

YINHUI MAO*
YAN SUN**

PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF BEIJING HUTONGS

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage, representing historical achievements, serves as a cornerstone of human civilization, providing an objective basis for understanding the origins, development, and transformations of society and culture.¹ China's millennia-old civilization has left behind a rich cultural legacy. As of the end of 2021, China possessed 108 million pieces (sets) of state-owned movable cultural relics and 767,000 immovable cultural relics. It boasts 56 World Heritage sites, ranking second globally. Given China's vast cultural heritage, preserving and transmitting that heritage is crucial for its cultural development. In the contemporary era, China's heightened emphasis on heritage conservation is evident through ongoing legislative developments. In the era of globalization, safeguarding cultural heritage is a paramount global imperative.² China's experience in preserving and developing its cultural heritage can offer valuable governance insights to other nations. Thus, this study will examine the protection and development of hutongs in Beijing's historic urban areas, serving as a case study to review China's progress in cultural heritage preservation.

* Professor and Dean of the Institute of Foreign Literature Culture, Research Fellow of the Institute of Hermeneutics, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, ORCID: 0000-0002-5612-3224

** Master of Polish language, Department of the Polish Language, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China, ORCID: 0000-0001-8651-8940
DOI: 10.4467/23538724GS.24.007.19868

¹ Liu Fang, Wu Zhenxin, "Wenhua yichan de shuzi xushi xianxiang fenxi ji yingyong jianyi" [Analysis of Digital Narrative Phenomena in Cultural Heritage and Application Suggestions], *Digital Library Forum* 2023, vol. 19, no. 11, p. 46.

² Xia Jiechang, Liu Ruiyi, "Wenhua yichan baohu yu chuanchen de guoji jingyan ji zhengce qishi" [International Experience and Policy Implications for the Protection and Inheritance of Cultural Heritage], *Journal of Ghuizhou Normal University (social science)* 2023, no. 6, p. 64.

Beijing, as an ancient capital of a world civilization, boasts a cultural heritage that is unparalleled both in quantity and quality on a national level. Hutongs serve as quintessential representatives of Beijing's cultural heritage. Cultural heritage can be categorized into tangible and intangible forms. The preservation of hutongs encompasses not only the tangible cultural protection of traditional architectural ensembles in Beijing's historic urban areas but also the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Selecting hutongs in Beijing as the research subject allows one to explore China's cultural heritage protection and development.

This article focuses on the preservation and revitalization of Beijing's hutongs, delineating the origins, response strategies, developmental trajectory, and outcomes of hutong governance issues. Using Beijing's hutongs as a case study, it elucidates the developmental trajectory of China's efforts to conserve its cultural heritage. It further discusses the current status of hutong development in Beijing and analyzes the new trends in China's cultural heritage conservation represented by Beijing's hutongs.

2. Overview of Beijing hutongs and origins of preservation issues

2.1. Hutongs' formation and change

According to the definition in *The Great Dictionary of the Chinese Language (Hanyu Da Cidian 汉语大词典)*, the term "hutong" originates from the Mongolian word "gudum." During the Yuan Dynasty, alleys and lanes were referred to as "hutong," which later became a general term for northern streets and lanes.³ The origin of Beijing's hutongs dates back over 700 years to the Yuan Dynasty, and their formation is closely tied to city planning during the construction of the Yuan capital. Initially, the layout of the Yuan capital, known as *Yuan Dadu 元大都*, adhered to the principles outlined in the ancient Chinese city planning theory *Zhouli · Kaogongji 周礼 · 考工记*. However, in terms of street network arrangement, *Yuan Dadu* not only followed the traditional "nine vertical and nine horizontal" construction pattern (where the city's main roads form a grid consisting of nine major thoroughfares in both north-south and east-west directions) but also drew upon experience acquired since the Song Dynasty, planning evenly spaced east-west alleys between the "nine vertical and nine horizontal" axes for residential areas,⁴ which later became known

³ *Hanyu Da Cidian* [The Great Dictionary of Chinese Language], <https://www.hanyudacidian.cn/> (accessed: 6.04.2024).

⁴ Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning, Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning&Design, Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, *Beijing jiuoben hutong shilu* [An Account of Beijing's old city Hutongs], China Architecture & Building Press, Beijing 2008, p. 2.

as *hutongs* among the people of the Yuan Dynasty. Secondly, during the construction of the capital, measures were taken to ensure access to water resources. Main thoroughfares were planned along water sources. In the city, wells were dug before the construction of houses in streets and lanes, eventually leading to the formation of a layout characterized by “lanes formed around wells.”⁵ This also explains why the term *hutong* originates from the Mongolian word *gudum*, meaning water well, as some preserved water wells can still be found in certain Beijing hutongs today. Since the Yuan Dynasty, hutongs have evolved alongside changes in urban structures during different dynasties. The capitals of the Ming and Qing dynasties were rebuilt on the foundation of the Yuan capital. Hutongs in the Yuan Dynasty were over 9 meters wide, but after reconstruction during the Ming and Qing dynasties, their width was reduced to around 5 meters. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, the basic form of buildings on both sides of hutong passages has evolved from single-story structures to *Sibeyuan* (四合院).⁶ The venerable *Sibeyuan*, a traditional Chinese courtyard-style architecture, stands as the predominant structure within hutongs, emblematic of Beijing’s architectural heritage.

When one looks back at the formation and evolution of Beijing’s hutongs, it is evident that they possess a complex developmental history. Hutongs constitute an integral component of Beijing’s historical and cultural narrative, embodying the city’s enduring legacy. The preservation of the authenticity of hutongs is of paramount importance for the development of Beijing.

2.2. Tracing the origins of hutong preservation issues

The evolution of hutongs intricately intertwines with Beijing’s urban planning and development. Hutongs of various sizes scattered throughout Beijing’s urban areas have undergone over 700 years of development, during which both demolition and construction have been integral aspects of their evolution. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of China’s swift urbanization and modernization, the semantic and conceptual essence of demolition and construction has undergone profound shifts. Preserving the authenticity of cultural heritage is a global concern. Hutongs, like other historic structures, derive their value from their authenticity. Any compromise of this authenticity inevitably raises serious preservation concerns. Amidst the ongoing processes of demolition and construction, there exists an urgent necessity to safeguard the hutongs as invaluable cultural heritage sites within Beijing’s historic urban landscape.

From the perspective of “demolition,” after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, a series of urban planning and construction activities was carried out in

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁶ Duan Bingren, *Beijing hutong zhi* [Beijing Hu Tong Annual], Beijing Publishing House, Beijing 2007, p. 18.

Beijing, resulting in significant changes in the urban landscape and street layout. The demolition of a certain number of hutongs was inevitable. The book *Beijing Jiuchen Hutong Shilu* (An Account of Beijing's old city Hutongs) provides a detailed account of the changes in the number of hutongs: based on investigation and research conducted by the Beijing Institute of Surveying and Mapping and Design in 2004, the number of hutongs in the old city of Beijing was 3,073 in 1949, 2,382 in 1965, 2,290 in 1980, 2,242 in 1990, and 1,559 in 2003.⁷ This data has numerous implications. The demolition of hutongs has been ongoing, but 1990 emerged as a pivotal juncture. Between 1980 and 1990, only 48 hutongs were removed, whereas the period from 1990 to 2003 witnessed the demolition of a remarkable 683 hutongs over thirteen years. Such extensive demolition of hutongs in the old city area inevitably attracted widespread attention and concern. The transformations in hutongs after 1990 are closely intertwined with Beijing's urban planning. On 30 April 1990, during the 8th meeting of the standing committee of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress, the decision to "accelerate the restoration of dilapidated houses in Beijing" was made, inaugurating a large-scale restoration of dilapidated houses in the city.⁸

The restoration of dilapidated houses in Beijing is intricately connected with the fate of the city's historic hutongs. Commercial redevelopment has predominated in the transformation of the old city, often entwined with real estate ventures. The government's haste and eagerness for urban revitalization have created opportunities for developers to exploit, resulting in widespread demolition of structures within the old city precincts. Consequently, numerous hutongs and traditional courtyard residences have succumbed to this rapid redevelopment process.⁹ The demolition of hutongs not only disrupts the urban aesthetic of Beijing but also poses a threat to the historical and cultural legacy of the old city. Consequently, the developmental trajectory of hutongs has become a focal point, underscoring the pressing need for robust measures to safeguard historical and cultural heritage within urban environments.

From the perspective of "construction", whether it is the "rebuilding" of hutongs by developers or the spontaneous "restoration" by residents within the hutongs, a series of issues have arisen, sparking discussions on hutong preservation. On one hand, in the restoration of dilapidated houses of Beijing, real estate development has brought many benefits, but the construction of new properties often prioritizes economic gain over preserving the long-established architectural layout of hutongs, significantly damaging the urban landscape of old Beijing. Researchers note that due to large-scale demolition in the old city, high land prices,

⁷ Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning, Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, "An Account of..." p. 5.

⁸ Wei Ke, "1990~2004: Beijing liangci daguimo weigai" [1990~2004: Two Large-scale Renovation Campaigns in Beijing], *Beijing Planning Review* 2005, no. 6, p. 74.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

and construction costs, developers pursue higher plot ratios and increased building heights, breaching height restrictions. Consequently, many high-rise buildings encroach upon historic residences, courtyard houses, and ancient gardens, encircling them gradually.¹⁰ On the other hand, Beijing's rapid development has attracted numerous migrants, creating a severe imbalance in housing demand and supply. On central Beijing's scarce land, hutong residents resort to unauthorized construction or expansion, while migrants settle in overcrowded large courtyards, impairing living quality. This "restoration" transforms traditional courtyard houses into crowded spaces, severely affecting hutong residents' lifestyle and quality of life.¹¹ This undermines hutong culture and traditional architectural aesthetics. Consequently, protests from original residents highlight the need to prioritize hutong preservation in urban development agendas.

In conclusion, this article considers the origins of hutong preservation issues, examining both the aspects of "demolition" and "construction." During the period characterized by hutong demolition and construction, particularly from 1990 to 2004, Beijing's urban planning primarily emphasized economic benefits and expanded development space. However, this approach led to substantial destruction of hutongs because of inadequate experience in old city restoration. The second large-scale urban restoration in Beijing in 2004 concluded amidst effective measures by the state and opposition from domestic and foreign experts and scholars.¹² Subsequently, responding to calls from various sectors of society, the Beijing government began prioritizing the protection and restoration of hutongs as crucial cultural heritage. Over the past two decades, significant progress has been made in this endeavor. In what follows I discuss the evolution of hutong preservation in Beijing.

3. The process and achievements of Beijing hutong preservation

The protection and renewal of Beijing's hutongs are integral to the overall urban planning of the old city area. By the late 1990s, the negative effects of the urban restoration of the old city in Beijing had become more pronounced. The extensive renovation of dilapidated houses has resulted in the dwindling number of historically intact neighborhoods within the urban area of Beijing.¹³ Faced with the challenging

¹⁰ Tang Hao, "Beijing hutong de lishi yu weilai" [The History and Future of Beijing Hutongs], *City&House* 2009, no. 7, p. 88.

¹¹ Li Hua, Zhang Haibin, "«Jiupin xindan»: renju huanjing shijiao xia de beijing jiucheng siheyuan gengxin" ["Old Bottles, New Spirits": Renovation of Siheyuan in Beijing's old city area from the Perspective of Living Environment], *Huazhong Architecture* 2022, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 19.

¹² Wei Ke, "1990~2004: Beijing liangci...", p. 77.

¹³ Lu Xiang, "Beijing lishi wenhua baohuqu baohu fangfa chutan" [An Initial Exploration of Conservation Methods for Historic and Cultural Protection Areas in Beijing], *Journal of Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture* 2001, no. 1, p. 76.

situation of preserving the rich material and intangible cultural heritage within the old city of Beijing, relevant municipal departments began exploring methods for the protection of historical and cultural neighborhoods. Within the framework of protecting historical and cultural neighborhoods in old Beijing, the preservation and restoration of hutongs occupy a significant space. Therefore, considering the history of hutong preservation involves an exploration of the history of preservation of historical and cultural neighborhoods in old Beijing.

In terms of the protection of historical and cultural neighborhoods in old Beijing, it is evident that the core of preservation efforts lies in the establishment and management of historical and cultural protection zones, exhibiting several key characteristics: firstly, government leadership and increased policy support; secondly, extensive participation of experts and scholars; and thirdly, active improvement of relevant laws and regulations. This article outlines the developmental trajectory of Beijing's hutongs within the framework of historical and cultural protection zones, organized according to the timeline of government-led initiatives. In general, its developmental trajectory since the 1990s can be divided into three stages.

The first stage, from 1990 to 2004, can be characterized as the nascent period of conservation awareness. This stage marks the era of demolition and construction in the old city and the initial formation period of the protection system for the old city. At the end of 1999, in response to the negative impacts of urban renewal, the Capital Planning and Construction Commission approved the *Plans for the Protection of the Historical Cultural Relics of the old city of Beijing and for the Areas Under Control*.¹⁴ This plan initially delineated 25 historical and cultural protection zones within the old city area of Beijing.

Ultimately, in 2001, the People's Government of Beijing Municipality approved the *Plans for the Protection of Twenty-Five Pieces of Historical Cultural Relics of the old city of Beijing*, prepared by the Capital Planning and Construction Commission. This undoubtedly marks a significant milestone in the development of historical preservation in old Beijing. As is noted by scholars in the field, this represents the first instance of the People's Government of Beijing Municipality explicitly committing itself to the protection of historical and cultural districts.¹⁵ Among these 25 pieces of historical cultural relics, there are six main categories of protected areas, with traditional hutong residences ranking second among them. This planning addresses the previous limitations of cultural heritage protection units being restricted to palaces and temples, giving full attention to folk buildings such as traditional neighborhoods. More importantly, it explicitly recognizes hutongs and Siheyuan as tangible

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Liu Hong, Zhao Lianwen, "Beijing lishi wenhua baohuqu de zhengtixing baohu yanjiu" [A Study on the Holistic Conservation of Historic and Cultural Protection Areas in Beijing], *Journal of Beijing Union University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 2008, no. 2, p. 36.

cultural heritage. In 2002, the National People's Congress passed the "Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China". The establishment and improvement of laws and regulations provide a legal basis for hutong protection.

But at this stage, the most critical issue of dilapidated house renovation remained unresolved, and ambitious developers violated the strict "control indicators" set forth in the protection plans.¹⁶ Under various pressures, in 2004, the government halted large-scale renovation projects. The era of extensive demolition and construction finally came to an end, and the old city entered a long and difficult period of improvement.

The second stage, from 2005 to 2016, can be described as a period of improvement and of tackling challenges. The work on the old city historical and cultural protection zones was comprehensively carried out, and a well-defined protection system has been established within the historical and cultural protection zones. Awareness of cultural heritage protection at the social level has been significantly heightened, and widespread attention has been drawn to the protection zones's efforts. Moreover, a team of experts and scholars has spearheaded a series of specialized studies.

Specifically, the management system of the old city protected area has been continuously refined. These conservation efforts no longer solely focus on preserving and revitalizing the landscape of the protected area; rather, the scope of this work has expanded to encompass the entire old city of Beijing. For instance, in January 2005, Overall Plans for the Metropolis of Beijing (2004–2020) were formally issued, explicitly arguing for the "overall protection of the old city" as a basic principle.¹⁷ As conservation efforts progressed, the work regulations became increasingly standardized and detailed. In 2007, the Beijing municipal government issued the Technical Guidelines for Renovation and Protection of old city Houses in Beijing, which provided specific methods for the renovation and protection of old city houses in Beijing.¹⁸ The continuous improvement of the institutional framework has provided clear guidelines for the work within the old city historical and cultural protection zones, reflecting the advantages of government leadership and overall planning.

During this stage, work within the old city historical and cultural protection zones was systematically carried out. The principles of conservation planning were

¹⁶ Wei Ke, "1990~2004: Beijing liangci...", p. 77.

¹⁷ Sun Shimeng, Shang Qian, Zhang Yue, "Beijing jiuchen jili gengxin guancha 2005–2016" [Observations on the Renewal of Beijing's Old Urban Fabric 2005–2016], *Architectural Journal* 2018, no. 6, p. 23.

¹⁸ Song Han, Gao Chao, Ma Tingting, "Beijing laochen lishi wenhua jiequ baohu gengxin celv yanjiu – yi tazhuan hutong lishi wenhua jiequ weili" [A Study on Conservation and Renewal Strategies for Historic and Cultural Districts in Old Beijing: A Case Study of Zuantou Hutong Historic and Cultural Distric], *Huazhong Architecture* 2024, vol. 42, no. 1, p. 79.

explicitly outlined in the reserve plan issued by the Capital Planning and Construction Commission. These principles include preserving the overall appearance of each neighborhood according to its nature and characteristics, maintaining the historical authenticity of the neighborhoods, and preserving historical relics and original features. The implementation of a “micro-circulation” renovation model was advocated, aiming for gradual improvement.¹⁹ This approach is specifically aimed at key historical buildings and individual courtyards within the protection zone, closely related to the renovation and renewal of hutongs. Guided by this philosophy, the renovation and reconstruction of hutongs aim to preserve the traditional *Siheyuan*, maintain the original layout of the hutongs, and ensure architectural styles harmonize with the surrounding environment, while also demolishing dilapidated houses to increase living space and improve living conditions. Such principles are both scientifically sound and sustainable.

According to research by relevant scholars on the urban fabric renewal during this period, visible changes occurred in approximately 11.8% of the land within the old city area. Among these changes, 9.3% of the area underwent renewal, while 2.5% saw demolition. Within the protection zone, approximately 7.9% of the area underwent changes, while outside the protection zone, approximately 13.5% of the area underwent changes.²⁰ The old city of Beijing, covering an area of 93 square kilometers, serves as the core functional area of the capital. It is the most densely populated area in terms of both surface public transportation and rail transit in Beijing. Moreover, it boasts rich educational and medical resources, making it the core functional area of the city with a significantly higher population density than other areas. Therefore, the transformation of the old city is challenging. Data on the renewal of the old city fabric demonstrates that during this period, the renovation of the old city, especially within the protection zone, was subject to strict control and gradual improvement.

However, the progress during this challenging phase of improvement was not without flaws, and many new issues emerged during this period. Evaluation reports on the implementation of the 2004 Overall Plans for the protection of the old city were issued in 2010 and 2015. These reports highlighted a significant issue with the old city protection strategy, namely that since 2004, the protection strategy for the old city primarily focused on preserving traditional areas of cultural significance, while showing “a lack of serious consideration and practice” towards areas that had already undergone modernization.²¹

¹⁹ Zhao Xiuchi, “Beijing jiuchen baohu gaizao yanjiu” [Research on the Protection and Renovation of Beijing’s old city], *Journal of Commercial Economics* 2016, no. 21, p. 216.

²⁰ Sun Shimeng, Shang Qian, Zhang Yue, “Beijing jiuchen jili...”, p. 28.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

In fact, the demolition of the old city had not ceased. Developers were still eyeing opportunities for commercialization in prime locations of the capital. This is precisely the concern raised in the evaluation reports: while urban fabric renewal within the reserve of the old city was to some extent controlled, the issue of protection and renewal of the old city outside the reserve had not received sufficient attention and intervention. The segmented management approach of delineating the reserve highlighted the focus of work in the early stages of old city protection. However, after a considerable period of exploration during this stage, significant experience had been accumulated in the protection and renewal of the old city. It was time for protection efforts to shift focus and give due attention to the concept of “overall protection” of the old city, which had long been proposed but overlooked. With the update of the overall plans for the metropolis of Beijing in 2017, the protection of the old city also entered a new historical stage.

The third stage, from 2017 to the present, represents a period of mature development. At this stage, the profound need for urban renewal in Beijing significantly influenced the protection and renovation of the old city. The conservation of the old city has entered a mature stage of development, while at the same time Beijing’s urbanization process has reached a certain stage, one where the mode of development and construction of the city and the mode of economic growth will be transformed, and will inevitably face the important issue of urban renewal.²² In 2017, during the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, it was proposed that “China’s economy has shifted from a stage of high-speed growth to a stage of high-quality development.” Subsequently, in September of the same year, the People’s Government of Beijing Municipality formally approved a new version of the Overall Plans for the Metropolis of Beijing (2016–2035). The revised overall plan introduced clearer and stricter requirements regarding the content, scope, and intensity of the protection of Beijing’s old city, emphasizing that no further demolition should occur. Some researchers argue that with the implementation of the new regulations, Beijing’s urban renewal efforts have officially entered a new stage of comprehensive management. This shift signifies a systematic approach aimed at promoting sustainable urban development, high-quality development, and high-level governance.²³

What distinguishes this stage of urban planning is primarily systemic renewal. In addition to the Overall Plans for the Metropolis of Beijing, in 2019, the Beijing Government issued the “Guidelines for the Protection and Renovation of Historical and Cultural Blocks in Beijing,” further clarifying the methods and approaches

²² Ma Hongjie, “Beijing chenshi gengxin fazhan licheng he zhengce yanbian – quan shengming zhouqi guanli he pinggu zhidu tansuo” [The Development Process and Policy Evolution of Urban Renewal in Beijing: Exploration of Whole Lifecycle Management and Evaluation System], *World Architecture* 2023, no. 4, p. 4.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

for the protection and renovation of historical and cultural blocks within the old city of Beijing.²⁴ In 2020, the government issued the Control Detailed Plan of the Capital's Functional Core Area (Block Level) (2018–2035), proposing to strengthen the overall protection of the old city and build the capital into a top-notch city with a first-class living environment. The new system highlights key points for the protection of the old city. Firstly, it emphasizes overall protection, and secondly, it shifts the focus of the old city's renovation from material transformation to a people-oriented approach, prioritizing improvements in the living environment.

In this context, the specific situation of hutong preservation and renewal also aligns with the requirements of the overall planning of this stage. Firstly, with the new regulations implemented in 2017, it was finally stipulated that all hutongs and *Sibeyuan* within the old city must not be demolished. Secondly, the renovation of hutongs and associated buildings has shifted from material transformation to a focus on improving the living environment. This includes initiatives to improve hutong traffic and environmental greenery, making hutongs more liveable. Simultaneously, there is a greater emphasis on the quality of hutong preservation and renewal, focusing on the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. One major characteristic of the intangible cultural heritage in hutongs is that it is closely linked to the tangible cultural heritage of the hutongs themselves. Many aspects of the intangible cultural heritage in hutongs can only be manifested through the daily lives of hutong residents. Moreover, intangible cultural heritage elements are often combined with the development of cultural industries to drive the development of cultural tourism in hutongs. Transitioning from the protection and renovation of tangible cultural heritage to the development and revival of intangible cultural heritage, and from commercialization to the development of higher-quality tertiary industries, hutongs have entered a new stage of development alongside the urban renewal of Beijing.

This article delineates three stages of preservation and revitalization of Beijing's old city. From the era of demolition and reconstruction to the implementation of pilot improvements within protected areas, and subsequently to comprehensive urban planning, the metamorphosis of hutongs has been striking. With a shift of focus from material redevelopment to prioritizing cultural heritage preservation, hutongs now exhibit a renewed vitality. Hence, research on hutongs should be closely intertwined with studies on urban planning in Beijing. As Beijing continues its emphasis on downsizing and the ongoing relocation of what are non-essential functions for a capital city, the evolution of hutongs is poised to persist into the future. The preservation of hutongs will continue unabated. As methods for protecting tangible heritage, such as physical structures, become more advanced, the challenge of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage within hutongs becomes

²⁴ Song Han, Gao Chao, Ma Tingting, "Beijing laochen lishi...", p. 79.

more pronounced. Focusing on the protection of intangible cultural heritage is emerging as a key trend in the future of hutong preservation.

4. The new trends in Beijing hutong and Chinese cultural heritage preservation

In the new era, starting from a standpoint of protection and using new developments in modern technology, digital development and integration of cultural tourism resources serve as important means for the preservation of cultural heritage. Two distinct new trends have emerged in the protection of Beijing's hutongs, as well as Chinese cultural heritage as a whole: modernized cultural tourism development and cultural digitization.

On the one hand, in terms of cultural tourism development, "hutong tours" have been popular in the Chinese tourism market since the 1990s. However, the development of hutong cultural tourism in the new era faces various challenges. Firstly, hutongs are located in the core urban areas of Beijing, which, as the millennium-old capital, boasts extremely rich cultural tourism resources. Beijing has seven World Heritage Sites listed in the World Heritage List, and according to the Beijing Cultural Relics Bureau, there are more than seventy national key cultural relics protection units in Beijing. In comparison to Beijing's abundant tourism resources, hutong tours are not very competitive. Many researchers have even pointed out that the actual development of hutong tourism in recent years has been relatively poor.²⁵ Secondly, in modern society, people's tourism demands are becoming increasingly diverse, while also pursuing greater depth and quality in their travel experiences. However, there have been few updates to projects offering a hutong experience, and there are even a series of problems. The modernization and development of hutong cultural tourism are urgently needed.

On 1 October 2020, Beijing began to implement the Service Standards for Hutong Tours, which stipulate that hutong tours should not affect the normal lives of local residents, that infrastructure within the hutongs should be improved, and that a mechanism for handling tourist complaints should be established.²⁶ The government's attention and support have laid the foundation for the modernization and development of hutong cultural tourism. Different hutongs have undertaken various directions of cultural tourism development based on their own characteristics. Additionally, the design of hutong-related cultural and creative products has

²⁵ Xu Meimei, Che Liangliang, "Jiyu SWOT fenxi de Beijing hutong lvyou fazhan duice yanjiu" [A Study on Development Strategies for Beijing Hutong Tourism Based on SWOT Analysis], *Tourism Overview* 2023, no. 5, p. 184.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

also developed. Hutong cultural and creative products cater to the recent trend of “cultural and creative tourism” in China’s tourism industry and have become a major feature of modern hutong cultural tourism development.

On the other hand, regarding cultural digitization, with the accelerated development of twenty-first-century technologies such as big data, visualization, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence, there has been an explosive growth in digital documentation and data archives.²⁷ This is of great significance for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Preserving the intangible cultural heritage within hutongs is vital for maintaining their authenticity. This heritage embodies the most charming and vibrant aspects of hutongs; yet its preservation and transmission are notably challenging. Intangible cultural heritage is characterized by its intangibility, perishability, and fluidity, often heavily reliant on its inheritors.²⁸ However, through digital means, the knowledge and information of traditional intangible cultural heritage can be expressed in entirely new media forms such as images, audio, and video data. In recent years, there have been numerous examples of digitizing intangible cultural heritage in China.

As tangible entities of traditional architecture, hutongs, like other ancient architectural complexes, primarily focus on the digitization of their architectural guide systems. With the rapid advancement of GPS and China’s Beidou navigation satellite system, digital navigation systems have incomparable advantages over traditional guide systems.²⁹ In the digital era, the digital transformation of guide systems has become an important development direction for hutongs.

A typical example is the digital navigation design for Beijing’s Dongsì Hutong. Based on the cultural characteristics of Dongsì Hutong, the designers constructed the navigation system to reflect the cultural image of Dongsì Hutong. They conducted detailed collection, classification, summarization,³⁰ and extraction of various data, including the historical origins of Beijing hutongs and the customs and culture of the capital city, as well as the spatial composition, housing and utensils, historical documents, folk legends, and other data specific to Dongsì Hutong. This laid the foundation and necessary conditions for the realization of the digital navigation system. After such a database is established, it can be combined with other digital technologies to further innovate the spatial presentation of hutongs. The designers also proposed integrating interactive technologies such as touchscreens,

²⁷ Tang Shukun, “«Shuzihua shengcun» tiaojian xia zhonghua duominzu feiyi chuanbo de xins-hengtai” [“Digital Survival”: The New Ecosystem of Transmitting Chinese Multi-Ethnic Intangible Cultural Heritage], *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Social Science)* 2024, vol. 32, no. 3, p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Xu Lang, Zhang Junpei, “Beijing hutong daolan xitong de shuzihua gaizao tanxi-yi dongsì hutong daoshi sheji weili” [Digital Transformation Analysis of Beijing Hutong Guide System: A Case Study of Dongsì Hutong Guide Design], *Art and Design (Theory)* 2021, vol. 2, no. 10, p. 60.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

multi-touch, voice input, and gesture interaction with navigation design to create an interactive navigation system. This transition from 2D to 3D presentation of hutong spaces enhances the overall presentation.³¹ In addition to Beijing's hutongs, digital navigation systems have been widely used in the preservation and transmission of historical and cultural heritage throughout the country. Cultural digitization not only represents the modern development direction of hutong cultural heritage preservation, but also reflects the trend of China's cultural heritage protection in the digital era.

Adapting to the changes of the times, hutong preservation and renovation are also keeping pace with the times. Whether promoting the development of the modern cultural tourism industry or utilizing digital technology, both are essential paths for the revitalization and renovation of hutong culture in contemporary society. Represented by hutongs, we can explore the new development trends of Chinese cultural heritage protection in the new era, and look forward to the future of heritage protection in China.

5. Conclusions

This article examines the development and changes of Beijing's hutongs, which represent a significant cultural heritage of China. It explores the origins of hutong protection issues. With a history of over 700 years, these hutongs have witnessed the dynamic transformations of Beijing, carrying a rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, rapid urbanization and modernization have posed challenges to their preservation, particularly because of commercialization and frequent demolition and reconstruction activities. The article reveals three stages in hutongs' protection: the budding stage of protection awareness (1990–2004), the stage of improvement and tackling challenges (2005–2016), and the stage of development and maturity (2017–present). This division elucidates the development process of hutong protection in Beijing. Using Beijing's hutongs as a case study, this article identifies common challenges and solutions in the preservation of tangible cultural heritage in China. While hutong protection faces unique challenges, such as the conflict between commercialization and cultural heritage preservation, and the loss of intangible cultural heritage, the experiences gained are invaluable for similar endeavors. The protection of cultural heritage is closely intertwined with national cultural development strategies and economic strength. This study indicates a growing focus on revitalizing cultural heritage and developing the cultural industry, with hutong cultural tourism rapidly modernizing and the digitalization of cultural

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

heritage becoming an unstoppable trend. In the future, mutual learning among nations is essential for the long-term progress of cultural heritage protection.

References

- Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning, Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning&Design, Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, *Beijing jiuchen hutong shilu* [An Account of Beijing's old city Hutongs], China Architecture & Building Press, Beijing 2008
- Duan Bingren, *Beijing hutong zhi* [Beijing Hu Tong Annual], Beijing Publishing House, Beijing 2007
- Hanyu Da Cidian* [The Great Dictionary of Chinese Language], <https://www.hanyudacidian.cn/> (accessed: 6.04.2024)
- Li Hua, Zhang Haibin, “«Jiupin xindan»: renju huanjing shijiao xia de beijing jiucheng siheyuan gengxin” [“Old Bottles, New Spirits”: Renovation of Siheyuan in Beijing's old city area from the Perspective of Living Environment], *Huazhong Architecture* 2022, vol. 40, no. 1
- Liu Fang, Wu Zhenxin, “Wenhua yichan de shuzi xushi xianxiang fenxi ji yingyong jianyi” [Analysis of Digital Narrative Phenomena in Cultural Heritage and Application Suggestions], *Digital Library Forum* 2023, vol. 19, no. 11
- Liu Hong, Zhao Lianwen, “Beijing lishi wenhua baohuqu de zhengtixing baohu yanjiu” [A Study on the Holistic Conservation of Historic and Cultural Protection Areas in Beijing], *Journal of Beijing Union University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 2008, no. 2
- Lu Xiang, “Beijing lishi wenhua baohuqu baohu fangfa chutan” [An Initial Exploration of Conservation Methods for Historic and Cultural Protection Areas in Beijing], *Journal of Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture* 2001, no. 1
- Ma Hongjie, “Beijing chenshi gengxin fazhan licheng he zhengce yanbian – quan shengming zhouqi guanli he pinggu zhidu tansuo” [The Development Process and Policy Evolution of Urban Renewal in Beijing: Exploration of Whole Lifecycle Management and Evaluation System], *World Architecture* 2023, no. 4
- Song Han, Gao Chao, Ma Tingting, “Beijing laochen lishi wenhua jiequ baohu gengxin celv yanjiu – yi tazhuan hutong lishi wenhua jiequ weili” [A Study on Conservation and Renewal Strategies for Historic and Cultural Districts in Old Beijing: A Case Study of Zuantou Hutong Historic and Cultural District], *Huazhong Architecture* 2024, vol. 42, no. 1
- Sun Shimeng, Shang Qian, Zhang Yue, “Beijing jiuchen jili gengxin guancha 2005–2016” [Observations on the Renewal of Beijing's Old Urban Fabric 2005–2016], *Architectural Journal* 2018, no. 6
- Tang Hao, “Beijing hutong de lishi yu weilai” [The History and Future of Beijing Hutongs], *City&House* 2009, no. 7
- Tang Shukun, “«Shuzihua shengcun» tiaojian xia zhonghua duominzu feiyi chuanbo de xinshengtai” [“Digital Survival”: The New Ecosystem of Transmitting Chinese Multi-Ethnic Intangible Cultural Heritage], *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Social Science)* 2024, vol. 32, no. 3
- Wei Ke, “1990~2004: Beijing liangci daguimo weigai” [1990~2004: Two Large-scale Renovation Campaigns in Beijing], *Beijing Planning Review* 2005, no. 6
- Xia Jiechang, Liu Ruiyi, “Wenhua yichan baohu yu chuanchen de guoji jingyan ji zhengce qishi” [International Experience and Policy Implications for the Protection and Inheritance of Cultural Heritage], *Journal of Guizhou Normal University (social science)* 2023, no. 6

- Xu Lang, Zhang Junpei, "Beijing hutong daolan xitong de shuzihua gaizao tanxi-yi dongsi hutong daoshi sheji weili" [Digital Transformation Analysis of Beijing Hutong Guide System: A Case Study of Dongsi Hutong Guide Design], *Art and Design (Theory)* 2021, vol. 2, no. 10
- Xu Meimei, Che Liangliang, "Jiyu SWOT fenxi de Beijing hutong lvyou fazhan duice yanjiu" [A Study on Development Strategies for Beijing Hutong Tourism Based on SWOT Analysis], *Tourism Overview* 2023, no. 5
- Zhao Xiuchi, "Beijing jiuchen baohu gaizao yanjiu" [Research on the Protection and Renovation of Beijing's old city], *Journal of Commercial Economics* 2016, no. 21

SUMMARY

Yinbui Mao, Yan Sun

PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF BEIJING HUTONG

The aim of this paper is to delve into the historical preservation of hutong as cultural heritage. Research reveals that in response to the needs of urbanization and modernization in Beijing, hutong has undergone continuous cycles of demolition and reconstruction, facing intricate developmental dilemmas. With the strengthening awareness of cultural heritage preservation in Chinese society, there has been a considerable increase in support from national laws and policies, emphasizing the importance of preserving and renovating old city areas such as hutong. Moreover, this study finds that Beijing Municipality has comprehensively revitalized hutong from the perspective of residential environment, transportation, and cultural tourism development, yielding a series of positive outcomes. Understanding the preservation process of Beijing hutong offers insights into China's advancement in cultural heritage conservation, highlighting its people-centered and context-specific approach, thus providing a deeper understanding of China's new developments in cultural endeavors in the contemporary era.

Keywords: hutong, Cultural Heritage in China, renovating, cultural tourism

STRESZCZENIE

Yinbui Mao, Yan Sun

OCHRONA DZIEDZICTWA KULTURY W CHINACH: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU HUTONGÓW W PEKINIE

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie historycznej ochrony hutongów jako dziedzictwa kultury. Badania pokazują, że w odpowiedzi na potrzeby urbanizacji i modernizacji w Pekinie hutongi poddawano ciągłym cyklom rozbiórek i odbudowy. Wzrost świadomości chińskiego społeczeństwa w zakresie ochrony dziedzictwa kultury wpłynął na politykę i prawodawstwo,

które zaczęto tworzyć z myślą o zachowaniu i renowacji starych obszarów miejskich, w tym hutongów. Ponadto władze Pekinu kompleksowo odnowiły hutongi, koncentrując się na środowisku mieszkalnym, transporcie i rozwoju turystyki kulturowej, co przyniosło wiele pozytywnych rezultatów. Zrozumienie procesu ochrony hutongów w Pekinie pozwala na lepsze zrozumienie postępu Chin w zakresie ochrony dziedzictwa kultury. Zauważalne jest w tym kontekście uwzględnianie potrzeb społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: hutong, dziedzictwo kultury Chin, renowacja, turystyka kulturowa