

Lanxi Yu Lin Tu Ce: The Key to Solving the Dilemma between Protection and Development of Ancient Cities and Villages

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Abstract

Ancient cities and villages are the most crucial carrier and vivid embodiment of regional culture. Streets, buildings, and cities are the symbols of ancient cities and villages, which are imperative as flesh and blood. History and culture are the connotations, signifying the “spirit” of ancient cities and villages. The protection and development of ancient cities and villages are not only to protect historical sites but also to explore and inherit history and culture when highlighting the characteristics of local cultures. In addition to being a significant content of inheriting and promoting Chinese excellent traditional culture, it’s also vital to advance urban revitalization and rural revitalization.

Keywords

Yu Lin Tu Ce; Ancient Cities and Villages; Protection; Development.

1. Lack of Accurate Ancient Maps & Dilemma of “Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features”

With the strong support of the CPC Central Committee and local governments, a series of achievements have come true in the protection and development of ancient cities and villages in various places, but many problems have also been exposed in the construction. The reconstruction of ancient cities and villages is prevalent and even on the rise. Under the banner of developing tourism economy, some areas imitate ancient buildings indiscriminately without considering or understanding the spatial structure and construction concept of the original region, which destroys the texture of cultural tradition and the connotation of historical memory. Meanwhile, some have caused irreparable regret, running counter to the original intention of protecting ancient cities and villages. Moreover, the reconstruction and homogenization of various places are very serious, obliterating the characteristics of regional culture, which is just a glamorous air castle and gradually forms the phenomenon of “Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features”.

The problem of “Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features” has attracted great attention from the government. In 2021, the No.1 Document of the Central Committee, that is, *Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization, Accelerating Agricultural, and Rural Modernization*, pointed out, “Rural construction should be adapted to local conditions steadily.” It is emphasized that rural construction should retain local characteristics and avoid “Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features”. *Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection and Utilization of Historical and Cultural (Traditional) Villages* put forward by Zhejiang Province clearly stated, “We need to scientifically grasp the differences in regional conditions, cultural characteristics, and resource endowments of villages. At the same time, we should pay attention to the integrity and authenticity of villages, in addition to formulating personalized protection and utilization plans as well as avoiding grafting fabrication and villages

homogeneity, to highlight the Zhejiang characteristics of historical and cultural (traditional) villages.”

However, it is hard to solve the dilemma of “Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features”. Among them, how to truly restore the original historical appearance of ancient cities and villages is the most difficult problem. Restricted by ancient surveying and mapping technology and influenced by traditional ideas, most ancient maps simply outline the landforms of cities and villages, which are neither detailed nor accurate, thus lacking detailed information such as orientation, area, and shape. Due to the lack of traditional literature records, most scholars believe that it is impossible to restore the geographical features of ancient cities and villages in a true, complete, and meticulous way. The insufficiency of accurate ancient maps directly leads to the lack of a blueprint for reference in the current reconstruction project. Therefore, the reconstruction of ancient buildings in most areas is based on the rough description of traditional documents and vague oral legends. Even many of them are fabricated out of thin air, so the homogenization phenomenon is extremely serious.

Every ancient city and village have unique building space embedded with respective history and culture. How to restore the unique historical geographical space of ancient cities and villages? How to rebuild on the basis of preserving cultural charm and historical memory? Particularly, how to avoid repeating the mistakes of homogenization in the past to explore a new path for the protection and development of ancient cities and villages? These are all problems that must be urgently considered and solved.

2. Yu Lin Tu Ce: The Key to Solving the Dilemma between Protection and Development of Ancient Cities and Villages

In addition to the traditional four (subset of classics and history) documents, there is a precious cadastral file in China, Yu Lin Tu Ce, which has been kept secret for a long time in the warehouse of archives. Recently, it has gradually entered the researchers’ vision. The so-called Yu Lin Tu Ce is a land book compiled by the government for collecting taxes since the Southern Song Dynasty. In addition to listing the fields in font size, it indicates the land type, name, grade, four directions, shape, area, business name, and address, and publishes the tax grain and real estate division. The natural attributes and socio-economic information of the fields are recorded in the book, which is named after the arrangement of the painted figures like fish scales (Yu Lin).

Zhao Gang, a famous Chinese-American historian, once commented, “I think the Yu Lin Tu Ce in the Ming and Qing Dynasties is the most thorough and meticulous archival record of government cadastral management in human history (before the advent of the computer age), and no similar archival material can be found in any country except China.” Yu Lin Tu Ce represents the highest level of cadastral management in the world at that time, which is known as “the miracle in the history of cadastral compilation in the world”. At present, a series of studies around the Yu Lin Tu Ce are mainly concentrated in the field of history, which is used to study ancient tax and service systems, land management, grass-roots organizations, and other academic issues, paying little attention to its practical application value.

By studying historical documents and analyzing text information, the author finds that Yu Lin Tu Ce has unique value and practical significance for the protection and development of ancient cities and villages, taking the county as the fabrication unit. The county has more than one million plots, so its fabrication needs a scientific and strict system. Before compiling the Yu Lin Tu Ce, the book (its fabricator in the ancient time) usually needs to draw the “General Map of Yu Lin (fish scales)” to ensure the unique number, accurate orientation, and specific shape of each piece of land, so as not to be confused. Apart from drawing the shape, location, and size of each land piece in mountainous or ponds in various regions of the county, the General Map of Yu Lin (fish scale) also draws mountains, rivers, streets, temples, docks, and other information.

It is undoubtedly the most detailed map in ancient times, which can be used as a blueprint for the reconstruction of ancient cities and villages, thus solving the dilemma of Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features to highlight the unique geographical space embedded with respective history and culture of various places.

3. Restoration of the General Map of Yu Lin & New Ideas of Protection and Development of Ancient Cities and Villages

Unfortunately, after wars and natural disasters, most of the General Map of Yu Lin attached to the front of these Yu Lin Tu Ce have disappeared into the dust of history. Books have passed away and their general maps have disappeared. After more than 100 years of changes in cities and villages, many changes have taken place in landforms. It is really difficult to put together thousands of General Maps of Yu Lin scattered in the Yu Lin Tu Ce and accurately correspond to the positions of buildings and place names, in reality, to scientifically restore the ancient General Map of Yu Lin. There are no successful cases in academia and no path for reference, which requires us to constantly explore.

We carefully read the text of Yu Lin Tu Ce and repeatedly study the plot number, four directions, plot shape, and other information. The ancient city and village of Lanxi, where the ancient buildings are relatively well preserved, were selected for an on-the-spot investigation. Meanwhile, various methods were tried. Through literature research, data analysis, field investigation, character interview, and geographical simulation, it took four years to initially put together more than 3,000 fine maps of ancient Lanxi, scientifically restoring the General Map of Yu Lin.

This is the finest and most reliable ancient map formed by using Yu Lin Tu Ce for the first time at home and abroad. Overcoming the problem that the previous academia could not accurately restore the historical and geographical space of ancient cities and villages, it provides the most reliable blueprint for the protection and development of ancient cities and villages, and makes the reconstruction project stand the fastidious history, thus solving the difficulties encountered in the protection and development of ancient cities and villages. It's also a unique exploration in Zhejiang for creating a new development pattern of "Endless Cities and Villages with Unique Features". Therefore, our work has important theoretical value and practical significance.

i. Yu Lin Tu Ce was successfully restored for the first time, which truly restored the historical and geographical space of ancient cities and villages and provided the most reliable blueprint for their protection and development. According to the archives of Yu Lin Tu Ce, through literature research and field investigation, we clarify place names, directions, shapes, and other information as well as correct the mistakes in naming places today. Combining the knowledge of history, geography, philology, philology, and other disciplines via modern information technology, the Yu Lin Tu Ce of Lanxi City Square in the Qing Dynasty was successfully restored, which truly reproduced the historical and geographical space of Lanxi Ancient City more than 150 years ago and provided the most reliable blueprint for the ongoing reconstruction of the ancient city.

ii. According to the order of making up the Yu Lin Tu Ce, a unique new cultural tourism route is created. Based on the restored Yu Lin Tu Ce, we designed a unique new cultural tourism route for Lanxi Ancient City, that is, Yu Lin Tu Ce Cultural Tourism Route. Compared with the original tourist route, according to the order of making up the Yu Lin Tu Ce of Lanxi in the Qing Dynasty, from one square to ten square, the historical sites such as academies, temples, streets, shops, and docks in Lanxi Ancient City are connected in series, so that visitors can find those remaining or disappeared civilizations purposefully and directionally in their visits. We also connect the Yu Lin Tu Ce in their hands with the green flag road they have walked through, to feel the ancient and modern charm of Lanxi and experience its historical changes. This will

promote the deep integration of traditional culture and modern tourism, accelerating the revitalization of ancient cities.

iii. Precious archives of Yu Lin Tu Ce are developed and cultural exhibition halls with local characteristics are created. Yu Lin Tu Ce is the representative of Chinese excellent traditional culture. However, the world knows little about its important cultural value due to its long-term secret storage in archives. Therefore, we suggested and assisted Jinhua Archives to design the first exhibition hall of Yu Lin Tu Ce in Wuzhou Yu Lin Tu Ce Exhibition Hall in China, so that Yu Lin Tu Ce can be known by more people. At the same time, we put forward the suggestion of using historical documents such as Yu Lin Tu Ce to create local characteristic culture exhibition halls in rural areas, to highlight local characteristic culture, reproduce the ancient building space and historical changes of ancient villages, and inject cultural vitality into urban revitalization and rural revitalization.

4. Conclusion

History and culture are the “soul” and “spirit” of ancient cities and villages. All the reconstruction of ancient cities and villages that ignore cultural characteristics are just castles in the air. However, due to the lack of accurate ancient maps as a reference blueprint, the reconstruction of ancient cities and villages can only be based on modern people’s imagination, which exposes problems such as serious homogenization and insufficient depth of cultural excavation, gradually forming the phenomenon of Endless Cities and Villages with the Same Features. How to retain the “rural soul”, preserve the original taste of ancient cities and villages, and create a new development pattern of Endless Cities and Villages with Unique Features has become an urgent problem to be considered and solved in the current urban revitalization and rural revitalization.

Adhering to a strong sense of social responsibility and mission, we searched up and down and found that Yu Lin Tu Ce, as the finest cadastral file in ancient times, is just the key to solving this problem. By restoring the General Map of Yu Lin, we can fully restore its historical geographical space, further understand the local historical documents, and show the “soul” and “spirit” of ancient cities and villages. During the period, the research group sorted out literature, such as Yu Lin Tu Ce, local chronicles, genealogy, and other documents. With Yu Lin Tu Ce on hand, we went deep into the fields many times and inspected more than 1,000 places in Lanxi Ancient City and Siping Ancient Village. Through full theoretical exploration and field investigation, we spent nearly two years finally breaking through the limitations of traditional research. For the first time, modern information technologies such as GPS and GIS were used to combine fine maps in Yu Lin Tu Ce. Moreover, the General Map of Yu Lin in Lanxi City Square (3892 pieces) and Sipingzhuang (3629 pieces) in the late Qing Dynasty was successfully restored, which reproduced the historical and geographical space a hundred years ago. Besides, its achievements are applied to the protection and development of ancient cities and villages at present, making a unique exploration in Zhejiang.

At the same time, we assisted Jinhua Archives in designing and creating the first exhibition hall of Yu Lin Tu Ce in China and assisted it in compiling a large-scale literature series “Tangxi Yu Lin Tu Ce Collection”, contributing to the protection and inheritance of Yu Lin Tu Ce.

It is hoped that through our unremitting efforts, we will awaken those “sleeping” documents, make precious cultural heritage shine brightly in the new era, and awaken “all the words written in ancient books”. Furthermore, we will promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese civilization, activating its vitality. At the same time, I also hope to attract more institutions and individuals to participate in the protection of ancient cities and villages, retain the precious “rural soul”, and inject cultural vitality into the protection and development of ancient cities and villages and rural revitalization!

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