

## A Tale of Two Villages: Debordering and Rebordering in the Bordered Community Scenic Area

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# **A Tale of Two Villages: Debordering and Rebordering in the Bordered Community Scenic Area**

## **Introduction**

Tourism scholars are no strangers to the notion of “border”. From international destination entrance or departure, to the development of gated, all-inclusive resorts, border is part of the entrenched history and reality of tourist movement, an inconvenient contradiction to the mobility tourism stands for. Traditionally, borders are always discussed at the national or international levels, such as in terms of tourists’ cross-border mobility (Gelbman & Timothy, 2011) or types of border destinations and their impacts on tourism development (Wachowiak, 2006; Timothy, Saarinen, & Viken, 2016). Nevertheless, the idea of local borders has been largely overlooked. Recent research has attempted to shift border studies in the tourism context from a national level to a local level (Xu, Huang, & Zhang, 2018). As Saarinen and Wall-Reinius (2019) point out, the establishment of exclusively planned tourism destinations is also characterized by active border-making, which has dynamic impacts on local socio-economy.

Meanwhile, borders are now widely understood as processes rather than fixed physical lines on the map; the paradigm of border research has thus shifted from borders per se to the bordering process (Jones, 2009; Newman, 2006). According to Liao, Breitung and Wehrhahn (2018), borders are produced and reproduced through acts of bordering, debordering and rebordering. Presumably, focusing on the process of debordering and rebordering should engender a more thorough understanding of local borders’ dynamic development.

The main purpose of this study is to take the concept of border as the theoretical basis for an empirical study of how local borders between a bordered community scenic area and its surrounding communities are produced, developed and transformed. By doing so, this study attempts to not only advance our understanding of Chinese bordered scenic areas development, but also contribute to border studies in general. Specifically, the current paper aims to answer the following questions: How do different aspects of local borders form and develop relative to tourism? How do debordering and rebordering processes develop? What factors dominate border development, and what are the effects of bordering processes?

## **Literature Review**

Borders refer to physical lines on a map (e.g., walls and checkpoints) as well as invisible spatial orders and relationships, which are closely tied to identity construction, socioeconomic development, and functional differences (Karaman & Islam, 2012). Borders essentially distinguish “us” from “them”, implying inclusion and exclusion (Houtum, 2005; Newman & Paasi, 1998). Nowadays, the notion of borders has been decoupled from national territoriality to become a multi-scale concept. In particular, local borders are essential for understanding people's daily routine; micro-level borders affect most people’s everyday lives substantially, thus requiring careful academic attention and practical reflection (Newman, 2006; Liao et al, 2018).

Borders are usually diverse, and arguably multi-dimensional (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008). Particularly, local borders can be examined in terms of physical, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions (Klein, 2005; Karaman & Islam, 2012). Breitung (2011) argued that borders as social constructs must be interpreted as political, socio-economic and cultural circumstances; he hence identified five aspects of borders on an intraurban scale: physical, political, functional, socio-spatial and

psychological. Moreover, scholars' understanding of borders gradually shifts from that of a fixed line to a dynamic process that includes bordering, debordering and rebordering (Liao et al., 2018). *Bordering* is understood as the creation and perpetuation of borders via demarcation in space. *Debordering* refers to borders becoming increasingly permeable and 'softer'. Comparatively, *rebordering* captures the tightening of borders as a reaction to excessive debordering, implying an increase in cross-border activity and fewer border-based differences (Albert & Brock, 1996).

## Methodology

This study analyzed a pair of historic villages in Eastern China: Hongcun Village and Jicun Village in Anhui Province which are neighboring villages only separated by a small river sharing a history of more than 800 years (Figure 1). Hongcun is a traditional and mature community-based scenic area in China with a complete physical border and management system. Under the influence of various factors, the tourism development has not only brought tangible physical border, but also intangible socio-economic, psychological and functional differences between Hongcun and Jicun.

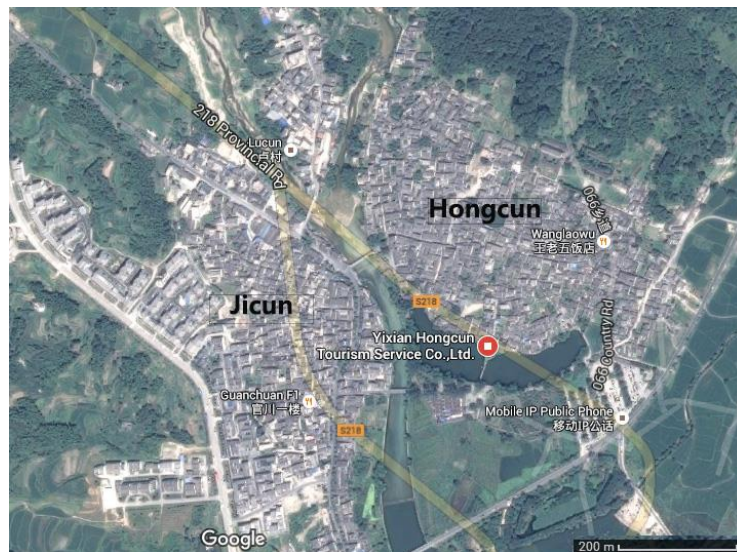


Figure 1 The relative location of Hongcun and Jicun

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how local residents describe border development and perceive different aspects of local borders, and their respective impacts on local development. A total of 71 residents were interviewed in a semi-structured manner, including 34 in Hongcun and 30 in Jicun, and 4 government officials as well as 3 tour guides. Observations were performed to track the mobility of tourists and residents and detect the distribution of non-mobile facilities.

## Results

### *The formation of physical border in Hongcun Scenic Area*

Although a detailed account of the formation process will be beyond the scope and space limit of this abstract, some key points of the border formation of Hongcun must be provided to put the analysis into context:

Prior to the village's tourism development, Hongcun's administrative border identified it as a basic administrative unit; specifically, the border indicated administrative territoriality and demarcated spheres of political management and responsibility.

In 1986, an ancient residential building, *Chengzhitang* Hall was opened as a tourist attraction, marking the official beginning of Hongcun tourism. From 1990 to 1995, several more attractions emerged as part of the village's tourism development. The physical border of Hongcun Scenic Area was initially developed.

In 1997, the local government and a Beijing-based tourism development company agreed to jointly develop tourism in Hongcun. A year later, the Tourism Committee of Yi County approved the scope of Hongcun Scenic Area. Since then, the physical border of Hongcun Scenic Area has been fully defined and recognized.

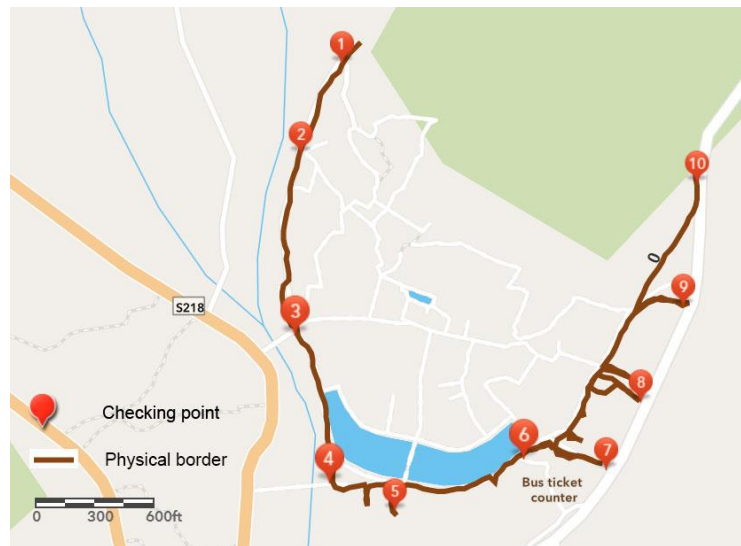


Figure 2 The physical border with ticket checking points

In 2000, Hongcun (and another village in the area, Xidi) was listed as a "World Cultural Heritage Site" by the UNESCO. The protection scope of Hongcun heritage site is divided into three levels (figure 3). And the physical border of Hongcun Scenic Area overlaps with that of the first-level protected area (see below the red line).

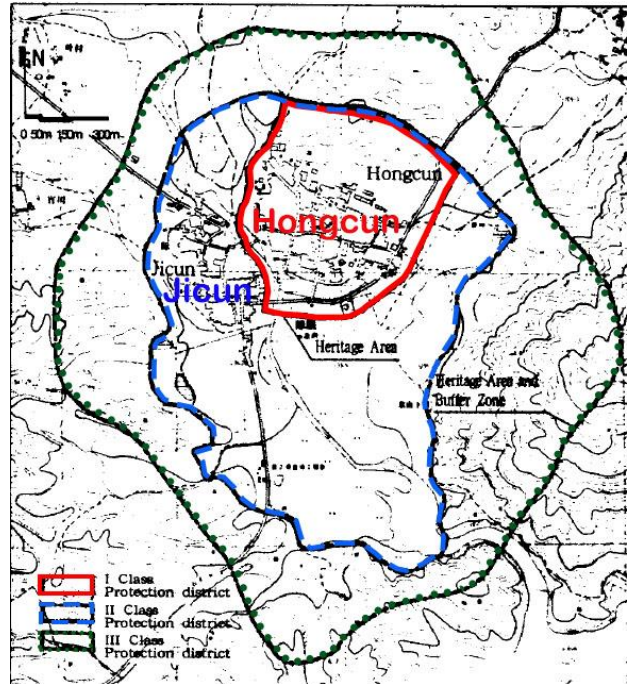


Figure 3 The border of Hongcun protection area

Over the past decades, while Hongcun enjoyed enormous tourism success, Jicun, its neighboring village cross the river, suffered damage of the original village structure and disoriented expansion, as it practically became part of the buffer zone for the construction of infrastructure and commercial facilities. Thus, socioeconomic, functional, and psychological borders formed along with administrative and physical borders. These changes elicited differences in the social economy, identity, functions, resource allocation, and space utilization inside and outside borders.

### *Debordering and rebordering in the bordered community scenic area*

#### *The administrative aspect*

Administrative borders are "manifestations of political and administrative territoriality, and they demarcate spheres of influence and responsibility, and separate different governance spaces from each other" (Breitung, 2011, p. 57–58). Hongcun was originally just an administrative village, same as Jicun. As tourism developed, Hongcun gains increasing popularity. In order to promote regional development, even the local township was later renamed Hongcun Town. A resident of Jicun described the process thusly (Hongcun and Jicun residents are denoted as H# and J#, respectively, in subsequent interview excerpts):

*“After tourism development, [the area] was renamed Hongcun Town. Several years ago, in order to participate in the selection of the national tourism town, Hongcun Town merged several remote villages and extended the jurisdiction”* (Jicun Interviewee J20).

Changes in the administrative area and name blurred residents’ perceptions of the village’s administrative border. For example, residents near Hongcun Village stated,

*"We all belong to Hongcun, and it's not far away from the scenic area and the outside"* (Hongcun Interviewee H23).

*"Now we tell tourists that we all belong to Hongcun "* (J23).

Corresponding to the administrative border is the household registration management system, which demonstrates the rebordering process. Tourism development has drawn a growing number of foreign workers to Hongcun for business or work, yet only those with Hongcun residential registration can earn a dividend from the revenue of entrance tickets of Hongcun Scenic Area. The administrative border covertly distinguishes those who can and cannot benefit from the dividend, thus differentiating Hongcun from the surrounding villages.

*"Hongcun Village pays dividends and retirement subsidies to villagers based on their residents' household registrations; we don't have this kind of treatment because we are outsiders"* (J14).

### *The physical aspect*

Physical borders are "visible in the landscape, both as physical structures such as fences and walls, and as discontinuities of land-use, building style, signage, vegetation, colours, or plot sizes" (Breitung, 2011, p. 57–58). Prior to tourism development, despite being separated by a river, locals in Hongcun and Jicun did not perceive a clear physical border.

*"Before the development of tourism, Hongcun and Jicun were the same, there was no difference"* (J10).

Later, even as ticket checkpoints were developed, the physical border (consisting of checkpoints, the river, paddy fields, and hills) is not totally closed. And the borderline is neither very clear nor fixed. As the landscape transformed around the scenic area (e.g., the riverside and fields), the landscape inside and outside the scenic area became more continuity and uniform. As such, the border became blurred with respect to physical aspects.

Rebordering of the physical border is also apparent in Hongcun's and Jicun's development. For example, many commercial shops opened at the street among the two villages prior to 2016. In 2017, most original houses and shops were demolished to build green belts to beautify the landscape and improve the environment. However, some villagers were skeptical that the government tried to obtain land to sell to developers to build commercial housing and obtain higher economic benefits; therefore, they did not support the demolition.

*"The government is supposed to take this land and sell it to developers. The land the government expropriates from farmers is cheap, but the price is much higher when the government resells to developers"* (J6).

In 2018, the result of the negotiation between the government and Jicun villagers was that the government fenced the houses that had not been demolished (figure 4). What's more, Hongcun's tourism development also brought new opportunities for modern development and prosperity to Jicun. By 2019, new parking lots, commercial housing and other facilities and infrastructures, have



been built in Jicun. Many houses in the old area were rebuilt and expanded to varying degrees, exemplifying a rebordering process in terms of building style, structure, and size.



Figure 4 The changes of the physical border between Hongcun and Jicun

### *The socio-economic aspect*

The welfare and management system differ between Hongcun and Jicun, including construction management, sanitation management, water and electricity subsidies, and retirement subsidies. The social-economic borders are also reflected in people's incomes, including business income and dividend income. For example, according to the interviews, the tourism dividend of Hongcun was about 5,000 yuan (approximately USD\$720) per person in 2019, whereas Jincun residents earned zero.

Socioeconomic debordering has also manifested in the economy-facilitated effects of Hongcun's tourism development on the surrounding villages. On the one hand, Jicun serves as a buffer zone, providing space for many projects required for tourism development. On the other hand, as a buffer zone of the Hongcun heritage area, housing construction and Jicun's expansion must be controlled.

*"Hongcun tourism development has a certain driving effect to Jicun. Just in the past few years, every family in Jicun has been busy with building or extending houses for tourist business." (J24)*

*"Stalling is now also strictly managed in Jicun. I am not allowed to put a dining car on the roadside. There are also strict restrictions on building in Jicun" (J14).*

However, this debordering remains incomplete and is accompanied by rebordering tendencies. Hongcun is still the main area for capital generation and tourist visitation. Moreover, rent within Hongcun Scenic Area is quite high; only those who can afford these rents own shops in the scenic area. Most people are therefore excluded by the socioeconomic border.

*"Tourists prefer to live in the old houses, and only when the houses inside are full will they be diverted to the outside, and the price outside the scenic area is much lower " (J12).*

### *The functional aspect*

The functional border of Hongcun Scenic Area, on the one hand, refers to the barrier and filtering effects. The mobility of people is managed and restricted by the borders. On the other hand, borders not only distinguishes groups or communities, but may also serve as a medium and bridge to connect the two villages.

*The barrier effects.* Initially, only individuals who lived within Hongcun could pass freely through the checkpoints. Various negotiations gradually enabled other local (i.e., Yi county) residents and those with area businesses or jobs to enter and leave the area freely. Thus, the barrier effect of the functional border on local residents has therefore become weaker.

Nonetheless, the border has become more restrictive and less porous to visitors. During the study period from 2016 to 2019, nearly all roads and waterways leading to Hongcun were monitored by ticket inspectors at all hours. Nowadays, the management of ticket checking is even linked to Hongcun villagers' financial interests.

*"Now there are people checking tickets 24 hours a day. As long as there is someone in the village bringing tourists without entrance tickets, [if the person] is caught, his/her travel dividend will be deducted." (H29).*

*The bridge effects.* The differences between Hongcun and Jicun also influence residents' and tourists' mobility. Firstly, to maximize economic benefits and ensure a comfortable living environment, many Hongcun residents prefer to live outside the village and purchase commercial housing in Jicun. Secondly, many villagers outside Hongcun try to work or conduct business in the scenic area because of more employment and business opportunities inside. Thirdly, a 'contact zone' has also developed between Hongcun and Jicun, featuring many commercial and service facilities. Locals and tourists both visit the area for shopping, dining, and services.

However, the mobility of most local villagers and tourists is limited to this 'contact zone'. Tourists tend not to visit other parts of Jicun to engage in various touristic activities, and residents from surrounding villages rarely enter Hongcun for sightseeing or consumption. Even residents of Hongcun who live in Jicun generally consider the scenic area their 'work space' while they live beyond the border.

### *The psychological aspect*



Psychological borders are represented in people's minds, marking the territories of groups of people with different spatial identities and senses of belonging (Breitung, 2011). Both Hongcun and Jicun residents stated the villages were not different before tourism development: *"More than 20 years ago, our two villages were similar"* (H22). As Hongcun becomes a scenic area and a world cultural heritage site featuring physical, socioeconomic, and functional borders, Hongcun and Jicun villagers began to emphasize the differences between "us" and "them". For Hongcun villagers, "World cultural heritage site" and "5A scenic area" (a national recognition) have become their labels when they describe "us", expressing a sense of pride and identity. Yet, Jicun villagers believe that they did not belong to Hongcun Scenic Area or the World Cultural Heritage Site given that they could not enjoy tourism dividends and are excluded from various other tourism benefits.

The psychological border between Hongcun and the surrounding villages does not exist independently, which is influenced by the interaction of administrative, physical, social-economic and functional borders. As a result, the psychological border also embodies a dynamic process involving the debordering and rebordering of other aspects.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

In the current study, the administrative, physical, social-economic, functional and psychological borders of the scenic area and its surrounding villages have been formed and developed with tourism development, and are in the process of bordering, debordering as well as rebordering. Some characteristics of local boundaries can also be inferred from this study. Various dimensional borders do not exist in isolation; they interact and influence each other. Also, the processes of debordering and rebordering may occur at the same time.

Different from national borders which are more solid and stable, controlling the flows for political and security reasons (Paasi, Prokkola, Saarinen, & Zimmerbauer, 2018), local borders are more dynamic and economic-oriented, which are susceptible to various organizations and individuals (Saarinen & Wall-Reinius, 2019). In Hongcun, there are three primary forces driving the development of local borders: the government, the company, and the individuals. Specifically, the administrative border is controlled by the local government and has existed long before the development of tourism. Later, driven by both the local government and the management company, a physical border was constructed as a result of tourism development and heritage protection. This physical border does not overlap with the administrative border, but it mitigates/reinforces the administrative differences between the two villages by debordering and rebordering processes. At the same time, socio-economic, functional and psychological borders have also been accompanied, and undergone debordering and rebordering processes due to different forces.

This paper makes some contributions to the literature. Firstly, it uses a micro perspective to look deeper into the borders constituting in the tourism context, revealing that local borders are always driven by external forces and actors, strongly supported by the market economy. Secondly, the current paper conceptualizes borders as processes including bordering, debordering and rebordering, which provides a dynamic perspective on local borders to understand the ongoing impacts brought by tourism. Finally, the conceptual framework of border is helpful to understand the impacts of tourism development on communities both within and outside the scenic area, thus, a holistic picture of impacts associated with bordered tourism community as well as the current heritage conservation model can be obtained.

As for managerial implication, this article helps understand the processes as well as potential problems brought by local borders in the tourism context, which has important planning and policy implications. For instance, it sheds light on how to determine the potential scope of a border, how to reconcile differences among involved parties, and how to promote debordering and prevent rebordering

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