Ancient City Protection and Urban Renewal Development in QI County: Selected Examples

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Abstract. Shanxi Province, in northern China, is rich in cultural heritage resources, because it was, historically, an important section of the ancient tea road. Many of its heritage towns have been meticulously protected. However, there exist some small historical towns whose precious heritages have not been protected and adaptively reused due to the local government’s shortage of funds and technical resources. With respect to this situation, international cooperation is an effective way to solve such problems. “Demonstration Project in Ancient City Protection and Urban Renewal Development in Qi County” is a representative example of such projects. The Qi County government is collaborating with the French Development Agency to undertake this project to embrace the Qi County ancient city as a source for regional sustainable development. This paper discusses the historical evolution of this ancient city, the local features of its cultural heritage, the orientation of its development and the integration of its regional resources, etc. Three example projects have been analysed in this paper. The first is the protection and restoration of the “Qujia Courtyard”. The second is the renewal of the “Cross Street”, which encompasses the commercial streets in the centre of the ancient town. The third example is the “Changyuan River National Wetland Park”, which is an important natural landscape in the Qi County region. Moreover, this paper focuses on how the local government uses the loans and technical support provided by the French Development Agency. The two sides solve a series of problems in the process of this demonstration project, such as concept conflict, positioning deviation and design accuracy. They finally achieve sustainability not only in the domain of heritage protection, restoration and adaptive reuse but also in urban public space transformation. Finally, this paper proposes a method for heritage protection with cultural localisation, value localisation, protection localisation and management localisation. Furthermore, it analyses the advantages which can result from international cooperation mode in the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage and natural heritage.

1. Introduction
There are a huge number of historical town heritage sites in Shanxi Province, China. In recent years, enhanced regulations concerning the protection of architectural heritage sites and ancient cities have been promulgated, with a positive impact on the living environments of cultural heritage. However, due to the large number of ancient cities in need of protection, some with rich heritage value are faced with the dilemma of damage, decline and even disappearance due to improper and insufficient protection and methods. In the process of urbanisation, protecting and upgrading some sites impede urban development. Such is the case in the ancient city of Qi County in Shanxi province. At present, the protection of ancient cities suffers from a lack of substantive support for their revitalisation. This
study explores the potential cultural value of ancient city heritage sites, as well as ideas for shifting the focus from simply protecting the physical heritage to also giving play to its intrinsic value [1]. Local research on heritage conservation can help the government more specifically address the challenges of development. When formulating a protection plan, the infrastructure construction, transformation and renewal, along with regional resources integration methods, are conducive to improving the development environment of the ancient city. It also avoids the lack of competitiveness caused by industrial structure convergence and excessive commercial development. Employing theoretical research and case analysis pertaining to the Demonstration Project in Ancient City Protection and Urban Renewal Development in Qi County, this paper discusses local conservation from the viewpoints of cultural understanding, value mining, protection planning and management operations.

2. ‘Localities’ and French heritage protection experience

The characteristics of a heritage project lay in its protection of the site, understanding the local qualities of the city, along with the urban space and natural environment where it is located, and its historical and cultural evolution. It can be said that these elements constitute the urban space gene and form the urban aspects. It is essential to provide effective ways for urban construction and nature protection, cultural inheritance and promotion of local economic and social development by changing planning and design methods [2]. Based on international documents of historic preservation, heritage protection is gradually moving towards the protection of the towns and regions where the site is located, and to paying more attention to the local historical, natural and social space. In France, for example, in addition to having a large number of well-preserved historical cities, the protection of historical towns and villages is also actively pursued. These localities are of practical significance to the expression of cultural diversity and the promotion of heritage conservation in France. What is important is that country pays attention to the local economic and social development, which involves interpreting the local characteristics of heritage conservation rather than the mere mechanical and physical conservation [3]. In this process, the French system of ‘architectural, urban and landscape heritage areas’ has undoubtedly had a great impact. The development of this system has gone through three stages:

• 1) In 1983, the ‘Loi de decentralisation relative à la répartition des compétences’1 was created. With central government decentralisation, cities and towns bear the rights of urban planning and management. Local government can protect valuable local heritage sites, build upon their local cultural identities, and preserve local renewal and development. Thus, the system of ‘architecture and urban heritage protection areas’ has become the main guide for the protection of local heritage.

• 2) In 1993, the ‘Loi sur la protection et la mise en valeur des paysages’2 was passed. It serves primarily to avoid the trend of landscape ‘assimilation’ in the process of economic development. Its basis is the full exploitation of local characteristics. As long as the historical, cultural and heritage elements they want to preserve – urban, rural, natural, artificial, tangible and intangible – can be protected in a holistic way that aids the promotion of regional characteristics.

• 3) In 2010, the ‘Aire de mise en valeur de l’architecture et du patrimoine’3 was passed, reflecting the need for the static protection of heritage to be actively integrated into the urban development process. Based on careful management and interpretation, the regulation is committed to an appreciation of heritage which not only interprets its core value but also the economic and social purpose of providing better services for the public.

The implementation process of local heritage protection also has its own characteristics. First, led by a professional team, it aims to investigate, excavate and analyse elements with local characteristics,

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1 Established the ZPPAU system, marking the beginning of the French local heritage protection system.
2 Establishing the ZPPAUP system, on the basis of protecting buildings and cities, incorporating landscape elements into the scope of heritage protection.
3 Established the AVAP system, with more emphasis on enhancing the value of heritage.
based on the suggestions and needs of local residents. Second is local protection and value reproduction. The protection of planning is dependent on the development of the city and has a guiding effect on local urban planning. Finally, there is the locality of the management system, including management, financial security and cultural communication. The locality is also attributed to decentralisation and public participation. These measures are of practical significance for the local protection of heritage.

3. Background of the Qi County project and the special challenges of ‘locality’
Based on the advanced experience of France with regard to heritage protection, the government of Qi County intends to introduce the French model into the protection planning of Zhaoyu Ancient City, while at the same time promoting the county’s overall development. The main bodies behind the project are the French Development Agency and the People’s Government of Qi County. The Law and Development Office provide key technical and financial guarantees for the protection of urban renewal of ancient cities. The task of urban renewal is carried out by the local government. In order to optimise the protection and utilisation of cultural and natural heritage sites, the two entities have designed a prototype for the protection of the cultural site itself and the improvement of the surrounding environment with global promotional values and international demonstration significance. The two sides have also developed a cultural heritage management system and public participation model that are economically sustainable and drive community development. The model combines cultural heritage protection with urban renewal and industrial development. The French Development Agency and the People’s Government of Qi County also put forward five construction elements: cultural heritage protection, cultural heritage interpretation and communication education, a capacity building project, heritage tourism and public participation [4]. In addition, the participation of local residents plays a key role in the development of the government work.

Initially, the project relies on the local government and a university research institute to make a detailed investigation and documentation of Zhaoyu Ancient City. The scope of protection has been expanded to include villages with similar cultural characteristics in the unified protection and utilisation. At the same time, the safety of cultural heritage projects has been carried out to eliminate the security risks of ancient cities. Surveying and repair work was carried out on the key buildings in the Ancient City centre. The building foundations were completed quickly. Secondly, the project focused on the construction of key service items, such as a cultural interpretation centre, a greenway and infrastructure construction, to improve the ancient city and the surrounding area of the ancient city services. The Changyuan River National Wetland Park was been developed by the Law and Development Office in cooperation with the Qi County government. It has become an important ecological resource in Qi County and has been included in the regional tourism plan, together with the outstanding heritage resources, such as Qiao’s Courtyard and Gulian Village. Finally, the project introduces advanced French promotional and management concepts, focusing on the construction of heritage communication education, a digital management system and community development. The tangible architectural heritage space is used to promulgate the concept of heritage protection, increase residents’ sense of identity and participation in the local culture, and form a leading standard of heritage dissemination in Shanxi Province.

The protection of heritage is no longer a mechanical commercial exploitation of the heritage. It requires a broader range of time and space to develop the unique cultural potential of each building, town and region to form a more stable heritage landscape system. a series of urban renewal activities should be helpful to enhance the symbiotic relationship between regional tourists and communities, enhance the cultural value and management level of ancient cities, and promote the overall construction of the regional cultural landscape. It is of great significance to highlight the value of historical research and carefully recover the culture.
4. ‘Local’ heritage protection actions and plans for the Ancient City of Qi County

Regarding how heritage protection reflects the characteristics of ‘locality’, the author hopes to use the example of the French Development Agency and Qi County arrangement for the selection of other key projects, from the mining of cultural elements, to the use of value recognition and protection planning. The three components are intended to introduce and reflect the local characteristics of planning management guarantees, bringing a new comprehensive development pattern to the Ancient City.

Qi County is located in Zhaoyu Town, Jinzhong City, Shanxi Province and to the southwest is adjacent to Pingyao. At present, Qi County is the most developed social and economic area in the county. The secondary and tertiary industries are developing well. At the same time, relying on superior location conditions and convenient transportation facilities, tourism has gradually become the core of the frontline service industry in recent years. The county has a rich historical and cultural heritage and is now a national historical and cultural city. The accumulation of 5,000 years has brought a wealth of cultural heritage to this land. The core remains, Zhaoyu Ancient Town, are located in the southwest of the county. It also has a national key cultural relics protection unit, the Qiao’s Courtyard. The intangible cultural heritage of Qi County, such as the Jin merchant culture in the Ming and Qing dynasties, as are the songs and dances, pasta and the folk crafts represented by Qitai Yangge. The history of Qi County is also full of talent. Situ Wang Yun, the poets Wang Ji, Wang Bo, Wang Wei and the author of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Mr Luo Guanzhong, all came from this land. The French Development Agency also recognised the extremely high ornamental and research value of these outstanding cultural heritages before deciding to implement a loan plan, and formulate a series of protection and development strategies with a view towards improving the protection of the ancient city and continuing the value of its cultural heritage [5].

4.1. Local Excavation Based on Cultural Elements—Qujia Yard of Zhaoyu Ancient City

From the perspective of ‘time-space’, the development of Zhaoyu Ancient City has gone through three major stages. Starting from the Spring and Autumn Period (771–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), the city was originally located in Guxian Village, 7.5km southeast of the city. During the Northern Wei Dynasty (477–499), it was moved to the present location. Until the Ming and Qing dynasties brought economic development, construction peaks occurred in the ancient city. Commercial markets and old shops began to appear on Cross Street, and religious buildings, such as the Confucian Temple, Wu Temple and Chenghuang Temple, were built in succession. The pattern of the ancient city was based on a checkerboard grid. The skeleton form reflected the rigorous structure of ‘One Country, Four Streets, Twenty-eight Streets and Forty Courtyards’. In the 20th century, along with war and economic development after the founding of the People’s Republic, the architectural form and traditional patterns of the ancient city evolved with its development. The reconstruction of buildings used for military purposes, and the walls demolished for urban expansion, reflect the evaporation of history. Fortunately, there was no large-scale construction over the ancient city. Early cross-street patterns, Jin merchant courtyards, Confucian Temples and other Buddhist buildings were preserved, though they were somewhat fragmented due to the lack of reasonable protection and overall planning. The centre is moving towards the northeast, and it is gradually losing its vitality as the bustling centre of the past.

In summary, unlike the ancient city of Pingyao, which was laid out according to the patriarchal ritual law system, in the city of Zhaoyu, its architectural shape and urban pattern were more affected by the development of commerce and trade, the traditional life of the residents and Buddhism. The East, West, South and North Streets were used as the cross skeleton adopting the traditional front store-back building architecture. Secondly, under the influence of the Qu and Qiao families, the formation of ‘East is a half city with Qu, and West is a half city with Qiao’ was formed in the city, which shows how the pattern of the ancient city at the time was mainly dominated by the residential community composition. Abide by the rules and embody the concentricity. At the same time, the
temples in the ancient city each performed their duties, becoming the centripetal space, faith and even culture in the city. The centralised public space, landmarks and spiritual culture of the Ancient City have maintained its social, economic and cultural history for more than a thousand years. It can be seen that the formation of the ancient city pattern is inseparable from the development of commerce. It also depends on the contemporary residents’ living patterns, which constitute the current cultural atmosphere. Therefore, protecting the ancient city also protects the traditional life of the modern residents.

Figure 1. Full display of Jin merchants’ production and life scene in Qujia Yard project. (The author draws from basic information)

As a material reflection of the traditional life of the residents, the protection of the Qujia Yard is an important local expression of its cultural elements. The Qujia Yard is located at No. 33 East Street, Qi County. It was built during the Qianlong period of the 18th Century Qing Dynasty. After expansion and construction, today it comprises one aisle, 11 courtyards and 44 buildings, a model of a wealthy ethnic businessman’s residential building. The other part of the protection project is Changyuchuan Tea House which was one of the longest and largest Jin merchant tea houses in history, it boasts five courtyards, 1 marsh road and 19 buildings. The combination of the two is of great historical value to demonstrate traditional Jin merchant life and culture. Currently, the project aims to position it as a museum to display the complete life and work of the Jin merchants, including their residence, Qu Family Ancestral Hall and its commercial activities. At the same time, it will open a special exhibition room to promote the Ten Thousand Mile Tea Road, thereby displaying Qi County status as the cultural centre of Jin merchants and the world capital of tea merchants. In the implementation process, in accordance with the relevant requirements of the Qujia Yard Protection Plan, the current display shows cracks in the wall, colourful corrosion of wooden members, and brick crisping, etc. in the construction of the Qu Family Ancestral Hall and the former residence of the Qu Benqiao renovation and exhibition plan [6]. These comprise the upgrade plans of Qujia Yard and Changyuchuan Tea House, including the production of cultural and creative products of various forms and a more modern museum curatorial plan, including their ability to carry out systematic training and promotion so as to continue the traditional cultural value in the truest possible way. A series of measures are based on a deep understanding of Jin merchant culture, to make it easier for tourists to enjoy a good sightseeing experience (Figure 1).
4.2. Local Utilisation Based on Value Cognition—Cross Street

At present, we are experiencing a renewal of heritage values. How to make heritage values closely integrate with the needs of residents in the contemporary social context via more professional, innovative and meticulous means, requires government, design teams and residents to work together. The recognition and use of this heritage value are different from transforming it into a public building. It also emphasises that indigenous people can play a more important role in the transformation. The approach is not only a concentrated display of historical culture or a restoration of functions, but an admonition to pay more attention to the remodelling of the historical atmosphere of the ancient city and to provide better services to the public and society in promoting local development. This is the second characteristic of heritage protection in the locality: the recognition of the heritage value and the formation of a utilisation pattern with local characteristics. Cross Street played such a role in the protection of Zhaoyu Ancient City.

As the backbone of the Ancient City’s basic structure, Cross Street is also a symbol of its commercial culture. Its historical value is self-evident. As the concentration of old commercial firms, today there are still a large number of buildings that preserve the traditional planar layout, façade structure, decorative decoration, etc. They are known as ‘Jin Merchants First Street’. At present, Cross Street is mostly life-style shops serving the residents of the ancient city. Some of them are used as characteristic museums, such as the Dart Museum, the Museum of Weights and Measures, and the Abacus Museum. The architectural style basically retains the tradition, but there are also quite a few modern buildings that do not match the historical style of the ancient city. The proportion of those buildings has reached 29%. The anti-theft roller shutter doors and shop signs on the facades of the commercial buildings have nothing to do with the traditional image of the historic city. This has resulted in a situation that focuses only on functions but neglects aesthetics and coordination. This seriously degrades the historical atmosphere of the ancient city (Figure 2). On the whole, the current Cross Street is mainly based on internal services. Although tourism has also developed, the overall historical atmosphere is not in place and the theme is not prominent, which makes tourism less appealing.

The goal and position of the Cross Street Protection and Utilisation Project is to develop design policies such as ‘Regulatory Guidelines for Commercial Signage Advertising Advertisements’ and ‘Plans for the Protection and Renovation of Buildings along the Streets of East and West South and North Streets’ to restore buildings along the street facade, improve the environmental space of the streets, and increase appropriate vertical greening and landscape sketches. The traffic policy of limited time and line will be introduced to create a pedestrian-friendly, ancient city transportation network. The business format will adjust and restore the traditional commercial structure, and on this basis, add to the relevant intangible cultural heritage, along with cultural and creative products, traditional cultural features and crafts display areas. Indigenous residents act as guides to participate in business and cultural promotion activities. The cross-street business along the street is the core project, which penetrates into the buildings on both sides to form a three-dimensional enterprise. It is a new type of tourist destination that integrates tourism, cultural display, accommodation reception, catering and entertainment while meeting modern consumer demand (Figure 3). Although there is no major adjustment to the current commercial format, more local adjustments have been made to the cultural atmosphere and experience for the purpose of reflecting cultural values, reprising the role played by Cross Street in the ancient city. It plays an important part as a skeleton connecting important nodes, such as temples, counties and service centres, to activate the historical context of the ancient city. In addition, strict standards and technical applications for the detailed reconstruction of the building are of great significance for enhancing the value of the building. Residents are also willing to participate in this transformation project that is beneficial to them.
4.3. Local Implementation Based on Regional Protection—Changyuan River National Wetland Park

After experiencing the full excavation of cultural elements and protection positioning, implementation is a means of further reflecting on local protection. The Changyuan River National Wetland Park in Qi County has also been funded by the French Development Agency. This is a means to explain the process of heritage protection in the ancient city, by generalising the hallmarks of heritage protection, increasing the landscape design, slowing the division between heritage protection and urban and rural development, and creating a positive impact on the protection of ancient cities. At the same time, it also explains the local characteristics of heritage protection in the planning process. Within the framework of overall urban development, the value of heritage is increased by forming networks.

Changyuan River National Wetland Park is located in the middle of Qi County, Shanxi Province. Since ancient times, it has been one of Zhaoyu’s eight scenic spots. National highways G108 and G208 run from the north to the east of the wetland park, and connect Qi County, forming an environmental development network. The interior of the wetland park is divided into three types of wetlands: river wetland, marsh wetland and artificial wetland. It covers an area of 526.65hm², and has 428 vascular plants, including cultivated plants and 234 vertebrates. Wetland parks play an important role in improving the ecological environment of Qi County and the urban landscape.

The construction of the Changyuan River National Wetland Park was conceived by French designers. Concepts of French wetland restoration were introduced based on four types of construction task, namely, wetland protection, scientific research and testing, publicity and education and infrastructure construction. The wetland park is primarily composed of water landscapes – river, marsh and other categories, etc. Together, they form conservation and restoration display area, a reasonable utilisation area and a management service area, offering a base of operations for the promotion of ecological culture, Jin merchant culture and other folk customs. At present, a series of missionary activities such as bird parks, bird-watching towers, science museums and mountain bike competitions are being carried out in the park. In the future, the Qixian government will also take advantage of regional linkages to plan a greenway system to effectively connect high-quality scenic spots in Qixian, such as Zhaoyu Ancient City, Wetland Park, Folk Village and Qiao’s Yard, to build a tourism development pattern for the entire region (Figure 4). The later Green Road will have
functions such as slow green travel, recreation and biological migration, which will promote the protection and utilisation of existing Qixian attractions, integrate tourism resources and increase the tourist attraction of the ancient city of Qixian [7] (Figure 5).

5. Conclusions
This was a case study of heritage protection in Qi County – its architecture, ancient town and region. The study proposes that local characteristics of culture, values, protection and management should be considered in the course of heritage protection projects. In addition, Aboriginal people also need consideration, especially in areas with underdeveloped economies. Residents’ neglect of heritage values and vandalism caused by weak cultural protection awareness can permanently damage cultural relics. Therefore, the primary task of protection is to educate the residents of ancient cities to make them aware of the history and participate in the process of displaying their cultural heritage.

A series of urban renewal activities will be carried out on this basis. They will presumably have practical significance for enhancing the symbiotic relationship between regional tourists and communities, highlighting the value of historical research and careful restoration of culture. Generally speaking, such practical activities are innovative and challenging. Faced with unfamiliar management
systems and complex fund management models, advanced concepts of heritage protection and more targeted local protection models, facing future promotion and applicability, will have a positive impact on China’s current heritage protection work. Such an enormous project requires a professional team of a suitable size. Therefore, it holds significant positive value for historical protection education in China and provides inspiration for development and solutions for Chinese heritage protection projects. This will enable localities to augment their heritage protection programmes more widely and effectively.

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