



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

WORKING PAPER SERIES

TRANSLATING HERITAGE AND CULTURAL MEMORY ACROSS TIME

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2026

Volume 357

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

INVENTED TRADITIONS, CONTESTED HERITAGE: NEGOTIATING FRANCOIST ARCHITECTURE IN DEMOCRATIC SPAIN

Katerina Chatzikonstantinou, David Martín López

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The material legacies of totalitarian regimes in Europe present potent sites for exploring how tradition is both deployed and contested over time. Under authoritarian governments, tradition often becomes a political tool — a curated, symbolic resource mobilized to legitimize power, assert collective identity, and anchor regimes in a mythologized past. Yet in democratic transitions, these same architectural forms become part of a contested heritage: spaces where historical memory, political identity, and urban environment intersect in ambiguous and often conflicting ways. This paper examines how Francoist Spain exemplifies these dynamics and what it reveals about the translation of tradition (across time, culture, and political system) in urban contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay analyses the instrumentalization of architecture as a tool of political propaganda during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and its complex management in democratic Spain. Through an analysis of the neo-Herrerian style – the so-called "imperial style" of the Escorial – and landmarks such as the Ministry of the Air and the Valley of the Fallen – now Cuelgamuros – it explores how the Franco regime built a story of "invented tradition" in the new architectural constructions of the State. Likewise, a comparative perspective is established with other European contexts to understand the uniqueness of the Spanish case. Finally, the contemporary debate on historical memory, the 2007 Law on Historical Memory and the 2022 Law on Democratic Memory is addressed, as well as the process of resignification of this uncomfortable heritage in contemporary society.

Under Francisco Franco's Regime (1939–1975), architecture and urban planning were instrumental in constructing a regime's claim to tradition. Neo-Herrerian style, monumentalism, remaking of religious and nationalist symbolism, and large memorials such as the Valley of the Fallen were explicitly designed to evoke an idealized Spanish historical continuity — linking fascist-Catholic ideology with earlier royal, imperial, and Catholic traditions. Tradition in this sense was neither neutral nor spontaneous: it was invented, selected, reused, and staged, serving as a tool of ideological transmission, constraint, and legitimation in the built environment.

Since the transition to democracy, Spain has grappled with how to translate these inherited traditions into forms compatible with pluralism, critical remembrance, and democratic values. The Law of Historical Memory (2007, and later reforms with the new Law of Democratic Memory, 2022) illustrates legal, symbolic, and spatial negotiations: what should be removed, what reinterpreted, how signage and contextualization can change meaning, and how public discourse can re-examine the monuments. The 2019 removal of Franco's remains from the Valley of the Fallen is one instance of seeking to cleanse symbolic power; yet many

Francoist structures remain in public space, continuing to evoke (intentionally or unintentionally) tradition as authoritarian tradition. These urban heritage sites become translated across time: from being monuments of power to contested heritage objects subject to reinterpretation, removal, or transformation.

By comparing European precedents (e.g. Nazi, Fascist, other authoritarian regimes' architecture) with the Spanish case, this paper maps how tradition is translated cross-culturally and across epochs: what aesthetic, political, spatial strategies are used, what agencies (state, civil society, heritage institutions) contest tradition, and what meanings are gained or lost in translation. It examines not just preservation vs demolition, but also adaptive reuse, symbolic de-signification, recontextualization, and public pedagogy as modes of translating tradition into democratic urban identity.

In line with IASTE's theme "Translating Traditions," this contribution foregrounds how tradition is not fixed: it is translated — meaning physically, temporally, politically. It investigates both tradition as a political tool under Francoism, and tradition as contested heritage today: a dynamic process situated in urban space, memory, and identity. Ultimately, this study argues that the translation of authoritarian tradition into democratic urban environments requires critical engagement: not erasure alone, nor blind preservation, but mediated transformation that acknowledges the past's power while enabling new meanings and plural identities.

2. ARCHITECTURE AT THE SERVICE OF FRANCO

After Franco's victory in 1939, the new regime that had been imposed in some territories of Spain since 1936, was not limited to the physical reconstruction of a country in ruins as a result of the war; The construction of a new "national body" was proposed to serve as a material support for a so-called spiritual resurrection. This symbolism and political character can be seen in numerous examples linked to the Commission of devastated regions, in which the Franco regime executes an ideology based on this national-Catholic discourse.

Architecture became, therefore, the fundamental language of this will to power. As the Falangist ideologue Ernesto Giménez Caballero (1899-1988) stated in his influential work *Arte y Estado* (1935), written a year before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War:

"To structure, to build, to order, are the verbs of the State. Architectural verbs. Every resurrection of the "state" in history means a resurrection of "the architectural." Primacy of the State; primacy of Architecture. Architecture: State Art, State Function, Essence of the State"

Giménez Caballero.¹

In this triumphalist context of the supporters of Francoism, the intellectual José María Pemán (1897-1981) described the moment as the beginning of an era destined to live enormous things according to the Andalusian poet. This aesthetic grandiloquence of the new regime is legitimized by the imperial architecture, precisely made by Philip II, with the paradigm of Escorial himself.

"While, in the face of this, our troops received there in those days, the news of the recognition of the new Spain, by Italy and Germany. Rome and Germany, the two components of Europe, merged again in the crucible of Spain. Alfonso the Wise and Emperor Don Carlos, dreamers of the "Holy Roman Empire", smiled. Everywhere you looked, everything was full of enormous perspectives and great transcendences. Everything was ready for huge things. We had to suffer gloriously again. We had half the world behind us and half the world in front of us again. They were, once again, face to face, like Apollo and Vulcan in the Velázquez forge, the only two forces in the world: the Beast and the Angel. The airs, trembling with fire, had been filled with a terrible Annunciation. And Spain, for the fifth time in history, accepted its destiny and knocked its head down to say: Behold the handmaid of the Lord...".

José María Pemán.²

The architects were mobilized as a kind of civil militia, after the purge made by the regime of republican architects and freemasons, some of them shot in the context of the Civil War such as Francisco Albiñana Corralé (1887-1936). Luis Gutiérrez Soto (1900-1977), paradigmatic architect of the first stage of the regime with stylistic models based on the Escorial of Philip II as a paradigm of the new Renaissance Spain that rises from the ashes of the past, which gains strength in his Ministry of Air in Moncloa, Madrid, comes to comment at the First National Assembly of Architects of 1939, exhorting his colleagues to make a homeland, to make architecture in its broadest concept to symbolize the spirit of our glorious resurgence.³ As Antonio Pizza points out, the Franco regime understood the Escorial as a unitary style, although it was hardly copied with few exceptions:

"If the Escorial is interpreted as a kind of entelechy of Spanish monarchical power, the identification between art and the state will inexorably lead to the definition of a unitary style, a process of decanting a series of linguistic codes that facilitate the processes of recognition and identification with the ideas and values that carry the political system. However, these conjunctions will be the object of little elaboration in theoretical terms, also giving only isolated fruits in the strictly constructive field".

Antonio Pizza.⁴

The University of Granada, for example, will have a significant work in the Isabel La Católica university residence, the work of Francisco Prieto Moreno (1907-1985) and Fernando Wilhelmi Manzano (1879–1969), whose chapel schematically represents the façade of the Escorial itself, in

which a niche is incorporated above the Evangelists of Isabel La Católica herself. symbol of the regime and under whose coat of arms Franco establishes his official imaginary.

3. THE NEO-HERRERIAN CANON AND FRANCOISM

Many Francoists, after the consolidation of the new regime, advocated a return to the glorious imperial past, creating mimesis of buildings and temples under the parameters of the sixteenth century, whose greatest exponent was Juan de Herrera (1530-1597), the great architect who completed El Escorial, to the monastery-palace and royal tomb built to commemorate the battle of San Quintín (1557) on the outskirts of Madrid between 1563 and 1584. They considered that the architecture of modernism and Art Deco, made of concrete and cement in the Madrid context, were symbols of an immoral republican Madrid. In 1944, in an essay on Architecture and Madrid, Giménez Caballero said: "In Madrid, the kingdom of cement is Gran Vía. And the cement is atrocious. It smells of socialization, of five-year plans, of a Bolshevik novel, of a Yankee movie, of free women, of organized misery, of the dissolution of families, of numbered officials. If there is hostile material to hang a crucifix, it is cement."

The search for a national style inevitably led to the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Although Franco felt a special devotion to the Catholic Monarchs, and Charles V was still a German emperor, grandson of these kings who has come to Spain to take charge of the empire, spiritual and moral stability was undoubtedly represented by Philip II and his idea of the centrality of Spain in Madrid and with his royal pantheon in the Escorial. where power, religion and prayer, with the Hieronymite monks shook hands. According to the theoreticians of the regime, the work of the Renaissance architect Juan de Herrera was not just a building, but the materialization of the myths of Hierarchy, Order and Unity. Eugenio D'Ors, in his disquisitions on style, argued that the message of Juan de Villanueva in the neoclassicism and the Herrerian of the sixteenth century was a perennial message inscribed in the "constancy of the Spanish".⁵

This style, often referred to as Neo-Escorialense or Neo-Herrerian, was based on a biopolitical hierarchy of building materials. Giménez Caballero theorized an aesthetic segregation based on the cultural origin of materials. The stone and granite with which a good part of the great buildings of the sixteenth century in Madrid, convents and palaces, had been made, represented the Roman and eternal, while the slate of the spires, for Giménez Caballero, made a kind of evocation of the Germanic and the Aryan, of the Habsburg dynasty that thus connected with the ideals of Nazism. Brick is an unworthy, serial material that connected with communist ideologies according to the intellectual of the Spanish avant-garde himself:

"The brick had to appear "subdued", since it represented the common people, wayward by nature. He had to frame himself before those in charge and, of course, submit to them. In

this way, the bricks had to be subdued by the slate, which showed the Germanic roots of the Spanish people and the stone, which was the bearer of the Roman style, the matrix element of eternal Spain".

Giménez Caballero.⁶

As Pallol suggests in his guide to Francoist Madrid, granite contains the mass, the vulgar and common: "Hence, the stone, necessarily, had to contain and frame the brick. That and no other was its symbolic function: framing, hierarchizing, ennobling, falangizing the red brick mass." ⁷



Figure 1: Former Air Ministry, Luis Gutiérrez Soto, 1943-1951. Air and Space Force Headquarters, Moncloa, Madrid, Spain (Source: Håkan Svensson, 2009).

The Ministry of the Air (1943-1951) (Figure 1), the work of Luis Gutiérrez Soto, represents the maximum synthesis of this style placed at the service of the military and Francoist authority. The building was designed as an "Escorialense mask" for a modern reinforced concrete structure. Curiously, the original project had an aesthetic close to German Nazism, but after the defeat of the Axis in 1945, it was modified to accentuate the "genuinely Spanish". Gutiérrez Soto recalled that General Vigón chose the final design "with the slate roof and the four spires, because he considered it to be the most genuinely Spanish and Madrid, since, in short, the Plaza de la Moncloa... it should be a sample of the state architecture of that time".⁸ The building functions as an attribute of authority whose towers recall the distance between the people and power, emulating the old Alcázar of Madrid burned down in 1734, after which the construction of the new Royal

Palace of Philip V of Bourbon (1683-1746) began, initiator of a new dynasty in Spain that lasted until the Second Republic and after the death of Franco.

It is interesting to mention this obituary of Gutiérrez Soto by another of the great architects of the Franco regime, Luis Moya Blanco (1904-1990), linked to Opus Dei, who modernized the architectural aesthetics of the regime, although he defended in 1940 that the work of Juan de Herrera was the only "true Imperial architecture" comparable to that of ancient Rome.⁹ In a kind of interesting juggling, he understands that the work of the late Gutiérrez Soto, has oscillated from neo-Herrerian and the evocative architecture of the Madrid of Philip II, with its Ministry of the Air to the modernity of the international style more typical of European democracies such as the French, in the exemplified work of the insurance company La Unión y el Fénix (1965-1971) (Figure 2), on the Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid:

Gutiérrez Soto did not do *kitsch* in the usual sense, which consists of creating false spaces from other times to live in our own; on the contrary, he made buildings for today that bear no resemblance to the old ones, adding to them expressive means latent in the collective unconscious, both ancient and modern, the archetypes of Jung, whose validity is evident judging by universal experience. His deep knowledge of individual and collective psychology allowed him to make the right choice of those archetypes, old or new, that should be used in each case. Taking this aspect into account, it is not surprising that the Air Ministry and the Union building and the Phoenix have such a different character. Well, in addition, Gutiérrez Soto had a sense of the urban landscape and never destroyed cities. The Ministry completes this landscape with towers and spires that Madrid had in other times along the west façade of the urban area, its total composition is appropriate to the site and a large office tower with the curtain-wall façade, which is common in modern architecture, as seen in the new skyscrapers of Paris, would not have been. in La Défense and in Montparnasse, with which one of the most beautiful city silhouettes in the world has been destroyed. The case of the Insurance Company in the Castellana is different. Here the urban landscape is new, because the old one has already been destroyed. The buildings of Gutiérrez Soto are removed from the promenade and are of modest dimensions compared to others in the same area. The black color chosen for them motivated many discussions, but it can be said that it is the result of common sense, a quality in which our colleague was excelled: since pollution blackens the facades, the way to keep them in good condition is to make them in a color that cannot be altered by gases, smoke and dust.

Luis Moya.¹⁰



Figure 2: View of the building of La Unión and the Spanish Phoenix at 33 Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid (Spain). Work by Luis Guitérrez Soto, 1965. (Source: Luis García, 2012).

As Zira Box suggests in his essay *Spain, Year Zero: The Symbolic Construction of Francoism* (2010), Franco had made the blood spilled a founding myth of the new regime, of its martyrs and of their memory. This formula legitimized the constant remembrance in monuments in all cities for the Fallen for God and for Spain:

"There is no redemption without blood and blessed is the blood that has brought us our redemption," Franco recalled in Asturias in 1946. Once Victory became the founding myth of the regime, the sacralization of the origins of the New State was linked to the pain that had engendered it. Much of the importance of this mythical conversion for the legitimization of the Franco regime had to do with the enormous number of deaths, both its own and others, that Francoism left behind to establish itself as a new victorious regime."

Zira Box.¹¹

4. FRANCOIST ARCHITECTURE TODAY AND THE PROBLEM OF RESIGNIFYING

The Spanish transition was built on the 1977 Amnesty Law, defined as the Basque Nationalist Party member politician Xabier Arzalluz Antia would say, as he argued while defending the proposed law in the Spanish Cortes, the Amnesty Law should be "a forgetting for everyone, by everyone."¹² This "pact of oblivion" kept Franco's symbolism intact for decades.

The heritage analysis of Francoism must be done from a holistic perspective, in which sociology, anthropology and political science come together. New visions such as Mónica Brito Vieira's essay *Democracy and the Politics of Silence* (2024) propose a re-evaluation of silence, not as a mere absence of words, but as a fundamental and positive dimension of democratic life.¹³ Traditional political theory, from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt, has established a constitutive coincidence between politics and speech, elevating discourse as the proper reason for the political. This vision has caused what remains outside of speech to be exiled from politics, relegating silence to the pre-political, irrelevant or subversive. Taking its sense of silence and speech and, making the paragon with the dictatorial heritage, we could affirm that the monuments of Tenerife continue to be too talkative testimonies, hegemonic talking landmarks, in the line of Aldo Rossi. Thus, this quality ends up legitimizing, possibly unconsciously, a recent past linked to the pain of many repressed citizens, victims who were even taken as political prisoners working on the monument of the Fallen in the capital of Tenerife in the 40s of the twentieth century.

We must go back to the beginning of contemporaneity, that is, to the end of 1789, after the French Revolution, to appreciate that archaeologists and theorists such as the politician Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849), considered that the monuments of a monarchical nature of the previous Bourbon stages should be respected *in situ*, compared to other authors who also under a protectionist sense considered that, once eliminated from the public space, their most feasible location was a museum as in the

case of Marie Alexandre Lenoir (1761-1839). Lenoir founded the Musée des Monuments français (1795) in the convent of the Augustinian Minims in Paris. These two positions between museographic compilation, eliminating the monarchical trace in the urban space, museophobia and in situ protection, inaugurate two theoretical models that, without entering the symbolic resignification of the uncomfortable monument, participated in it in a primitive way.

Just as some of the French monarchist monuments were almost contemporaneous with the new republican state, in Spain, Francoist productions still lack the protective umbrella of being one hundred years old, a formula that allows us to act more quickly in the event of doubt. But the problem lies in the fact that many of the Spanish productions of a markedly monumental and fascistic character created during the Franco dictatorship dangerously follow the conceptual line of Alois Riegl's monument. We recall here his famous proposal: "By monument, in the oldest and most primitive sense, is understood a work made by human hand and created with the specific purpose of keeping alive and present in the consciousness of future generations, individual feats or destinies – or a set of these. (...) But when we speak of the modern worship and conservation of monuments, we practically do not think of those 'intentional monuments' but of the 'historical and artistic monuments'."14

The issue of whether to re-signify or dismantle those "intentional monuments" of the Francoist period – paraphrasing Riegl – without detailed analyses that might even allow for their conservation and restoration without interventionist processes, and without provoking political diatribes, can lead to significant confusion and inconsistent guidelines.

This situation is exemplified in a particularly singular case, sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Housing and Urban Agenda, through the 2025 competition for the re-signification of the Valley of Cuelgamuros, formerly known as the Valley of the Fallen. The winning team, Pereda Pérez Arquitectos S.P. and Lignum S.L., in some respects re-signifies the space, yet has caused surprise within academic circles for scarcely altering its symbolic elements in appearance – neither the cross, nor the apse and interior – aside from the large access staircase and certain museographic resources.

Perhaps the issue lies in the very etymological meaning of re-signify, a term that does not yet officially exist in the Spanish dictionary. Nevertheless, as of March 2023, its widespread use has led the Royal Spanish Academy of the Language (RAE) to clarify on its website that “with the meaning ‘to give something a new significance,’ the term resignify is used, whose incorporation into the academic dictionary is currently under consideration” (2023). This is something that has been adopted in barely six years, although as recently as September 2020, the technical typographer and ortho typographer Javier Bezos, writing for FundéuRAE, referred to it as a new or curious term, noting that "resignifying and resignification have been in use for some

time in certain disciplines, such as history and psychology, to refer to the act of giving something a new meaning. In Spain, it is being used in relation to the Valley of the Fallen" (2020).



Figure 3: Panoramic view of Cuelgamuros with its imposing cross. In the image, in addition to the basilica, the buildings of the hostelry and the Abbey of the Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen, Madrid, are seen. (Source: Jorge Díaz Bes, 2012).

The old Valley of the Fallen (Figure 3), now Cuelgamuros, is among all the examples of Francoism the one that monopolizes the paradigm of the great narratives mentioned above due to symbology, monumentality and problems. Despite its deactivation as a mausoleum of José Antonio Primo de Rivera y Franco, the fact that it belongs to National Heritage, being a Benedictine abbey and basilica, as well as being the tomb of republican fighters taken from mass graves and ditches taken to the monument together with the remains of rebels in various chapels, make it one of the most unresolved complexities of European democracy in terms not only of politics but also of heritage. Since 1942, first with convicted soldiers and then in 1943 with political prisoners, the pharaonic work in which Pedro Muguruza (1893-1953) intervened and in 1950 his student Diego Méndez González (1906-1987), incorporating the cross more than 150 meters high.

It is necessary to incorporate the voices of the political prisoners who worked in many of them existing vestiges, as announced by the winning project: "All the details of the project to resignify Franco's old mausoleum: screens on ceilings and floors to see and hear the Civil War. The interpretation center projected for the Cuelgamuros Valley includes six thematic blocks and testimonies of prisoners who participated in its construction." ¹⁵

The dampness of the complex, mainly in the basilica of Cuelgamuros, needs restoration and intervention, as is the case in the deconsecrated crypt of the monument to the fallen of Santa Cruz; but any act of preservation, cleaning and restoration without resignification can be understood as a superlative form of continuity and lethargy in the transitional processes that the monument must have. This is the constant paradox that the different administrations have navigated: inaction as a synonym for forgetfulness and therefore, a supposed respect for the victims. Thus, in November 2025, the project under the hermetic title *La Base y la Cruz*, designed by Pereda Pérez Arquitectos S.P. and Lignum S.L. has won the prize of the international competition for the "Memorial of Cuelgamuros, in San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Madrid)" has been the subject of numerous controversies because it barely, apparently, resignifies the space. The works must begin in 2027 and with a maximum duration of four years, with thirty million euros in the budget and thus undertake the necessary resignification according to the law of democratic memory. Those in favor of its conservation consider it an outrage to the national heritage, while the voices that demanded a real symbolic action that would destabilize the resounding fascist charge of the complex. They thus see in the winning model, although inside it is museographically interesting, a mere operation not even aesthetic or surgical on its exterior, which continues to metaphorically legitimize all its formal forcefulness, opens a "courtyard of welcome and memory", as stated in the winning panel of the team of architects.¹⁶



Figure 4: Image of the winning project *La Base and La Cruz* (2025) of the resignification of Cuelgamuros, Valley of the Fallen (Source: *La Base and La Cruz*, 2025).

The British historian Timothy Garton Ash has analyzed memory for decades and recollection proposes the concept of "mesomnesia" as a formula to avoid the extremes of total amnesia or eternal fixation on trauma.¹⁷

From a heritage perspective, it allows us not to remain eternally fixed in trauma – hypermemory, never forget, in a sense similar to that of Alain Besançon – nor to opt for total amnesia, in the line of Hermann Lübbe's silence, resignifying *in situ*.¹⁸ This idea of mesomemory, referred to in Ash's texts as Mesomnesie or *mittleres Erinnern*, middle memory, is proposed as an intermediate and necessary way for societies to manage a traumatic past. It is presented as a balance between two pathological extremes: amnesia – total or institutionalized forgetfulness – and hypermnnesia – an obsessive and paralyzing memory. The middle way might seem to be the proposal for the resignification of Cuelgamuros, in the heat of the winning project, which maintains both the cross and the piety of Ávalos, and destabilizes the foundations with a new entrance-courtyard that subtracts the monumentality of the ceremonial and ritual staircase. It is a metaphorical way of desacralizing the monument from its base.

On the official website of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Agenda, curiously, not in any other type of governmental institutional entity, reference was made to the contest, its results and the panels of the finalists and the winning team itself, explaining its purpose, as a place of memory: "It is an international contest that aims to select a proposal for the Memorial in Cuelgamuros, through the development of an artistic, architectural and landscape action on the monumental complex and its immediate surroundings that contributes to the process of resignification.

The purpose of the competition is to generate a change in the collective perception of the place through the capacity for cultural, artistic, technological or social impact of the proposals, mainly aimed at the functional and social reactivation of the environment. In this sense, the contest seeks to transform the complex into a place of memory, recognition, commemoration and tribute, in line with the principles of democratic memory and hand in hand with Human Rights and Universal Justice."¹⁹

Under the slogans "paths of memory (Second Finalist)", with 92 points was Temperatura Extremas Arquitectos S.L.P., "Nude Architecture (Third Finalist)", with 90 points, by Martínez López Santa-María S.L.P. and "the light that emerges (Fourth Finalist)", represented by KAUH Arquitectura y Paisajismo S.L. with 83 points. The international jury chaired by Iñáqui Carnicero, had renowned architects such as David Chipperfield, María Largarita and Fuensanta Nieto or the artist Cristina Iglesias. The project that *La Base y la Cruz* (Figure 4) provides for the "[...] creation of an interpretation center and the demolition of the access staircase and will incorporate symbolic elements capable of redefining the space: a large crack that breaks the traditional axuality of the complex and an open circular vestibule of 40 meters in diameter that becomes the new threshold of access to the basilica."²⁰

The big difference between Cuelgamuros and the Francoist landmarks in the city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where two architectural and urban landmarks persist, such as the Cross-lighthouse of the Fallen and the

Monument to Franco (Figure 5), is that both are visible and coexist in the daily urban space, full of tourists who do not understand how fascism is legitimized or due to symbolic ignorance and attractiveness, they may even take selfies in the absence of a reinterpretation. At present, except for the cross visible from the highway, the person accesses Cuelgamuros of their own volition, with an entrance and therefore goes to a space that can be museumized and democratized at least museographically, as is the intention of the current government of Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón. Therefore, he knows that he is going to a place that was deliberately fulfilled by the regime and now he is going to resignify himself. Playing with these processes, preserving the monument in situ, is more complex.



Figure 5: Juan de Ávalos. Monument to Franco. Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Spain. This monument is part of the list of uncomfortable heritage that is still under study under the parameters of the Democratic Memory Law of 2022 and without currently having any process of resignification (Source: Mataparda, 2010).

The urban historian Christine Boyer delves into the reflection on how architecture and heritage have become contemporary battlefields where identity, power and trauma converge, in a kind of dance whose end you never know what it is. Boyer argues that architectural collective memory is tangible and permanent, which makes it the "archetype" of memory.²¹ In Germany, there are hardly any vestiges of the Nazi past, so society has no apparent dangers that imply an exaltation of the dictatorial past, as is the case in the Spanish context, where examples such as those of Tenerife continue to exist and without any resignification legitimize a hegemony in the urban space with an unusual notoriety, as they were conceived.

In his essay, Boyer highlights two ways of attacking heritage from a perspective of tactics and military strategy. In this sense, he defines "urbicide" as the deliberate attack on the urban fabric because cities are

symbols of multiplicity and coexistence of ethnic and religious values. Examples of this are the bombings in Dubrovnik and Mostar during the Yugoslav War, which sought to destroy shared spaces that contradicted exclusivist ideologies. In contrast to this formula, Boyer finds memoricide as a "murder of the past" through the eradication of architectural and geographical markers. However, when heritage destruction is carried out in the name of historical memory in a democracy, Boyer's models do not hold up.

Heritage becomes a kind of symbolic power, and its destruction can sometimes be within the concept of "heritage terrorism" indicated by the author. Boyer highlights the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan (2001) as an act of "heritage terrorism", where artifacts are removed to ensure that no other narrative (religious or historical) contradicts the dominant ideology of the time. To a certain extent, democracy, with its hegemonic values, eradicates symbols of the painful past, of European dictatorships and authoritarian regimes as thaumaturgical models that heal the collective, but it generates opposing dialogues, sometimes not understanding the idea of grey scales, of subversive monuments, or that allow reflection through resignification of the dark past of the recent history of a country.

Boyer, for contexts different from the one we are dealing with, suggests that there is no such thing as a "pristine memory", but a selected memory and an amnesia manipulated by those in power. Therefore, any architectural intervention in sites of memory must be aware that it may be obscuring or suppressing the voices of vulnerable groups, and that the way in which this heritage is managed can lead to both the renewal of peace and the repetition of conflict. Indirectly, in our Spanish uncomfortable heritage we find certain similarities, depending on who owns the building, the urban space in which the heritage is located or the regional, local or provincial government where it is located. In a way, some paradigmatic works of the Franco regime are interesting as monuments, as aesthetic references of a past to be forgotten, but at the same time, unconsciously, they can legitimize and strengthen links with those disastrous times, so pedagogical work is necessary around the interpretation of heritage that does not give ambiguity as to why it is preserved.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, resignifying is not erasing, but "restoring the border between past and present" as Timothy Ash affirms. The message of a monument changes over time; the current objective is that the presence of the past dies as a lived experience and becomes history reduced to an exhibition or a monument in an environment of democratic pluralism where it is possible to "agree to disagree" from mutual respect as Reinhardt Koselleck would say. This is the multifaceted dilemma that continues to exist in Franco's heritage when symbolically and aesthetically it is interesting despite the disastrous message and its narrativity. Erase all vestiges? Or stay with some resignified ones like Cuelgamuros so as not to forget?

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements
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**LOST ARCHITECTURE: A MULTI-
DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS OF SHANGHAI'S
BETH AHARON SYNAGOGUE**

Shuming Zhang, Xuefeng Yan, Jingwan Fu

LOST ARCHITECTURE: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS OF SHANGHAI'S BETH AHARON SYNAGOGUE



Compared with other modern religious buildings in China, the research on synagogues is a relatively niche topic, and Beth Aharon Synagogue with its elliptical floor plan is an even more unique case among synagogues. However, the synagogue has been demolished, and people can only infer its form from blurred images. Fortunately, the authors found its elevation drawings in the Shanghai Urban Construction Archives and accidentally discovered its floor plan in a fire protection atlas. By interpreting the drawings and with the assistance of Rhino software for modeling, they completed the digital archiving and 3D restoration of the synagogue, providing support for related research.

The study found three key points: First, by comparing it with circular synagogues in the United States during the same period, it discusses the underlying ideological trend of the theater-style layout; Second, the synagogue adopts the only elliptical floor plan and theater-style layout among the surviving synagogues in China, breaking the traditional pattern to form a dual-center layout of altar and bimah; Third, the expressive characteristics of the Byzantine Revival style behind the synagogue's facade style.

Finally, based on the context of Shanghai's diverse architectural culture, this paper explores how Beth Aharon Synagogue and Jewish religious architecture absorbed and integrated architectural styles from multiple countries, enriching the dimensions of research on the traditional translation of modern cross-cultural architecture.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a core window of China's opening-up and an international metropolis in modern times, Shanghai was once the largest and most active Jewish settlement in the Far East in the first half of the 20th century, known later as the "Oriental Noah's Ark". Since the mid-19th century, Sephardic Jews from the Middle East, Ashkenazi Jews from Europe, and Russian Jews have moved to Shanghai one after another, and religious buildings have become the core material carrier for them to maintain ethnic identity, inherit religious culture, and carry out community activities. Among the existing and disappeared synagogues in Shanghai, the Beth Aharon Synagogue, officially completed in 1927, is the highest-level religious space of the Sephardic Jewish community in the Tilanqiao and International Settlement areas, and one of the most innovative, stylistically integrated, and functionally complex synagogues in the history of modern Chinese architecture.¹

The construction of the synagogue originated from the serious limitations of the old Shearith Israel Synagogue: built in 1900, the original synagogue was dilapidated and narrow in space, unable to meet the religious and activity needs of the growing Sephardic Jewish community. In addition, the influx of Russian Jewish immigrants pushed the synagogue's capacity to the limit.² In 1925, Silas Aaron Hardoon, a wealthy Jewish merchant and real estate tycoon in Shanghai, invested 310,000 US dollars (including 169,000 US dollars for land and 150,000 US dollars for construction) to purchase a plot on the east side of Museum Road in the International Settlement (now No. 42 Huqiu Road), and named the new synagogue after his father

“Aharon” as a public gift to the Jewish community in Shanghai. The project was designed by Palmer & Turner of Shanghai, the most influential architectural firm in the modern Far East, and constructed by Fong Saey-Kee Construction Factory as the general contractor. The grand inauguration ceremony was held on June 30, 1927, presided over by the British Consul General in Shanghai, becoming a landmark event of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries in Shanghai that year.² After completion, the Beth Aharon Synagogue was not a single religious place, but a comprehensive community center integrating prayer, study, assembly, social interaction, and relief. During World War II, it was transformed into a reception station for Jewish refugees and a temporary residence for the Mir Yeshiva of Poland, providing teaching, accommodation, and religious activities for exiled teachers and students fleeing Nazi persecution, becoming an important sanctuary for the continuation of Jewish culture amid the war. After 1949, the function of the synagogue gradually changed, and it was completely demolished in 1985, with the site rebuilt as the Wenhui Building, putting an end to a vivid chapter of architectural history.³

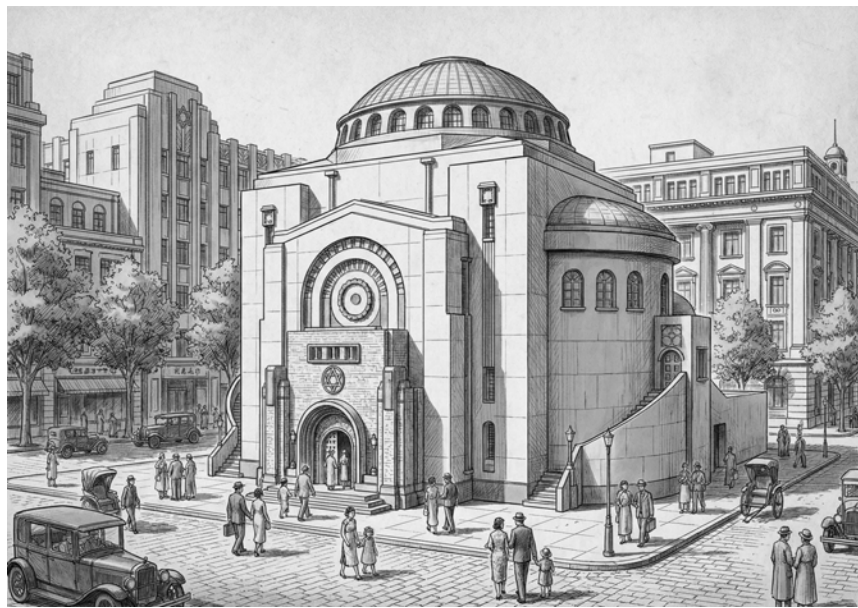


Figure 1: AI 3D Restoration Rendering of Beth Aharon Synagogue (Source: Author's own creation).

At present, there are obvious gaps in the academic research on the Beth Aharon Synagogue: existing achievements are mostly scattered in general architectural histories, modern Shanghai architectural histories, and Jewish cultural research works, mostly fragmentary mentions, lacking thematic and systematic research on the building itself. Previous studies have mostly focused on sorting out historical backgrounds, verifying architect identities, and briefly describing the construction process. For example, Edward Denison and Zheng Hongbin⁴ sorted out the architect pedigree, and Academician Zheng Shiling⁵ discovered the 1927

implementation drawings in the Shanghai Archives, but none of them conducted in-depth analysis of the building plan, spatial structure, facade language, stylistic origin, and doctrinal translation. Due to the demolition of the building, its internal spatial layout, structural system, acoustic design, and circulation organization have long been unknown, becoming a regret in the study of modern Shanghai religious buildings. The authors of this paper discovered the completed fire protection plan of the synagogue in China's Century-Old Fire Protection Illustrated Book,⁶ and combined with the design plans, construction reports, and historical photos in modern Western-language newspapers to construct a triple evidence system of "drawings + documents + images." Using digital modeling technology to restore the full picture of the building, this paper conducts a multi-dimensional analysis from three core dimensions: design origin and stylistic integration, plan layout and traffic circulation, and facade design and symbolic expression, restoring the design wisdom and cultural value of this lost building.

2. INTEGRATION OF FOREIGN STYLES IN BETH AHARON SYNAGOGUE

The architectural style of the Beth Aharon Synagogue is not a copy of a single origin, but a multi-integrated building with the Byzantine Revival style as the main body, the American theatrical layout as the framework, Moorish decorations and West Asian elements as the embellishments, and modern architectural technology as the support. It is a localized practice of global architectural trends in Shanghai in the early 20th century, and a spatial translation of the cultural identity and religious traditions of the Sephardic Jewish community.

2.1. Design Firm and Architects Behind Beth Aharon Synagogue

The design of the Beth Aharon Synagogue was completed by Palmer & Turner of Shanghai, the largest and most influential architectural design firm in the modern Far East, which left a series of landmark buildings in Shanghai such as the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Building, the Customs House, and the Sassoon House, representing the highest architectural design level in the Far East at that time.⁷ Based on various documents, the specific designers are confirmed as British architects George Leopold Wilson, Edwin Forbes Bothwell, and Russian architect Emmanuel Moiseevich Gran (1894-1969).⁴ Gran received systematic academic architectural education in St. Petersburg, joined Palmer & Turner in 1922, and later moved to the United States as the Director of Architecture and Interior Design for Hilton Hotels. His Russian architectural education background injected the gene of Eastern European Byzantine Revival style into the synagogue.

The construction of the synagogue brought together the top engineering forces in Shanghai in the 1920s, forming a complete supply chain of global procurement and localized construction, which is a concentrated reflection of the international engineering and construction level of modern Shanghai: Fong Saey-Kee

Construction Factory was responsible for the main reinforced concrete project, ensuring the structural stability of the building with exquisite concrete technology; New Engineering & Shipbuilding Works, Ltd. undertook the steel structure construction, providing structural support for the large-span dome; Gibb, Livingston & Co. completed the exquisite decoration of the plaster dome and ceiling; Kailai Mining Administration supplied building bricks; Malcolm & Co. and William Jack & Co. provided imported British steel doors, windows and leaded glass; Tai Chong & Co., Ltd. supplied seats, SingTai Furnishing made interior panels; Shanghai Waterworks installed sanitary and heating equipment; the electrical engineering was directed by H. C. Wessels.⁷ This cross-national and cross-industry collaborative construction model not only ensured the technological advancement of the building but also achieved the unity of spirituality and practicality of the religious building.

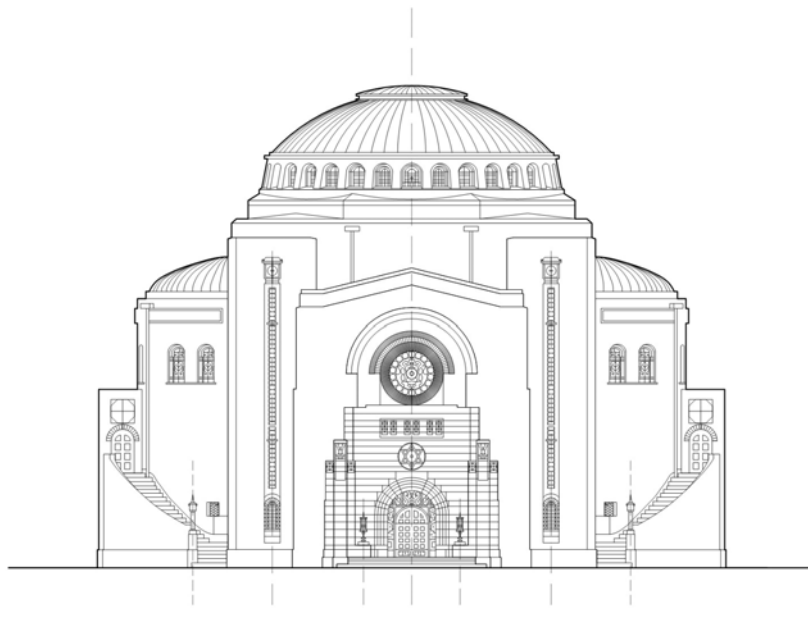


Figure 2: West Elevation of Beth Aharon Synagogue (Source: Author's own creation).

2.2. Influence of Byzantine Revival Style

The Byzantine Revival style was one of the mainstream styles of synagogues around the world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its domes, centralized layouts, and arch shapes have a spiritual inheritance relationship with the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, conforming to the Jewish pursuit of “sacred space.”⁸ As a religious space for Reform Sephardic Jews, the choice of the Byzantine Revival style for the Beth Aharon Synagogue is both a tribute to religious traditions and a response to modern architectural trends. Palmer & Turner combined this classical style with reinforced concrete technology and modern elements of the Vienna Secession to form a unique architectural language.

The top of the synagogue adopts the iconic “main dome + two side auxiliary domes” combination of the Byzantine Revival style: the central main dome is about 18.00 meters high, with a square base with a side length of 16.20 meters, a spherical height of 3.60 meters, and a spherical bottom diameter of 12.03 meters; each side is equipped with a quarter-ellipsoid auxiliary dome, with a major axis of 12.52 meters, a minor axis of 4.31 meters, and a height of about 1.75 meters. The surface of the domes is fully covered with green glazed tiles, which are both waterproof and enhance the religious ritual sense. The three domes form a distinct primary-secondary and rhythmically harmonious vertical composition, perfectly adapting to the elliptical plan base and becoming the most striking visual logo of the building. The main dome adopts a reinforced concrete frame structure supported by four columns, realizing a column-free large-span internal space, completely solving the drawbacks of blocked sightlines and depressed space in traditional synagogues. The interior is bright and ethereal, in sharp contrast to the dark and cramped space of old synagogues.

Sefer Ha-Bahir, a classic of Jewish mysticism, records: “The windows of the dome are the gates of heaven, through which the divine light enters the synagogue and unites the believers with God in prayer.” Thirty narrow vertical windows are opened on the side of the main dome, and natural light forms beam-like rays through the windows, symbolizing God’s guidance to the believers and creating a sacred and quiet prayer atmosphere. In addition, the synagogue integrates Moorish decorative elements, including horseshoe arches, Oriental floral bas-reliefs, and Moorish capitals, adding a strong exotic flavor of West Asia.⁹ From the comparison of stylistic characteristics, the synagogue retains the core elements of the Byzantine Revival synagogue: octagonal drum base and semicircular arched openings on the dome, only simplifying the traditional spired towers into square towers on both sides of the main entrance and canceling the spire design, which is more in line with the simple and solemn aesthetic orientation of modern architecture.

2.3. Influence of American Theatrical Layout

The “theatrical layout” was the core trend of spatial innovation in American synagogues in the early 20th century. It has gone through three stages: embryonic form in the colonial period, maturity in the 1830s, and finalization in the early 20th century. Its core feature is that seats are arranged in an arc around the central ritual area, with dual spatial attributes of “ritual focus” and “community participation.” With large capacity, unobstructed sightlines, and excellent acoustic effects as its core advantages, it promotes the transformation of synagogues from single religious spaces to comprehensive community public centers.¹⁰ The theatrical layout of American synagogues gradually evolved from row seating to arc arrangement, and finally deeply integrated with circular and elliptical plans. Temple Sinai, designed by Chicago architect Alfred Alschuler, adopted an “arena-style layout” to bring all seats close to the ritual core; Temple Tifereth Israel in the United

States integrated the women's gallery with the theater balcony to create a stepped auditorium, becoming a model of this layout.

This trend spread to Shanghai with international architectural exchanges and profoundly influenced the spatial design of the Beth Aharon Synagogue. The synagogue perfectly combines the elliptical plan with the theatrical layout. Most seats are arranged along the major axis of the ellipse facing the central bimah, which not only optimizes the sound transmission effect but also dilutes the hierarchical differences among believers, conforming to the core Jewish doctrine of “equality of all living beings.” The women's gallery on the second floor of the east side draws on the form of a theater viewing stand, adopting an arc-shaped cantilevered concrete balcony. While meeting the ritual requirements of gender separation in Judaism, it provides unobstructed and good sightlines for female believers, representing a typical practice of the “under the same ceiling” women's gallery system in modern synagogues.¹¹ This design responds to the wave of women's rights movement in the early 20th century, achieving a spatial balance between religious traditions and social progress.



Figure 3: Interior View of Beth Aharon Synagogue

(Source: http://www.ushmm.org/uiacgi/uia_query/photos?hr=null&query=kw131786, ushmm.org).

3. PLAN LAYOUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE

The plan layout of the Beth Aharon Synagogue takes functional adaptation, doctrinal conformity, and site optimization as the core principles, fully taking into account the needs of religious rituals, community activities, circulation organization, and spatial equality. Its innovative double-centered elliptical plan perfectly solves the design problems caused by the irregular trapezoidal site, which is an accurate response to the architectural trend of international Reform Jewish synagogues and a model of the high integration of religious doctrines and architectural technology.

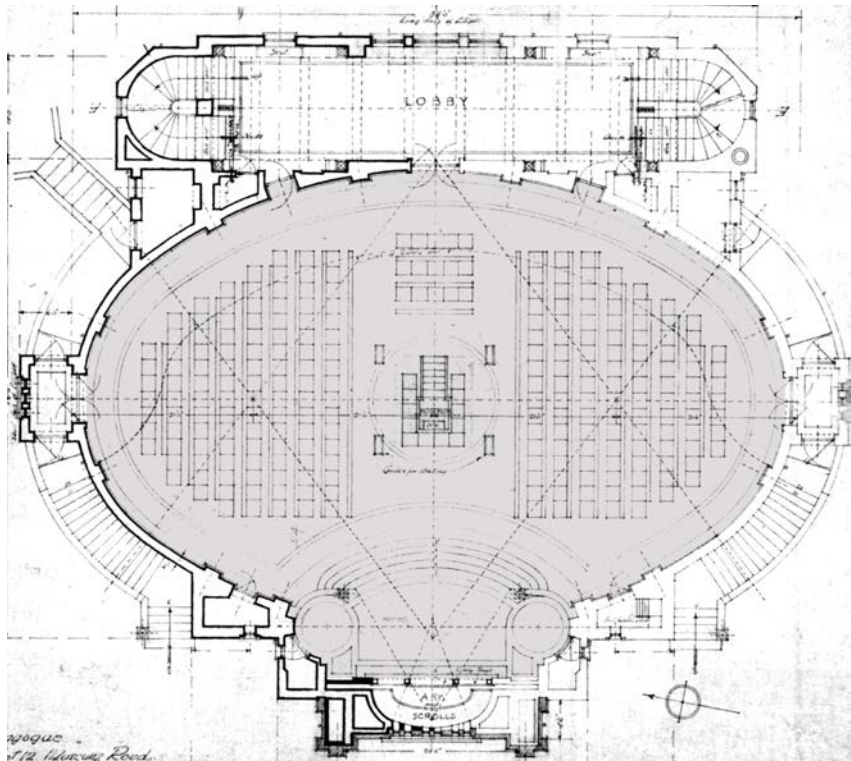


Figure 4: Ground Floor Plan of the Beth Aharon Synagogue (Source: *China's Century-Old Fire Protection Illustrated Book*, p.32).

3.1. Overall Layout and Traffic Circulation

The site of the synagogue is an irregular trapezoid narrow in the north and wide in the south, with a north-south length of 24.38 meters (80 feet) and an east-west width of 15.85 meters (52 feet), forming an acute angle with the road on the west side. The site conditions greatly restricted the use of the traditional rectangular plan. The architect creatively adopted the double-centered elliptical plan, which not only ensured the symmetry and solemnity of the religious building but also maximized the use of the site boundary, expanded the effective building area, and achieved a perfect balance between site restrictions and spatial needs.



Figure 5: Photo of the Entrance Hall of Beth Aharon Synagogue (Source: North-China Daily News. 1927).

The entrance design faces the core contradiction between religious traditions and site conditions: according to Jewish regulations, the Ark of the Covenant storing the Torah scrolls must be placed on the west side (facing Jerusalem), but the west side of the site is adjacent to the road, so the main entrance can only be opened to the west, causing believers to turn their backs to the Ark directly after entering, violating religious rituals⁹. To solve this problem, the architect designed a three-line dedicated circulation system to realize the orderly passage of different groups of people: clergy, important guests, and community leaders enter from the main entrance, go up to the second floor through corridors and reception rooms, step into the sanctuary from the east, and face the west altar; ordinary believers reach the second-floor sanctuary directly through special outdoor stairs and enter the core prayer area through the transition space; female believers go up to the third floor through stairs on both sides and enter the independent women's gallery to participate in worship. The sanctuary is equipped with five entrances corresponding to different user groups, forming a complete ritual sequence of “entrance—transition space—core sanctuary,” which strictly abides by religious ritual norms and efficiently solves the circulation contradiction caused by the site orientation, reflecting extreme design ingenuity.

3.2. Core Space: Main Sanctuary

The main sanctuary is the spiritual core of the synagogue, adopting a standard double-centered elliptical plan: the center radius is 6.40 meters (21 feet), the major axis is 25.60 meters (84 feet), and the minor axis is 12.80 meters (42 feet), which can accommodate more than 400 people to carry out religious activities at the same

time, making it one of the largest Jewish prayer spaces in Shanghai at that time. Its most revolutionary design is to completely break the end-style pattern of “altar-bimah integration” in traditional synagogues, forming a dual-core layout of “west altar-central bimah”, which is a unique example in modern Chinese Jewish religious architecture.

This layout has a profound religious classical basis: the *Mishnah* clearly stipulates that “a reading platform shall be set in the center of the synagogue, emphasizing that the rich and the poor, scholars and craftsmen, nobles and commoners have equal rights to study the Torah;” the *Talmud* also records that the reading platform of the great synagogue in ancient Alexandria was located in the center, reflecting the doctrine of equality.¹⁰ The Beth Aharon Synagogue strictly abides by this regulation, placing the octagonal bimah in the south-central position of the hall, surrounded by wooden railings, with a dome light hanging above to focus on the core area; standing on the bimah, the rabbi can face all believers, who sit around the center and listen equally to the preaching of the Torah, realizing the spatial translation of the doctrine. On the day of the synagogue’s inauguration, Rabbi S.S. Sommers recited Psalm 8, chanted *The Open House of Aaron* with the elders and circled the bimah seven times, symbolizing the seven circumambulations of the walls of Jericho, meaning victory over evil and perfection, becoming an important witness to the religious significance of the synagogue.¹²

The west altar covers an area of about 27.9 square meters, housing the Ark of the Covenant where the Torah scrolls are stored, symbolizing “the Torah is the presence of God.” The perpetual lamps on both sides guard the sacred covenant between believers and God.¹³ As the ritual core, the altar is responsible for Torah worship, ritual holding, and sacred prayer; as the preaching core, the bimah is responsible for Torah reading, doctrinal explanation, and collective chanting. The two complement each other in function and coexist spiritually, jointly constituting the spiritual center of the main sanctuary.

Acoustic design is another major advantage of the elliptical plan: tested and calculated according to Zbigniew’s acoustic index method for synagogues, the reverberation time of the synagogue is about 1.3 seconds, which perfectly meets the acoustic standards of synagogues.¹⁴ Compared with the rectangular plan, the elliptical curved space can achieve uniform sound field diffusion, avoid sound attenuation and echo interference, and the sound of scripture reading and hymn singing can clearly spread to every corner of the hall, providing a high-quality acoustic environment for religious rituals.



Figure 6: AI Restoration of the Main Sanctuary of the Synagogue (Source: Author's own creation).

3.3. Auxiliary Spaces

The synagogue adopts the dual-function positioning of “religious core + community complex,” breaking through the limitation of single religious function of traditional synagogues, and is equipped with complete auxiliary spaces to deeply adapt to the living needs of the modern Shanghai Jewish community. On both sides of the corridor on the first floor are functional spaces such as reception rooms, cloakrooms, meeting rooms, and libraries to meet daily reception, meeting, and study needs; the “Hardoon Hall” at the deep end of the building serves as a multi-functional assembly space, which can hold speeches, celebrations, community gatherings and other secular activities, becoming the public vitality core of the synagogue.¹⁵ The third floor on the east side of the building is equipped with a community kitchen and dining room to meet the needs of festival dinners and collective banquets of the Jewish community; some small rooms serve as guest rooms to provide temporary accommodation for out-of-town believers, Jewish refugees, and teachers and students of the Mir Yeshiva, realizing the functional integration of religion, education, accommodation, and catering.

In addition to core religious rituals, the synagogue undertakes a large number of secular functions: the synagogue choir, established on July 8, 1927, carried out religious music activities with four-part chorus and organ accompaniment, attracting Reform Jewish composers to create here; Hanukkah celebrations, weddings, concerts and other activities are held regularly. On December 7, 1930, the wedding of Louisa Isaac and Nuriel Silas Isaacs was held here, with the Third Squad of the Shanghai Special Police Force serving as the honor guard, becoming an important public event of the Shanghai Jewish community.¹⁶ During World War II, the synagogue served as a relief center for Jewish refugees, providing food, accommodation and shelter

for thousands of exiled Jewish refugees, and as a temporary school for the Mir Yeshiva, supporting the continuation of Jewish culture amid the war.³ Ultimately, the synagogue became a comprehensive community center integrating religious prayer, Torah study, community social interaction, cultural activities, refugee relief, and education, a true microcosm of the life of the modern Shanghai Jewish community.

4. THE FACADE DESIGN OF BETH AHARON SYNAGOGUE

The facade design of the Beth Aharon Synagogue takes simplicity and solemnity, clear symbols, and stylistic integration as the core principles. After three versions of iterative optimization, it integrates Jewish religious symbols, Byzantine Revival style, Moorish decorative elements and modern architectural technology, forming a highly recognizable visual feature and becoming a classic sample of modern Shanghai cross-cultural architecture.

4.1. Facade Form and Volume

The design scheme of the synagogue has undergone three core adjustments, always maintaining the stability of the overall framework and style: Version A (conceptual drawing, 1925)⁹, Version B (audit drawing, 1927),⁵ and the final completed Version C, with adjustments focused on facade detail optimization. The finally completed building adopts a reinforced concrete structure, presenting a regular geometric volume with a simple and grand outline and coordinated and rigorous proportions. The roof takes three domes “one large and two small” as the core visual elements, which not only enriches the roof outline but also implies the symbolic meaning of the “Trinity” in Judaism, and integrates the characteristics of Mesopotamian modern domes to form a unique regional style expression.

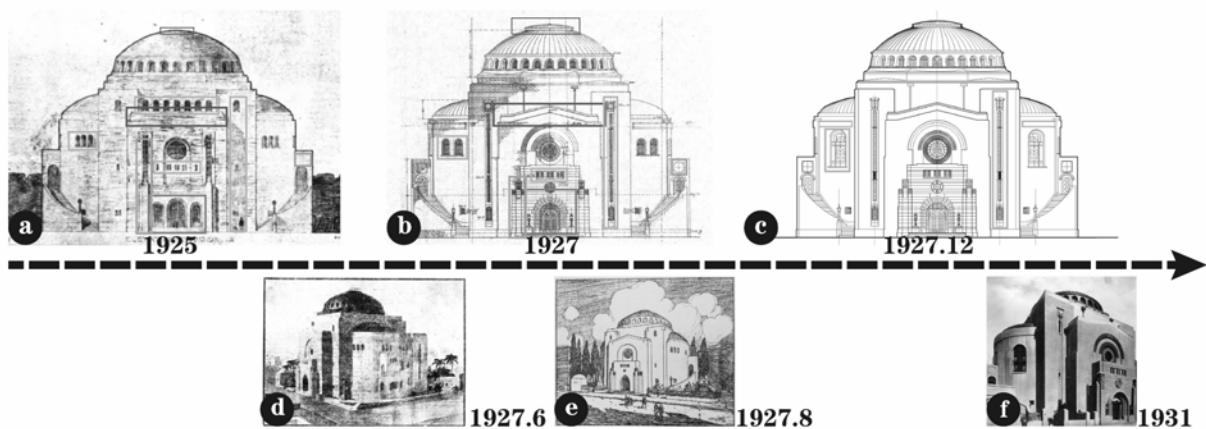


Figure 7: Entrance Facade of Beth Aharon Synagogue (Source: Author's own creation).

The bottom of the central dome is equipped with an octagonal drum, with 30 narrow vertical windows around it, strengthening the upward sense of the building through vertical lines and creating a sacred and lofty spatial atmosphere; the altar area on the west main facade of the building protrudes outward, highlighting the core position of the main entrance and enhancing the sense of ritual. Compared with Version A, Version B adds reinforced concrete decorative lines and mezzanines, integrates the three-part entrance into an integrated main entrance, adds a sloped roof to strengthen the entrance effect, and gradually reduces the number of window openings. The overall vision is simpler and more solemn, reflecting the aesthetic orientation of modern architecture.

4.2. Facade Elements and Religious Symbols

The facade takes Jewish religious symbols as the core, classical architectural elements as the framework, and exotic decorations as embellishments, realizing the unity of spiritual expression and visual aesthetics. The main entrance adopts a multi-concentric arch shape, made of brick and earth with texture as decoration. A stone-carved Star of David is inlaid above the arch, becoming the visual focus of the facade; the Hebrew words “Beth Aharon” (House of Aharon) are engraved below, clarifying the building’s identity and commemorative significance. Pillars of Jachin and Boaz stand on both sides of the entrance, derived from the copper pillars of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, symbolizing strength and stability, a classic symbol of Jewish religious architecture.²

A rose window is set above the main entrance, behind which is the sacred niche for storing the Torah scrolls. Since the Torah contains six core parts, and the number “six” symbolizes God’s six days of creation, six great virtues, and the hexagram meaning of the Star of David in Judaism, six windows are specially opened between the rose window and the Star of David, accurately echoing the religious symbolism. The side doors on both sides of the second floor adopt horseshoe arch shapes with distinct West Asian styles, echoing the overall Byzantine Revival style and Moorish decorative elements, strengthening the characteristics of multi-cultural integration.

4.3. Materials and Crafts

The synagogue adopts the most advanced reinforced concrete structure technology in the 1920s, providing solid technical support for the large-span elliptical plan, column-free internal space, and dome structure; the moisture-resistant and corrosion-resistant physical properties of concrete perfectly adapt to Shanghai’s rainy and humid subtropical climate, ensuring the durability of the building.⁷ Decorative materials achieve the in-depth integration of global supply and localized production: the dome and ceiling are exquisitely decorated

with plaster, steel doors and windows are imported from Britain, copper ornaments, wooden furniture, and interior panels are exquisitely made by local manufacturers in Shanghai, dome windows are decorated with art glass, and the dome is covered with green glazed tiles, which not only enhances the ritual sense of the building but also realizes regional climate adaptation. This integration of materials and crafts is an intuitive manifestation of the architectural construction level of modern Shanghai as an international metropolis.

5. CONCLUSION

The Beth Aharon Synagogue is the pinnacle of modern Shanghai Jewish architecture and the only Reform Jewish synagogue in China. Its historical changes, spatial design, stylistic integration, and functional transformation profoundly reflect the cultural identity, religious beliefs, and community life of the Jewish community in modern Shanghai, and a vivid material witness to the symbiosis of diverse civilizations in modern Shanghai. Through the systematic interpretation of architectural drawings, the integration and verification of historical documents, and digital 3D restoration, this paper completely reveals the design wisdom and stylistic origin of this lost building: it adapts to the irregular trapezoidal site with an innovative double-centered elliptical plan, realizes the spatial translation of the Jewish doctrine of equality with the dual-core layout of “west altar-central bimah,” solves the contradiction between religious traditions and site conditions with a three-line circulation system, and forms a unique architectural aesthetics with multi-style integration, becoming a model of modern cross-cultural architectural translation.

From a cultural positioning perspective, the Beth Aharon Synagogue is a triple integration of “Eastern European Byzantine style + American theatrical layout + Shanghai local context,” a product of the collision and integration of global architectural trends and Jewish religious traditions in Shanghai in the early 20th century. It accurately responds to the three major development trends of synagogues around the world: elliptical plan, theatrical layout, and “under the same ceiling” women’s gallery, and is important physical evidence that Shanghai was a modern global center of architectural and cultural exchange. Although the building has been demolished, its remaining drawings, documents, and digital restoration results still have irreplaceable research value: it provides historical reference for contemporary cross-cultural architectural design, spatial basis for restoring the life scene of the modern Shanghai Jewish community, and core support for improving the history of modern Chinese synagogues and enriching the research pedigree of modern religious buildings.

As a lost building, the Beth Aharon Synagogue is the “spiritual mark” of modern Shanghai Jewish culture and a classic sample of the translation of cross-cultural architectural traditions. An in-depth study of this lost building can not only fill the gaps in the research of modern Chinese Jewish architecture but also interpret the

urban spirit of modern Shanghai as “inclusive and diverse,” providing important enlightenment for contemporary cultural heritage protection, cross-cultural architectural creation, and digital inheritance of historical buildings.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND SUPPORT

This article is supported by “National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 52308021),” “the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. ZQN-1212),” “the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. 22BS128),” and “Natural Science Foundation of Xiamen, China (Grant No. 3502Z20227044).”

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE FEATURES AND STATUS OF MODERN BRICK ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN KOREA

Eunki Hong, Abhyeon Oh, Sumin Ryu

A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE FEATURES AND STATUS OF MODERN BRICK ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN KOREA



This study aims to systematically analyze the architectural characteristics and patterns of deterioration of 24 modern brick architectural heritage sites designated as National Cultural Heritage, in order to examine the technical value of modern masonry architecture in Korea and to provide a foundation for conservation and management. The results of the study revealed the following: First, modern brick architecture exhibited differences in brick specifications and joint specifications depending on the type of facility. Second, analysis of masonry techniques confirmed the widespread use of a “Korean bond” that displays unique characteristics in corner construction and arrangement, in addition to the previously known Dutch and English bond; furthermore, the mixing of various masonry techniques within a single building demonstrated flexibility in construction. Third, the patterns of deterioration in architectural heritage were classified into five types: physical structural damage, surface physical and chemical deterioration, chemical discoloration and contamination, biological deterioration, and human-induced damage. In particular, biological factors and inappropriate repairs were identified as key causes accelerating deterioration by inducing moisture retention within the materials. This study is significant in that it empirically confirmed the diversity of modern masonry techniques. It is expected to serve as foundational data for future research, which will expand the scope to include Nationally Registered Cultural Heritage sites to elucidate the history of technical development and establish a conservation and management system.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the modern era, brick served as a transitional building material bridging the gap between traditional Korean timber architecture and the modern material of reinforced concrete and was widely used in buildings of that period. Currently, these buildings are experiencing a continuous decline in physical performance due to aging and climate change, yet detailed technical standards for repair and maintenance, as well as guidelines for material preservation, remain unclear. While data and techniques accumulated during the repair process of some architectural heritage sites can be verified through records, there are limitations to applying this to brick architectural heritage as a whole. Unlike Nationally Designated Cultural Heritage, which prioritizes the preservation of the original form, Nationally Registered Cultural Heritage, which emphasizes utilization, often lacks not only altered records but even repair records.

To date, previous research on modern brick buildings has primarily focused on individual materials, specific techniques, or individual buildings, such as analyses of the physical properties and damage mechanisms of individual bricks (Yi 2010), studies on structural design (Im et al. 2020), and proposals for repair techniques (Yu and Kwon 2005). However, there remains a lack of research that comprehensively examines the architectural characteristics of modern brick architectural heritage, such as bricklaying techniques and decorative brickwork around openings. Furthermore, existing repair and survey reports often describe these features uniformly based on predefined standardized methods or terminology rather than closely analyzing

the actual construction methods or architectural characteristics used on-site, resulting in numerous cases where the descriptions differ from the actual conditions. Meanwhile, while the deterioration and damage patterns of brick buildings that have emerged over time since their construction have been investigated individually through periodic surveys, there is a lack of research that comprehensively analyzes the overall trends and characteristics of brick architectural heritage. Consequently, there are still limitations in identifying the comprehensive status and characteristics of modern brick architectural heritage.

Therefore, to establish a system for the survey, repair, and preservation of modern architectural heritage, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage under the Korea Heritage Service began research in 2024 on the basis for repair and restoration—grounded in authenticity—and construction techniques for brick architecture. Starting in 2026, the institute is concurrently conducting research on the manufacturing techniques of building materials, focusing on the materials used. This study serves as a preliminary investigation aimed at deriving the comprehensive architectural characteristics and current status of modern brick architectural heritage, which has previously been approached only on a building-by-building basis. The scope of the study was limited to 24 nationally designated cultural heritage sites designated as Historic Sites that use brick as a structural element, and through this, architectural characteristics and patterns of damage were analyzed. The scope was limited to National Cultural Heritage sites because these are cases where the principle of preserving the original form is strictly applied and their value is officially recognized.

This study combined a literature review (including management histories, documentation reports, and repair reports) with on-site surveys to verify the physical condition of the structures. The analysis was divided into architectural characteristics and patterns of deterioration; architectural characteristics were examined primarily in terms of bricklaying techniques and decorative elements of openings. As a foundational step of the research, the focus was on the original form, and repair work that altered the structure after its construction was excluded from the analysis.

2. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN BRICK HERITAGE

2.1. Overview of Brick Architectural Heritage

There are 24 modern brick architectural heritage sites designated as National Cultural Heritage in Korea, and their current status is shown in Table 1. By facility type, there are eight religious facilities, five educational facilities, three diplomatic facilities, two medical facilities, two residential facilities, and one each of national, railway, administrative, and correctional facilities. In cases where multiple buildings constitute a single historic site, the study was limited to the main building, which is considered representative.

NO	NAME	YEAR	USE	BRICK SPECIFICATIONS		JOINT	
				Size(mm)	Color	Shape	Thickness(mm)
A	Former Russian Legation, Seoul	1890	Diplomacy	230x110x54	Red	-	-
B	Yakhyeon Catholic Church, Seoul	1892	Religion	230x105~110x55	Red	Concave / Raked	10
C	Chungdong First Methodist Church, Seoul	1897	Religion	230x110x60	Red/Black	Flush	10
D	Dapdong Cathedral, Incheon	1897/1937	Religion	225x107x60	Red/Black	Fine/Convex	10
E	Myeongdong Cathedral, Seoul	1898	Religion	230x110x55	Red/Black	Fine/Flush	10
F	Deoksugung Palace(Jungmyeongjeon Hall)	1899/1925	National	242x113x55	Red/Black	Fine	10
G	Former Japanese Consulate, Mokpo	1900	Diplomacy	224x109x60 214x101x60	Red	Fine	10
H	Gyesandong Cathedral, Daegu	1902	Religion	240x113x65	Red/Black	Fine	10
I	Wonhyo-ro Catholic Church, Seoul	1902	Religion	220x105x53	Red/Black	Fine	10
J	Former Belgian Consulate, Seoul	1905	Diplomacy	221~227x106~8x5 5~58	Red	Concave	10
K	Nabawi Shrine, Iksan	1906	Religion	235x115x60	Red/Black	Fine	10
L	Former Main Building of Gunsan Customs Office	1908	Administration	230x110x58	Red	Flush	10
M	Daehan Hospital, Seoul	1908	Healthcare	228x110x55~60	Red	Beaded	10
N	Yongsan Theological School, Seoul	1911	Education	235x112x60	Red/Black	Fine	10
O	Jeondong Catholic Cathedral, Jeonju	1914	Religion	250x110x55	Red/Black	Flush	10
P	Former Seodaemun Prison, Seoul (Jungangsa)	1915	Corrections	223x110x58	Red	Fine	10
Q	Unhyeongung Royal Residence, Seoul (Yanggwan)	1910s	Residential	235x110x62	Red	-	-
R	West Building of Choong Ang High School, Seoul	1921	Education	220~225x105x55	Red	Fine	10
S	East Building of Choong Ang High School, Seoul	1923	Education	230~250x110~113x60	Red	Flush	10
T	Former Seoul Station Building	1925	Railways	220x118x58	Red	Raked	7
U	Provisional Capital Presidential Residence, Busan	1926	Residential	220x107x56~57	Red	Fine	10
V	Former Daegu Provincial Hospital	1928	Healthcare	230x107~110x55	Red	Fine	10
W	Former Main Building of Seoul National University	1931	Education	225~235X108x60	Red	Raked	8
X	Main Building of Former Daegu College of Medicine	1933	Education	222~227x108~112x59~62	Red	Fine	10

Table 1: Overview of the study.

The 24 buildings under study were categorized by period, and the specifications of the bricks and mortar joints visible to the naked eye were analyzed. They were classified as follows: six buildings constructed before 1900, seven from 1900 to 1909, four from the 1910s, and seven from 1920 onward. Although there were no significant differences in brick dimensions across the periods, a trend was observed in which relatively smaller bricks were used more frequently in buildings constructed after the 1920s. The survey found that 11 buildings (45.8%) used bricks with a width of 230 mm or less, 10 buildings (41.7%) used bricks between 230 and 240 mm, and three buildings used bricks 240 mm or wider. When examining differences by building use, relatively larger bricks were used in religious and national facilities, whereas relatively smaller bricks were used in practical buildings such as railways, residential, medical, and educational facilities. Regarding joint patterns, Fine and Flush joints were the most common, while concave, raked, beaded, and convex joints were also identified.

Field surveys of foundation specifications revealed a tendency in existing repair reports and documentation reports to standardize brick sizes or omit joint information. Actual survey results showed that brick sizes had a certain margin of error, and joint thicknesses were also variable. This suggests a need for improvements in future documentation methods.

2.2. Brick Masonry Techniques

Previous reports have defined the masonry techniques of the structures under study in this research as limited to Dutch Bond and English Bond. However, the actual masonry techniques confirmed through visual inspection deviate from the standardized descriptions found in the literature, necessitating a detailed analysis. Generally, masonry techniques are classified based on the pattern formed by each course of the wall relative to the corners. This study also conducted its analysis based on this criterion, focusing on the corners of the walls. However, six sites—the Yanggwan at Unhyeongung Royal Residence in Seoul (Q), Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul (E), the Former Russian Legation in Seoul (A), the Former Seoul Station Building (I), Yongsan Theological School in Seoul (N), and the Former Main Building of Seoul National University (W)—were excluded from the analysis because the exterior walls could not be verified, or because the corners were obscured by buttresses, columns, or decorative walls, making identification or analysis difficult.

The masonry techniques found in these heritage sites are classified into three types: Dutch, English, and “Korean bond.” The Dutch bond is further classified into standard Dutch, simplified Dutch, similar-standard Dutch, and similar-simplified Dutch, while the English bond is classified into similar-English and similar-English wall. The Korean bond can be further subdivided into three categories.

CLASSIFICATION	SUB	QTY	OBJECT
DUTCH	standard	1	M(1908)
	simplified	3	H(1902), O(1914), K(1906)
	similar-standard	1	D(1937)
	similar-simplified	1	B(1892)
ENGLISH	Similar	1	C(1897)
	similar-wall	1	J(1905)
KOREAN	1	8	F(1925), U(1926), X(1933), V(1928), L(1908), G(1900), R(1921), S(1923)
	2	2	I(1902), P(1915)
	3	1	C(1897)
TOTAL		19	Multiple Responses Incl.(C)

Table 2: Types and number of masonry techniques.

First, the Dutch bond involves alternating header and stretcher courses and using a three-quarter bat at the corner to ensure that the bricks in the upper and lower courses are laid in a staggered pattern (Jang 2010, 104). Among the known detailed masonry techniques, there is the standard-Dutch bond, in which a single header is placed next to a stretcher made of a three-quarter bat, followed by a stretcher course; and the simplified Dutch bond, in which no header is placed next to the stretcher made of a three-quarter bat, and the stretcher course is laid directly. The standard-Dutch bond has been confirmed in only one instance, at the Daehan Hospital in Seoul (1908, M), while the simplified Dutch bond has been confirmed in three locations: Gyesandong Cathedral in Daegu (1902, H), Jeondong Catholic Cathedral in Jeonju (1914, O), and Nabawi Shrine in Iksan (1906, K). Additionally, the similar-standard Dutch and similar-simplified Dutch bond, which were identified later, differ from the standard Dutch and simplified Dutch bond in that the three-quarter bats forming the corners are placed in the header course rather than the stretcher course. The similar-standard Dutch bond was surveyed at Incheon Dapdong Cathedral (1937, D), and the similar-simplified Dutch bond was confirmed at Seoul Yakhyeon Catholic Church (1892, B). In the case of B, full bricks were used at the right-side corner instead of three-quarter bats, and bricks of a length similar to three-quarter bats were positioned next to the corner's end face within the header course. This suggests the possibility that an attempt was made to employ the English bond.

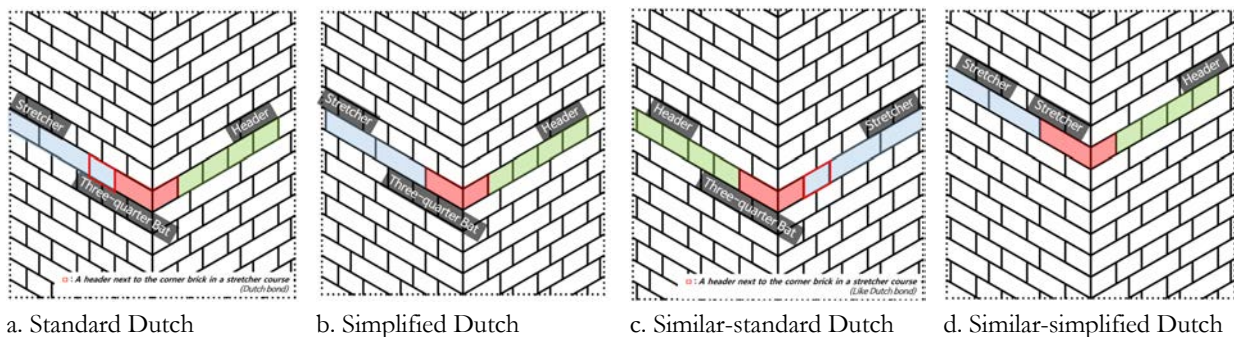
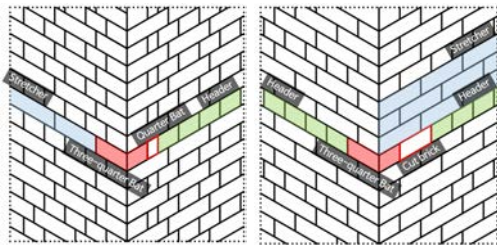
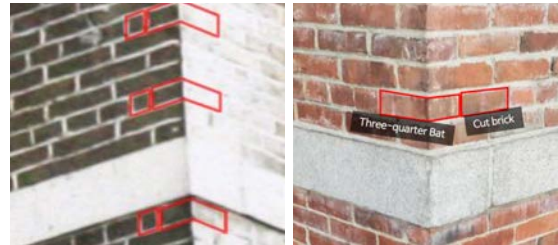


Figure 1: Classification of Dutch-bond.

The English bond is a masonry technique in which stretcher courses and header courses alternate on the surface of a brick wall, and Queen Closer(Half-width brick), Quarter Queen Closer, or Quarter Bats are used at the corners to ensure that the bricks above and below interlock (Jang 2010, 104). However, at the Chungdong First Methodist Church in Seoul (1897, C), it can be observed that the bricks used at the corners next to the quarter bats are actually three-quarter bats. Consequently, since a difference from the Standard English bond was identified, the term “similar” was applied to distinguish it. While English Wall bond is defined as laying 3 to 5 courses of stretcher with staggered vertical joints followed by one header course (Jang 2010, 104), a discrepancy was observed in the case of the former Belgian Consulate in Seoul (1905, J). Records from before the building was relocated to its current site in Seoul confirm the presence of quarter bats next to the corners, but it was also confirmed that three-quarter Bats were used at the corners instead of full bricks. Furthermore, since the quarter bats are no longer visible at the relocated site, and the bricks in the position where the quarter bats should be are cut bricks of a size similar to the three-quarter bats, it is difficult to consider the masonry as a complete English wall bond both before and after the relocation.



a. Similar-English b. Similar-English wall
Figure 2: Classification of English bond.



a. Before relocation b. After relocation
Figure 3: Brickwork on the corners before and after the transfer of the former Belgian Consulate.

Finally, there is the “Korean bond” which we aim to redefine through this study. This method uses three-quarter bats or quarter bats at the corners and alternates between stretcher-course and header-course bond. As a result, it could easily be mistaken for the English or Dutch bond, but a comparison with these conventional methods reveals clear differences. In Standard English or Dutch bond, the brick faces on the left and right sides of a corner alternate between stretcher and header courses. In contrast, the Korean bond differs in that the brick faces on the left and right sides of a corner continue in stretcher courses from one end to the other and in header courses from one end to the other.

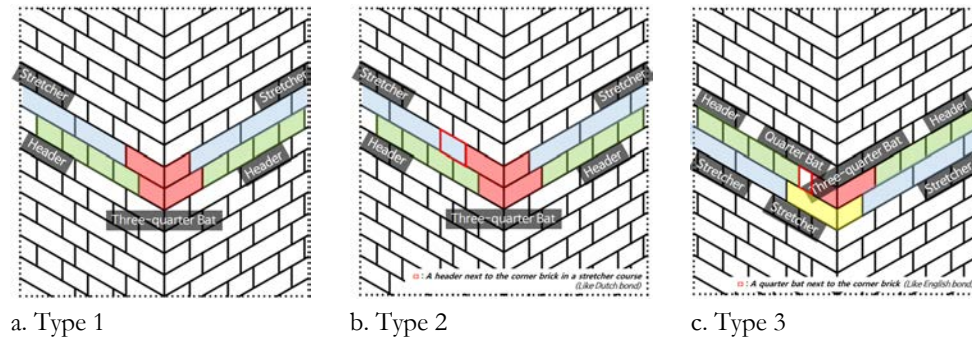


Figure 4: Classification of Korean bond.

A document from 1937 describes that most buildings constructed at that time utilized this bond, confirming that a masonry technique distinct from the English and Dutch bond was indeed widely used in Korea. Since this method has not been precisely defined to date, this study defines it as the “Korean bond.”

“最近建った煉瓦造の百中の九十九までは、それ等のどれにも當らない組積が採用されて居る”

Toshihiko Koshibe 1937.

The Korean bond is further classified into three types. Type 1 involves masonry technique so that both sides of a corner three-quarter bats are aligned with other stretcher courses or header courses, maintaining the same configuration. Type 2 follows the same basic procedure as Type 1, but, similar to the standard Dutch bond, features a header appearing once next to the corner three-quarter bats in the stretcher course before the stretcher course continues. And a method (Type 3) in which a quarter bat is placed next to the end face of the corner three-quarter bats, so that when viewed from each side, it appears to be either the English bond or the Dutch bond. Type 3 features a full brick at the corner of one course, followed by a three-quarter bat at the corner of the next course. Korean bond Type 1 is the most frequently observed among the cases studied. It accounts for eight out of the total 18 cases (19 variations) and should therefore be regarded as the representative bond of historic brick architectural heritage. Korean bond 2 was found in three cases, including the Wonhyo-ro Catholic Church in Seoul (1902, I) and the former Seodaemun Prison in Seoul (1915, P), while Korean bond 3 was found in only one case: Chungdong First Methodist Church in Seoul (1897, C).

While this typological classification identifies cases where multiple masonry techniques coexist within a single building, these instances are limited to specific sections and occur infrequently, making them difficult to consider representative. Accordingly, each building has been classified based on the most dominant masonry technique observed. However, in the case of C, while the Korean bond is confirmed as the primary feature, the altar, which was expanded after the Korean War, exhibits some elements of a similar-English bond that

distinguishes it from other heritage sites. Although this cannot be considered a representative bond, it has been listed as an exception due to its morphological distinctiveness.

Analysis of the masonry techniques revealed that most of the study subjects differed from the techniques identified in previous reports. This is presumed to be because the reports were written based on the forms observed on the facades, such as the repetition of lengthwise and end-to-end laying, and the shapes of cut bricks used at corners, such as three-quarter bat and quarter bat—rather than focusing on the composition of walls and corners when describing the techniques.

2.3. Openings

The analysis of building openings focused on the external appearance, including the material finishes, forms, and configurations of the arches comprising the main entrances visible on the facade and the windows on the first floor. A porch is a space with a roof that protrudes from or is attached to the front entrance of a building, serving as a transitional space before entering the interior. Since porches emphasize decorative functions and forms rather than serving as primary building entrances, they were omitted from this analysis. Furthermore, structures that have undergone repairs or modifications since their construction, or those where the main entrance has been finished with materials other than brick, such as paint or stone, making it difficult to identify the arch's form, were excluded from this analysis.

The primary material for the arches of main entrances connecting the interior and exterior of buildings was brick (11 cases, 61.1%); other materials identified included stone, a combination of brick and stone, tile, and painted finishes. Historic sites where only the upper part of the arch was constructed using brick included Iksan Nabawi Shrine (K), Seoul Yakhyeon Cathedral Church (B), Seoul Chungdong First Methodist Church (C), and Yongsan Theological School (N). Jeonju Jeondong Catholic Cathedral (O), Daegu Gyesandong Cathedral (H), and Seoul Myeongdong Cathedral (E) added decorative elements by constructing the main entrance with multiple rings connecting from the cluster of columns to the top of the arch. The West Building and East Building of Seoul Choong Ang High School (R&S), as well as the former Japanese Consulate in Mokpo (G), combined brick and stone. In the R&S, stone infill was applied along the edges of the pointed arches. The G does not feature stone infill or multiple rings, but stone is used for the keystones and spandrels, and red and white bricks are alternated to add decorative elements. Incheon Dapdong Cathedral (D) uses stone instead of brick for its infill and features multiple rings extending from the cluster of columns to the top of the arch and back to the cluster of columns, enhancing the decorative quality of the main entrance. Due to the nature of the material, tiles only form shapes on the wall surfaces themselves; the Former Main Building of Seoul National University (W) features a semicircular arch, while the Former Daegu

Provincial Hospital (V) features a flat arch. In the case of the two buildings at Unhyeongung Royal Residence (Q), it was impossible to determine the extent of the brickwork due to paint coatings.

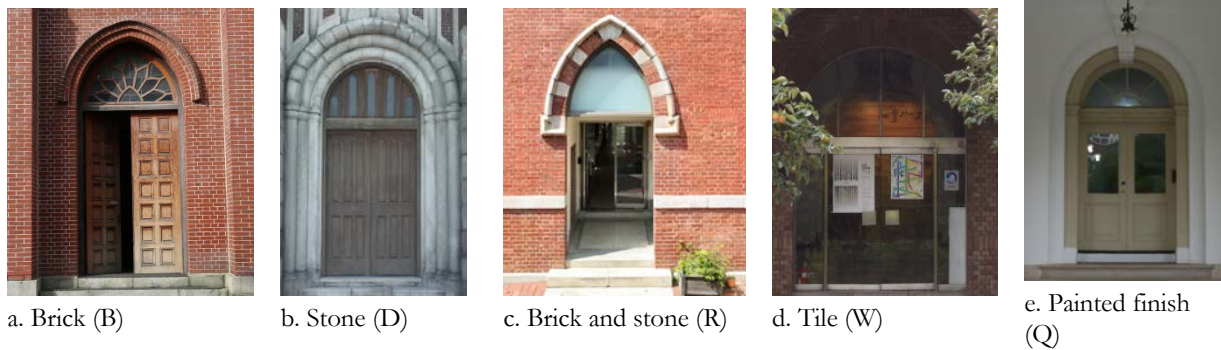


Figure 5: Finishing Materials for the Main Entrance.

The main entrances of the study subjects incorporated decorative elements to highlight their hierarchical status while constructing the arch forms. In terms of construction methods, two approaches were identified: building the arch directly from the wall itself or constructing it from the wall and then bricking it in, or adding multiple layers of rings to the structure. Four types of arches were used for the main entrances: flat arches, segmental arches, semicircular arches, and pointed arches. It was confirmed that flat and segmental arches were constructed solely from the wall surface, while pointed arches were constructed from the wall surface with brick infill. For semicircular and pointed arches, two construction methods were identified: one involving brick infill from the wall surface to the top of the arch, and another where the brick infill extended from the wall surface through the clustered columns and arch, adding multiple rings to the overall arch structure. In some cases, the arch was formed from the wall surface itself, with brickwork extending only to the top of the arch for decorative purposes; in others, it connected to the cluster of columns, adding multiple rings to enhance the sense of depth at the entrance; and in some instances, brick colors were alternated or combined with other materials such as stone. Jeonju Jeondong Catholic Cathedral (O), Daegu Gyesandong Cathedral (H), and Seoul Myeongdong Cathedral (E) added decorative elements to enhance the sense of depth at the main entrances by placing arches atop the clustered columns and composing them with multiple rings.

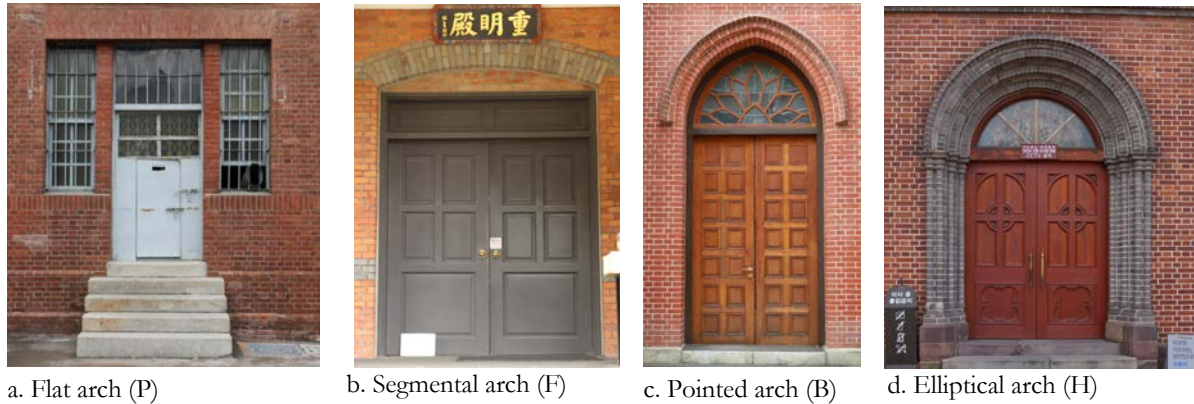


Figure 6: Classification of Architectural Elements at the Main Entrance

Windows serve functions such as providing natural light, blocking noise, and creating a sense of openness, while also adding decorative elements to express the hierarchy of a building. This paper limits its analysis to the number of windows visible on the ground floor facade, left and right sides, and rear. For each building, the windows can be classified into two types: the arch forms of the main windows and those of the secondary windows. Of the 24 modern historic brick buildings, the following table presents the window forms at each location on the first floor and the materials used to construct the arches at the top of the windows for the 21 buildings, excluding the three cases where no window arches were identified.

The main windows in the study consisted of seven flat arches, four segmental arches, five semicircular arches, two pointed arches, one elliptical arch, and two multi-paned windows. Among the main windows constructed primarily of brick, there were five flat arches, two segmental arches, two semicircular arches, two pointed arches, and two multiple windows. The eight main windows constructed with materials other than brick included two flat arches, two segmental arches, three semicircular arches, and one other type. As with the main entrances, it was confirmed that flat arches and segmental arches are arch forms created solely within the wall surface itself, while semicircular arches and pointed arches were analyzed as forms that extend from the wall surface to the arch section, incorporating brick infill. Furthermore, the construction of window arches exhibits a characteristic of being built in layers, starting from the wall surface itself, followed by infill, and then multiple rings of brickwork up to the arch, with a greater number of rings indicating a stronger decorative element. Buildings featuring windows constructed with multiple rings extending to the top of the arch are generally religious facilities. Examples include Jeonju Jeondong Catholic Cathedral (O) and Daegu Gyesandong Cathedral (H), both of which feature semicircular arches with brickwork extending to the top of the arch, and Seoul Wonhyo-ro Catholic Church (J) features a pointed arch with brickwork extending to the top of the arch.

NO	USE	MATERIAL				WINDOW			ARCH			
		Brick	B+S	Stone	Tile	Circ ular	Multi	Flat	Segmen tal	Semicir cular	Pointed	Ellipti cal
B	Religion	Red					1				2	
C	Religion	Red									2	
D	Religion			O						O		
E	Religion	Black				2	1	1		<u>2</u>		
F	National	Black						1	<u>1</u>			
G	Diplomacy	Red/ White	O						O			
H	Religion	Black								3		
I	Religion	Black							1		<u>2</u>	
J	Diplomacy		O	O				O				
K	Religion	Black						<u>1</u>		1		
L	Administra tion	Red		O				<u>O</u>		O		
M	Healthcare	Red	O					O	<u>O</u>			
N	Education	Black							<u>1</u>			2
O	Religion	Black						1		<u>2</u>		
P	Corrections	Red						1				
Q	Residential			O						O		
R	Education	Red	O					1				
S	Education	Red	O					1				
U	Residential	Red						1				
V	Healthcare				O			O				
W	Education				O			O		<u>O</u>		
Notes	* Construction Type:											
	1. Wall-only construction: The arch is integrated within the wall plane without any protrusions.											
	2. Wall construction with corbeling: The arch is formed within the wall, followed by decorative corbeling (protruding brickwork).											
	3. Wall construction, corbeling, and ring courses: The arch is formed with corbeling, and the upper section is reinforced or decorated with ring courses (archivolts).											
	**Main windows are underlined.											
	*** The former Russian Legation in Seoul (A), the former Seoul Station Building (B), and the Main Building of Former Daegu College of Medicine (X) were excluded as their specific details could not be verified.											

Table 3: Materials and construction of the windows under study.



a. Flat arch(R)



b. Segmental arch (F)



c. Pointed arch (C)



d. Elliptical arch (O)

Figure 7: Types of window frames.

Unlike entrances, windows generally followed a trend of using a single arch form to frame windows on all four sides, with additional arch forms incorporated to enhance the building's architectural design. The Daehan Hospital in Seoul (M), the Former Main Building of Seoul National University (W), the former Seoul Station Building (I), and the former Main Building of Gunsan Customs Office (L) all featured additional windows to enhance the architectural design of the facade, even though windows were already visible on the ground-floor facade. For windows other than the main ones, different materials were sometimes used for the arches. The West Building and East Building of Seoul Choong Ang High School (R&S) feature flat arches constructed of brick, while one side of each building features flat arches constructed using a combination of brick and stone. The former Belgian Consulate (J) features stone-finished windows, but on the left side and rear, flat arches with pronounced curvature were observed, constructed using a combination of brick and stone atop stone lintels.



a. Multiple window (B)



b. Multiple window (E)



c. Circular window (E)

Figure 8: Multi-paned windows and round windows.

Multiple windows could be observed at both Seoul Yakhyeon Cathedral Church (B) and Seoul Myeongdong Cathedral (E). The windows on the left and right sides of B consist of multiple windows featuring two pointed arches framed by wooden mullions, topped with a semicircular arch and a spandrel. E features multiple windows with even more decorative elements than B. Similar to B, the left and right sides each feature a pair of pointed arches, with a single round window positioned above them; the entire assembly is framed by a pointed arch, forming the multiple window unit. Unlike B, E features two pointed arch windows, one round window, and the pointed arch framing them all, all constructed using black brick.

3. TYPES OF DAMAGE

Field surveys revealed a variety of deterioration patterns, including cracks, spalling, efflorescence, and vegetation intrusion. Rather than a single type of deterioration being observed in a single building, multiple patterns were identified simultaneously. This suggests that the deterioration resulted from a combination of factors—specifically, the aging of modern building materials and their interaction with the external environment—rather than a single cause. In this study, these patterns were classified into the following five types based on material and structural characteristics for analysis.

3.1. Structural Damage

The primary physical structural damages observed were cracks and bulging or detachment. Cracks are damages that occur in structurally vulnerable areas, such as lintels above openings, due to building settlement or concentrated loads. Bulging and detachment are phenomena that occur when the bond between the wall and mortar is lost or when delamination occurs within the bricks.

In some buildings, such as the Daehan Hospital in Seoul (M), cases were identified where such structural damage was repeatedly observed at the same locations and had been repaired. The recurrence of structural damage at the same locations indicates the mechanical vulnerability of those areas, necessitating maintenance plans involving detailed safety assessments and continuous monitoring. However, based on the results of the current status survey for the buildings studied in this research, no structural damage was identified that seriously threatens the structural stability of the buildings.

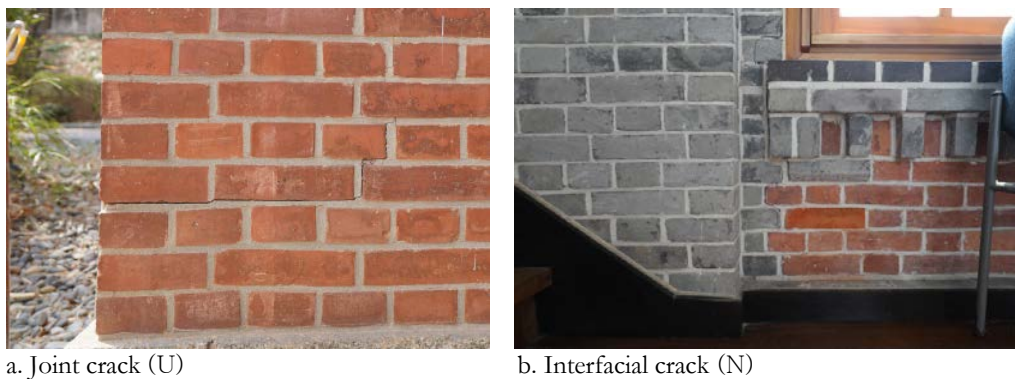


Figure 9: Crack.

3.2. Surface Deterioration

Physical and chemical surface degradation includes spalling and flaking (the peeling off of thin surface layers), abrasion (surface wear caused by external forces or environmental exposure), mortar joint loss (the loss of Mortar between bricks), and powdering/degradation (the crumbling of the surface into a powder-like state). Spalling, flaking, abrasion, and mortar joint loss were observed in all study subjects. Surface cracking and delamination—a phenomenon in which fine hairline cracks form on the brick surface and material layers separate and expand—were also observed in some buildings.

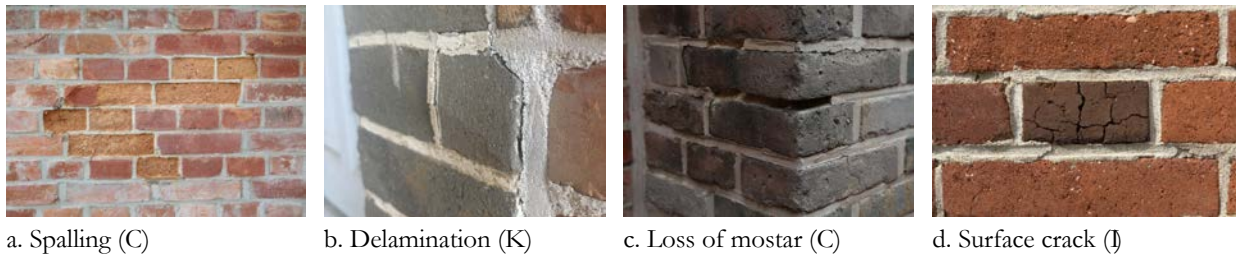


Figure 10: Surface deterioration.

3.3. Chemical Alteration and Contamination

The primary types of deterioration include efflorescence, blackening, abrasion, and dampness, which are typically caused by chemical reactions, environmental pollutants, and prolonged exposure to moisture.

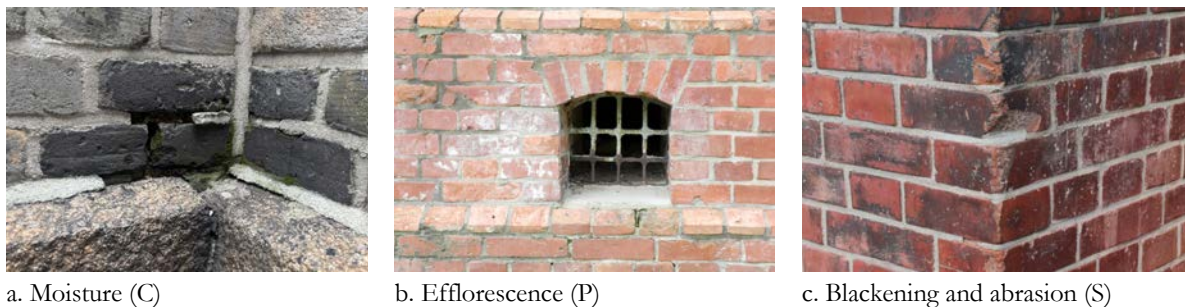


Figure 11: Chemical alteration and contamination.

3.4. Biological Degradation

Microbial growth causes surface damage from mold and moss, while biological infiltration occurs when vegetation such as weeds and tree roots penetrates cracks. Additionally, there are signs of biological activity, including bee hives, bird droppings, and nests. Currently, a beehive has been identified at the bottom of the

windows at the Gyesandong Catholic Church in Daegu (H); following an on-site inspection, this matter was reported to the relevant agency.

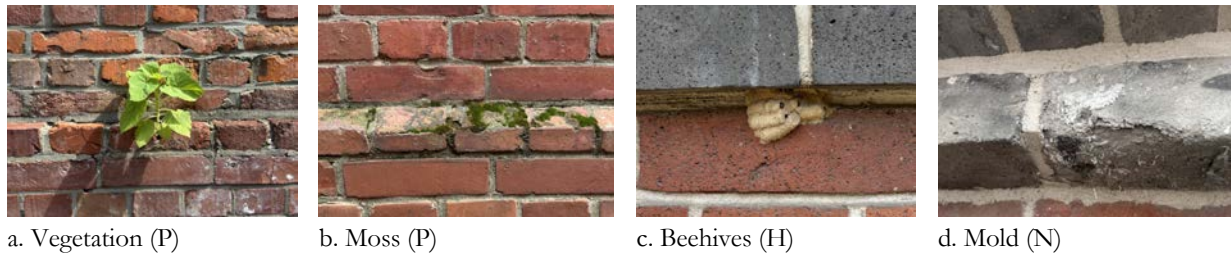


Figure 12: Biological degradation.

3.5. External and Anthropogenic Factors

External environmental and human factors include discoloration and staining caused by external pollutants, graffiti, or fire; freeze-thaw damage, which is general material deterioration resulting from repeated freezing and expansion of moisture; Inappropriate repairs resulting from human intervention, such as the use of mortar with specifications or colors different from the original materials, or alterations to the architectural form.

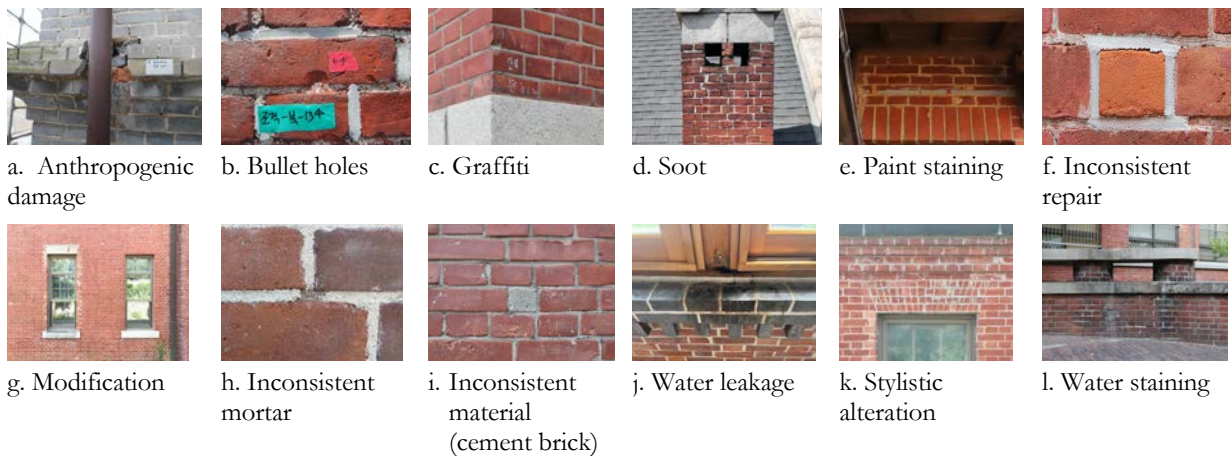


Figure 13: External and anthropogenic factors.

In brick buildings associated with specific historical periods or events (such as the Former Seodaemun Prison, P), bullet marks remain, allowing for the verification of historical records.

The various types of damage also interact with one another, leading to further deterioration. While spalling and fine powdering are primarily caused by material degradation resulting from the loss of physical bonding strength, it is believed that the damage was accelerated by repeated freeze-thaw cycles and moisture

penetration. Furthermore, efflorescence and vegetation intrusion stem fundamentally from inadequate moisture control; it appears that improper repairs during this process hindered the material's breathability, leading to internal condensation and creating a vicious cycle that exacerbated the damage.

4. CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively analyzed the architectural characteristics, current status, and patterns of deterioration of 24 modern brick architectural heritage sites designated as Historic Sites among the nation's designated cultural heritage. The findings derived from this study are as follows.

First, based on a basic analysis of brick specifications, joint specifications, and the decorative composition of openings, it was confirmed that materials and construction types varied depending on the building's purpose and hierarchy. Religious and state facilities primarily used relatively large-sized bricks, while facilities with practical purposes—such as railways, residential buildings, and educational institutions—primarily used smaller-sized bricks. Furthermore, it was confirmed that existing reports tend to standardize brick sizes or omit joint information; therefore, future documentation methods need to reflect these basic specifications in detail.

Second, through an analysis of bricklaying techniques, we confirmed that modern historic buildings feature numerous unique masonry methods—beyond the Dutch and English bond documented in existing literature—that can be defined as “Korean-bond.” Korean bond exhibits distinct forms in corner construction and the arrangement of stretcher and header bricks, and it accounted for the highest proportion among the structures studied. Furthermore, cases where various masonry techniques were mixed depending on the specific section within a single building were identified, allowing us to grasp the complexity and flexibility of modern masonry techniques.

Third, the patterns of damage to architectural heritage could be classified into five types: physical structural damage, surface deterioration, chemical contamination, biological deterioration, and anthropogenic damage. This deterioration tended to be exacerbated by a combination of factors, including not only the aging of materials and exposure to the natural environment but also human factors such as the use of inappropriate repair materials. In particular, biological deterioration (vegetation and insect infestation) and improper repairs acted as key causes, leading to moisture retention within the materials and accelerating structural deterioration.

The significance of this study lies in its systematic investigation and analysis of the current status of modern brick architectural heritage, which allowed for the identification of its architectural characteristics and patterns

of deterioration. In particular, the findings of this study, which empirically confirmed the diversity of masonry techniques and changes in material properties, will serve as foundational data for future examinations of the development of modern Korean masonry techniques and the systematization of the history of technical advancement.

However, this study was limited to 24 nationally designated cultural heritage sites where strict principles of original preservation were applied. If the scope of the study is expanded to include Nationally Registered Cultural Heritage sites, which place greater emphasis on future utilization, it will be possible to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the variations in masonry techniques across different architectural types during the modern period, as well as their repair histories. It is expected that such an expansion of the research scope will provide an opportunity to more broadly elucidate the level of construction techniques used in the original forms of Korea's modern brick architectural heritage, encompassing both Nationally Designated and Nationally Registered Cultural Heritage sites.

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

TIME AND BUILDING TRADITIONS IN EUROPE AND CHINA – COMPARING COMPETING ATTITUDES TOWARDS ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Yun Gao, Jing Xiao

TIME AND BUILDING TRADITIONS IN EUROPE AND CHINA – COMPARING COMPETING ATTITUDES TOWARDS ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE



This research project explores how the study of notions of ‘historical time’ in Chinese and European building traditions reflect different ways of understanding the meanings of traditional heritage in various cultures in China and Europe. In making this comparison, case studies are analyzed to reveal important parallels in Chinese and European perspectives of historical continuity of buildings and their contexts, and the manner in which the historical buildings are preserved and renovated. Case studies include Carlo Scarpa’s famous restoration project of the medieval Castel Vecchio in Verona, undertaken between 1957 and 1975, and the design projects in China, such as Water Street in Yancheng and Lianzhou Museum of Photography, in the history and contemporary era demonstrating the use of ‘archetypal’ references in buildings and their context is to preserve their original authenticity and meaning.

This study argues that there are different understandings towards architectural heritage in building within their own contexts by different stakeholders. The first is that buildings constructed in a particular historical moment and place can retain authenticity and truth to that time. The second perspective is that a ‘faithful’ reconstruction or reinterpretation may acquire more authenticity than the original, because the process of ‘mimesis’ may sometimes lead to a deeper sense of historical continuity. A third attitude may focus on the continuation of the spatial ‘conversation’ between tectonics and urban development that are represented in architectural and urban history. This study aims to understand how these different perspectives from designers, public and authorities towards traditional heritage in the Europe and China can come into dialogue through the understanding of notions of ‘historical time’. Our investigation demonstrates how the idea of traditional heritage in building depends in various ways on how we determine the relationship between an “original” work and its reconstruction or “replication,” and our understanding of the past informs different cultural perceptions of authenticity.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study starts with comparing concepts of historical time in Chinese and Western traditions by referring to Trachtenberg’s two concepts: Building-in-time and Building-outside-time, and Chinese classical concept of cyclic cosmic time in the history. It then investigates how ideas of heritage depend on each culture understands the relationship between an original work and its reconstruction. Central to the analysis is how differing views of historical time shape approaches to passing down architecture across generations. Three case studies are then investigated to demonstrate how architecture solutions represent different views of historical time.

2. HISTORICAL CONCEPTS OF BUILDING AND TIME IN THE WEST AND IN CHINA

2.1. Historical understanding of buildings and time

In the book *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*,¹ Marvin Trachtenberg discusses that in pre-industrial societies, time was governed by natural rhythms, with broad measures sufficient to align labor, especially agricultural work, with seasonal cycles. The rise of urban industry, trade, and banking demanded more precise, standardized timekeeping. This shift was embodied in new public clocks and hourglasses, which visualized time in finer increments and disciplined work and daily life. In the book, Trachtenberg defines two concepts: Building-in-time and Building-outside-time. Building-in-time describes the practice regarding how large cathedrals, urban spaces, and monumental buildings were erected over a long period with cumbersome building methods that prevailed at the time and the unpredictable outcomes of building construction. In this way the design of the building needed to be developed during the process of construction. Across late medieval and Renaissance Italy, architects typically supplied only minimal information at each stage of a project, leaving many details, and sometimes major construction challenges, to be resolved on the worksite during the building process itself.

Trachtenberg elaborates four aspects of building-in-time, which he defines as continuous redesign, myopic progression, concatenation, and retrosynthesis. Continuous redesign is developed from the long periods of construction afforded builders opportunities to adapt designs according to perceived needs, including changes in stylistic preferences. Myopic progression defines how architects detailed a project or a portion of a project only as much as needed at a particular moment in construction, not in advance, even ignoring potentially intractable challenges until the building had progressed to the degree that such challenges had to be faced. Concatenation refers to the linking of each successive “myopic progressive” moment to the preceding ones, integrating each stage in design to what was already built with the possibility of structured change and growth, the re/alignment of the ever malleable. Retrosynthesis is a development of the process of concatenation at any moment of potential completion, coordinating previous phases to project the appearance of a coherent whole.²

The second concept: Building-outside-time refers specifically to Leon Battista Alberti’s work. Trachtenberg argues that Alberti extended the concept of authorship to architecture, giving architects a way to create autonomous works and claim authorial authority comparable to literary authors. By applying techniques of literary composition directly to architecture, Alberti also sought to protect architectural works from distortion by later, less faithful successors. The perfection and coherence of architecture design were completed at the design stage. The humanist concept of authorship emphasizes the need to preserve the integrity of a formally perfect literary work against corruption by copyists or imitators. By safeguarding an uncorrupted body of

works, the humanist could establish an enduring authorial persona that rendered their writings authoritative and unassailable over time.

Trachtenberg argues that while Alberti's notion of the architect as author asserts design authority, it also removes design from the temporal process of building and fixes a building's identity in its original design, thereby promoting the idea of Building outside time. Building –outside-time means that the architect was expected to resolve every issue in advance, presenting the design as a fully complete and self-contained whole, worked out in such detail that no part could be added or removed during construction. The perfection could only be diminished by alteration. On the other hand, Alberti also articulates an aspect of the design process that involves the deep study of past models and their improvement through creative transformation. In this way, the buildings constructed in the particular historical moment and place can retain authenticity and truth to that time, as we discussed before as the first understandings towards architectural heritage in building within their own contexts.

These views about architectural tradition contrasts the traditional Chinese view of heritage that closely aligns with Chinese cosmological thought, particularly Taoist and Confucian notions of process, renewal, and cyclical continuity, which represented in the different concept of architectural heritage, the authenticity and its imitation or reproduction. In Chinese thoughts, built form participates in the same logic as nature: growth, maturation, decline, and regeneration. The rebuilding of a temple, tower or hall is not considered a rupture but a reaffirmation of order. Authenticity lies in fidelity to principles and rites (*li*), not in the preservation of original material substance. This will lead to our second perspective towards architecture heritage which is that a 'faithful' reconstruction or reinterpretation may acquire more authenticity than the original, because the process of 'mimesis' may sometimes lead to a deeper sense of historical continuity. Ryckmans argues, based on the view expressed by Victor Segalen (1878-1919), about Chinese 'in-built' obsolescence that.

“[E]ternity should not inhabit the building, it should inhabit the builder. The transient nature of the structure is like an offering to the voracity of time; for the price of such sacrifices, the constructors ensure the everlastingness of their spiritual designs.”

Pierre Ryckmans³

Building in the Chinese tradition is not conceived as a monument intended to defy time, but represents an enduring order of relations, such as the harmony between natural rhythms and human habits, and appropriate of the architectural setting relates to the moral standards *li*. Buildings are rebuilt, repaired, replaced, and transformed, sometimes repeatedly over centuries, without anxiety about loss of authenticity. What persists is not the material object but the ritual knowledge, represented people's relationships within the imperial China and within the families, craft lineages, and moral orientations that guide reconstruction. Eternity, in this sense,

resides in practice, transmission, and disposition rather than in materials. Impermanence as the condition through which meaning, spirit, and cultural vitality are sustained. Eternity also inhabits the human through self-cultivation in the process of designing, building and experiencing.

One example of this is the Yellow Crane tower (Huanghe Lou) which is famous for the poem associated with the tower and the context it sits in. The tower had been constructed many times during the history but remain as the “true” representation to the particular historical moment and place it was originally created. In this way, building becomes less a struggle against impermanence and more a discipline of participating in it, an attitude that offers an alternative understanding of permanence and architectural heritage from those in the West.

In Imperial China, architectural settings were conceived as ritualized frameworks that sustained harmony between natural rhythms and cultural life. Rather than relying on material permanence or immovable sites, continuity was ensured through repetitive practices in rituals, seasonal ceremonies, rebuilding, maintenance, and embodied modes of use, that aligned human activity with cosmological order. Within this context, mimesis in Chinese concepts of heritage may not primarily mean preserving an original fabric but reenacting a paradigmatic form of veneration that could be renewed over time. A historical building functioned as a model to be followed through the faithful repetition of spatial sequences and ritual engagement. Heritage thus emerged as a participatory process in which human actions, rites, gestures, and collective practices, played a central role in sustaining meaning, allowing architecture to remain alive through use and renewal.

Henri Lefebvre specified two concepts: “conceived space” and “lived space” in Western urban history. He argues that in Europe since the Renaissance abstractly conceived space, shaped by perspective, visual logic, monumental façades, and grand avenues, became dominant and separate from lived, everyday spaces rooted in medieval, religious, and symbolic life. This hierarchy privileged visual order and representation over daily social experience. Lefebvre suggests that Chinese characters, unlike alphabetic writing, may integrate both: simultaneously expressing the cosmological order of space–time and the concrete, social, and symbolic dimensions of everyday life. This implies a spatial conception in China where conceived and lived space are more closely intertwined than in the Western tradition.⁴ While Renaissance cities prioritized open, visually ordered public spaces shaped by perspective and spectacle, Chinese traditional cities were organized as dense networks of enclosed compounds, streets, lanes, and numerous temples that supported local civic and social activities. Rather than privileging visual dominance and formal display, Chinese urbanism emphasizes lived experience and order of the spaces.⁵

2.2. Modern Chinese Architectural Design

Jianfei Zhu defines the “modern Chinese architect” as one whose design and practice internalized foreign

ideas, especially European perspective, geometry, and later modern functionalism within the Chinese context since around 1600.⁶ He highlights the period from the 1910s onward as crucial, when modern architecture in terms of function and structure took root and evolved in China. Zhu identifies key phases of change after 1978: first, from the late 1970s to late 1980s, economic reform and foreign investment led to rapid urban development, raising urgent concerns about the conservation of historical cities like Beijing. Planning policies during this time sought to balance economic modernization and international engagement with the preservation of Beijing's historic and cultural identity. In the second phase, from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, deeper market reforms and global capital intensified urban development, prompting even stronger calls for heritage protection. For example, the Beijing Master Plan (1991–2010) envisioned the city as a top-ranking modern international capital while mandating the protection of its historic buildings, districts, and overall urban structure.⁷ The plan then specified that the 'renowned, historic, cultural city' of Beijing must be protected, at the level of buildings, urban areas and the whole urban framework at the center of the city.

The successful host of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and China's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) marked the third phase of urban and architecture development. The phrase was marked by accelerating China's pace of building a market economy opening to the outside, and its effective participation in economic globalization. Many autonomous architecture design studios started to design based on ideas from 'purist modernism' with regional sensitivities into China. Overseas architects were also invited to design buildings in China, including buildings with predominantly modernist, with tectonic and sometimes regionalist sensitivities. During the period, the heritage conservation of the historical city and buildings became increasingly a crucial concern with renovation and preservation projects implemented. The state and market relationship represented those between opening actively to international capital and the retaining of a political superiority above capital and market. The considerations of design and urban development were closely linked to a larger area of social life where fair distribution of wealth and greater space for participant and expression. As Zhu suggests that "A crucial dimension here is the generic, the synthetic, the comprehensive, the 'non-ideological', which define a new system beyond classical ideological categories made in the West in the nineteenth century in social theories."⁸

In the rapid urbanization of Chinese cities, the destruction of historical urban fabric including courtyard houses and lanes, as well as the changes of an overall urban public space with human, habitable, accessible and green spaces. Although the policies were calling for protection of heritage, yet "a body of critical studies that is both empirical and critical, historically founded and practically normative, is hard to find."⁹ The traditional architecture setting and construction methods were historically created and maintained as part of the continuous symbolisms and practiced through rituals to maintain the heritage. However, contemporary design and urban development are articulated through different concepts and shaped by economic changes,

marketing force, together with modern professional, technological, and regulatory frameworks. Some contemporary Chinese examples reveal a shift toward fabricating tradition, reflecting nostalgia for a lost culture rather than a continuously living one. At the same time, advanced digital tools, regulatory oversight, and risk management practices are often used as a strategic or critical choice that influences design practice and urban development. In our book *The Temporality of Building: European and Chinese Perspectives on Architecture and Heritage*¹⁰ we examined different examples of contemporary building projects that variously address the architectural heritage and adaptation within the current changing contexts in the West and in China, offering ways of rethinking questions of time in building. In this paper, we selected three case studies for examination: Carlo Scarpa's museum converted from Castle Vecchio in Italy, Wenming Street in Kunming and Museum of Photography in Lianzhou, China, which will be discussed in more details in the following section.

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1. Carlo Scarpa's Intervention at Castle Vecchio

The castle Vecchio in Verona, which had been the ancient home of the della Scalas, the ruling family of Verona between the mid-13th century and the late 14th century, was converted into a museum in 1924. Carlo Scarpa was the architect to refit the exhibition spaces according to contemporary design ideas. His interventions included the radical transformation of seven big rooms of the Napoleonic Wing into the harmonized sequence of spaces: the false frescoes from the 1920s were removed, the walls rendered in neutral shades and the sculptures displayed on simple concrete slabs. The project completed between 1957 and 1975 blend historical reverence and modern innovation. Rather than presenting the medieval fortress as a unified historical artifact, Scarpa revealed it as a layered and composite structure, which resonates with his belief in his own Venetian "Byzantine heritage," which framed history not as a linear progression but as an accumulation of interrelated strands, an outlook that informed both his design philosophy and his understanding of identity. In the Napoleonic Wing, for instance, Scarpa radically reconfigured seven large rooms into a carefully sequenced spatial narrative. Decorative false frescoes added in the 1920s were removed in favor of neutral wall finishes, enabling the historical fabric and exhibited artworks to emerge with greater clarity.¹¹

The transformation of this medieval castle into a museum, through a series of modern interventions and adaptations, effectively represents the original castle and adjoining fortified wall through modern interventions and adaptations. This involved demolishing the interventions of Napoleon and restoring the visible presence of Cangrande (fourteenth century Lord of Verona) within the structure of the castle. As Samia Rab describes:

“In Scarpa's hierarchy of architectural and historical value, the Commune wall and the Statue [of the Cangrande] came first. To him, both these elements represent a time during which Verona offered its inhabitants a measure of individual freedom. He viewed Napoleon as an outsider and his conquest of Italy as paving a way for the later suppressive control by the Fascist Regime. Scarpa was convinced that those who were enfranchised during the rule of the Lords of Verona enjoyed individual freedom. Therefore, he liberated the wall from Napoleon's Construction.....and placed the Cangrande statue at this critical junction between the two sections of the museum.”

Samia Rab¹²

Carlo Scarpa's intervention at Castel Vecchio can be understood less as an exercise in conservation and more as an architectural manifesto grounded in his belief in his own “Byzantine heritage,” which he associated with his Venetian ancestry. Rather than treating history as a continuous, unified narrative, Scarpa considered the monument as a constellation of fragments, historical, cultural, and material, whose careful juxtaposition could intensify awareness of the past's complexity. In this sense, Scarpa's design approach affirms the idea that cultural inheritance plays a crucial role in forming both individual identity and collective memory. As Kenneth Frampton argues in his writing “Carlo Scarpa and the Adoration of the Joint”¹³ that Scarpa's attention to joints, details, and transitions reflects a tectonic mindset rooted in the coexistence of Eastern and Western traditions, an architectural language that mirrors the layered cultural history of Venice itself. Through this lens, Scarpa's creative interventions do not compete with historical fabric but instead activate it, revealing history as a network of interrelated threads. Byzantinism thus becomes a productive conceptual framework for understanding Scarpa's work: a way of thinking historically that embraces discontinuity, overlap, and cultural transmission, and one that underpins his distinctive contribution to modern architectural practice.

3.2. Wenming Street in Kunming

The same conceptual understanding informed the refurbishment of Wenming Street in Kunming city, Southwest China. Similar to the urban development carried out in Beijing discussed above, after the first phase of urban development in China between late 1970s and late 1980s, the ‘invasion’ of intense building that conservation of historical cities and buildings emerged as an urgent issue. Despite being one of the first group of cities to be awarded the title of Historical Cultural City in China in 1982, Kunming rapidly lost its stock of traditional houses built during the Ming and Qing Dynasties due to the rapid urban development.¹⁴

Wenming Street occupies a relatively modest position within Kunming's urban history: it is shorter and less commercially or politically prominent than the city's major thoroughfares, and its frontage consists largely of small, unassuming courtyard houses. Its significance, however, lies in the fact that it became the last and the only street in Kunming where a systematic attempt was made to preserve traces of the historic urban and built fabric as a living ensemble rather than as isolated relics. In 1998, the Kunming Urban Construction

Archive Institute commissioned a comprehensive survey of the street, later published as *The Investigation of the Design and Construction of the Wenming Street District*.¹⁵ The publication documents the street through detailed drawings and photographs of its courtyard houses, stating that the primary purpose of the survey was both to record traditional dwellings as evidence of historical cultural practices and to provide a foundation for future preservation projects. The documents state that many of these houses possess considerable antiquity and embody cultural values of lasting importance. Preservation, in this context, did not mean safeguarding buildings as static objects, but rather renovating them in ways that reveal and reinstate their original forms and characters. Four guiding principles were articulated in the survey documents for the renovation process: first, the reintegration and thus protection of the ‘spiritual’ dimensions of the buildings alongside their physical forms; second, the balancing of preservation with reform; third, the combination of new materials with protected fragments; and fourth, the use of scientific survey data as an evidential basis for intervention rather than reliance on subjective judgement.¹⁶ These principles resonate with a traditional Chinese understanding of architecture, in which buildings are not conceived as monuments designed to resist time, but as provisional material configurations within an enduring order of relations.

The Wenming Street project explicitly embraced this logic by seeking to reproduce the traditional style of the historic commercial street, including the insertion of new buildings that were considered to possess a form of ‘immaterial authenticity’, as described by *Li*. In these pseudo-traditional productions, the connection to the past operates not through strict correspondence to a particular historical moment, but through the evocation of a general sensibility, an atmosphere of continuity that aligns present-day experience with inherited cultural patterns. This contrasts with Western restoration approaches, which often attempt to protect and reveal a building or interior at a specific point in time, privileging material originality as the primary bearer of historical truth. In the Chinese context, however, this nostalgia is not grounded in the preservation of unaltered artefacts, but in the continual reactivation of inherited forms through use, rebuilding, and reinterpretation. The collaboration between the Kunming Planning Department and the Zurich Institute during the same period to develop new transportation and water systems for the city also suggested that renovation efforts should extend beyond the protection of individual cultural relics or antiquities to recognize the heritage value of the street as a whole, its spatial sequences, public spaces, and patterns of social interaction, as an integral part of the contemporary city. Viewed in this light, the Wenming Street refurbishment can be understood as an attempt to enact a form of architectural eternity grounded in human participation rather than material permanence. The following renovation of the street in the 2000s also constructed new buildings in the traditional forms. Despite of the traditional styles of the visual appearances of the new buildings, some were constructed with timber and some concrete. Similar to many other traditional styles buildings and commercial streets constructed in different Chinese cities, those news buildings have no signs of age or marks of alternations or restorations throughout the time but consistent visual appearance that could not represent the

intrinsic value to material culture. Nevertheless, the construction teams and craftsmen involved have skillfully reproduced traditional forms, by exploring new ways of using contemporary materials and technologies.¹⁷

3.3. Museum of Photograph in Lianzhou

The third case study discussed in our book *The Temporality of Building: European and Chinese Perspectives on Architecture and Heritage*¹⁸ and being selected for examination in this paper is the Museum of Photograph in Lianzhou, Guangdong province. The project has been recognized as one of the outstanding examples of contemporary architectural design in China. Since 2022, *RIBA International Awards and Open Door: Transform Buildings, Treasure the Past* have been launched with the aim of promoting the communication and practice collaboration between the architects in China and Britain. Projects were invited to nominate to represent ‘renovation’ projects in both countries, with different categories covering those of the pre-1900 period and in the twentieth century category.¹⁹ The Lianzhou Museum of Photography was one of 13 entries from China to be nominated in the twentieth century category due to its erudite consideration of the cultural context and imaginative use of materials as a reflection of local history.

The Lianzhou Museum of Photography was initially proposed by a local journalist Duan Yuting who curated a modern exhibition of photography in Lianzhou in 2004. Her aim was to create a photographic archive that combines photography from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with contemporary experimental exhibitions, including some photos donated by the French Ministry of Culture for works by photographic masters like Paul Fox. From that time onwards, public exhibitions increasingly be held in the place, which lead to an abandoned old factory used to make and assort sugar and fruits during the 1950s, being identified as the site for a new photographic museum to be constructed to produce and exhibit photographic works.²⁰ O-office Architects who took on the design works believe in protecting the cultural heritage and historic memories of Lianzhou, whilst at the same time upgrading their built environments to meet the needs of modern urban life. The autonomous architecture design studio has used tectonic design ideas with regionalist sensitivities for the design of the Museum. Lianzhou Museum of Photography was constructed in 2017, which is located in an area full of shophouses and arched corridors built in the early twentieth century. The nearby South Sun-yat-sen Road was originally built during the Song Dynasty (960 to 1279). The area also contains different patterns of domestic temples that support important rituals and ceremonies in the life of the town. Traditionally the ritual activities such as the worship of ancestors, combined with educational functions of *jiashu* (family schools) for children of local families took place on a daily basis. The traditional building settings of the local courtyard buildings were specifically designed to accommodate the rich activities in the daily life. Following the traditional style, the new building adopts a large, pitched roof comprising three sloping planes to cover the whole complex, emulating Lianzhou-style houses found in the old city. This roof

canopy has the purpose of sheltering the original inner space of the courtyards that to be converted into exhibition spaces and public activities. Visitors can pass freely through the elevated spaces of the museum within the original central courtyard. Galleries on the upper level are opened to the streets below, directing visitors to the semi-open atrium and inner gardens.

The frontage of the museum to the South Sun-yat-sen Road is understated to merge into the overall streetscape. Its street appearance gives the impression of an anonymous warehouse or industrial building, supported on an open concrete frame on the ground floor. This understated elevation merges into the overall streetscape, giving it restraint and continuity with the surroundings. Within the spaces of this former sugar factory, four former industrial buildings were renovated. Their original timber and masonry structure represented the local industrial architecture of the past century in Lianzhou. However, those structures were demolished and reconstructed for safety reasons. As the central core of the complex of renovated buildings, a three-story reinforced-concrete building (constructed in the 1980s) was left to provide accommodation for a public arena, with the addition of other auxiliary facilities such as a library and an auditorium.²¹ The original arrangement of courtyards between dilapidated residential structures was largely hidden from adjacent streets. The architects sought to find design opportunities where visual and spatial relationships across the site could be forged, treating public space in this process as a fluid tissue that brings together both existing and new fabric. Architectural intervention becomes an effective regenerative tool for bringing a largely forgotten part of the city back to life, incorporating both monumental and instrumental aspects of cultural education that provoke imaginings of a shelter that can fulfill these different purposes.²²

4. CONCLUSION

This study starts with comparing concepts of historical time in Chinese and Western traditions by referring to Trachtenberg's two concepts: Building-in-time and Building-outside-time, and comparison with Chinese Classical concept of cyclic cosmic time in the history. Following that the changes of the urban development, architecture design and practices in China in modern history was introduced, which lead to the discussions of three case studies, Carlo Scarpa's museum converted from Castle Vecchio in Italy, and two cases in China: The Wenming street development in Kunming and Museum of photograph in Lianzhou.

The contemporary designs and urban development have many similarities to the concept: building-in-time that Trachtenberg elaborated, although they are articulated through different concepts and shaped by economical changes, marketing force, together with modern professional, technological, and regulatory frameworks.

Carlo Scarpa's intervention at Castel Vecchio can be understood less as an exercise in conservation and more as an architectural manifesto grounded in his belief in his own "Byzantine heritage," which he associated with his Venetian ancestry. Scarpa's design approach affirms the idea that apart from the importance of materials, cultural inheritance plays a crucial role in forming both individual identity and collective memory.

Two Chinese cases reveal a different perspective of building time and heritage compared to that of Europe. However, they represented different ways of conservation regarding the notion of a non-material (human-centered) heritage, achieved through a process of inheritance in the context of these city developments. A measure of how this peculiarly Chinese attitude towards heritage is conceived and 'handed down' today, as opposed to the historic past, can be seen in the incorporation of live re-enactments of traditional rituals in Wenming Street. In the course of purchasing goods in shops, consumers and spectators also have the opportunity to watch local performances by perambulating alongside, and in close proximity to some visitors dressed in traditional costumes when visit traditional style streets even in their daily lives. These activities of seeing and visiting are organized concurrently with commercial activities. The Museum of Photograph involves both cultural or artistic initiatives as well as building as the material culture. In many respects, this architectural approach to a site and its history affirms recognition of the inherent value of material heritage, in situations where this can be effectively cultivated. Such a design approach is in many ways a departure from traditional Chinese attitudes towards building time and heritage as Ryckmans recognized and quoted earlier: "Eternity should not inhabit the building, it should inhabit the builder."²³ This is where questions of building time in China today, in relation to both daily and ritual regimes of human activity, become entangled in consciously reconstructed traditions. We get a sense of how this contemporary urban development such as Wenming Street and Museum of Photograph trigger collective memories or associations of traditional urban landscapes and the lives they sustained in the past.

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

SELECTIVE TRADITION IN LIVING HERITAGE: COMPARING ACADEMIC, POLICY, MARKET, AND RESIDENT NARRATIVES IN JIANGNAN WATER-TOWN PRACTICES

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SELECTIVE TRADITION IN LIVING HERITAGE: COMPARING ACADEMIC, POLICY, MARKET, AND RESIDENT NARRATIVES IN JIANGNAN WATER-TOWN PRACTICES



This paper examines how “tradition” is selectively expressed in living heritage conservation through the case of Xinchang Ancient Town in Shanghai, a historic water town in Jiangnan. Living heritage emphasizes continuity, and residents are central bearers of this continuity. Yet in heritage conservation, urban renewal, and tourism development, tradition is rarely presented as a complete or neutral whole. It is selected, narrated, and stabilized through different criteria. Drawing on Raymond Williams’s concept of selective tradition and comparative narrative analysis, this study compares academic, policy, market, and resident-oriented narratives. It illustrates that visible spatial forms, cultural labels, and visitors’ experiences are more easily translated into academic knowledge, policy instruments, and tourism products. In contrast, daily services, house repair, informal livelihoods, resident mobility, and private domestic boundaries remain less visible, although they are essential to everyday continuity. This paper argues that comparative narrative analysis can help identify dominant heritage narratives and weakly represented everyday traditions, thereby informing governance and conservation strategies that are more consistent with the protection of living heritage.

Keyword: Living heritage; selective tradition; comparative narrative analysis; Jiangnan water towns

1. INTRODUCTION

Jiangnan water towns represent one of the most identifiable types of historic settlements in China and deeply entwine with the cultural landscape of the Lower Yangtze River region. Their canals, bridges, waterside streets, houses, and commercial spaces reflect a lengthy relationship between settlement life and water-based environments.¹ In recent decades, these towns have also become important sites of heritage conservation, tourism development, urban renewal, and, in some cases, World Heritage nomination.

However, Jiangnan water towns are not static monuments or architectural ruins. They remain inhabited sites where historic buildings, water systems, local businesses, neighborhood relationships, and everyday routines continue to interact. This makes them especially relevant to discussions of living heritage, in which the value of heritage lies not only in the survival of material fabric but also in the continuity of use, meaning, and community life.

A key problem is that the “tradition” presented in conservation and tourism is often selective. Existing representations of water towns tend to emphasize visible and recognizable elements, such as old streets, bridges, waterfront scenes, former residences, traditional shops, and folk-culture images. These elements are important. However, they do not fully represent the living continuity of historic towns. Less visible practices, including residents’ daily routines, houses’ maintenance, neighborhood interactions, local consumption, small-scale livelihoods, and the everyday use of riverside and street spaces, are often less prominent in official, academic, or market-facing narratives. Correspondingly, the water town may appear culturally continuous in

images, texts, and planning documents, while the social practices that sustain its living character are weakened, displaced, or left outside formal recognition.

This study approaches this problem through Raymond Williams's concept of "selective tradition." Tradition is not understood here as a complete and neutral inheritance from the past. It is an active process through which certain elements are selected, emphasized, and stabilized as representative, while others are marginalized, reworked, or forgotten.² Applied to living heritage, this perspective allows this paper to ask how particular elements of water town life are made visible as "tradition" in the representation of heritage, governance, and tourism.

Within this context, Xinchang Ancient Town in Shanghai provides a useful case. Xinchang is both a historic Jiangnan water town settlement and a town shaped by metropolitan development, tourism promotion, and heritage governance. As Shanghai's representative in the joint World Heritage tentative listing of Jiangnan water towns, it offers an important site for observing how different actors define tradition and how these definitions influence the protection and use of living heritage.

This study addresses three questions. First, which elements of Xinchang water town life are selected and stabilized as "tradition" across academic, policy, market, and resident-oriented narratives? Second, which aspects of lived experience become weakly represented, reworked, or difficult to recognize in this process? Third, how do these selective constructions of tradition reshape heritage governance, tourism development, and residents' everyday lives? By comparing these narratives, this paper argues that living heritage conservation should surpass the preservation of visible cultural images and institutionalized heritage categories. It should pay closer attention to the everyday practices and living conditions through which historic towns remain socially and materially alive.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Living Heritage and Continuity

Living heritage refers to heritage that remains connected to the lives of contemporary communities. It differs from a static monument preserved mainly as an object of historical memory. In living heritage, material fabric, social practice, local knowledge, and everyday use continue to interact.³ Therefore, buildings, streets, waterways, and public spaces are significant not only because they survive but also because they are still used, maintained, interpreted, and adapted. Living heritage does not require a place to remain unchanged. Its continuity often depends on the capacity to manage change while sustaining the relationships that give heritage sociocultural meaning.⁴

Continuity can be understood through several related dimensions. The first is material continuity, including historic buildings, settlement patterns, street networks, and waterways. The second is *functional continuity*, through which historic spaces continue to support dwelling, commerce, circulation, ritual, leisure, or other everyday activities. The third is community continuity, which refers to the ongoing connection between local communities and the heritage environment. The fourth is the continuity of care, including daily maintenance, small-scale repair, local management, and practical knowledge.⁵ These forms of continuity are interdependent. A historic town may retain its architectural appearance; however, its living character can still be weakened if residents are displaced, everyday functions disappear, or maintenance becomes detached from local practices.

This understanding is particularly relevant to Jiangnan water towns. Their value to heritage lies not only in individual buildings or scenic waterfronts but also in the long-term relationship between water systems, streets, bridges, houses, markets, neighborhoods, and local ways of life. Studies of Jiangnan water towns have demonstrated that their distinctive urban form is closely related to canal systems, waterside streets, commercial activities, and settlement patterns shaped by the water in the environment.⁶ The UNESCO Tentative List description of the Ancient Waterfront Towns in the South of the Yangtze River similarly emphasizes their semi-urban and semi-rural character, water-based economy, and canal-centered lifestyle.⁷

Nevertheless, heritage-related narratives do not always fully represent the living continuity of such towns. Visually recognizable or administratively clear elements are often easier to record than ordinary practices such as repairing, shopping, walking, greeting neighbors, or managing household space. Recent studies on Jiangnan ancient water towns also indicate the risk of homogenizing both landscape patterns and tourism images.⁸ This makes it necessary to ask how certain aspects of living heritage are selected as “tradition,” while others remain less visible.

2.2. Selective Recognition of Tradition and Heritage

If living heritage depends on everyday continuity, a further question follows. How does this continuity become recognized as “tradition”? Tradition is often described as an inheritance from the past. Yet tradition is also organized in the present.⁹ Raymond Williams’s notion of selective tradition draws attention to the cultural process through which certain meanings, practices, and objects are selected, emphasized, and stabilized as representative, while others are neglected or excluded.¹⁰

This perspective is useful for heritage studies because heritage practices not only protect old elements but also classify, interpret, display, and manage selected elements of the past. Laurajane Smith’s critique of authorized heritage discourse reveals that expert and institutional languages often have greater power than the public in defining what counts as heritage.¹¹ This point matters for living heritage. A practice may continue in everyday

life; however, it may not be formally recognized as heritage. A place may remain socially meaningful but not fit easily into planning categories or tourism images. Thus, the recognition of heritage is selective. It may privilege elements that can be classified, displayed, or managed while leaving other forms of everyday practice weakly represented.

Recent studies of everyday, vernacular, and community-based heritage support this argument. They emphasize ordinary life, cultural participation, local experience, and the aesthetic reframing of the ordinary.¹² They also highlight that official heritage policy and community praxis may define heritage in different ways.¹³ These studies help explain why local practices are often difficult to fit into formal heritage categories.

In Jiangnan water towns, selective tradition helps explain why some elements of water town life are more easily recognized than others. Visually distinctive elements, such as bridges, old streets, canals, façades, and folk-culture images, are likelier to be recorded, planned, and promoted. Ordinary practices, including house repair, local shopping, unneighborly relationships, riverside use, and small-scale livelihoods, are less visible. Yet, these practices are central to the living character of a town. This paper does not use selective tradition to distinguish authentic traditions from inauthentic ones. It uses the concept to examine how different criteria for selecting traditions shape conservation and renewal priorities.

2.3. Comparative Narrative Analysis and Selection Criteria

Building on its previous sections, this paper understands tradition in historic water towns as an outcome of continuous definition, selection, and stabilization within multi-actor narratives. This view does not deny that continuity exists in everyday practice. It asks how different actors select certain forms of continuity and describes them as “tradition.” Different actors may use different criteria in this process. These criteria shape what becomes important in conservation, the development of tourism, and urban renewal.

This paper uses comparative narrative analysis to examine this process. Narrative analysis is useful because narratives do more than describe heritage. They organize meanings, assign value, and connect the past with possible futures.¹⁴ In heritage studies, narrative-based approaches have also displayed how stakeholders use heritage stories to interpret landscape change and development priorities.¹⁵ This approach is suitable for Xinchang because several actors interpret the town simultaneously. Academic writings, policy and planning documents, tourism texts, and resident-oriented accounts all define tradition; nevertheless, they do not define it identically. The purpose of comparison is not to separate these narratives into fixed groups. It aims to identify how disparate selection criteria shape the priorities of living heritage protection.

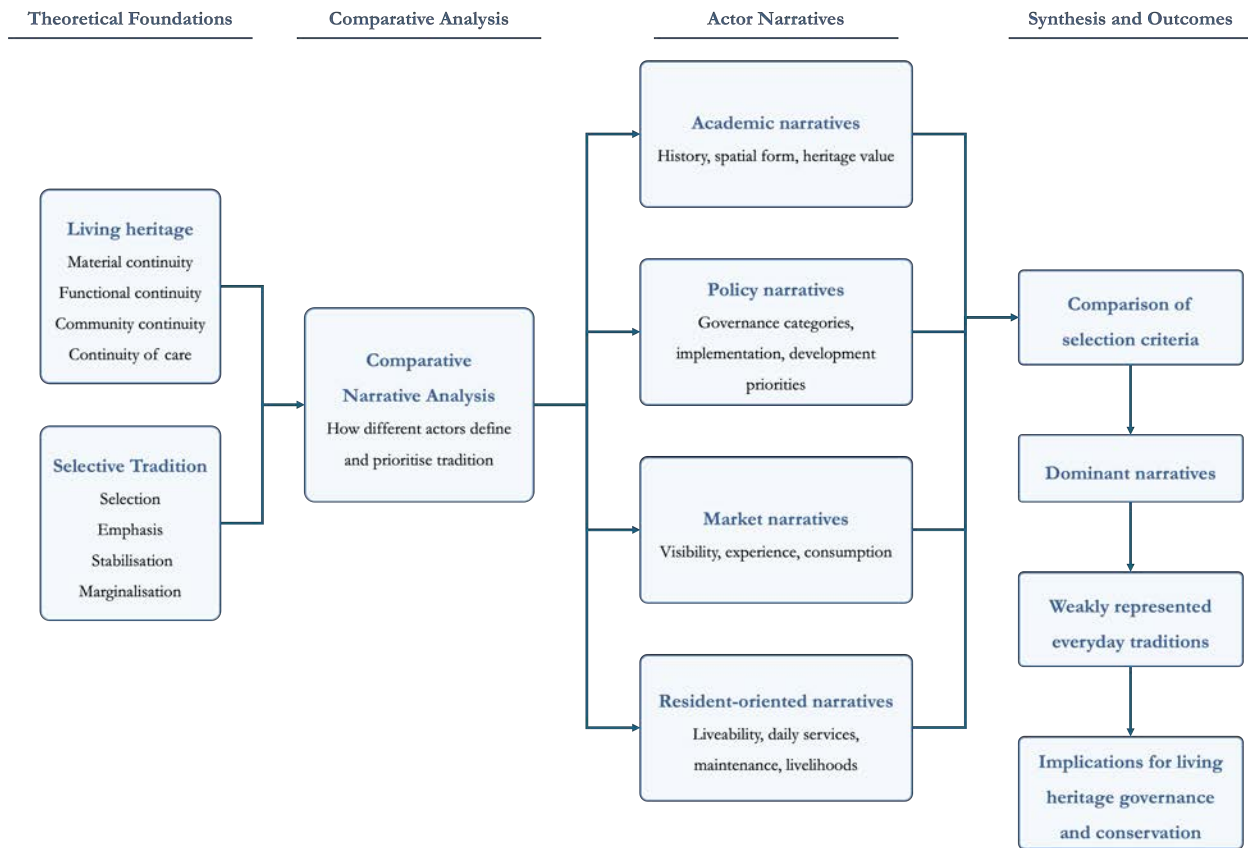


Figure 1: Analytical framework for comparing selection criteria across heritage narratives.

3. CASE AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Case Study

This paper uses Xinchang Ancient Town in Shanghai as its case study. Xinchang is in the Pudong New Area, though its historical formation belongs to the wider Jiangnan water-town system. The town developed through a relationship between waterways, settlements, trade, and everyday life. Its canals, stone bridges, riverside streets, historic houses, and commercial lanes show the typical spatial and cultural features of Jiangnan water towns. Its historical connection with salt production and trade also links it to regional networks of water-based commerce.

Xinchang is also shaped by the contemporary condition of metropolitan Shanghai. The town must conserve its historic fabric, improve the living environment, present a heritage-oriented value, support local development, and attract visitors. These demands do not always follow the same logic. Conservation may emphasize historical integrity, while renewal may focus on infrastructural and environmental improvements. Tourism may foreground visual experiences and marketable images, while residents may prioritize livability,

convenience, and livelihood. Consequently, Xinchang is a useful case for observing how actors narrate, select, and prioritize tradition.

3.2. Research Materials

This study used four groups of materials. The first group consists of academic writings on Jiangnan water towns, Xinchang Ancient Town, historic settlements, living heritage, and traditional town conservation. These writings display how academic narratives define the value of the water-town tradition.

The second group comprises policy, planning, and official promotional materials, including conservation plans, governance texts, heritage-related policies, promotional brochures, and materials linked to the Jiangnan water-town nomination context. These documents showcase how tradition becomes translated into protected objects, cultural labels, management targets, and development goals.

The third group includes marketing and tourist-facing materials, including tourism websites, social media posts, visitor reviews, promotional texts, guide materials, and descriptions of shops, food, film locations, and visitor experiences. These materials reveal which images of Xinchang are repeatedly circulated and how tradition becomes part of the visitor experience.

The fourth group is constituted by resident-oriented materials, including field observations, walking notes, informal conversations, management interviews, and anonymized community survey materials. These materials were not used as a statistically representative sample. They provide grounded points of comparison with academic, policy, and tourism narratives.

Overall, the study used a small qualitative corpus designed for interpretive comparison rather than statistical representation. It includes three key monographs and selected academic articles on Xinchang and Jiangnan water towns, two official planning-related documents, three transcribed management interviews, visitor-generated tourism materials from platforms such as Dianping, Xiaohan's, and Ctrip, eight anonymized community survey records, and field observations of Xinchang Street, its side lanes, and the northern, middle, and southern sections of the town. These materials were selected because they explicitly define, describe, or evaluate tradition, the heritage-related value, the tourist experience, local life, or renewal priorities in Xinchang.

3.3. Methodology

This paper uses comparative narrative analysis, supported by thematic coding and a framing comparison. The analysis did not focus on word frequency alone. It targets the meanings and criteria through which tradition

becomes recognizable and actionable.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, the study identified narrative units in the collected materials. A narrative unit refers to a sentence, paragraph, image caption, policy statement, tourism description, or interview excerpt that defines, describes, or evaluates tradition in Xinchang. Second, each narrative unit is coded through four dimensions: selected element, selection criterion, narrative framing, and practical implication. Selected element refers to what is presented as tradition. Selection criterion refers to why it is treated as important. Narrative framing examines how tradition is described, for example, as a heritage asset, scenic image, planning object, tourist experience, or lived environment. Practical implication identifies the conservation, renewal, or development priority that a particular framing may support.

CODING DIMENSION	GUIDING QUESTION	EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE CODES
SELECTED ELEMENT	What is presented as tradition?	Canals, old streets, bridges, historic houses, shops, daily practices
SELECTION CRITERION	Why is it treated as important?	Historical value, spatial morphology, visual recognizability, manageability, touristic appeal, everyday use
NARRATIVE FRAMING	How is it described?	Heritage asset, scenic image, planning object, tourist experience, lived environment
PRACTICAL IMPLICATION	What priority can this framing support?	Conservation control, streetscape improvement, tourism branding, business upgrading, daily maintenance, community benefit

Table 1. Coding framework for comparative narrative analysis.

Third, this study compares coded materials across academic, policy, market, and resident-oriented narratives. These arenas may overlap and borrow language from each other. The purpose of comparison is not to separate actors into rigid groups but identify patterned distinctions in how tradition is selected and justified.

4. FOUR NARRATIVES OF TRADITION IN XINCHANG ANCIENT TOWN

This section compares four narrative arenas through which tradition was selected and prioritized in Xinchang Ancient Town. These arenas are not treated as isolated categories. They often overlap and borrow language from each other. The comparison asks what each narrative presents as tradition, why these elements are treated as important, and how these selections shape conservation, renewal, and touristic priorities.

4.1. Academic Narratives

Academic narratives tend to select tradition through historical value, spatial morphology, and typological

significance. In studies of Xinchang Ancient Town, scholars often conceptualize the town within the wider system of Jiangnan water towns. They focus on canals, waterfront spaces, bridges, historic streets, traditional dwellings, and commercial–residential patterns.¹⁶ Monographs on Xinchang waterfronts, historic town conservation, and design management all treat these spatiocultural elements as the basis of the town’s heritage value.¹⁷ Hence, academic studies tend to define tradition through historic development, spatial structure, architectural character, water systems, and cultural value. This approach increases the recognizability and scholarly legitimacy of the town’s heritage value. It may also turn the historic town into an object that can be summarized, classified, and analyzed, while giving less attention to the fine-grained continuity of residents’ everyday life.

This academic framing also includes a concern with renewal. Some studies examine how traditional streets, water systems, houses, courtyards, and micro-spaces can be activated while continuing a local culture and lifestyle.¹⁸ Other studies shift attention to residents and argue that historic district planning should pay more attention to community rights, living conditions, and local participation.¹⁹ Recent research using spatial syntax turns traditional street networks and public nodes into measurable spatial relationships.²⁰ Although these approaches expand academic narratives beyond formal descriptions, their selection criteria remain largely professional and analytical.

Taken together, academic narratives provide an important basis for value identification. They clarify the historical, spatial, and architectural significance of Xinchang. Yet tradition is often recognized through morphology, spatial order, architectural fabric, planning problems, or technical evidence. This framing supports conservation research and design guidance but may translate everyday practices into professional categories before they become visible as heritage-related concerns.

4.2. Policy, Planning, and Official Promotional Narratives

Policy, planning, and official promotional narratives in Xinchang select what constitutes tradition through governability, communicability, and implementation capacity. They do not solely ask what is historically valuable. They also ask what can be explained to the public, coordinated across departments, linked to development goals, and turned into action. In this sense, official narratives are not merely promotional but operational.

An official brochure presents Xinchang through clear cultural labels, including its salt-related history, water-town landscape, cultural heritage, religious culture, local life, and future development. This structure makes the town legible to visitors and external audiences. The salt culture becomes an origin story. The water town scenery becomes a visual identity. Historic buildings and bridges become heritage assets. The intangible

heritage becomes a resource for activities, education, and cultural consumption. Local life is included but is usually framed in terms of atmosphere, memory, and public image.

The interviews with managers revealed a more critical tension. Government actors recognize Xinchang as a heritage community that includes protected buildings, intangible heritage, folk customs, and the living conditions of original residents. Yet, the same interviews also suggest a hierarchy of governability. Built heritage and intangible heritage enter the management system more easily because they have legal categories, funding channels, and policy support. Commercial activities can also be guided through local rules. In contrast, resident life, informal livelihoods, small-scale maintenance, and everyday habits are harder to translate into stable policy tools.

This creates a hierarchy of policy visibility. Resident life has long been noticed and acknowledged, yet it has rarely become a stable policy instrument or a central strength of heritage management. When resident-oriented renewal enters policy action, it is often absorbed into two logics. One is modernization, which includes housing improvement, infrastructure, accessibility, and daily service circles. The other is conflict management, in which residents' convenience, tourism growth, informal livelihoods, and public order must be balanced. Residents may cede their rights to the market or to vacant properties. Accordingly, policy narratives make tradition actionable; however, their actionability also filters tradition.

4.3. Marketing and Tourism Narratives

The marketing and tourism narratives of Xinchang Ancient Town select what constitutes tradition through visibility, experience, and consumption. Visitor-generated materials from Dianping, Xiaohongshu, and Ctrip repeatedly present Xinchang through old streets, canals, bridges, waterfront houses, lanterns, local snacks, film locations, and walking routes. These elements are easy to recognize, photograph, and remember. They help construct Xinchang as a Jiangnan water town destination for half-day trips, family leisure, city walks, food exploration, and a light cultural experience.

These selected traditions are not necessarily invented or false. Many of them originate from everyday spaces and local practices. Snacks, teahouses, small shops, and waterside streets give visitors a sense of the local atmosphere and the ambiance of daily life (*yanhuoqi*). Yet, these everyday fragments are reorganized into routes, recommendations, check-in points, and consumable experiences. In this process, tradition becomes easier to circulate on social media and easier to transform into products, brands, events, and tourism Intellectual Property (IP). Visitors tend to perceive traditions that they can understand and experience directly. Salt culture is recognized as Xinchang historic foundation. Nonetheless, it is less visible to visitors because salt production no longer exists as a daily practice.

According to footfall data (Figure 2), tourism narratives also reshape the town spatially. The northern section is more often associated with snacks, retail, short visits, and lively street consumption. The middle section appears less strongly in visitor materials and may function more as a transitional area. The southern section is more closely linked with temples, cultural spaces, homestays, creative experiences, and slower forms of consumption. This pattern shows how heritage value translates into spatial and operational strategies.

The key issue is not whether tourism is simply positive or negative. Tourism can bring visibility, capital, and new uses to living heritage. Yet, the tradition that visitors recognize may differ from the tradition that sustains residents' everyday life. Neighborhood services, informal livelihoods, ordinary repairs, and long-term community relationships are less marketable and, therefore, less visible. In this sense, market narratives tend to translate living heritage into experiential heritage.

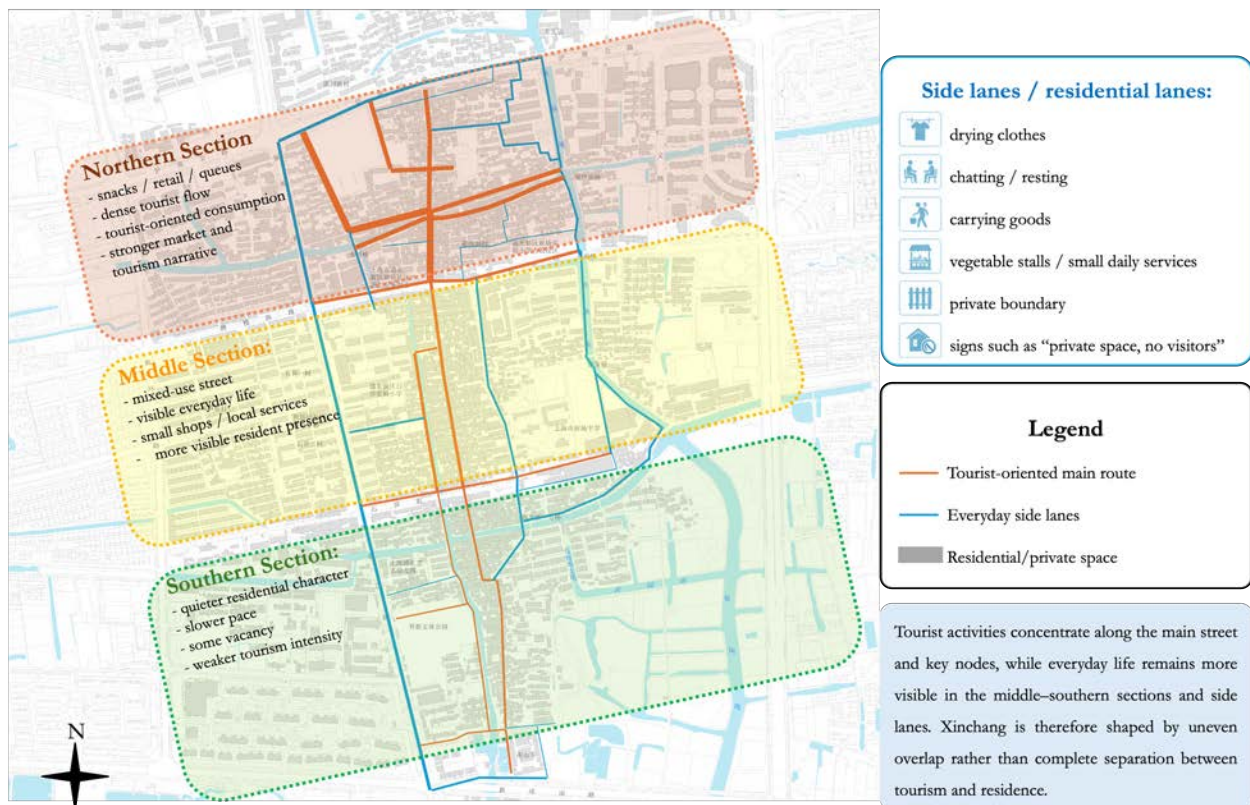


Figure 2: Spatial differentiation of tourist routes and everyday life in Xinchang Ancient Town.

4.4. Resident-Oriented Narratives

Resident-oriented narratives select what counts as tradition through the conditions that allow everyday life to continue. This section does not treat residents as homogeneous groups. It draws on field observations,

resident-focused studies, management interviews, and anonymized community survey materials to identify a resident-oriented way of recognizing tradition. From this perspective, tradition is not primarily a visual symbol or a cultural label. It connects to livability, housing repair, everyday services, mobility, livelihood, social relationships, and the boundary between public heritage space and private domestic life.

This perspective shifts the analytical focus from heritage appearance to living conditions. Resident-focused research on Xinchang argues that historic town planning should examine the population's structure, property relationships, housing facilities, public activities, and community services. It also notes that in tourism-led water towns, ordinary services, such as groceries, repair shops, pharmacies, and hair salons, may become marginalized when a town is transformed into an "ancient town." These services are rarely treated as iconic heritage. Yet, they form the everyday infrastructure that enables residents to remain.

Community survey materials further show that residents and resident business operators do not define tradition as a frozen historical image. Some respondents understood Xinchang through ordinary social use, such as meeting friends, eating, chatting by the river, running small shops, or maintaining familiar neighborhood relationships. They did not simply reject commercial activity. Rather, they distinguished between commerce that supports local vitality and commerce that turns a town into a noisy or homogeneous scenic street. Their concerns also focused on small but decisive conditions of living, such as river quality, facility maintenance, damp walls, uneven paving, traffic convenience, and night-time use.

Field observation supports this point. The northern section of Xinchang Street is more strongly shaped by tourist consumption, especially on weekends, when snack queues and visitor flows occupy the main street. In contrast, the middle and southern sections reveal more visible traces of ordinary life, including small shops, vegetable stalls, resting, chatting, drying clothes, carrying goods, and small-scale vending. Side lanes convey how resident life continues behind the tourist-facing main street. Signs such as "private space, no visitors" mark boundaries between heritage as public viewing and the home as private space.

Therefore, resident-oriented narratives do not reject renewal. Better traffic organization, emergency access, delivery access, housing facilities, and public services may support living continuity. The critical issue is that these practical conditions are less visible than old streets, cultural labels, or touristic experiences. Resident-oriented analyses remind us that a living heritage depends not only on preserving what can be displayed but also on sustaining the ordinary spatial and social conditions that allow people to stay.

4.5. Summary

NARRATIVE ARENA	SELECTED ELEMENTS	SELECTION CRITERIA	NARRATIVE FRAMING	PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
ACADEMIC NARRATIVES	Historical evolution, water systems, street patterns, architectural fabric, waterfront spaces, settlement morphology, cultural value	Historical value, spatial morphology, typological significance, scholarly legibility	Tradition as historical-spatial evidence and cultural type	Supports value identification, conservation research, design guidance, and spatial protection; may translate everyday lives into professional categories
POLICY, PLANNING, AND OFFICIAL PROMOTION NARRATIVES	Salt culture, water-town image, tangible heritage, intangible heritage, cultural labels, development zones, business guidance, living environment	Governability, communicability, policy support, implementation capacity, coordination potential	Tradition as an actionable governance object and public cultural resource	Supports zoning, management, public communication, cultural branding, tourism governance, and renewal programs; resident life is recognized but often enters policy as modernization or conflict management
MARKET AND TOURISTIC NARRATIVES	Old streets, canals, bridges, waterfront houses, lanterns, snacks, teahouses, shops, film locations, citywalk routes, homestays, cultural experiences	Visual recognizability, emotional appeal, visitor experience, commercial potential, social media circulation	Tradition as scenic atmosphere, consumable experience, and tourism IP	Supports branding, check-in routes, food consumption, cultural products, and experiential tourism; may translate a living heritage into experiential heritage
RESIDENT-ORIENTED NARRATIVES	Housing repair, daily services, small shops, vegetable stalls, mobility, informal livelihood, neighborhood relationships, side lanes, private domestic boundaries	Livability, usability, convenience, livelihood continuity, everyday maintenance, right to remain	Tradition as the practical conditions that allow ordinary life to continue	Supports attention to housing, public services, accessibility, everyday infrastructure, community benefit, and private-life boundaries; reminds conservation to protect living conditions, not just visible heritage images

Table 2: Comparison of tradition selection across four narrative arenas.

This comparison shows that the four narrative arenas differ not only in what they describe, but also in how they make tradition recognizable, actionable, consumable, or livable. This matters because living heritage protection is not only a matter of preserving more heritage content. It also requires attention to the criteria through which tradition is selected and prioritized. When certain forms of tradition are easier to classify,

govern, brand, or consume, they are likelier to become central to conservation and renewal. Ordinary practices that sustain everyday continuity may remain less visible.

5. DISCUSSION: FROM NARRATIVE DIFFERENCES TO LIVING HERITAGE PROTECTION

The comparison of the four narrative arenas shows that the problem is not simply that various actors describe Xinchang Ancient Town in varied ways. The deeper issue is that each narrative makes certain forms of tradition more visible, usable, and influential. Academic narratives make tradition legible. Policy narratives make it actionable. Market narratives make it experiential. Resident-oriented narratives point to tradition as a set of conditions that make ordinary life possible.

Thus, comparative narrative analysis is not merely a descriptive method. It is also a diagnostic tool for protecting a living heritage. It helps identify which traditions become dominant because they are easier to classify, govern, brand, or consume. It also reveals which everyday traditions remain weakly represented because they are ordinary, informal, fragmented, or difficult to convert into stable policy and market forms. The key issue is not the absence of living traditions. Xinchang still contains daily services, resident mobility, small-scale livelihoods, house repair, local routines, and domestic boundaries. The issue is their unequal convertibility into academic knowledge, policy instruments, and touristic experiences.

This unequal convertibility is central to the selective formation of tradition. Water systems, historic streets, architectural fabrics, and cultural labels can be surveyed, mapped, classified, and interpreted. They can become planning objects, exhibition themes, promotional images, or tourist routes. Conversely, a small repair shop, a vegetable stall, an informal vending practice, a neighborly relationship, or a resident's need to keep tourists away from a private doorway may be essential to everyday continuity; however, these elements are harder to turn into heritage categories, funding items, or visitor products. They are not necessarily ignored. Resident life has long been noticed and acknowledged in Xinchang-related planning discussions and management interviews. Yet, it has not easily become the central strength of heritage management. It often enters policy through the language of modernization, order maintenance, or social coordination rather than as a heritage-related value.

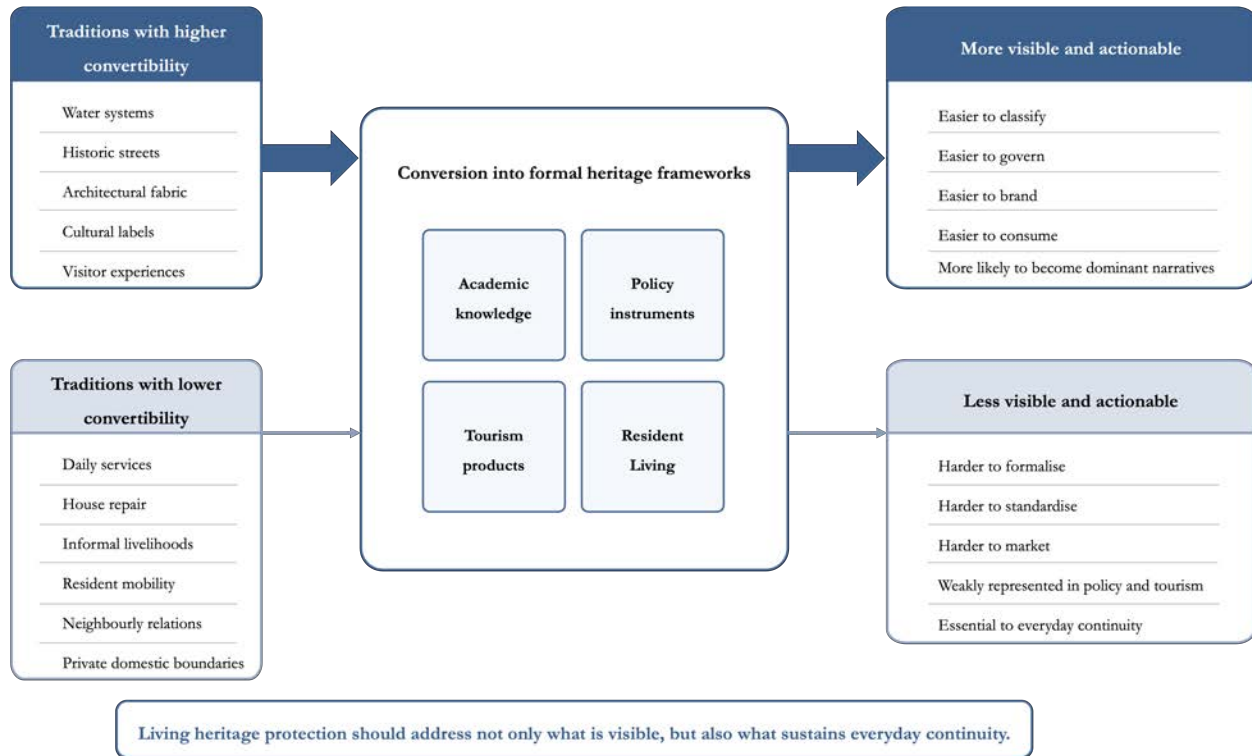


Figure 3: Unequal convertibility of tradition.

This point also explains the limits of simply calling for more “living heritage” protection. If living heritage is understood only as a continuation of cultural expressions or the presence of local residents, the concept remains too general. The more difficult question is how everyday continuity can become a criterion for conservation and renewal. A resident-oriented approach should not be added after heritage-related value has already been defined. It should be part of how the value of living heritage is defined. Ordinary services, small-scale livelihoods, household adaptation, repair capacity, access, affordability, and private-life boundaries should not be treated as secondary social issues. They should be regarded as part of the infrastructure of a living heritage.

The same argument applies to tourism and renewal. Tourism is not simply a threat to authenticity. It can bring attention, capital, and new uses to historic buildings and streets. However, tourism tends to favor traditions that are immediately recognizable and experientially accessible. Salt culture may be historically central to Xinchang; nevertheless, it is not easy for visitors to perceive when salt production no longer exists as a living practice. Visitors more easily understand what they can see, taste, photograph, or experience. This does not make tourism narratives false. This means that they translate a living heritage into an experiential heritage. The risk is that the town becomes lively for visitors, while becoming less supportive of the everyday practices that made it living in the first place.

The implication for Xinchang is that living heritage governance should rebalance selection criteria rather than simply add more heritage content. Conservation should continue to protect water town morphology, historic buildings, and cultural resources. Policy should continue to provide tools for implementation. Tourism can continue to activate spaces and support cultural transmission. Yet these logics should be evaluated against a further question: Do they help sustain the town as a livable heritage community? This question shifts attention from the image of tradition to the conditions of continuity. It asks whether residents can maintain houses, access daily services, move through the town, benefit from development, protect domestic boundaries, and participate in change without being reduced to ambience.

In this sense, the future of Xinchang does not depend only on preserving the image of a Jiangnan water town. It depends on whether the town can maintain its capacity to be lived in, repaired, adapted, and socially reproduced. Comparative narrative analysis shows that the most dominant traditions are not always the most essential to living continuity and that the least visible everyday practices may be the very basis of living heritage protection.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how tradition is selected, narrated, and prioritized in Xinchang Ancient Town through academic, policy, market, and resident-oriented narratives. It argues that living heritage protection should not just ask what traditions should be preserved. It should also ask through which criteria certain traditions become recognizable, actionable, consumable, or livable.

The analysis illustrates that living traditions are not absent from Xinchang. Rather, they have unequal convertibility into academic knowledge, policy instruments, and tourism experiences. Traditions that can be classified, governed, branded, or consumed are likelier to become dominant in conservation and renewal. Ordinary practices that sustain everyday continuity may remain weakly represented even when they are central to a town's living character.

Living heritage protection should move beyond definitions of tradition that rely mainly on landscape displays and institutional recognition. It should incorporate the continuous practices of residents' everyday life into both heritage understanding and governance frameworks. For Xinchang, this means that the future of the town depends not only on preserving its Jiangnan water-town image but also on sustaining it as a livable heritage community.

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TRANSLATING HERITAGE AND CULTURAL MEMORY ACROSS TIME

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