements (as cultural objects). This aligns with the concept of "anti-routine experiences" in tourism, where visitors derive value from novel, performative, or sensorially rich encounters, such as appreciating the aesthetic qualities of ICH displays or actively crafting traditional artifacts under artisan guidance.

Legitimacy. In scene theory, legitimacy denotes a scene's ability to influence perceptions of right and wrong, moral worth, and social acceptability. Within ICH homestay clusters, legitimacy is shaped by the authority and value orientations of key stakeholders—including homestay operators, government agencies, local communities, and tourists. The interplay of these actors' interests and narratives establishes a shared value system that underpins the cultural and ethical credibility of the cluster. For instance, tourists' recognition of Spring Festival-related cultural symbols displayed in homestays can reinforce collective identification with broader national or ethnic identities, thereby strengthening the sense of a shared community.

Table 1: Core Dimensions of the Clustered scenario for ICH Homestays

Core Dimensions	Theoretical Implications	Typical Manifestations
Authenticity	Cultural authenticity and historical continuity	Heritage-preserving homestays (Traditional tailoring, ancient brewing techniques)
Dramatic	Experience design and sensory immersion	Daoguanchong rammed earth Architecture + floral paper craft experience Bamboo forest trek (Tianzhu Mountain)
Legitimacy	Value recognition and social embedding	ICT homestays fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation (Luanchuan County)

4.2 Constituent Elements of ICH Homestay Cluster Scenarios

As a composite construct integrating physical space, cultural symbols, and social interaction, the scene functions as a central driver in the clustered development of ICH homestays. Its formation relies on four key constituent elements, detailed as follows:

4.2.1 Cultural Symbol Dimension

Intangible cultural heritage and folk cultural symbols constitute foundational components of ICH homestay cluster scenes. By embedding these symbols into spatial decoration and experiential programming, homestays translate abstract cultural narratives into tangible, perceptible forms, thereby strengthening visitors' cultural cognition and emotional connection. For example, Fengxi Hanshan Inn in Wanfenglin systematically integrates Bouyei ethnic ICH elements—such as tie-dyeing, batik, and embroidery—into guest rooms and public areas, offering guests an accommodation experience rich in aesthetic value and cultural depth.

4.2.2 Spatial Experience Dimension

The contextual design of physical environments provides the essential framework for enhancing

experiential quality. ICH homestay clusters establish distinctive cultural fields through characteristic architectural forms and thoughtfully designed public spaces, thus reshaping visitor engagement. In Hanyuan County, Ya'an City, homestay renovations have preserved traditional architectural typologies, utilized locally sourced materials, and incorporated historical rural artifacts. This approach achieves architectural regeneration while ensuring continuity in regional cultural identity and heritage expression.

4.2.3 Technological Empowerment Dimension

The application of digital technologies and multimedia tools within ICH homestay clusters enables dynamic, multimodal representation of intangible cultural resources, significantly enhancing guest immersion and interactivity. For instance, a homestay in Hangzhou employs AR technology to reconstruct the kiln-firing process of Southern Song imperial ceramics; visitors scan QR codes to observe virtual artisans shaping clay and applying glaze in real time. Similarly, a homestay in Chengdu applies 3D printing to replicate traditional Shu embroidery patterns, allowing classical motifs to be reinterpreted through contemporary cultural and creative products. These technological interventions render ICH craftsmanship visible and accessible while actively stimulating visitor participation and cognitive engagement.

4.2.4 Multi-stakeholder Collaboration Dimension

Establishing a collaborative mechanism among multiple stakeholders—including government agencies, enterprises, local communities, and tourists—is fundamental to the sustainable development of ICH homestay clusters. The government provides policy support and infrastructure investment, enterprises lead design, operation, and market promotion, community members contribute through cultural transmission and service provision, and tourists act as experiential participants and informal cultural disseminators. A notable example is Danzhai Wanda Town in Guizhou, which has established a tripartite partnership model of "ICH bearers + tourism enterprises + local community," fostering synergistic development between cultural preservation and tourism-driven economic growth.

5. Implementation Pathways for Creating ICH Homestay Cluster Scenarios

5.1 Translating Cultural Symbols into Scenarios: Activating Abstract ICH into Tangible Visitor Experiences

Theoretically, Symbolic Interactionism posits that the meaning of cultural symbols emerges through dynamic interactions between subjects and objects^[30], with scenes serving as critical physical environments and symbolic mediators for such processes^[27]. The scenographic transformation of ICH symbols should follow an effective pathway: "ritual deconstruction—experiential reconstruction—emotional resonance." Through this scene-based translation, abstract cultural concepts become tangible, perceptible, and deeply participatory cultural tourism experiences, enhancing destination appeal. The clustered development model of ICH homestays amplifies this translational effect. A representative case is Shuangsheng Village in Xingyi City, where a cluster of ethnic-cultural-themed homestays systematically integrates displays and hands-on experiences of traditional crafts such as batik and textile arts, significantly deepening visitors' cultural understanding and immersive engagement. Likewise, Danzhai Wanda Town in Guizhou transforms Miao silver-smithing techniques into a "workshop experience + custom product" scenario, shifting visitor roles from passive spectators to active cultural participants and increasing consumption conversion rates by 45%. Clearly, ICH homestay clusters reinforce local cultural identity by contextually re-embedding regional cultural symbols—such as Yellow River Huabao or Qinling bamboo weaving—thereby stimulating consumer spending and fostering long-term brand loyalty.

5.2 Collaborative Innovation in Spatial Scenarios: Expanding from Accommodation Function to Multi-Dimensional Experience Spaces

The core competitiveness of ICH homestay clusters extends beyond accommodation to include diversified, composite experiential spaces constructed through the "homestay+" model. Take Dalucun Village in Tonglu, Hangzhou, as an example: centered on the integrated scenario of "homestay clusters + high-altitude terraced fields + agro-cultural festivals," the village has developed a four-season experiential chain—"spring tea picking, summer retreat, autumn harvest, winter folk customs"—ensuring year-round visitor engagement. Furthermore, these clusters innovate spatial design

to create "third spaces" that enhance immersive perception. Chengdu's Mingyue Village exemplifies this approach, employing a spatial configuration of "pottery workshops + homestays + pastoral landscapes" to form a creative community integrating production and consumption functions. This model extended the average visitor stay from 1.5 to 2.3 days and improved respondent satisfaction across dimensions including natural scenery, cultural immersion, and infrastructure quality.

5.3 Technology-Empowered Immersive Spatial Scenario Construction: Enhancing the Depth and Breadth of Guest Experiences

With rapid advancements in digital technologies, constructing immersive scenes in ICH homestay clusters requires focused exploration of how tools such as VR, AR, and metaverse platforms can reconstruct the dimensions of "authenticity" and "drama" within ICH contexts. This includes investigating pathways for cultivating cultural identity in virtual environments and establishing integrated online-offline platforms for presenting and engaging with ICH culture and craftsmanship within cluster zones^[31,32]. Such technological integration enhances both the depth and breadth of visitors' ICH homestay experiences, transforming passive observation into interactive, multisensory participation.

5.4 Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Development Mechanism: Advancing High-Quality Development of ICH Homestay Clusters

The successful construction of ICH homestay cluster scenes depends on a robust collaborative mechanism involving multiple stakeholders—local governments, enterprises, community residents, and tourists—at rural tourism destinations. First, homestay operators within the cluster must establish close partnerships with local ICH bearers, cultural and creative institutions, study tour organizations, and catering providers to form a comprehensive cultural tourism experience chain integrating "lodging, dining, sightseeing, shopping, entertainment, and learning." This satisfies tourists' demand for holistic, in-depth experiences and establishes a sustainable mechanism for ICH transmission and market value realization. Second, multi-stakeholder collaboration facilitates deeper integration of ICH homestay clusters into the broader local cultural tourism industry. This enriches experiential offerings, strengthens destination attractiveness, and supports the living preservation of ICH alongside sectoral upgrading of the homestay industry.

6. Conclusion

In the domain of ICH homestays, cluster-based development not only enables the spatial concentration of resources—such as traditional craftsmanship and folk customs—but also generates significant synergistic effects. ICH homestay clusters serve as critical catalysts for activating rural cultural capital, evolving into innovative cultural spaces that integrate local nostalgia with contemporary creativity. The progressive enhancement of experiential capabilities enriches visitor experience dimensions and strengthens destination attractiveness. This study investigates the construction of experiential scenes within rural ICH homestay clusters and identifies a four-dimensional integrative mechanism—linking "culture, space, technology, and stakeholders"—formed through scenographic translation of cultural symbols, collaborative innovation in spatial design, technology-mediated immersive experience upgrades, and value co-creation among diverse actors. This integrated framework reinforces both cultural identity and developmental resilience within the clusters, while providing renewed momentum for advancing the competitiveness and sustainability of rural ICH homestay destinations.

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