

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Sustainable development of landscape environment of traditional Changzhen

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Old town is like living fossil which has accumulated rich historical connotations; the one carrying the history of a region's political, economic, cultural and ecological changes as well as the formative art created by collective labors and wisdoms of generations. The preservation of ancient Chinese dwellings and old towns began late; many historical architectures and traditional country fairs are forcibly removed during the transformation of old cities and towns, thus ancient towns with their original historical looks are becoming less and less. In comparison, the preservation and development of old western towns started earlier than China; with rich experience, they offer good examples for China, especially the successful developing way: eco-tourism. By comparing the preservation and development of traditional Chinese towns' landscape features to that of western ones, this paper points out that the future development of old towns rely on proper handling of the relation between preserving and the feasibility of renewing, so as to maintain the landscape features of old towns in the course of sustainable development.

**Key words:** Traditional Changzhen, landscape environment, sustainable development, preservation.

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional Changzhen as carrier of a particular region's history and culture embodies a specific nature, geography and ecology, as well as a society, history and culture; their forms and features are made up by thousands years history, the precious heritage left by our ancestors. To research landscape features of old town, to protect them and make good use of them is significant and practical for the maintenance of historical context and local traits.

It is hard to trace when and where the names of old

Chinese towns began. Looking up Encyclopedia of Cihai or Etymology, we can know "Chang" means fair or place where people gather together (Ci, 1979a), "Zheng" means town or fair (Ci, 1979b), an industrial and commercial resident area smaller than city. Changzhen in China is where country fair locates, the population and commercial center of countryside level in terms of geography and politics.

The function of traditional Chinese Changzhen as fair is weakened after long history, instead, they represent more

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cultural deposit through their architectural styles, layouts of streets and lanes, monuments and former dwellings, national and folk features; the cultural transmission interweaving tangible heritage with intangible, static heritage with dynamic (Liu, 2008), the living fossil of Chinese historical and cultural context (Shen, 2007).

The traditional Changzhen mentioned in this paper refers to those small towns which enjoy some history and traditional culture characters. The phenomena of old town developing, traveling or applying for world heritage site, etc. are the reflection of its value.

### **RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL CHANGZHEN'S LANDSCAPE FEATURES**

The landscape features of a small town are the comprehensive product of local nature, history and humanities; they can be fast changed by factors of natural disasters like earthquake, flood, tsunamis, mud-rock flow, volcanic eruption, etc., and political evolution, cultural exchange, vandalism, etc. The 5.12 Wenchuan earthquake which happened in Sichuan province and the secondary geological disasters after earthquake like large-scale landslides, ground collapse, surface dislocation, mud-rock flow and barrier-lakes, etc. ruined the only autonomous county of Qiang minority in China. The loss was serious such that lots of material carriers of Qiang culture disappeared or were heavily damaged; some of the inheritors (performers) of intangible heritage are even dead (Wu, 2009). From late 20<sup>th</sup> century till date, with the fast development of urbanizing plus foreign culture, technology, living mode flooding into China, traditional styles of small towns are replaced by the stereotyped look under globalizing context, gradually driving the local traits of rural landscapes out of the historical stage.

Therefore, the research of traditional Changzhen's landscape features, protecting and exploiting them is important and pragmatic for sustaining history and culture as well as conserving local traits.

### **PROTECTION STATE OF TRADITIONAL WESTERN TOWNS**

The historical and cultural protection in the West first started from Europe; in terms of preserving and developing old towns, comparatively speaking, it is well done in Europe, especially in France.

The protection has been through stages. During the socially and economically underdeveloped period, natural damage was the main way to destroy cultural relics and monuments; during the initial stage of economic development, that is, the period of industrial revolution, artificial damage instead of natural damage became the primary way because people were eager to better their

material condition, neglecting the spiritual need; after the economy reached a certain level; their focus was correspondingly switched to chase after colorful spiritual life, relics and monuments which were re-cherished and seemed more valuable. In between those periods, damages to cultural relics and monuments caused by construction were much more than those caused by the nature and wars.

After the Second World War, more and more people paid attention to the relation between the nature and human beings, forming the modern thinking of getting along with the nature and coordinate developing. The following practices were that western countries increased the input in environment, improving the construction of urban citizens' living condition. They would rather respect the nature than ruin their environmental quality for faster economic construction.

Western countries have made the relevant laws and measures in preserving old town. The classic ones are "three charters and one convention" in 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, Athens Charter, Venice Charter, Washington Charter, and Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage by UNESCO in November, 1972. Athens Charter in 1933 is the first international document in conserving historic architectures. The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites in 1964 (abbreviated as Venice Charter) extended the idea of conservation of historic architectures to "a unique civilization, a meaningful development, a town or country setting which has witnessed historical events. Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historical areas drawn up by UNESCO in 1976 (abbreviated as Nairobi Recommendation) clearly proposed the concept of historical areas, thus the safeguarding of historical architectures are not limited in their surrounding areas, historical streets, villages, towns and ancient towns are also included. Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas in 1987 (abbreviated as Washington Charter) puts the conservation of historic cities and towns to the first place, which is identified in the form of international laws and regulations (Xiong et al., 2002); the classical European flavors are thus largely inherited.

### **CONSERVATION STATE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CHANGZHEN (OLD TOWNS)**

The safeguarding of old towns and ancient dwellings in China is referred to the "Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas" adopted by ICOMOS on the 8<sup>th</sup> general assembly held in Washington, DC, October, 1987. From Figure 1a and b, we can see the first local regulation regarding ancient dwellings in China, conservation regulation concerning ancient dwellings in Southern Anhui Province, was passed on the 33<sup>th</sup>



**Figure 1.** Ancient Villages in Southern Anhui – Xidi and Hongcun. **(a)** The outside landscape of the village. **(b)** The inside landscape of the village.

Session of the 8<sup>th</sup> People's Congress Standing Committee of Anwei province on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1997, which has been carried out since 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1998.

The first step among the measures to protect ancient Chinese towns is to identify those famous historic towns and classify them into the scope of legal protection. According to the statistics, in China, the number of safeguarded historical and cultural towns, reserves, monuments above county level is less than 100 000 sites; the amount and scope are far less than those countries that have smaller area, shorter history and less population. Take England as example, its area is 130 000 km<sup>2</sup>, only 1/73 of China, whereas it has 500 000 listed architectures and over 8000 reserves. The implementation of safeguarding ancient towns/villages in China will facilitate the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in larger scale, catching up the amount to match the status of china that has thousands years civilization. Historical and cultural villages and towns constitute the important parts among conservation system of Chinese heritage (Yin, 2008).

Managers in small towns are familiar with the local conditions and closely related with the masses, while they have awareness limitation and peasant consciousness due to the cultural and educational shortage. They emphasize industrialization but depreciate urbanization; emphasize economic profit but ignore environmental and social interest; focus on their political "achievements" and "image projects" but neglect the improvement of individual quality and awareness; as well as pay little attention to developing and conserving ancient towns in long-term.

#### **DEVELOPED STATE OF TRADITIONAL OLD TOWNS IN WESTERN COUNTRIES**

The development of old towns concerns the relation between tourism, preservation and ecology. Europe

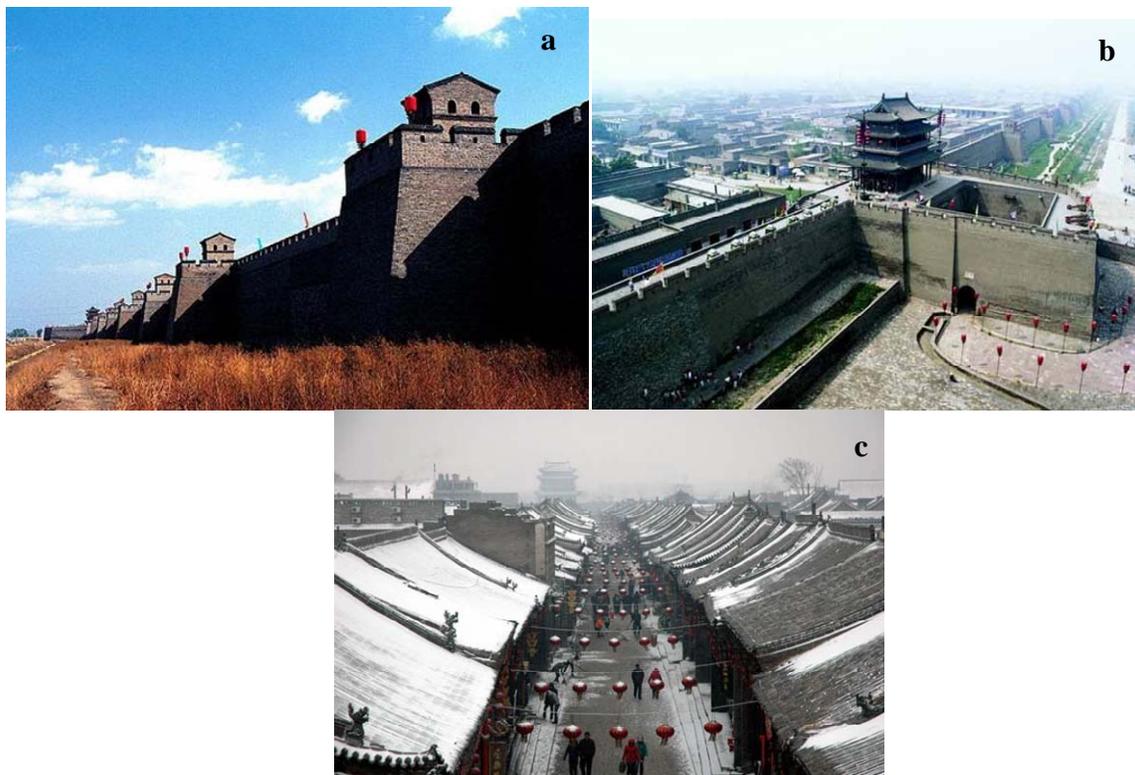
proposed the thought of ecotourism after continuous exploring and comparing successes to failures. Ecotourism is travelling modes which cultivates tourists, experience and appreciate them. There are three criteria of ecotourism: nature based factors, education ingredients and continuity.

Old towns and architectures abroad are preserved mainly through the ways of developing ecotourism and transferring the ownership of properties, etc. In West Europe, governments often transfer the ownership of castles with very favorable, even zero price, to private owners, on the condition of that the buyers must strictly abide by the standards of restoration and maintenance stipulated by governments, and violation of those standards will be punished. The Russian government could not afford the preservation of old architectures, trading more than 3000 units of old castles to international market in March, 2004.

Developing and exploiting old towns as tourism are the ways to conserve them or to timely rescue the few survived ones. Tourism in France can be rated first class and it occupies a very important position in France's economy. France is one of those countries that have successfully preserved and developed old towns. Their methods and experiences are worth our borrowing.

First of all, they strictly comply with the regulations and specify the preservation of tourism resources into laws. According to the statistics, about 14 000 architectures and monuments are classified into historical sites, and 26 000 units are on the list of reserves. Among 4000 museums, about 1000 are governed by the nation. For the conservation of the tourism resources, the French government has laid down strict laws and policies on the ownership as well as safeguarding and exploiting them. All historical and cultural monuments in France have been well preserved and restored under the principle of repairing the antiques as their original looks.

Secondly, they take full advantage of tourism resources to development the tourism industry. At the time of



**Figure 2.** Ancient city of Pingyao in Shanxi province. (a) Wall outside the city. (b) Small town outside the city gate-Wengcheng. (c) Inner street inside the city

preserving the resources in accordance with the laws, the government has fully developed and exploited the artificial sceneries and natural landscapes. Historical and cultural heritages like the Louvre, Versailles, Notre Dame, etc. are intriguing; people fill in south France, west coast, Alps and the skiing resorts of Pyrenees.

Thirdly, the government gives weight to capital investment and policy support. They spend over 20 billion franc each year on the preservation and development of tourism resources, among which, 2 billion franc is used for cultural heritage; 1.8 billion for Museums, and the rest for developing.

Fourthly, there are highly developed transportation and service facilities. The developed transportation, fine road condition, majority of scenic spots accessing to highways, smooth traffic, service stations along roads, public convenience, catering, accommodations, etc. have brought convenience to tourists.

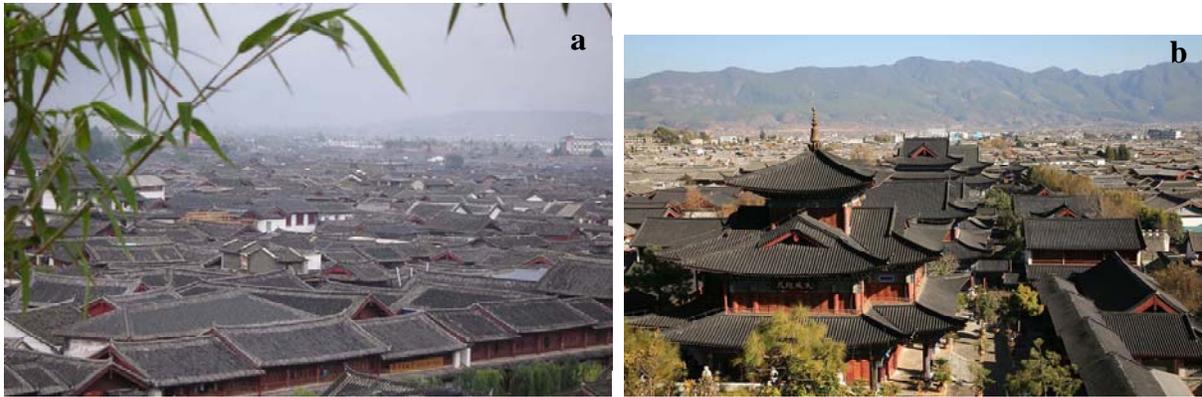
Fifthly, they offer high quality service and efficiency. Many French hotels are chain star hotels with the outstanding characteristics of integration, modernization and computerized management mode. Practitioners in tourism always offer good service, the management and service people in hotels are dedicated to their duties and very professional (Zhou, 2007).

The points mentioned above can be implemented in China for exploiting tourism resources of old towns,

further constructing and developing them. They are practical measures worth referring to.

### **DEVELOPED STATE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CHANGZHEN (OLD TOWNS)**

The development of traditional Chinese Changzhen (old towns) takes the form of tourism. From Figure 2, we can see the well-known ancient city of Pingyao in Shanxi province. Figure 3 shows the old town of Lijiang in Yunnan province, Ancient Villages in Southern Anhui – Xidi and Hongcun are on the list of world cultural heritage. Zhouzhuang and Tongli, the ancient towns in southern Yangtze, with the landscape features of small bridges and streams, have boomed the tourism industry in these regions. Behind smooth developing, the pressure ancient towns faced gradually came out. Tourism development brought problems for the preservation of old towns, example, over saturation of tourist capacity, fast increasing of tourists exceeding the capacity ancient towns could hold and tendency of over commercialized. Under the drive of economic profit, commercial networks were increased, featureless souvenirs flooded everywhere, and strong commercial air of all people being merchants gradually eroded the natural environment and humanistic atmosphere of ancient



**Figure 3.** Old town of Lijiang in Yunnan province. (a) The Panoramic landscape of the ancient town. (b) MuFu - the inside landscape of the ancient town.



**Figure 4.** Ancient town Zhouzhuang.

towns. The development of tourism was not coordinate with the residents' life. The gained economic profit did not better the residents' living. Problems of aging building, incomplete infrastructure, flood and fire hazards, etc. affected harmoniously developing ancient towns that sustain the traditional styles, the unity of tourism development and monuments preservation. Developing tourism is the way to promote the value of monuments and offer the financial support for the preservation; exploiting the monuments is an important channel to develop tourism. Therefore, preserving and developing should not work against each other, but mutually promote and complement. Monuments as tourism can produce huge economic profit, but solely chasing after profit and ignoring the preservation, once the tourist recourse on monuments are ruined, it will threaten the development of tourism industry. Based on long-term interest, placing the preservation of monuments to the first position and developing them scientifically, tourist industry can be sustainable. Our pressing task is to assess the tourist

resource on monuments and ascertain the reasonable capacity, seek for the balance between preserving and tourism developing of historic sites (Zhang, 2008).

From Figure 4, we can see Zhouzhuang as the leading role in terms of preserving and developing tourism industry among the ancient towns in Southern Yangtze. Zhouzhuang has made some achievement, with the features of well preserved integrity and representativeness, since the cultivated awareness of preservation has penetrated into the minds of local residents. Zhouzhuang, as the pioneer in China, has sustained its development, and by constantly borrowing the mature thoughts and methods of planning and developing historical towns from western countries, it also offers a prototype which represents a typical Chinese style and is a set of scientific theories of preserving and planning ancient Chinese town.

## CONCLUSIONS

Different from a single antique or monument, ancient towns are valuable assets for mankind representing the living condition in certain period and the simple dwelling environment created by people, thus reflecting the material and cultural level at that time. The main developing form for ancient Chinese towns is tourism with the purpose of making profit, but the capital used for later development is not much. The local governments and residents in ancient towns have not realized the direct relation between sustainable development and their lives, causing little awareness of and paying little addition into preservation of ancient towns and later development. The preserving and developing of ancient towns are always difficult to balance. In that aspect, old western towns started earlier than china. Their rich experience, especially the successful developing form - ecotourism, gave China inspiration. The future developing focus should be placed on the relation between well preserving them and developing them. Taking preservation as the

priority, make clear of developing orientation and the measures of exploiting them.

### Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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