

GUARDIANS OF HERITAGE: SAFEGUARDING DATONG CITY WALL AND XIDI VILLAGE

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Abstract: Historic villages and towns, as invaluable legacies of human civilization, are currently under threat due to inadequate restoration efforts. To illustrate the challenges faced by these precious resources, this paper examines the ancient city wall of Datong in China and the ancient village of Xidi in Huizhou. It conducts an in-depth analysis of the existing damage, highlighting the pressing need for preservation. Additionally, this study proposes solutions that emphasize the imperative integration of sustainable development and the protection of cultural heritage. By delving into these issues, the paper aims to draw attention and inspire collective action to safeguard historic villages and towns and uphold the rich historical and cultural wisdom of humanity.

Keywords: Historic Villages, Cultural Heritage Protection, Sustainable Development, Restoration Challenges, Cultural Wisdom Inheritance

Introduction

Historic villages and towns are precious heritages of human civilization, but some unprofessional restoration works threatens the preservation of these precious resources. Taking the ancient city wall of Datong in China and the ancient village of Xidi in Huizhou as examples, this paper discusses the protection problems faced by historical villages and towns. In-depth analysis of its damage to the current situation, emphasizing the urgency of protection. At the same time, it proposes solutions to advocate the organic integration of sustainable development and cultural heritage protection. Through in-depth research, this paper aims to call for more attention and actions to jointly safeguard the historic villages and towns and inherit the precious historical and cultural wisdom of mankind.

1. Regulations on the Protection of Historic Villages in China

In order to strengthen the protection and management of famous historical and cultural cities, towns and villages, and inherit the excellent historical and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, the state has formulated the Regulations on the Protection of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages, including a total of 48 regulations on declaration and approval, protection planning, protection measures and legal liabilities. This regulation was set for 2008, after which the restoration and protection of historic villages and towns were carried out randomly on a large scale^[1].

1.1. National policies and regulations

From the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics (2017 Amendment)" issued in November 2017, we have learned about the basic principles and policies for the protection and restoration of historical villages, and clarified the judgment and regulations of historical villages. At the same time, the

corresponding legal responsibilities for the restoration and preservation of historical relics (including historical villages and towns) are stipulated, so that everyone can treat historical relics in a more correct and standardized way^[2].

The Notice on Further Strengthening the Protection of Rural Ancient Buildings gives further and more detailed instructions on the protection of rural ancient buildings, requiring the focus on the protection and restoration of ancient buildings in rural areas, including ancient buildings in historic villages, and the need to recognize the importance and urgency of strengthening rural cultural construction. The government should attach great importance to the construction of rural culture. Party committees and governments at all levels bear important responsibilities for strengthening rural cultural construction. It is necessary to incorporate rural cultural construction into the important agenda of party committees and governments at all levels, into economic and social development plans, into financial expenditure budgets, into poverty alleviation plans, and into the evaluation indicators for cadres' promotion, so as to ensure the realization of the goals and tasks of rural cultural construction^[3].

1.2. The enlightenment of the 14th Five-Year Plan on the protection of historic villages

In 2022, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and The General Office of the State Council issued the 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development, which mentioned the need to "inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture and revolutionary culture." These include strengthening the study and interpretation of fine Chinese traditional culture and revolutionary culture, strengthening the protection and utilization of cultural relics, and strengthening the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. "The concept of protecting historical and cultural heritage is of great responsibility to strengthen the awe of historical relics." We will comprehensively strengthen archaeological work and improve the system of "conducting archaeological work first and selling it later". We will strengthen technological innovation in cultural relics." At the same time, the state believes that the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in historic villages should not be underestimated. In the process of inheriting and protecting intangible cultural heritage, it is necessary to adhere to the position of Chinese culture, adhere to creative transformation and innovative development, continue the Chinese context, inherit the red gene, build a common spiritual home of the Chinese nation, and gather the spiritual strength of unity and forging ahead of the Chinese people.^[4]

1.3. Local government policies and regulations

Provincial, city and county governments have formulated a series of local laws, regulations and regulations to strengthen the protection of historic villages. Most of these policies are specific implementation rules formulated according to national policies, which cover the requirements of protection, restoration, management and utilization.

Taking Datong City of Shanxi Province as an example, after the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 15th People's Congress of Datong City on June 29, 2020, approved by the 19th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 13th People's Congress of Shanxi Province on July 31, 2020, they implemented corresponding local policies for the protection of the ancient city of Datong with reference to the central policies and regulations. Under the guidance of the central regulations on the protection of historic villages, the policy has carried out more comprehensive, detailed and detailed targeted regulations, which are more in line with the local culture and the status of the ancient city.

2. Datong ancient City Wall case statement

The ancient city of Datong is a famous historical and cultural city in Datong, Shanxi Province, China. It plays an important role in history with far-reaching influence and outstanding status.

2.1. *Comparison before and after restoration*

Datong Ancient City, located in the north of Shanxi Province, China, is one of the most representative ancient cities in northern China. Since ancient times, Datong has been the center of politics, economy and culture, with rich historical and cultural heritage and unique urban features. The history of Datong dates back to the Warring States Period in the 3rd century BC. With the development of history, it became an important political and military location in the North. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Datong became the political center of the North and the hub of northern economy and culture. Tang Dynasty general Guo Ziyi built a city here and named it Datong to express the desire to unify the world. In the jurisdiction of Datong, also includes the famous Yungang Grottoes, these grottoes preserve a wealth of Buddhist art fine, for the study of Chinese Buddhist culture and art has a high value. In the Song Dynasty, Datong was the economic center of the north and was once one of the prosperous and prosperous cities at that time. However, after the Jin invasion, Datong was severely damaged and fell into ruins. Since then, although the ancient city of Datong has risen and fallen many times, it still retains many monuments and buildings, showing the rich face of Chinese history(Figure 1).



Figure 1 Ancient City wall of Datong.

Today, the ancient city of Datong, as a famous historical and cultural city in China, attracts a large number of tourists after completing its protection and restoration work.

But on March 25, 2019, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development issued a harsh criticism of Datong.

Datong has been accused of carrying out large-scale demolition and construction in the ancient city and historical and cultural districts, and there are problems with demolition and construction of fake. This is not the first time for Geng Yanbo, director of Datong's Cultural Heritage Bureau, to face accusations of "fake cultural relics".

In the process of the reconstruction of Datong, the old city area is composed of four cities: Ancient City, Tiexi, Shilihe and South of the city, of which the old city is formed by relying on the city construction. The total perimeter of the ancient city wall is 7270.7 meters, and the city wall contains two historical and cultural blocks, namely Guangfujiao Historical and cultural block and Gulou West Street historical and cultural block. In these areas, many antique style shops and homestays have appeared.

However, some experts pointed out that these new homestays do not conform to the housing style of Yanbei district in Datong, but imitate the style of Yuci district in southern Shanxi. The specific difference is that the houses in Yanbei area are relatively short, while the houses in southern Shanxi area are relatively tall(Figure 2).



Figure 2: Geng Yanbo served in Datong for many years.

3.2. Difficulty in repairing ancient city walls

3.2.1. Land expropriation and demolition

There are often residential areas and buildings around the ancient city walls, and land acquisition and demolition work are required to free up the space needed to restore the ancient city walls.

3.2.2. Site disease assessment and preparation for restoration

The site survey and site disease assessment of the ancient city wall were carried out to determine the scope and method of restoration. At the same time, it is necessary to carry out restoration preparations, such as making restoration plans and drawing surveying and mapping drawings.

3.2.3. Prevent further damage

The walls of ancient city walls are often damaged and aged, and need to be repaired in time to prevent further damage and corrosion(Figure 3).



Figure 3: The situation around Datong ancient City Wall.

3.2.4. Protect the integrity of historical sites

When repairing the ancient city wall, it is necessary to maintain the original appearance and integrity of its historical relics and avoid excessive modification or change of the original historical characteristics.

3.3. Causes of planned damage

3.3.1. Planning and design problems

First of all, in the process of rebuilding the ancient city wall, the planners may not have fully investigated and understood the historical culture of the ancient city wall and its surrounding areas, and could not accurately grasp its unique value and significance. This leads to the planning and design does not conform to the historical style and characteristics of the ancient city wall, and destroys its original historical continuity and cultural connotation. Secondly, due to errors or neglect of the positioning and protection concept of the ancient city wall, planners may be inclined to excessive demolition and reconstruction in pursuit of modernization and commercialization goals.

This may involve the large-scale demolition, reconstruction or transformation of the buildings surrounding the ancient city wall, making the environment and pattern of the ancient city wall lose its historical integrity and authenticity.

3.3.2. *Driven by economic interests*



Figure 4: Status quo of Datong ancient City Wall.

In order to attract tourists and promote the development of tourism economy, the planners may take reconstruction measures to meet the market demand or speed up the reconstruction process. As a result, the ancient city wall will be subjected to excessive commercial development, such as the construction of too many commercial facilities, tourist facilities or entertainment facilities along the city wall, destroying its original historical environment and cultural atmosphere. At the same time, in the pursuit of economic benefits, the respect and protection of the original style and architectural characteristics of the ancient city may be neglected. This resulted in the design and material selection during the restoration process that did not correspond to the historical style and architectural skills of the ancient city wall, affecting its unique cultural values(Figure 4).

3.3.3. *Lack of professional guidance*

There may be a lack of professional guidance on the conservation and restoration of ancient buildings during the reconstruction process, which may lead to decisions and actions that do not meet the principles and standards of heritage conservation. Without the participation of experienced experts, planners may make improper decisions in the selection of restoration materials, construction methods, etc., causing potential damage to the ancient city wall.

This indirectly leads to a lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to correct and correct unreasonable actions in a timely manner. Without regular assessment and monitoring, the reconstruction process cannot be effectively supervised, which will result in planned damage to the ancient wall.

4. **Huizhou Xidi Village case statement**

Xidi Village is a traditional ancient village of Huizhou with a long history located in Yi County, Anhui Province, China. The village was established during the Northern Song Dynasty and has a history of 950 years. As a typical representative of Hui style architecture, Xidi Village is famous for its exquisite ancient architecture and rich intangible cultural heritage.

4.1. *Xidi Village history and culture*

The buildings of the ancient village of Xidi Village are distributed in an area about 700 meters long and 300 meters wide. The whole village adopts the ship-shaped layout, the streets and alleys in the village are set along the stream, and the bluestone is paved on the ground. There are about 200 residential buildings of the Ming and

Qing dynasties preserved in the village, which show the typical characteristics of Hui style architecture. Exquisite decorations such as wood carvings, stone carvings and brick carvings are dotted on the ancient buildings, demonstrating the exquisite skills of Hui style architecture. The ancient buildings in Xidi Village are one of the important examples of Huizhou ancient residential architecture art(Figure5).



Figure 5: Original appearance of Xidi Village.

In addition to its breathtaking ancient architecture, Xidi Village is also notable for its rich intangible cultural heritage. As an important part of Huizhou culture, Xidi Village has inherited rich traditional skills, customs and folk art forms. It includes the inheritance and development of traditional crafts such as Hui style architecture, wood carving, stone carving and brick carving. There are still some traditional folk activities in the village, such as throwing hydrangeas, which reflect the unique folk customs of Huizhou area(Figure6).



Figure 6: Xidi Village.

The importance of Xidi Village is widely acknowledged. In 2000, Xidi Village was included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List and became one of the World Cultural Heritage Sites. At the same time, in 2001, the ancient buildings of Xidi Village were approved by The State Council of China as key national cultural relics protection units. The implementation of these recognition and protection measures aims to protect and pass on Xidi Village as a treasure of Hui architecture and culture, so that the world can appreciate and experience this unique historical heritage.

4.2. Status quo of ancient village

Xidi Village is currently a popular tourist attraction for tourists, but in the process of tourism development and commercialization, some destructive effects have begun to appear.

4.2.1. Over-commercialization

With the rise of tourism, the commercialization of Xidi Village has gradually deepened. A large number of shops and stalls have opened in the village, selling a variety of goods related to Huizhou culture. However, the excessive

concentration of commercial activities and the deepening of commercialization have made part of the original simple and quiet rural landscape covered by the commercial atmosphere.

4.2.2. Building renovation and damage

In order to meet the needs of tourism, some ancient buildings have been renovated and restored to meet the purpose of commercialization. However, some of the renovations did not maintain the original architectural style well, and excessive commercial signage and decoration destroyed the historical style and original character of the building (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Xidi Village Paint at will.

4.2.3. Environmental damage

As the number of tourists has increased, Xidi's environment has come under pressure. The excessive flow of tourists leads to traffic congestion and noise pollution. At the same time, some tourists litter in the village, destroying the cleanliness and beauty of the environment. Such environmental damage will affect the experience of Xidi Village for visitors who are looking for a peaceful rural landscape (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Garbage in Xidi Village.

4.3. Destruction of intangible cultural heritage

4.3.1. Decline of traditional handicrafts

Xidi Village is famous for its unique Hui style architecture and traditional handicrafts. However, under the impact of commercialization and modernization, the inheritance of some traditional handicrafts is facing difficulties. The number of inheritors of skills has decreased, and the younger generation's interest in traditional handicrafts has weakened, leading to the decline and loss of traditional skills.

4.3.2. Commercialization of intangible cultural activities

Some intangible cultural heritage activities, such as traditional operas and folk performances, have been hit by commercialization. In order to meet the needs of tourists and seek economic benefits, cultural activities that are originally rich in ritual and traditional values may be adapted, simplified or over-commercialized, losing their original depth and purity (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Traditional cultural performance.

4.3.3. Change of social life style

With the development of tourism and the influx of foreign tourists, the social life style of Xidi Village will also change. Values that originally focused on local traditions and community communities may be under attack, and some traditional ways of social interaction and activities will gradually disappear, replaced by commercial and modern methods.

4.4. Causes of Planned damage

Generally speaking, the destruction of Xidi Village was mainly caused by the development of local tourism, which led to a series of reconstruction problems.

4.4.1. Commercial requirements

With the rise of tourism and the increasing demand of tourists for historical and cultural attractions, Xidi Village, as a place with unique historical and cultural characteristics, has attracted a large number of tourists. The motivation of commercialization has driven the reconstruction and development of Xidi Village to meet the needs of tourists and seek economic benefits.

4.4.2. Construction and development pressure

In order to meet the demand of tourism, Xidi village may be under pressure from construction and development. In order to provide more tourist facilities and services, new buildings or alterations may be required, resulting in the destruction or alteration of existing historic buildings.

4.4.3. Inappropriate Reconstruction Methods

In the process of reconstruction, if there is not sufficient protection awareness and technical guidance, inappropriate reconstruction methods may be adopted, which will destroy the authenticity and history of the original building. Excessive restoration, alteration or use of modern materials may result in the loss of the historical character and cultural value of the original building.

4.4.4. Pressure of tourism development

Xidi Village, as a tourist attraction, is facing the influx of a large number of tourists and the pressure of tourism development. Excessive human flow and commercial activities may cause damage to the village environment, community lifestyle and intangible cultural heritage, affecting the original tranquility and traditional characteristics.

5. Problem summary and improvement suggestions

5.1. Summary of failure causes

5.1.1. Pressure of tourism development

As a tourist attraction, the ancient city wall and Xidi Village are facing the pressure of a large number of tourists and tourism development. Excessive human flow and commercial activities may cause damage to the

environment, community lifestyle and intangible cultural heritage of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, affecting its original tranquility and traditional characteristics. This pressure of tourism development may lead to excessive consumption of resources, ecological damage and a decline in the quality of life of local residents, making the sustainable development of the ancient city wall and Xidi village a challenge.

5.1.2. *Planning and design issues*

In the process of rebuilding the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, the planners may not have conducted sufficient research and understanding of its history and culture. The lack of in-depth understanding of the historical background, architectural style and cultural connotation of the ancient city wall and Xidi village leads to the planning and design not conforming to its unique value and significance. Planners may not be able to accurately grasp the historical continuity of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, thus destroying the original historical coherence and cultural connotation.

In addition, due to errors or neglect of the positioning and protection concepts of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, planners may be inclined to over-demolish, modify or rebuild in pursuit of modernization and commercialization goals. This may involve the large-scale demolition, reconstruction or transformation of the buildings around the ancient city wall, making the environment and pattern of the ancient city wall and Xidi village lose their historical integrity and authenticity. This kind of planning and design method, which is biased towards commercialization and modernization, easily leads to the loss of the original unique charm and cultural value of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

5.1.3. *Economic driver problem*

In order to attract tourists and promote the development of tourism economy, the planners may take reconstruction measures to meet the market demand or speed up the reconstruction process. This drive for economic interests led to the over-commercial development of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village. For example, building too many commercial facilities, tourism facilities or entertainment facilities around the ancient city wall and Xidi Village not only destroys its original historical environment and cultural atmosphere, but also may lead to excessive commercial competition and resource consumption.

5.1.4. *Lack of professional guidance*

During the reconstruction of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, there may be a lack of professional guidance on the protection and restoration of ancient buildings. The lack of participation of experienced experts can lead to decisions and actions that do not conform to the principles and standards of heritage conservation. For example, improper decisions may be made in the selection of restoration materials, construction methods, etc., causing potential damage to the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

5.2. *Corresponding Improvement Measures*

5.2.1. *Improvement of planning policies and regulations*

① The government should fully investigate and understand the history and culture in the planning process of historic villages and towns to ensure that planners have a deep understanding of the historical background, architectural style and cultural connotation of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

② The government shall introduce professional historical and cultural experts and architects to participate in the planning and design process in the planning process of historic villages and towns to ensure that the planning scheme conforms to the unique value and significance of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

③ In the planning process of historic villages and towns, the government should emphasize the historical coherence and cultural connotation of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village, and avoid excessive demolition, reconstruction or reconstruction of it.

④ In the planning process of historic villages and towns, the government should increase the punishment for the arbitrary transformation of historic villages and towns, improve and rationalize the punishment system, and ensure that historical buildings and intangible cultural heritage are effectively protected. Formulate clear construction planning and management measures to balance the relationship between tourism facilities and original buildings, and avoid excessive reconstruction and destruction of the ancient city wall and the historical buildings of Xidi Village.

5.2.2. *Improvement of economic and tourism strategies*

① The government should formulate sustainable tourism development strategies and balance the relationship between economic interests and cultural protection. Ensure that economic development is coordinated with cultural protection, and avoid over-commercial exploitation.

② The government shall formulate reasonable planning and restrictions to control the number and scale of commercial facilities, tourist facilities or entertainment facilities, so as to maintain the historical environment and cultural atmosphere of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

③ Governments should encourage tourists to participate in sustainable tourism activities, promote the development of local culture and handicrafts, reduce the consumption of local resources, and protect intangible cultural heritage.

5.2.3. *Talent management and professional guidance*

In the process of planning, construction and protection of historic villages and towns, the government should attract experienced experts and talents to participate in the reconstruction and restoration process, provide professional advice and technical guidance, and ensure that the selection of restoration materials and construction methods are in line with the historical style and architectural skills of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village.

6. Summary

The existing problems in Datong Ancient City and Xidi Village mainly include the inconsistency of planning and design, the drive of economic interests, the lack of professional guidance, the pressure of construction and development and the pressure of tourism development. In order to improve these problems, a series of measures can be taken. Through the implementation of comprehensive measures, the protection and sustainable development of the ancient city wall and Xidi Village can be realized.

Similarly, these methods can also be used in the protection and restoration of other historic villages, so that Chinese history and culture can be best inherited and developed.

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