

# “Protection” or “Destruction”: Taking the Cultural Heritage Protection of the Grand Canal in Huaxian and Xunxian Sections of Henan Province as Example

Yue Sun, Yuan Wang

**Abstract**—The Grand Canal of China has been in use for more than two thousand years. It runs through the central and eastern regions of China and communicates with the five major river systems of Haihe River, Yellow River, Huaihe River, Yangtze River and Qiantang River from north to south. It is a complex, systematic and comprehensive water conservancy project in the period of agricultural civilization and includes the three parts of the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal, the Sui and Tang Dynasties Canal and the Eastern Zhejiang Canal. It covers eight provinces and cities including Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Henan and Anhui. The Grand Canal is an important channel connecting the Central Plains and the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal, and it is also an important waterway trade channel. Nowadays, although the Grand Canal no longer bears the burden of communicating water transportation between the north and the south, the site of the Grand Canal is still a “historical museum” of the lifestyle of people who lived on the canal from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republic of China. By means of literature reading and field investigation, this paper compares the different protection strategies of the Grand Canal in the region between the ancient villages of Huaxian and Xunxian, which witness the vicissitudes of canal water transport, to explore whether the protective renovation of historical and cultural routes is “protection” or “destruction”, and puts forward some protection suggestions.

**Keywords**—The Grand Canal, heritage conservation, cultural route, ancient villages, strategies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to records, after the Sui Dynasty, the Weihe waterway from Baiquan to Tianjin was “full of sails”. Three million people’s boats were sailing smoothly on all sides, grain was transported from the south to the north, and goods were transported from the south to the south. The superior water transport conditions of the Grand Canal gave birth to the economic and cultural prosperity of the ancient towns of Daokou and Xunxian. From the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republic of China, merchants gathered, trade flourished, and the ancient towns of Daokou and Xunxian became known as a bright pearl along the canal. The blending of economy and culture in the north and south not only promoted the prosperity and development of the local economy, but also gave birth to a rich and unique canal culture. In the 1970s, with the rise of modern industry and the development of transportation modes, the traditional transportation function of the Grand Canal shrank, the

widespread water shortage, river silting, pollution, ecological damage, and even the subsequent repeated renovations and coastal development have caused serious damage to the river. Eventually, with the gradual depression of the Weihe shipping industry, navigation was gradually stopped in the late 1970s. In the past, many businesses and shops along the canal were empty or even disappeared. The scenes of life in the canal, which are lined with wharfs, adjacent to ancient houses, and continuous shops, have become a thing of the past [1].

The Grand Canal carries a long history, leaving a large number of material and intangible cultural heritage, enriching the history of Chinese canals. Huaxian and Xunxian are located at the joint of the canal water transport, and are important ports for economic exchanges between the north and the south. Both ancient villages were born along the river and served the river. However, as the Grand Canal no longer bears the burden of communicating water transportation between the north and south, the two ancient villages changed from prosperity to decline, but they remain as a well-preserved museum showing the prosperity of the canal. This paper mainly discusses the protection strategies of the “Canal Heritage” by comparing the different restoration methods adopted by the adjacent Huaxian and Xunxian for canal monuments in the region.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

At present in the world, there is no clear theoretical system for the “Canal Heritage Protection”, the related research on cultural routes is still in the exploratory stage, and the research on the Canal Heritage is also in the initial stage. The concept of “Heritage Canal” was proposed at the 1994 Canadian Heritage Canal Conference. The document “Heritage Canal Document” fully affirmed the status of “Heritage Canal” in “Cultural Heritage” [2]. In the same year, the Expert Meeting on World Heritage of Cultural Lines was held in Madrid. Since then, the heritage of Cultural Lines has become a new hotspot of international culture. In 1998, the Tenerife Conference of Spain which was convened by the International Council of Monuments and Sites began a systematic study of cultural routes. The Madrid Consensus of 2002 clarified the value of cultural routes for the first time. In 2003, the World Heritage Committee, in its Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, stressed that cultural routes represent people’s migration and movement, represent people’s interaction within or between countries and regions within a certain period of time, and represent the reciprocity and

Yue Sun is with the Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China (e-mail: anyangsunyue@163.com).

continuous exchange of multi-dimensional goods, ideas, knowledge and values; and represents the communication and mutual nourishment of the resulting culture in space and time; these nourishments have been constantly reflected through material and intangible heritage for a long time [3]. At the 15<sup>th</sup> International Council of Monuments and Sites held in Xi'an in

2005, the "Cultural Route" and its related linear cultural heritage received great attention. In 2006, a meeting of the Scientific Committee on Cultural Lines was held in Paris to discuss the protection of a series of linear cultural heritage, including the Silk Road, the Indian River Exchange Line and the Greek Ocean Line [4].

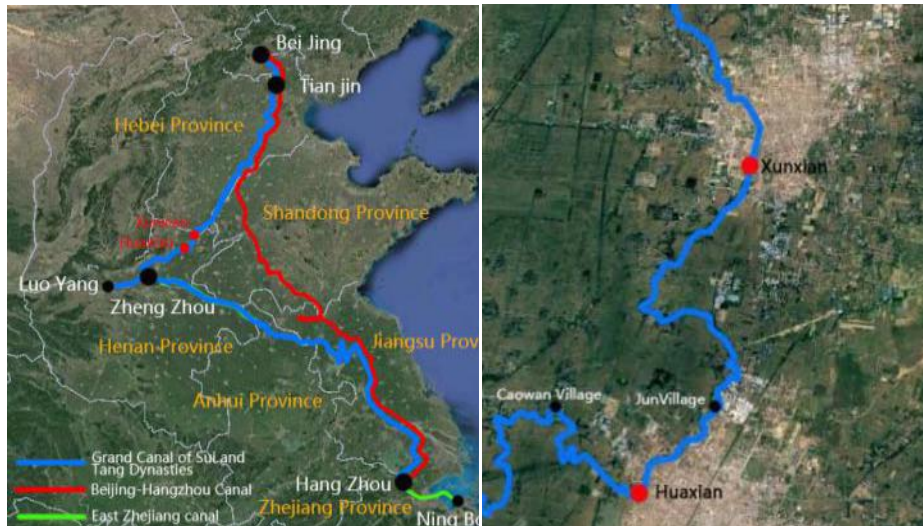


Fig. 1 The Composition of the Grand Canal in China and the Position of Huaxian and Xunxian in the Grand Canal

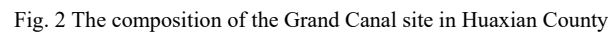
Domestic research mainly focuses on the theory and practice of archaeology, protection and utilization of the canal. In 2009, Shan Jixiang pointed out that as a cultural heritage system and a collection of cultural heritage resources, cultural routes have their own contact structure, network texture, ecological environment and impact scope, rather than simply as a series of isolated cultural routes or sites [5]. The 4<sup>th</sup> Wuxi Forum on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in China was held in 2010, with the theme of "Scientific Protection of Cultural Route Heritage", published the "Wuxi Initiative on the Protection of Cultural Line Heritage". The initiative clearly points out that the heritage of cultural routes includes the main body and its subsidiary facilities with specific functions such as water transport, post, commerce, religion and migration, as well as the relevant historical environment and landscape, movable culture, intangible cultural heritage, etc. [6]. In 2012, Li Denan, aiming at the great difference in the status quo of the canal preservation, focused on the "authenticity" and "integrity" of the cultural heritage of the canal, carried out a multi-disciplinary approach, restored its evolution process, analyzed its heritage value, and improved the evaluation, protection and management system of the heritage [7]. There are also special studies on a section of the Grand Canal, such as Gao Wanfei's combination of the canal and the city to explore the protection

of large-scale linear cultural heritage. Taking the Zhejiang section as an example, Li Peiyang studied the formation, development, function and form of the canal settlement. Based on the general characteristics of the canal settlement, the general method of the canal settlement protection planning was discussed [8].

### III. COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT PROTECTION MEASURES FOR THE GRAND CANAL IN HUAXIAN AND XUNXIAN

#### A. Introduction to Huaxian, Henan Province

Huaxian County, directly under the jurisdiction of Henan Province, is located in the northern of Henan Province, bordering Puyang, Anyang, Hebi and Xinxiang. The county covers an area of 1,814 km<sup>2</sup> and has an area of 1,140 million km<sup>2</sup> of cultivated land. It administers one new district, 12 towns, 10 townships, 1019 administrative villages, with a total population of 1.24 million, of which 103,000 are farmers. It is an ancient civilized town with a long history of more than 1,000 years. Daokou Town is the political, economic and cultural center of Huaxian, where the county committee and government are located. Daokou was once famous for its Grand Canal and is now known for its "dragon-burning chicken".



The Huaxian Section of the Grand Canal (Yongji Canal) is now called Weihe River and located in the north of Henan Province. It enters Huaxian from Caowan Village of Xunxian to the east, and returns to Xunxian through Qiaoshang Village of Daokou. Daokou is located in the northwest corner of Huaxian, on the golden dike of the ancient Yellow River. There is a saying that the ancient town of Daokou prospers and declines due to the canal, which shows that the development of towns is closely related to the Grand Canal, which runs from south to north, with a total length of 8,240 meters. Existing cultural relics include the canal channels, wharf, sluice, the ancient city walls of Daokou, Shun Henan Street, Shun Hebei Street, Dawang Temple, etc. The Grand Canal of the Huaxian Section is mainly composed of two ancient streets, Shun Henan Ancient Street and Shun Hebei Ancient Street. It is a well-preserved community of northern residential buildings in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Most of the existing buildings are street shops and ancient residential buildings.

The street was built along the Weihe River from the north to south is about 3,000 meters long, and so it is called Shunhe Street. The cross street at the intersection of Shunhe Street and Daji Street divides it into two: the south of the cross street is called Shun Henan Street and the north is called Shun Hebei Street. In addition, there are 16 old alleys (Hutong), two ancient temples, one old exchange shop and one store selling textiles.

Thirdly, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of the first lunar month of each year, Daokou holds the Fire Temple Fair, where actors and



actresses with painted opera faces and costumes conduct various forms of performances, and includes stilts walkers, pavilions, dragon dance, lion dance, Wushu, Bagua swing, bamboo horse, Yangko, Picked flower baskets, Flower boats and other forms of performance. Each team has to walk into the

ancient street from this archway, but the height of the archway makes it difficult for the stilts walkers and the pavilions to enter, and the width makes it difficult for the equipment vehicle difficult to follow the performers.



Fig. 3 Fire God Temple Fair

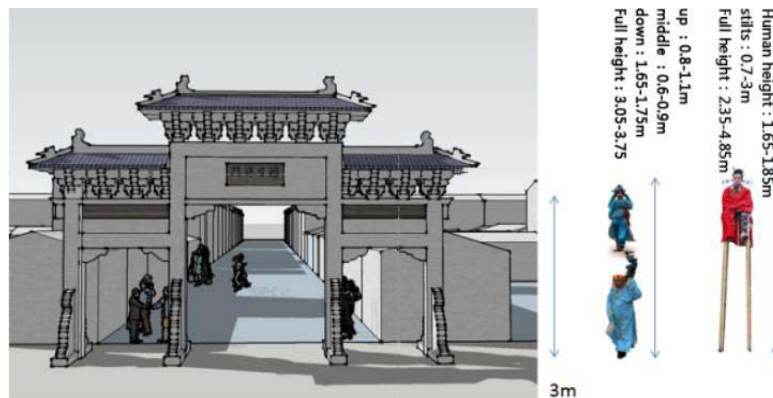


Fig. 4 High contrast between stilts and arches

## 2. Residential

The forms of residences are various. The first is “Sanheyuan” or “Siheyuan”, which is the house for the wealthy residents. The representative houses are Leijia Courtyard, Jinshang Courtyard, Yuanjia Courtyard, and Zhoujia Courtyard. The second is “Dazayuan” for which the layout is relatively free, mostly for the common use of several households, and houses are arranged freely according to the needs of the head of each household. However, most of these families are related by blood or kinship. These properties are located in historic and cultural protected areas where all renovation works are strictly regulated, so that the building community can remain the original state and people's lifestyle has changed little. However, with the long years out of repair, the houses are serious damaged.

The third is the residential house with front commercial. This kind of dwelling is mostly distributed along the street, and most of them are home rich merchants and wealthy landlord. This kind of courtyard is arranged in a regular fashion and in good condition. Nowadays, through renovations, the facade styles of such buildings are unified, but have lost their historical

“originality”.

## 3. Commerce

Business is mostly distributed along the Shunhe Street and Daji Street. Each shop is 3-5 rooms wide and about 4 meters deep, wooden columns and slab doors. Users of single-storey shops will separate the interior into the first half for the commercial space and the second half for the living space; users of multi-storey shops will separate the interior into the bottom business space and the above living space. Now that they have been trimmed, the facade has been unified.

One of the most representative commercial spaces is the old teahouse of Mrs. Liu, which has a history dating back hundreds of years. It is a wooden structure and the existing stone staircases on the upper and second floors were built later. Now the bottom floor is rented to sell ancient brown sugar, and the second floor is still used as a teahouse. It maintains the original mode of business, the people can come here to drink tea and listen to stories.

The other is the old roast chicken shop of the “Yixing Zhang”, which has a history of more than 300 years. It is said

that “Daokou Roast Chicken” was originated by Zhang Bing in the Qing Dynasty. It became a tribute after the Jiaqing Emperor tasted, and then shipped it to all parts of China because of the developed shipping. Although it is no longer used as a roast chicken shop, it remains as the historical witness to the rise and fall of “Yixing Zhang Daokou Roast Chicken”.



Fig. 5 Ancient Street and the Old Teahouse of Mrs. Liu

#### 4. Temples

There are two temples in the area. One is “Bixia Yuanjun Temple”, located in the middle of the ancient street; however, it is not considered as important as other temples and therefore will

not be discussed here. The other is the “Dawang Temple”, located on the edge of the Weihe River, which is dedicated to five ancient sages related to water control in China's history. Originally there were more than 30 temples of different sizes, which were destroyed during the “Cultural Revolution”, leaving only the main hall. At present, all the buildings in this area have been renovated and rebuilt, the surrounding environment and landscape have been redesigned and the appearance has been greatly changed.

Although the “Fire God Temple” is not located in the protected area, it is the most important temple in the hearts of the Daokou people. Every year, Daokou hosts an ancient folk cultural activity on January 27, 28, and 29, called the “Fire Temple Fair”. In ancient times, in order to avoid fires, people sacrificed the god of fire in this way, expressing the good wishes of the working people to ward off evil and disaster. Although hundreds of years have passed, it is no longer necessary to entertain the gods, but the “Fire Temple” has been preserved as an intangible cultural heritage.



Fig. 6 Before and after the renovation of the “Fire God Temple”

#### C. Introduction of Xunxian, Henan Province

Xunxian County is located in the north of Henan Province, which belongs to Hebi City. It administers one village, six towns, and 452 administrative hamlets. The county covers an area of 966 km<sup>2</sup> and has a cultivated land of 717 million km<sup>2</sup>.

#### D. Protection of the Grand Canal: Xunxian Section

The entire length of the Xunxian section of the Grand Canal is 71.1 km, which runs through the north and south of Xunxian County. As an important part of the Grand Canal, Xunxian played an important role in the history of China, especially in the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Three Kingdoms, and the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The canal in Xunxian County was called Baigou in the Han Dynasty, the Yongji Canal in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Yuhe River in the Song Dynasty, and the Wei River in the Ming Dynasty. The Xunxian section of the Grand Canal, including the Weihe River, is the site of Fang Chengyan, Yunxi Bridge, the ancient city, the cultural landscape of Dapi Mountain, and Liyang Canal. It is a relic for the study of the Grand Canal in Sui and Tang Dynasties.

##### 1. Yunxi Bridge

Located outside the west gate of Xunxian, Yunxi Bridge is one of the two remaining ancient bridges on the Weihe River

section of the Grand Canal in ancient China. Its repair work will be restored in accordance with the rule of “not changing the original state of the cultural relics”. The main work includes strengthening the bridge body, repairing the irregular bridge deck, and restoring the bluestone pillar column, etc. Modern buildings and illegal buildings along the bridge were demolished, and the population living inside was moved elsewhere. As a complete object preserved on the Grand Canal, Yunxi Bridge provides valuable material for the study of the history, development and changes of the Grand Canal.

##### 2. Ancient City

The ancient city of Xunxian includes the city wall, county government office, city gate, ancient street, Chenghuang Temple and so on, all of which are the key points of the reconstruction of the ancient city. The city walls and county government office at the entrance have been repaired and protected to maintain their original appearance. On the basis of the present situation, the city gate added a three-rooms wide and two-floors high observatory. The transformation of West Street is the largest, a large number of buildings have been demolished and rebuilt so that they lost their charm of the past. The East Gate, which was rebuilt in the middle, separated West Street from East Street. East Street in the latter half maintains

its original appearance.



Fig. 7 The composition of the Grand Canal site in Xunxian County



Fig. 8 Ancient Street



Fig. 9 Ancient City Gate

### 3. The cultural landscape of Dapi Mountain

The Dapi Mountain cultural landscape is divided into East and West mountains by a street, East Mountain is called Dapi Mountain, and West Mountain is called Fuqiu Mountain. It is famous for the stone Buddha which is the earliest in China and largest in north China. The stone Buddha was built in the Northern Wei Dynasty and was excavated by the mountain. It is 26.7 meters high and is hidden in the building with a height of 23.3 meters. There are seven Buddhist temples, eight pavilions, six grottoes, 138 ancient buildings and more than 460 inscriptions existing on the Dapi Mountain. Every year, New year's Eve (Shou sui), the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month (temple fair), and the 25<sup>th</sup> of May (the birthday of Xishan's mother), a large number of believers will come to Dapi Mountain to pray for the protection of the gods. Usually, local residents will come to the mountains for physical exercise and leisure.



Fig. 10 Mountain Gate and Temple in Dapi Mountain Scenic Area

## IV. PROTECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

By comparing the protection and transformation of the Huaxian and Xunxian Grand Canals, the following recommendations for protection and transformation are proposed:

- (1) Overall planning: Comparing the different protection measures of two adjacent ancient villages, it was found that because of the lack of overall planning for the Grand Canal, the protection measures for the canal in each region are independent. Nowadays, for the protection of the Grand Canal, we should establish a complete heritage protection plan, formulate guidelines, policies and transformation direction to make the ruins of the Grand Canal line present a unified appearance. At the same time, it will allow some room for change, so that each place can flexibly adapt according to its own regional culture and show its own characteristics.
- (2) Grading construction: Graded construction is carried out according to the importance of the canal sites. Priority protection and restoration planning should be given the sites listed on the World Heritage List, and then the scope of protection and restoration should be extended to important corridors, towns and ports that are not included in the list.
- (3) Expanding the scope of protection: We should not only protect the material cultural heritage of the canal section, but also pay attention to the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Firstly, only protecting the site itself will



make the sites become an isolated existence. The scope of the protection and transformation should be extended to the periphery of the sites to make them connected. Secondly, intangible cultural heritage resulting from the canal, such as the “temple fair”, “Daokou Roast Chicken”, and “Shousui”, are also important components of the collective memory of the local people and cannot be ignored.

- (4) Do not care for one thing and lose sight of another: The protection of Canal Ancient Street in both places focuses on the street-facing buildings, but neglects the large number of historic residential. These housing are neither reasonably protected nor allowed to be privately rebuilt by the users, which not only causes inconvenience to users, but also makes the old urban synonymous with poverty and backwardness. The related intangible cultural heritage, such as the manufacturing technology of “Daokou Roast Chicken” and the clothing, makeup, props of “Temple Fair” will gradually disappear as time goes by.

#### V.CONCLUSION AND QUESTION

Huaxian and Xunxian have adopted different restoration methods for the Grand Canal ruins in the region. In Huaxian District, the old buildings along the street are renovated to a unified appearance. Most of the Aborigines still live here to maintain their original livelihood. However, Xunxian section adopts different restoration methods, the buildings of West Street are basically new-built; the ancient buildings of East Street are renovated and strengthened without changing the appearance of the building itself; all the modern buildings around the ancient city have been demolished, and the people living in them have been moved. The demolition scope covers more than 40 households, more than 120 houses, and the demolition area is more than 6,700 m<sup>2</sup>. The two different restoration methods are based on two different purposes. Huaxian County hopes that the reconstruction of the canal ruins will drive the development of the local tourism. But similar results have been achieved by different modification measures, which are full of people on holidays and nobody on weekdays. Most of the scenes that can show the life of people living by water in ancient times are invisible.

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