

The Present Situation and Countermeasures of the Protection and Inheritance of Urban Historical and Cultural Heritage in China

Qinhan Yu^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Science and Technology Studies, University College London, Gower Street,
London, WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom*

a. yutsinhan@126.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: China has a long history and rich cultural heritage, but the urbanization process poses an inevitable threat to the urban historical and cultural heritage. Protection and inheritance of urban historical and cultural heritage has become an urgent problem to be solved. This study aims to explore the current situation of the protection and inheritance of Chinese urban historical and cultural heritage in Xi'an as an example, and put forward corresponding countermeasures and measures. First, introduce the urban development history of Xi'an, in order to better understand the value and importance of its historical and cultural heritage. Subsequently, through the detailed analysis of the protection of the historical and cultural heritage of Xi'an in Xi'an, the current existing problems and challenges are revealed. On this basis, a series of improvement strategies are proposed, including strengthening laws and regulations, strengthening cooperation and stakeholder participation, implementation of sustainable tourism management, promotion of education and public awareness, and application of innovative technologies in heritage protection. Through further research on the current status of urban historical and cultural heritage in Xi'an, this paper aims to provide experience and inspiration for the protection and inheritance of urban historical and cultural heritage in China. Only through effective protection and inheritance, we can integrate China's historical and cultural heritage into the development of modern cities, and add unique charm to the city, while retaining precious historical memories and leaving precious wealth for future generations.

Keywords: urbanization, urban historical, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of the urbanization process and the continuous advancement of modernization, China's urban appearance is undergoing great changes. However, behind this change is the huge challenge faced by China's rich and unique historical and cultural heritage. The rapid development of cities is often accompanied by the destruction and disappearance of historical and cultural heritage, which is of great significance for the inheritance and promotion of China's long history and culture [1].

As one of the cities with a long history in China, Xi'an carries a rich historical and cultural heritage. As the capital of ancient China, Xi'an has many precious historical relics and cultural heritages, such as the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of Emperor Qin Shihuang, the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, and the City wall of Xi'an in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. However, with the pace of urban development, these valuable legacies also face unprecedented challenges.

This paper aims to take Xi'an as an example to deeply analyze the current situation of the protection and inheritance of urban historical and cultural heritage in China, and put forward corresponding countermeasures [2]. First, the history of the urban development of Xi'an will be introduced to better understand the value and importance of its historical and cultural heritage. Subsequently, through a detailed analysis of the historical and cultural heritage protection in Xi'an, the current problems and challenges are revealed. Based on this basis, this paper will propose a series of improvement strategies, including the strengthening of laws and regulations, the participation of cooperation and stakeholders, the implementation of sustainable tourism management, the promotion of education and public awareness, and the application of innovative technologies in heritage protection.

Through further research on the protection status of urban historical and cultural heritage in Xi'an, this paper aims to provide experience and inspiration for the protection and inheritance of urban historical and cultural heritage in China. Only through effective protection and inheritance, we can integrate China's historical and cultural heritage into the development of modern cities, add unique charm to the city, while retaining precious historical memories and leaving precious wealth for future generations [3].

2. Xi'an City's Historical and Cultural Heritage Situation

China's cities have a long and rich history, with each city having its own planning traditions and cultural spirit. This is a precious asset of Chinese urban planning. "To handle the relationship between cultural heritage protection and urban development, one must first understand the history of urban development." Xi'an, known as Chang'an in ancient times, is located in the southern part of the central plain of the Wei River impact plain in the Guanzhong region. The city benefits from a favorable natural environment, suitable landforms, fertile soil, and well-developed irrigation, which have allowed human beings to thrive and pass on civilization in this region. Sima Qian once wrote, "From Qianyang in the east to the Yellow River and Hua in the west, the fertile soil and fertile fields span a thousand li." The "Shaanxi Tongzhi" records, "As for the products, the region is known for its fertile soil and the beauty of millet and crops, ranking first in the world." It has long been renowned as the "Eight Hundred Li of the Qin Plain." Xi'an is strategically located due to the presence of the southern range of the Qin Mountains, the Wei River to the north, and the Long Mountains on the western side of the Guanzhong Plain, forming a military barrier known as the "Four Passes for Defense" since ancient times [4]. The development of the Qinling Mountains has resulted in an abundance of water resources in the Xi'an area. As an ancient saying goes, "The land of Chang'an is crisscrossed by eight rivers, with the Yuan and Wei flowing to the south, the Ba and Chan bordering to the left, and the Feng and Lao merging to the right." Xi'an has long been praised as the "City Surrounded by Eight Waters," and its rich water resources have facilitated the resolution of the region's water issues, creating favorable conditions for the social and economic prosperity and urban development of ancient and modern Xi'an. The line between the Qinling Mountains and the Lishui River forms a natural embrace of "mountains surrounding water" (Figure 1).

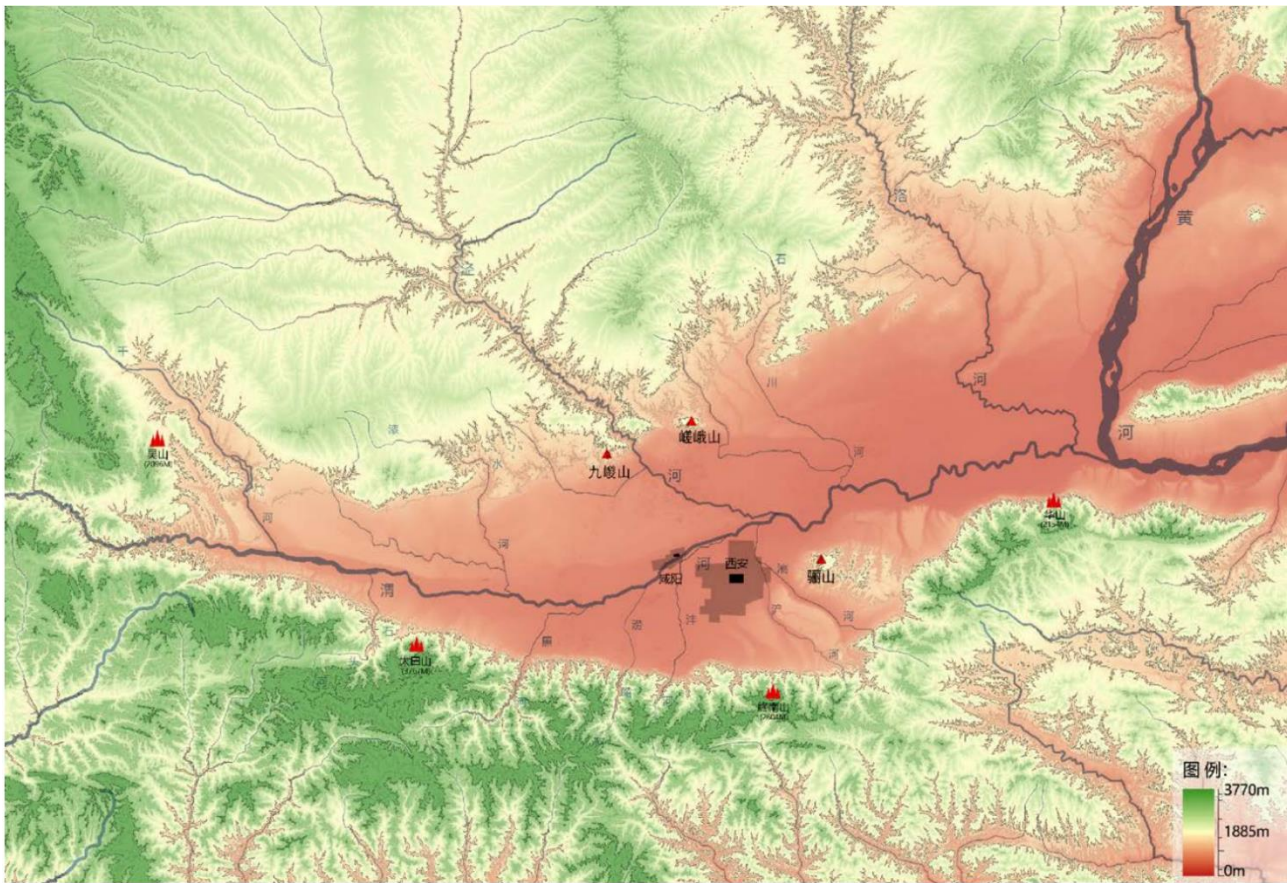


Figure 1: Geographical environment of Xi'an city. (Source: The author self-painted it).

The city of Xi'an has gone through various stages of human social and historical development, preserving and harboring cultural relics of various types from different eras both above and below ground. This is also extremely rare in the history of world urban development. Xi'an is a world-renowned ancient capital in the East, with a history of 3,100 years of city construction. Thirteen dynasties, including the Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties, have established their capitals here. Especially during the Sui and Tang dynasties, Chinese culture and urban planning reached their zenith. Such a profound cultural heritage constitutes the historical and cultural roots of modern urban development. Xi'an is home to representative cultural heritage sites in Chinese history, including the Zhou Fuhao Site, the Qin's Palace of Fáng, the Han Chang'an Site, the Sui Daxingcheng Site, the Tang Chang'an City Site, the Tang Daming Palace Site, the Huaqing Palace Site, the Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang and the Terracotta Warriors, the Xi'an Stele Forest, the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, the Small Wild Goose Pagoda, and the Ming-Qing Xi'an City Wall, among others [5].

3. The Current Situation of the Protection and Inheritance of Urban Historical and Cultural Heritage

3.1. The Current Situation of Urban Historical and Cultural Heritage Protection in Xi'an

The relationship between the challenges brought by modern urbanization and the protection of historical and cultural heritage is very complex. On the one hand, the process of urbanization promotes the excavation and protection of cultural heritage [6]. At the same time, the prosperity of cities also provides economic security for the protection of cultural heritage. However, in the process of urbanization, many cultural heritages have been destroyed or transformed due to urban

development. This contradiction makes the protection of historical and cultural heritage more complex, urgent, and important.

In current China, the government's awareness of the protection of historical and cultural heritage has been continuously strengthened. The country has established a series of protection measures, such as the establishment of the system of cultural relics protection units and the protection system of historical urban areas. According to statistics, there are currently more than 5,000 historical and cultural heritage protection units in China, including many world cultural heritages. This number reflects the degree of attention paid by the government to the protection of historical and cultural heritage.

The historical and cultural heritage of Xi'an encompasses a wide range of iconic sites that hold immense significance in Chinese history. Various departments and organizations have been involved in the protection and preservation of these heritage sites.

Zhou Fuhao Site:

The Zhou Fuhao Site represents the Shang Dynasty's cultural relics and is under the protection of the Xi'an Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage. The department has taken measures to ensure the site's preservation, including regular inspections, maintenance, and the implementation of security measures to prevent unauthorized access.

Qin's Palace of Fáng:

The Qin's Palace of Fáng, also known as the Afang Palace, is protected by the Xi'an Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage. The department has focused on the site's restoration and maintenance, including the repair of damaged structures, preservation of artifacts, and the establishment of visitor management systems to regulate access.

Han Chang'an Site:

The Han Chang'an Site, an important archaeological site from the Han Dynasty, is under the protection of the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration. The administration has conducted comprehensive research, excavation, and preservation work at the site, including the restoration of ancient architecture and the development of visitor facilities.

Sui Daxingcheng Site:

The Sui Daxingcheng Site, the remains of the capital city of the Sui Dynasty, falls under the jurisdiction of the Xi'an City Wall Cultural Relic Protection Management Office. The office is responsible for the protection, maintenance, and repair of the site's ancient walls, gates, and other structures. It also implements measures to control visitor flow and ensure the site's integrity.

Tang Chang'an City Site:

The Tang Chang'an City Site, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is protected by the Xi'an Cultural Relics Bureau. The bureau has implemented preservation plans, including regular inspections, restoration of historical buildings, and the establishment of conservation zones to safeguard the site's authenticity and cultural value.

Terracotta Warriors:

The Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang and the Terracotta Warriors are managed and protected by the Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum Site Museum. The museum has implemented strict conservation measures to protect the delicate terracotta warriors, including controlled environmental conditions, regular maintenance, and ongoing research to ensure their long-term preservation.

Xi'an Stele Forest, Big Wild Goose Pagoda, Small Wild Goose Pagoda, and Ming-Qing Xi'an City Wall:

These sites are under the protection of the Xi'an Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage. The bureau focuses on maintenance, restoration, and visitor management, including the conservation of ancient steles, repair of pagodas, and preservation of the city walls.

In conclusion, Xi'an's cultural heritage sites receive protection and preservation efforts from various departments and organizations. These entities work towards the maintenance, restoration, and management of these sites to ensure their historical and cultural value is safeguarded for future generations.

3.2. The Key Influencing Factors in the Protection and Inheritance of Xi'an City's Historical Culture

The process of modernization has led to the diversification of urban functional structures, resulting in changes in urban spatial patterns. This, in turn, has given rise to conflicts and negotiations between tradition and modernization [7]. The protection of historical and cultural heritage in Xi'an has undergone a deepening understanding of its historical and cultural value. Urban planners and developers, consciously or unconsciously, have followed the traditional pattern and order of Xi'an as an ancient capital, carrying forward its traditional cultural essence. However, this process is accompanied by debates and actions concerning the preservation and destruction of historical sites. Behind the struggle between preservation and demolition lies intense ideological confrontation. It is precisely because of the existence of such intertwined contradictions that the formation of Xi'an's ideas on the protection of urban historical and cultural heritage has undergone a complex process, reflecting the difficulties and challenges faced in the course of urban preservation.

Tracing back the process of urban historical and cultural heritage preservation and urban planning development in Xi'an, a development trajectory emerges from the preservation of historical sites to the revitalization of urban culture. It reveals profound truths, highlighting that while there are numerous factors influencing urban planning and development, a city's cultural traditions and key figures play a crucial and underlying role. The importance of these two factors becomes even more evident during critical periods. A city's cultural traditions nurture and influence key figures, while key figures promote and develop the city's cultural traditions. Additionally, Xi'an's special status at the national level, coupled with the guidance of urban planning in different periods, and the diverse support of the economy, technology, and ecology, are all indispensable factors.

4. Problems and Challenges

Preserving historical and cultural heritage is an important means of protecting cultural diversity and a significant manifestation of a country's cultural soft power. Although China has made some achievements in the protection of urban historical and cultural heritage, it still faces many problems and challenges.

Firstly, the government's financial investment in historical and cultural heritage protection is insufficient. Despite the increased investment by the state, the actual effect is not satisfactory. The government's financial investment in historical and cultural heritage protection has been insufficient for a long time, which cannot meet the needs of urban historical and cultural heritage protection.

Secondly, there are shortcomings in the implementation of laws, regulations, and policies related to historical and cultural heritage protection. The execution of some laws, regulations, and policies related to historical and cultural heritage protection is not standardized or complete, which makes the protection work more difficult.

In addition, the contradiction between urbanization planning and construction and the protection of historical and cultural heritage is gradually intensifying as urbanization accelerates. The external environment of buildings and architectural complexes, as historical and cultural heritage, is seriously damaged due to the rapid development of urbanization, which increases the difficulty of protecting the heritage [8].

At the same time, the public's awareness of historical and cultural heritage protection is weak, and they lack relevant basic knowledge and cultural literacy. They have little understanding of historical and cultural heritage protection, which makes the protection and inheritance of historical and cultural heritage face difficulties.

5. Measures for the Protection and Inheritance of Urban Historical and Cultural Heritage in China

5.1. Policy and Planning for the Protection and Inheritance of China's Urban Historical and Cultural Heritage

The development of China's historical and cultural heritage protection can be divided into three stages. The first stage, from the 1950s to the 1970s, was mainly a stage of awareness. The government began to realize the importance of preserving cultural heritage and issued some regulations at the provincial and municipal levels. The second stage, from the 1980s to the 1990s, witnessed an important turning point in China's cultural heritage protection, with the proposal of "protecting cultural relics by the whole nation" and the promotion of this concept nationwide. At the same time, the government began to propose and enact a series of laws and regulations on cultural heritage protection. The third stage, from the 21st century to the present, is a new period in the history of China's cultural heritage protection. The government has attached increasing importance to the protection of cultural heritage and has intensified its efforts in this regard. It has formulated a national cultural protection strategy with a focus on "urban cultural heritage protection". Meanwhile, the government has also strengthened its control and regulation of urban planning and construction, and any construction related to cultural relics must follow corresponding planning standards.

In terms of specific planning and construction, the planning and construction of urban historical and cultural heritage protection includes protection, restoration, reconstruction, and reuse. The government needs to increase investment in protection, comprehensively collect and sort out historical and cultural heritage resources, and formulate corresponding protection measures based on the different characteristics of cultural heritage. At the same time, restoration and reconstruction are also essential means of protecting cultural heritage, and the government needs to supervise and manage the restoration and reconstruction of historical buildings in accordance with relevant regulations.

5.2. Management and Supervision

In the protection and inheritance of China's urban historical and cultural heritage, management and supervision are crucial. In practical operations, government departments should strengthen the supervision and management of historical and cultural heritage, and establish a sound legal system to enhance the level of protection for historical and cultural heritage.

Firstly, the government should strictly manage matters related to the protection of historical and cultural heritage, and strengthen daily management. As the competent department, a series of protection measures should be formulated and implemented, and a protection mechanism and project supervision system should be established to strengthen the management of historical and cultural heritage protection. Secondly, information management of historical and cultural heritage should be strengthened through the use of modern technological means to timely understand the situation of historical and cultural heritage and ensure their protection.

In terms of supervision, the government should strengthen daily supervision of historical and cultural heritage. For historical and cultural heritage that has safety hazards, measures should be taken in a timely manner for repairs and reinforcement to ensure that they are not seriously affected by external environments. At the same time, scientific means should be employed to carry out

monitoring work, such as installing cameras and setting up patrol personnel to timely discover and solve problems.

Overall, the government should strengthen the management and supervision of historical and cultural heritage, establish a sound legal system and management mechanisms, adopt modern technological means for information management and protection, and effectively protect and inherit China's urban historical and cultural heritage.

5.3. Mission of Understanding the Protection of Xi'an's Urban History and Culture

Xi'an possesses profound and extensive historical and cultural heritage, which is embodied in all historical buildings, historical districts, and the urban historical pattern. Any arbitrary renovation and transformation would cause the loss of historical authenticity. Therefore, Xi'an's ancient city is the object of renovation and development. Any demolition or construction that ignores the value of historical culture and pursues immediate interests undermines the continuity of the historical context of the ancient city. The pursuit of modern functional and commercialized consumption spaces, detached from the isolated urban historical landscape, drowns it. However, history is priceless, and the disappearance of its material carriers also means the rupture or termination of urban memory. "Protection first" is an unbreakable bottom line principle that planners and developers should deeply reflect upon.

The historical and urban pattern of Xi'an as an ancient capital represents the evolution of China's ancient capital pattern and exemplifies the model of capital construction in various periods. As the starting point of the Silk Road, Xi'an had exceptional global cultural influence. These are outstanding values of Xi'an's urban history and culture, which do not need further elaboration. The urban construction in Xi'an has gradually shifted from demolition and construction to rational protection planning, focusing on preserving the cultural characteristics of the ancient city through planning and engineering practices. It has transitioned from monument protection to urban cultural revitalization, highlighting the promoting role of urban historical and cultural preservation in urban development.

In the new era, as a window city for the dissemination of Eastern civilization, Xi'an's urban development should shoulder the historical responsibility of preserving urban historical and cultural heritage, perpetuating the spirit of the Chinese nation, and inheriting Chinese cultural memory. From the perspective of the overall development of Chinese civilization, it is necessary to reexamine the global value of Xi'an as the starting point of the Silk Road, how to continue historical culture and shape the image of an ancient capital at a higher level, and drive the coordinated revitalization of the Northwestern region. These are the core issues in planning and development during this period. The value foundation of urban historical culture lies in the source of protection and inheritance, and it is of great significance to accurately grasp the connotation of protection and inheritance.

6. Conclusions

In this article, we have conducted an in-depth exploration of the current situation of the protection and inheritance of urban cultural heritage in China, and put forward some countermeasures. Firstly, we found that there are many problems in the protection of urban cultural heritage in China, such as insufficient protection efforts, inadequate management mechanisms, and insufficient supervision. Therefore, we propose to strengthen the formulation and implementation of laws and regulations, optimize management mechanisms, and strengthen social supervision, so as to promote the comprehensive and in-depth development of the protection of urban cultural heritage in China, and we believe that the protection and inheritance of urban cultural heritage is a long-term and complex task that requires joint efforts from all parties. The government, scholars, and all sectors of society should work closely together, increase investment and efforts, and continuously improve people's

cultural quality, in order to achieve the long-term development of the protection and inheritance of urban cultural heritage.

References

- [1] Cao, X. (2012). *Analysis of the current situation and countermeasures of the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China*. *Consumer Guide*, (9), 2.
- [2] Wu, Z. (2018). *The current situation and countermeasures of the protection of intangible cultural heritage*. *Literary Life and Art Garden*, 000(002), 252.
- [3] Gao, Z. (2019). *Research on the protection status and principles of Chinese world cultural heritage in urban development*. *Shandong Academy of Arts*.
- [4] Yuan, H., & Wang, X. (2023). *Research on the protection and inheritance countermeasures of intangible cultural heritage in western Beijing-taking Mentougou District as an example*. *Human Beijing and Beijing Studies-The 11th Beijing Academic Seminar*, 0.
- [5] Ling, H. (2019). *Research on the current situation and development countermeasures of the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in China*. *Chinese Artists*, (10), 1.
- [6] Ma, S. (2018). *The current situation, problems, and countermeasures of the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China*. *Research on the Inheritance of Non-legacy*, (2), 2.
- [7] Yan, Z., Li, J., & Chai, H. (2003). *Analysis of the current situation and countermeasures of "World Cultural Heritage" in China*. *Science and Technology Progress and Policy*, DOI: CNKI: SUN: KJJB.0.2003-15-024.
- [8] Xue, Y. (2014). *Research on the current situation, problems, and countermeasures of the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China*. *Industry and Technology Forum*, (14), 2. DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1673-5641.2014.14.003.