

# Exploring the Adaptive Conservation and Development of Chongqing's Historic Buildings

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**Abstract:** Historical and cultural heritage is an essential part of human civilisation. Nowadays, in the progress of a society that emphasises sustainable development, the simultaneous modernisation and preservation of historical and cultural heritage has become a criterion for the degree of urban advancement. However, in China's large-scale urban renewal and renovation, many old urban structures and historical relics are being submerged by the pace of modernisation. Therefore, we need to strengthen the awareness of protection, while exploring deeply under the conditions of market economy to respond to the historical preservation issues in the development of ancient towns in a flexible and effective way. In tourism development, new ancient towns with traditional market style can be reconstructed to integrate them with modern life. This not only promotes the development of urban characteristics, but also injects new vitality into traditional culture and enriches the historical connotation of the city. However, some worrying situations of historical and cultural preservation have also emerged. For example, some people regard historical culture as a cash cow and blindly carry out temporary imitation of antique commodity blocks, leading to the chaos of cultural landscape; some people carry out one-sided and isolated protection, which makes the historical buildings incompatible with the modern life and so on. Therefore, there is an urgent need for domestic academics to explore effective methods for the conservation and utilisation of historic buildings, so as to ensure that the conservation and development of historic buildings can embark on a healthy path.

**Keywords:** Historic buildings, Traditional culture, Cultural preservation.

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## 1. Introduction

China is currently facing a number of problems in the protection of historic buildings. The traditional concept of heritage building protection can no longer meet the requirements of modern historical and cultural heritage protection, ignoring the multiple and complex values of historic buildings, failing to effectively differentiate between the social, economic and cultural environments faced by different historical buildings, and failing to take targeted protection and development measures, and so on. The main objective of this paper is to study the conservation, utilisation and development of historical culture from the perspective of the general environmental view. Another objective is to provide Chongqing with concrete and operable design methods with reference value in the process of high-intensity and high-speed urban development and construction in order to protect and promote the city's historical culture, so as to establish a research platform for the protection of urban historical culture in practice.

## 2. The Value and Decline of Traditional Architecture

Since mankind entered the era of agricultural civilisation, natural settlements have gradually formed, which cleverly make use of the landscape pattern for housing and agricultural production, while continuing the national culture and customary traditions that are closely linked to the natural environment. Settlement space has always been a faithful record of history and culture, carrying the evolution from farming civilisation to commodity trade and industrial production, and the spatial change from countryside to city. Traditional villages, as remnants of the traditional settlement form of the farming civilisation, are precious historical and

cultural treasures. In the long course of history, due to their unique natural conditions and social circumstances, traditional villages have maintained their simple folkways and traditional ways of production and life, forming spatial patterns and architectural styles that are quite different from those of urban landscapes.

The current cause of historic building protection in China faces a number of problems. Firstly, the traditional concept of buildings under heritage protection can no longer meet the requirements of modern historical and cultural heritage protection, ignoring the multiple values and composite nature of historic buildings. Secondly, we have not effectively distinguished between the social, economic and cultural environments faced by different historic buildings, nor have we taken targeted conservation and development measures.

## 3. Status of Historical and Cultural Preservation of Chongqing Ancient Towns

With the establishment of new China and the resumption of national construction, the protection of historical and cultural heritage gradually emerged. During this period, conservation efforts focused on the protection of specific cultural relics. During the period of national economic recovery, the State issued decrees and set up institutions to prohibit the theft and transport of cultural relics, as well as the destruction of them. On the basis of the reorganisation of heritage conservation in the old China, the new China established its own heritage conservation programme.

After China's reform and opening up, the cause of historical and cultural heritage protection was gradually put on the right track under the promotion of a series of policies. In February 1982, the State Council issued the Circular on the Request for Instructions on Protecting China's Famous Historical and

Cultural Cities, formally putting forward the concept of 'Famous Historical and Cultural Cities', which marked the entry into the stage of overall historical city protection from the microcosmic field of protecting a single cultural relic or ruin. In August 1997, the Ministry of Construction forwarded the notice of Interim Measures for the Protection and Management of the Historical and Cultural Reserve of Tunxi Old Street in Huangshan City, which established the status of the historical and cultural reserve in China's historical and cultural heritage protection system, and the historical towns began to be formally included in the scope of protection.

Since the 21st century, the conservation of Chongqing's ancient towns' historical and cultural heritage has made remarkable progress, becoming the result of social interaction between the awakening of humanistic consciousness and the flourishing of cultural consumption. Unlike the 1990s, when protection was driven by the government in a one-way direction, protection since this century has become a common action of all people. There are three reasons for this change: firstly, the revised Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics incorporates historical and cultural protection areas into the heritage protection system, gives legal status to ancient towns, and formally opens the legislative process of ancient towns protection, making it a responsibility and obligation shared by all sectors of the society; secondly, the protection and development of historical and cultural heritage, as represented by the Jiangnan Group of Ancient Towns, has brought about tremendous socio-economic benefits, changed Chongqing society's Secondly, the protection and development of historical and cultural heritage, represented by the Jiangnan ancient towns, has brought great social and economic benefits, changed the perception of Chongqing society to the local ancient towns, and inspired people from all walks of life to protect and develop the enthusiasm of the ancient towns. Overall, Chongqing ancient towns protection work has made important achievements, protection awareness gradually deepened into people's hearts, become the common will of the government and the public; at the same time, the protection of the theoretical research and practical activities have also entered an active stage. Although compared with the protection of ancient towns in Jiangnan, Chongqing ancient towns protection is still in its infancy, but the above achievements show that the protection of Chongqing ancient towns is moving towards the development of the cause, the future is very bright.

#### **4. The Serious Situation Facing the Historical Protection of Chongqing Ancient Towns Nowadays**

Although since the 21st century, the protection of Chongqing ancient towns has made great achievements, but the overall situation of protection is not optimistic, facing a series of serious situations such as the destruction of the natural environment, the artificial environment of dilapidation and the decline of the humanities environment.

##### **4.1. Destruction of the natural environment**

In terms of the regional natural environment, most of Chongqing's ancient towns are located in hilly and mountainous areas, with only a few in the plains. Ancient towns usually take feng shui into account when choosing a site, so the environment in which they are located is usually relatively favourable. However, it should be noted that this

advantage can only exist and be maintained under the traditional production and life style, and is only a conditional advantage. The production and life style of modern society has caused an increased load on the natural environment, breaking the delicate balance between the ancient towns and nature and leading to extensive damage to the natural environment of Chongqing's ancient towns. Especially since the reform and opening up, especially since this century, the industrial and agricultural level of Chongqing ancient towns has developed rapidly and the living standard of the residents has increased significantly. In this process, due to resource exploitation, production facilities construction and changes in residents' lifestyles, the relatively fragile natural environment of the ancient towns has suffered increasing damage and rapid deterioration of ecological conditions. The destruction of the natural environment of Chongqing's ancient towns is mainly reflected in the mountains and water bodies. The cause of mountain destruction can be attributed to resource exploitation and facility construction. Most of the mountains in Chongqing are sandstone, shale and granite suitable for use as building materials, and the development of urban and rural construction in recent years has stimulated a huge demand for building stone, leading to an increase in mountain mining. Most of the ancient towns are located in relatively remote mountainous areas, which can easily become the target of illegal mining when regulation is not in place, thus causing serious damage to the mountains.

Therefore, the traffic construction programme needs to be reconsidered in order to reduce the damage to the mountains and to protect the ecological environment of the ancient town. The ancient town of Bashu faces serious water pollution problems that far exceed the extent of the destruction of the mountains. Ancient towns and water bodies have formed an interdependent relationship, with some water systems located on one side of the town and some traversing the entire town. For a long time, a delicate balance has been maintained between the traditional farming lifestyle of the ancient towns and the self-purifying ability of the water bodies, effectively preventing pollution from occurring. However, in recent years, the rapid development of township enterprises in the ancient town of Bashu, changes in residents' lifestyles, and outdated and outdated drainage facilities have disrupted this balance, leading to a sharp increase in production wastewater, domestic sewage and littered household rubbish, which has seriously polluted the water bodies in the ancient town.

##### **4.2. Destruction of the man-made environment**

Most of the artificial environments in Chongqing's ancient towns were formed in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and have a history of more than two to three hundred years. In this long historical process, affected by natural and man-made factors, coupled with the lack of maintenance, the artificial environment of the ancient town is generally in a state of disrepair.

The human factors that play a role in the artificial environment of the ancient town of Bashu include the two factors of construction and maintenance.

The construction factor refers to the construction behaviour that causes damage to the traditional artificial environment of the ancient town. The formation of the traditional artificial environment of ancient towns is a continuous and gradual process, with strong characteristics of inheritance and continuity. Therefore, the so-called 'construction factor' did not exist for a long time until the 1980s, when the rural

economy developed, and this influence factor gradually appeared and showed great destructive power. On the one hand, the need to improve the existing living and working environments became urgent and was acted upon by the township authorities and the general public when economic conditions permitted. On the other hand, due to the lack of appropriate restrictive regulations, strict construction supervision and scientific technical guidance, the scale, craftsmanship, materials and styles used in repairing, remodelling or constructing new buildings are often quite different from the original traditional architectural forms, thus leading to the serious destruction of the traditional appearance of the artificial environment in ancient towns.

The maintenance factor refers to the lack of daily maintenance that leads to the continuous decay of the traditional artificial environment landscape or municipal functions of the ancient town. Due to the long-term economic backwardness of the ancient town of Bashu, it is not possible to raise sufficient funds for maintenance, resulting in the lack of necessary maintenance of the historical environment and the persistent decline of the phenomenon. On the one hand, due to the lack of maintenance of the aging infrastructure in the town, municipal functions such as water supply and sewage disposal have basically been lost, making the daily life of the residents of the town very difficult. On the other hand, the lack of daily repair and maintenance of the old street buildings in the old town has led to a high proportion of dilapidated houses, which are often subject to accidents such as house collapse, cracks and even fires.

According to the degree of dilapidation of the artificial environment, Chongqing ancient towns can be divided into three types of situations. The first type of situation is that the artificial environment of the ancient town is generally well preserved, and the style of the neighbourhood is basically maintained since its formation, and only individual buildings have been damaged to a certain extent. The second type of situation is that the artificial environment of the ancient town has been damaged to a certain extent, and some of the buildings in the neighbourhood have been altered, demolished or naturally collapsed, but the overall structure and form still retain the historical style. The third type of situation is that the artificial environment of the ancient town has been more seriously damaged, and most of the traditional buildings in the neighbourhood have been altered, demolished or naturally collapsed, and the historical style of the artificial environment has been almost completely destroyed.

## **5. Approaches to Conservation and Development: Adaptive Conservation**

The trend towards globalisation has been accompanied by a growing strength of regionalisation, creating a virtuous circle of mutual reinforcement between globalisation and regionalisation. At the heart of regionalisation is the preservation of diversity. From a cultural point of view, any attempt to eliminate cultural diversity and force homogenisation will face challenges to the human cultural ecology and will inevitably hit a wall in the end. Regionalisation is precisely a trend in interaction with globalisation. The preservation of historical and cultural heritage, as a carrier of regional cultures, which meets the needs of diverse cultural values and unique cultural contents

pursued by regionalisation, will inevitably be promoted and contribute to the in-depth development of regionalisation. Therefore, the superposition of the maintenance of diversity and the demand for individuality brought about by regionalisation constitutes one of the important backgrounds of the current situation of the protection of China's historical and cultural heritage.

### **5.1. Proposing a general approach to resolving real-life conflicts**

By analysing three key issues in the protection of the historical and cultural heritage of the ancient towns of Bashu, namely, 'resolving the contradictions between protection and development', 'coordinating the relationship between tradition and modernity', and 'responding to opportunities and challenges', we propose a general strategy for the current protection of the historical and cultural heritage of the ancient towns of Chongqing. 'It proposes a general strategy for the protection of the historical and cultural heritage of Chongqing's ancient towns. Firstly, in reality, the protection and development of Chongqing's ancient towns exist in the coexistence of contradiction and undertaking unity. Therefore, the protection of historical and cultural heritage of Chongqing ancient towns should be based on the premise of 'protecting the bottom line' and pursuing the strategy of 'giving priority to development'. Secondly, in the protection, we need to objectively view the dichotomy between tradition and modernity in Chongqing ancient town, and make full use of tradition to promote the modern development of Chongqing ancient town, and actively coordinate a series of realistic contradictions between tradition and modernity. Finally, in view of the current situation in Chongqing, such as the development of the western part of the country and the construction of new rural areas, we should, according to the principle of 'avoiding harm', put forward coping strategies according to the situation, and open up a development path for the protection of Chongqing's ancient towns to adapt to the current situation.

### **5.2. Building an institutional environment of linked and integrated safeguards**

In order to protect the historical and cultural heritage of contemporary Chongqing ancient towns in the contemporary socio-economic context, it is necessary to build an interlinked and comprehensively safeguarded protection system environment, in addition to adopting technical methods. This thesis explores this research theme from four aspects: legal safeguard mechanism, administrative safeguard mechanism, economic safeguard mechanism and public participation mechanism. First of all, the mechanism of the law is reflected in the administrative process of heritage protection of ancient towns in the normative management of the protection of various behaviours. The construction of the legal protection mechanism should be achieved through the three specific links of the protection laws and regulations, such as articulation and coordination, maintenance and optimisation, enrichment and improvement. Secondly, the role of administrative mechanism is reflected in the protection of ancient towns as a whole society to participate in the activities, through the management and organisation of specific administrative institutions. The construction of administrative guarantee mechanism should adopt the reform ideas of 'centralisation' and 'verticalisation' to implement. Thirdly, financial mechanisms also play an important role in heritage

conservation. As a government-led public administration activity, heritage conservation requires adequate funding to ensure the realisation of its objectives and to provide sustained financial support for specific projects. The economic guarantee mechanism is embodied in the search for multi-channel financing, the construction of scientific fund management, and the rational distribution and use of these funds. Finally, the protection of historical and cultural heritage of Chongqing ancient towns requires the participation of the whole society. Protection not only involves the improvement of the protection system and protection technology, but also is a complex social project closely related to the social and economic development of the whole region. Therefore, a public participation mechanism is also very necessary.

## 6. Conclusion

The conservation and development of historic buildings requires the mutual co-operation of all forces, including government management, design creation and public participation. As the main decision-making level involved in conservation and development, the government has an important influence in the practice of conservation and development of historic buildings. The government should enhance its awareness of the protection of historic buildings, strengthen local legislation, especially for the protection of

modern historic buildings and traditional residential buildings, and increase the pertinence of local regulations according to the heritage resources of each place. At the same time, the government should give full play to its management advantages and participate in broadening the sources of funding for conservation. Public participation is also an important aspect of historic building conservation. The needs and wishes of residents, as part of the community in which a historic building is located, form the basis for the development of conservation. Through active participation, residents can promote the democratisation process and enhance their sense of identity and pride in the community. Residents' participation also contributes to the preservation and utilisation of buildings with historical memory and the continuation of the social network and human environment associated with these old buildings.

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