This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30051746

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that permission has been obtained for items included in Deakin Research Online. If you believe that your rights have been infringed by this repository, please contact drosupport@deakin.edu.au

Copyright: 2012, International Federation of Landscape Architects
The Evolution of National Level Historic District Registration and Conservation in China: 
The Beijing Yandaixiejie and Beijing Guozijian Districts in Beijing, China

Zhe Geng
PhD candidate, School of Architecture and Building, Deakin University, Australia
zgeng@deakin.edu.au
&
Associate Professor David Jones
Associate Head of School (Learning & Teaching), School of Architecture & Building, Deakin University, Australia
david.jones@deakin.edu.au

Abstract

From the 1980s, Chinese experts from some mainland universities, such as Tongji University in Shanghai and Tsinghua University in Beijing, commenced research into heritage management and historic architectural conservation in China. With the announcement of the First and Second Lists of 10 Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts in 2009 and 2010, the conservation of historic districts was generally received and elevated in agreements from state-level government to local level governments. This paper considers literature about international and Chinese regulations and presents the evolution of historic district conservation in China. The paper explores the effective and ineffective results of the “Selection Contest of Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts” in two cases selected from the First and Second Lists of 10 Chinese Historical and Cultural Districts during upon recent research and investigations. In each example, the paper provides a detailed examination of public awareness and their evaluation of conservation effectiveness through questionnaires.

Keywords: Historic District Conservation; Chinese National Registration; Public Evaluation; Beijing Guozijian District; Beijing Yandaixiejie District

1. Introduction

The conservation of historic areas and monuments has internationally been the subject of discourse for many years. There are now numerous Charters, Recommendations and Guidelines adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). They provide international framework for historic areas conservation, including the Athens Charter (ICOMOS 1931), the Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1964), the Washington Charter (ICOMOS 1987), the Nairobi Recommendation (UNESCO 1976) and the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS 1994). The Chinese government became a signatory to the “Conservation Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO)” in 1985 thereby requiring Chinese conservation work at heritage sites and historic sites to meet international standards [1]. The Chinese Commission for the International Council on Monuments and Sites (China ICOMOS) was formed in 1993, supervised by the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). With nine-year reviews of the viability of international Charter and Recommendations by China ICOMOS, the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China was adopted in 2002, as a result of international collaboration by the North American Getty Conservation institution, Australia ICOMOS and China ICOMOS [1]. The Chinese Principles provide a national approach to the conservation and management of heritage sites and addresses their historical, artistic and scientific values in China. The Principles also provide feasible and detailed processes for Chinese heritage conservation [1].

The legalization of cultural heritage conservation in China can be traced back to Chinese National Government years before the establishment of New China in 1949. The Chinese National Government adopted some initial protection laws approaching to antiques and relics, such as the Antiques Protection Law in 1930 [2]. Until 1982, the first Law of the People of China for the Protection of Cultural Relics was adopted by the Standing Committee of the
National People's Congress. This Law required the conservation of cultural relics to be undertaken at a legal level. In the same year, the State Council of PRC announced the first batch of 24 National Historic and Cultural Cities, and there are now 101 designated National Historic and Cultural Cities in China. With the establishment of a registration system of Chinese historic and cultural cities, the Central Government has shifted the focus to historic villages and towns. In 2003, the first batch of National Historic and Cultural Towns and Villages was announced by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) and the State Ministry of Construction (SMC). There are now 181 designated National Historic and Cultural Towns and 169 registered National Historic and Cultural Villages in China. Over this period, several provincial governments published provincial-level regulations and laws to protect their cultural heritage and their national-level Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages. Until 2008, the state-level Protection Regulations on Famous Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages was formally announced by State Council which further detailed various and ratification processes, protection details, planning guidelines, and protection measures [1]. The concept of ‘Historic and Cultural Districts’ was defined in the supplementary articles of the ‘Regulations’.

Many significant frameworks on historic district conservation have been appropriated from ICOMOS and UNESCO benchmarks. The Suzhou Declaration on International Co-operation for the Safeguarding and Development of Historic Cities (UNESCO 1998) expressed the important roles and the conservation objectives of historic districts [3]. In 2003, international ICOMOS adopted The Hoi An Declaration on Conservation of Historic Districts of Asia which provided professional and detailed methods for conserving the cultural and historical features of historic districts in the Asian region. It provided another international instrument for Chinese authorities to better guide historic district conservation [4]. In China, the legalization of specific historic district conservation commenced in the 1990s. The first structured regulations concerning historic district conservation - Administrative Regulations on Huangshan Tun Xi Old Historic and Cultural Districts - were adopted by a city government - the People's Government of Huangshan City. This law provided legal status of conservation work for Huangshan Tun Xi Old District. In 2009, a selection contest of Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts’ was held to register the national-level historic districts, which was the initial stage of the establishment of registration system of national-level historic districts. Beijing Guozijian District and Beijing Yandaixiejie District are selected from the first and second lists of Top 10 Chinese historic and Cultural Districts as examples to investigate the public awareness of the selection contest and community evaluation of these two districts through questionnaires.

2. Definition and Scope of Historic Districts

The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (ICOMOS 1931) articulated the importance of protecting the surrounding areas of historic monuments [5]. 'Historic sites', including the urban and rural settings of sites, was clearly defined as a part of the integrity of monuments by the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS 1964) [6]. The Washington Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (ICOMOS 1987) encompassed the material and spiritual characteristics of historic towns or urban areas as well as related protection principles [7]. The scope of historic districts was defined as including historic villages and city quarters by ICOMOS in The Hoi An Declaration (ICOMOS 2003) [4]. This Declaration provided a clear definition that a historic district was not equal to a historic area. Early in The Nairobi Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (UNESCO 1976), the scope of ‘historic and architectural areas’ was also defined including prehistoric sites, historic towns, old urban quarters, villages and hamlets as well as homogeneous monumental groups [8]. This direction was reaffirmed in the Washington Charter with the addition of ‘historic centers into historic areas’. Thus, it is clear that ‘historic districts’ are a part of ‘historic areas’. The hierarchical relationship between ‘historic areas’ and ‘historic districts’ is summarised in Chart 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Areas</th>
<th>Historic Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prehistoric Sites, Hamlets, Monumental Group</td>
<td>Historic Villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Towns</td>
<td>City Quarters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1. The Hierarchical Relationship Between historic areas and historic districts
(Source: Author)
Whilst such Charters and Recommendations offer no definitive answers of what is a historic district, they provide valuable frameworks for conservation practices in historic districts. In China, the concept of ‘Historic and Cultural Districts’ was defined in the supplementary articles of the Protection Regulations on Famous Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages (2008) as:

... the district is with a certain scale announced by provincial, autonomous regions’ or municipal (directly under the Central Government) People’s Governments retained abundant ancient monuments, intensive area of historic buildings and can reflect relatively integrated and authentic traditional structures and historical features [9].

From this definition, it can be concluded that: firstly, a Chinese historic district is an area associated with any group of ancient monuments or historic buildings rather than single architecture; secondly, a Chinese historic district is of historical and traditional significance; and thirdly, the historic and cultural features are authentic and integrated rather than possessing ‘fake-antique’ attributes. Besides these three aspects, residents of the historic districts were recognized as key actors in the Hoi An Declaration (ICOMOS 2003). This article argues that a historic district is a living area, and not an area with groups of ancient architectures protected just for visiting. As a consequence, the residents and visitors should be welcomed in planning, respecting, protecting and evaluating the heritage sites of conservation process.

3. The Evolution of the Conservation of Historic Districts in China – the Registration of State-level Historic Districts

Developed countries’ governments used to register historic areas or historic districts to preserve their historic heritage, such as Japan and Singapore [10]. Chinese historic designation commenced with the registration of historic relics, to historic cities, towns and villages. The registration of national-level historic districts was commenced in China in 2009. Under the guidance of Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China (PRCMC) and the State Administrative of Cultural Heritage (SACH), Chinese Culture Newspaper (CCN), the Chinese National Culture Promotion Association (CNCPA) co-hosted a contest of ‘Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts’. This contest has been held in three consecutive terms in 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively selecting the top 10 districts every year.

In this contest, the selection criteria include historic elements, culture elements, conservation status, economic and cultural vitality, management status as well as the social popularity. An important evolution was the involvement of the public in deliberating upon what they deemed as their socially-important heritage. The contests have developed into a public vote where experts defined possible districts. Individuals could then vote through the mail, short message or via the internet to choose their favourite districts. Although these selective criteria were not issued by the State Council, the exercise served as a landmark of early efforts towards legislation and initial social-importance assessments especially for historic district conservation wherein the range of stakeholders expanded from government to experts as well as to the public.

4. Methodology

The assessment of the authentic conservation of historic sites arises from persons, the historic sites and mutual effects between people and sites [11]. Therefore, this theoretical framework was used in on-site surveys on visitors and residents. This study applied questionnaires of residents and shop-owners who were living in and visitors who were visiting in both two districts.

Two case studies were chosen from the first and second lists of Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts. One is Beijing Guozijian District, selected from the first Top 10 list, and the other one is Beijing Yandaixjie District, selected from the second Top 10 list. For residents and shop owners, 51 questionnaires were executed in the Guozijian District and 58 questionnaires in Yandaixjie District. For domestic visitors, 75 visitors were interviewed in the Guozijian District and 60 in Yandaixjie District.

The reasons of the choice of these two sites are: 1) they are both located in Beijing (Figure 1). Hence the nearby locations ensure the two districts have similar Beijing cultures and are also supervised by the same governments which aid better comparison of the different conservation situations under similar cultural backgrounds and governance systems; and 2) they were both chosen by experts and public in the 10 most significant historic and cultural districts in each contest respectively. This research sought to investigate: 1) residents’ and visitors’ awareness of the registration of these two districts as national-level historic and cultural districts; 2) the level of residents’ and visitors’ satisfaction of current historic streetscapes of these two districts; and 3) the residents’ opinions of the...
changes of these two districts since they were selected as Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts and opened to tourists.

Resident and shop owners were asked to answer following specific questions:

Do you know that this district which you are living in was listed in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts?

Are you satisfied with your current living conditions?

Do you think your home neighbourhood and lifestyle have been changed since this district was listed in Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts and opened to tourists?

Visitors who were visiting there were asked to answer following specific questions:

Do you know that this district was listed in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts?

Does this place match the information you had before you come?

5. Historical background of Two Districts

5.1 Beijing Guozijian District

Beijing’s Guozijian District is located in Andingmen Avenue in the Dongcheng Administrative Area of Beijing, stretching 665m long and an average 11m wide as a precinct [12]. It begins in the east from Yonghegong Avenue and ends at Andingmen Interior Avenue. It was named as Chengxian Street (Figure 2) during Qing Dynasty (AD 1636 – 1912). Chengxian means being educated to be a worthy person. It took its name Guozijian Street in 1965 [13].
Beijing’s Guozijian District was designated as the City-level Historic and Cultural Preservation Street in 1984 and the first batch of Beijing Historic and Cultural Preservation Districts in 1990 by the People’s Government of Beijing [13]. In 2009, it was selected in the first list of the 10 Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, which is under the Ministry of Culture of China. The street was developed before the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271–1368) and hosts 700 years of history and takes its name from the ancient buildings – the Imperial Academy (Guozijian) and Kong Miao (Figure 3) [13]. It retains well-preserved traditional features of Beijing’s old streets. The Imperial Academy and Kong Miao were considered as a whole system rather than a single component, and called by the joint name “Guozijiaji.”

According to the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics, the Protection Planning on Historic and Cultural Cities of Beijing, the Protection Planning on 25 Historic and Cultural Areas of Old Beijing and other relevant laws and regulations, under the guidance of Beijing Bureau of Cultural Relics, the People’s Government of the Dongcheng District of Beijing undertook research on the orientation of 17 Historic and Cultural Areas, and formulated the Long-term Planning on Protection and Utilization of Cultural Relic Resources of Dongcheng District and the Long-term Planning on Emergency Restoration and Protection and Utilization of Cultural Relic Resources of Dongcheng District during the eleventh five-year plan (2006-2010). Further, the People’s Government of the Dongcheng Administration of Beijing drew up detailed plans for the restoration and construction of the historic and cultural district, which included classifying different levels of buildings in the historic and cultural district to better protect and repair them. The Dongcheng Administrative government also identified the districts, hutongs and courtyards with the most outstanding historic and artistic values to implement targeted conservation including improving living conditions and better presenting historic and cultural resources.

5.2 Beijing Yandaixiejie District
Beijing’s Yandaixiejie District is located in front of the Drum Tower in Di’anmen External Avenue, in the north side of Shichahai sea front. It belongs to the Shichahai Area of the Xicheng Administrative Area of Beijing [14]. It begins in the east from Di’anmen External Avenue and ends at the junction of Xiaoshibei Hutong and Ya’er Hutong in the west. Yan-dai means small-bowled long-stemmed pipe used to smoke tobacco. Xie means skewed. Jie means street. Xie-jie means a street unparallel to and out of vertical with the main street. Beijing’s Yan-dai-xie-jie is one of the oldest skewed streets in Beijing dating from the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368). It was named as Drum Tower Xie-jie in the Emperor Qianlong years (AD 1735-1795) of Qing Dynasty (AD 1636-1911), and was renamed as Yan-dai-xie-jie in the late Qing Dynasty because of the form of this street as a tobacco pipe but also its attracting in hosting tobacco pipe industries (Figure 4) as the main business trade trait of this street during the remaining years of the Qing Dynasty [15].
The administrative organizations are city-level and district-level governments. The main administrative organization is the Shichahai administrative office. The businesses in the District are mainly individual shops, including some State-owned enterprises and joint stock companies. Beijing’s Yandaixiejie District is an important node in the Beijing history culture axis, and also is the core area of the history and culture of Shichahai Area. It has the special functions that combine historic and cultural traditions, promoting its historic and cultural status, and continues as a tourism and entertainment node for the Shichahai Area [15]. The renovation plans for the Yandaixiejie District focus on improving production design studios drawing upon Beijing’s traditions and modern fashion elements as core characteristics, including establishing artworks design and trade corridors of antique calligraphy and painting and folk crafts, attracting famous and folk artists in calligraphy and painting and establishing high-grade dining, bar areas and venues to attract international visitors and white-collar workers.

6. Key Findings and Discussion

6.1 Do people know the “Selection Contest of Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts”? This study found that all residents and shop owners knew that the districts which they were living in were listed in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts. In contrast, a large proportion of visitors did not know that the districts that they were visiting were listed in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts before they arrived. Only 12 visitors (16%) in the Guozijian District knew that this destination had been selected in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts in 2009; and only 8 visitors (12.5%) of Yandaixiejie District knew it had been listed in the Chinese Top 10 Historic and Cultural Districts in 2010. When asked about how they knew information about the “Selection Contest”, the answers included internet, TV or radio and families or friends. It is concluded that the levels of public education and awareness about Historic Districts for visitors is quite low. Only residents living in were educated well, probably because the “Plaque Awarding Ceremony” was held by SACH in each district and the “Awarding Plaques” were hanging up on Districts’ walls (Figure 5).

6.2 Are people satisfied with current streetscape? This study found that most residents were satisfied with living in these two districts. When asked were you satisfied with current living conditions, only 5 residents were very happy with living in with 14 residents (27.5%) being satisfied with living in the Guozijian District. However, 12 were dissatisfied and 9 were very dissatisfied. Fortunately, most residents (19; 37.3%) were happy with living in this District. This figure was lower than anticipated. In contrast,
the levels of residents' satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the Yandaixiejie District were a little bit higher than the figures for the Guozijian District with 39.7% (23 persons) and 32.8% (19 persons). But only 3 persons living in the Yandaixiejie were very happy, and most people (20 persons, 34.5%) were satisfied with current living conditions in the Yandaixiejie District. When asked why you were unhappy with living in, some Guozijian District residents were dissatisfied with commercial development, environment and toilet inconvenience; and most Yandaixiejie's residents were unhappy with the increase of tourist businesses, the increase of visitors and increase of the noise from Bar Street nearby.

In terms of on-site visitors, when asked does this place achieve the information you had before you visited, visitors were presented with four choices: pretty well, somewhat, not much and not at all. In the results, no visitors chose -Not at all for the two districts. This study found that the levels of visitors' evaluation of Guozijian District were lower than levels for Yandaixiejie. The percentage of visitors who visited Guozijian District and chose -Pretty well were 24% (18); lower than 28.3% (17) for Yandaixiejie District. However, the number of visitors who expressed -Not much for Guozijian District were only 3 (4%); much less than 10 (16.7%) for the Yandaixiejie District. The remaining visitors chose -somewhat all.

6.3 What are residents' opinions on “changes”?

When residents were asked to express their opinions about the changes since these two Districts were registered as Chinese Historic and Cultural Districts and opened to tourists, 26 residents (51%) living in Guozijian District thought the District was getting better and only 5 people (9.8%) thought the District was getting worse. The other largest cohort (20; 39.2%) chose -Unsure. In contrast the figures for Yandaixiejie District were 27 (46.6%), 10 (17.2%) and 21 (36.2%) respectively. In comparison, most residents (around half) thought the districts which they were living in obtained benefits from the "Selection Contest"; the number of residents with negative opinions was small. The proportion of residents with negative answers for Yandaixiejie was higher than the percentage for Guozijian. When the residents with negative answers about the Yandaixiejie were asked to expand upon the differences between now and before, 8 out of 10 people identified the out-movement of local residents and extensive tourism.

7. Conclusions

In comparison, it cannot be concluded which district the residents and visitors perceived are better protected. However it can be deduced from the figures that: 1) the level of residents' awareness was much higher than the level of visitors awareness, pointing to the need to improve public propaganda and education; 2) the number of both residents and visitors who were very satisfied with current districts was small and most people were satisfied. From this section of questions and answers, it can be concluded that many people were happy and only a small proportion were unhappy. However if asked why they were happy or unhappy, it could not be identified from this questionnaire because this section of "Q&A" was too simplistic to provide a thorough evaluation of their appreciation of conservation structurally and systematically. Such is a limitation of this study. Hence, in future studies, detailed structural evaluation questionnaires should be set to assess these two districts more scientifically; and 3) regarding residents' opinions on the changes, although most residents were happy with the changes and the registration, it also revealed that there existed some problems arising from the increase of tourist businesses, local residents moving out and increases in visitor numbers. Therefore, administrative governments should pay more attention to balancing development and conservation in these Districts.

References

[9] The State Council of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国务院), -The Protection Regulations on Famous Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages,


