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*Original*

An analysis framework for studying Chinese urban heritage area / Zhang, Ting. - ELETTRONICO. - (2022). ( The 3rd International Conference on Urban Engineering and Management Science Wuhan (CHI) 21-23 January 2022).

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2955476 since: 2022-02-16T09:38:44Z

*Publisher:*

CRC Press / Balkema – Taylor & Francis Group

*Published*

DOI:

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# An analysis framework for studying Chinese urban heritage area

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last decades, Chinese cities have experienced a dramatic development process, which caused many convergence urban phenomena, such as urban heritage space, gentrification, etc. A large number of similar spaces has led to a lack of vitality in some urban heritage areas. Addressing this problem, this study examines how similarities of space organization these areas through heritage-commerce-leisure. Different from previous studies that focus on a single element, this study concerns about heritage-commerce-leisure as a whole through a lens of space organization. Drawing upon two case areas in diverse urban context, it investigates the organization of heritage space by proposing an analytical framework. The analysis reveals that how the urban heritage area is transformed under the same formula. This study also provides virtual materials for understanding similarities of heritage space.

**KEYWORDS:** historical area; analysis framework; urban China.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

After decades of urban regeneration, today's urban heritage areas in China are described as "historical feature areas", which has experienced a process of transforming from a residential area to a hybrid area among heritage, commerce and leisure. The municipality participates in the whole process make the process more streamlined, from the repossession of the land from the natives to sell land use rights to the developer, and then developer has absolute planning power over the area (Ren,2008). The development of urban heritage projects often carries cultural significance. The local government has adopted from the traditional methods-subsidies or tax cuts to attract developers to more creative methods, such as the use of landmarks to create urban cultural brand projects. The same management model has made the heritage areas in contemporary cities begin to converge in heritage-leisure-commerce. These three elements interacted each other, which influences the space production of urban heritage area.

China's urban renewal in recent decades can be roughly divided into two processes (Ren,2020). The first stage is from 1990s to 2000s. The city is quickly demolished and rarely considers the concept of historical conservation. The second stage was after the 2000s, due to the gradual improvement of the concept of urban development, the government and developers gradually realized the role of historical buildings in the leisure industry and urban cultural image. Many historical buildings were preserved under this period. Therefore, the Chinese heritage concept can be understood as a process from demolition to protection (Ludwig&Walton,2020), as state and local government want to use heritage as a driven force to get economic and political goal (Svensson,2016; Zhu&Maags,2020). This process causes the "fever heritage" in urban China (Zhu,2018). In contemporary urban China, many historical areas are facing the homogeneous problem, which led to the decline of leisure and commerce. How to study these areas has come a critical issue in Chinese heritage study.

This article examined the characteristics of Chinese urban heritage areas through the heritage-commerce-leisure. Through the detailed case analysis of Yandai historical area in Beijing and Confucius temple in Nanjing, how these three elements operate and influences each other in one space is examined. The conclusion explores the heritage-leisure-commerce as a research perspective that can be obtained by studying the historical areas in urban China. After decades of urban development, China needs more comparative perspective studies to provide more theoretical foundations.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

Focusing on heritage-commerce-leisure as a research perspective, this article proposed an analytical framework (Figure 1). The core element of the heritage area is heritage, which provides the basic physical space for the whole system. Thus, the physical elements of heritage are divided into location, accessibility, path, building and space. By mapping these elements, the characteristics are described. Second is the leisure and commerce that are linked to the dynamic activities of the human. Activity types and commercial types are analyzed through fieldwork. Finally, the conclusion is proposed based on the case studies.

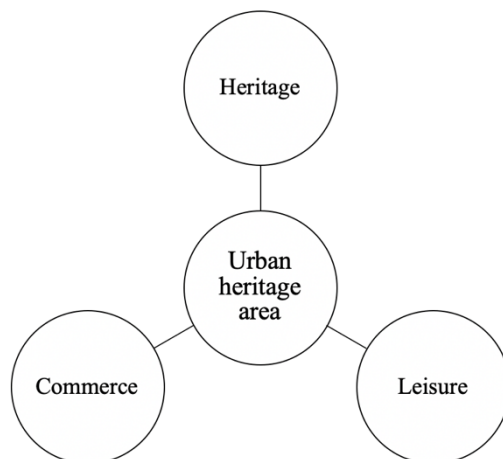


Figure 1. The analytical framework  
Source: by author

## 3 CASE STUDY

### 3.1 *Yandai historical street, Beijing*

Beijing is the capital of China that with a history of more than three thousand years. In the ancient China, it was also the capital of the Qing Dynasty that made its urban style is unique. The layout of the overall inner city is determined by a central axis and a chessboard road network. The architectural styles are divided into two types: palace-style and residential buildings. The buildings such as palaces are large in volume and rich colors. The main style of residential buildings is Si-He-Yuan- courtyard-style buildings in the north. The buildings, streets and alleys become of pleasant scale, forming a street space with local characteristics. This study selects Yandai historical street in Beijing as a case area, and conducts the examination based on the proposed analytical framework.

#### *Heritage*

The Yandai historical area is located in the Shichahai Historical and Cultural Protection Area, it was listed in the first batch of 25 historical and cultural protection areas announced by the Beijing government (Figure 2). This is an area with Beijing's traditional characteristics that concentrate residential, leisure and commercial activities as a whole. In the 1980s, the government cooperated with Tsinghua University to complete the overall plan for this area, which became an important basis for subsequent renewal. In 2001, Yandai Historical Street was one part of the key areas in Shichahai Historical and Cultural Protection Area, and Tsinghua University continued to conduct conservation and renewal research.

Before renovation, the diversified building property, dense population and poor basic conditions affected the traditional characteristics of the Yandai Historic Street. The designer established hierarchical and protection elements at the material level and non-material level. It carried out heritage protection at three levels: point-line-plane. Before the renovation, there were many traditional courtyard buildings in Yandai Historic Street that were mainly formed on the



Figure 2. The Location of Yandai historical street  
Source: Google map (edited by author)

basis of courtyards and expanded in disorder in order to increase the living area. The courtyard space has also been transformed into living space due to the high population density, completely destroying the original type of the courtyard. Therefore, in the restoration process, the buildings with the characteristics of courtyard houses are "combed" and "integrated". The specific method is to demolish illegal parts of buildings and restore the original courtyard space function, so that the building typology becomes the original form in terms of space. The overall form of Yandai historical street gradually restored to the original pattern of Ming and Qing Dynasties-courtyard building and Hutong Street (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The morphological map  
Source: by author

### *Leisure*

After transformation, the buildings on both sides of this area are simple and elegant, and the traditional styles of Ming and Qing dynasties are eye-catching. The form of "front stores and back residences" presents a profound commercial street style and strong characteristics of old Beijing. The new space focused on the leisure and injected activities for attracting tourists. Through fieldwork, I divided activities into five main types, including shops, company offices and bank, museum, former residence and hotel (Table 1). These activities reveal that the whole area is totally transformed to modern urban scenic area for tourists. The renovation project was used to apply for a national scenic area, and Yandai historical street is the 4A level. Tourists can enter the scenic area for free through a gate. Depending on official statistics, there are about 10,000 to 15,000 visitors here every day, and this number doubles during holidays. In contemporary Beijing, Yandai historical street has become a famous scenic area.

Table 1. The dynamic types

Types	Number	Proportion
Shops	59	88%
Museum	2	3%
The former celebrity residence	2	3%
Hotel	1	2%
Others	3	4%

\* Fieldwork data,2021  
(Table is edited by author)

### Commerce

In terms of commerce, the path of the case area is composed of the blank space between the buildings, presenting an irregular state. Before transformation, there was only one commercial model in this area--temporary commerce, which refers to the commerce on the roadside. This kind of commercial model does not extend to the residential space, so the path becomes a local exclusive commercial space. Therefore, commercial and architectural space did not overlap in this area. In order to build the new historical feature, the natives are relocated to other urban area. The developer introduces commercial function into the new space, while selecting diverse commercial types. Basing on the survey, it is briefly divided into three categories: traditional brand shops, international brand shops and general shops (Table 2).

Table 2. The commercial types

Types	Number	Proportion
General shops	42	71%
Traditional shops	11	19%
International shops	6	10%

\* Fieldwork data,2021  
(Table is edited by author)

### 3.2 The Confucius Temple historical area, Nanjing, China

Confucius Temple of Nanjing is located in Gongyuan Street on the north bank of the Qinhuai River in Qinhuai District, west of Jiangnan Gongyuan. It is located in the core area of the Qinhuai Scenic Belt of Confucius Temple, namely Nanjing Confucian Temple and Wenxuanwang Temple (Figure 4). It is the highest institution and one of the four largest Confucian temples in the ancient China. It is not only the cultural and educational center of Nanjing during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, but also the cultural and educational complex that ranks the first in the Jiangsu provinces.

#### Heritage

Confucius Temple is the core of the Qinhuai scenic belt, and the development of this area has also experienced the process of initial-prosperity-decline-recovery. In the Song Dynasty, Confucius Temple was officially built on the basis of the original Eastern Jin Academy(东晋学宫). In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, due to the holding of various examinations and the establishment of Jiangnan Gongyuan (江南贡院), this area was a very prosperous commercial place. At the same time, hotels, tea houses and local restaurants have gradually increased. In 1937, due to the war, the Confucius Temple area was bombed and fell into a period of decline. In 1985, the Nanjing government rehabilitated the area with the main goal of preserving the architectural heritage and rehabilitating vitality. The Confucius Temple area is mainly restored with the feature of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The physical environment includes buildings and streets that has been restored to the features of the temples and market streets of ancient China (Figure 5). This renovation project made the Confucius Temple gradually become a famous scenic area in the Nanjing.

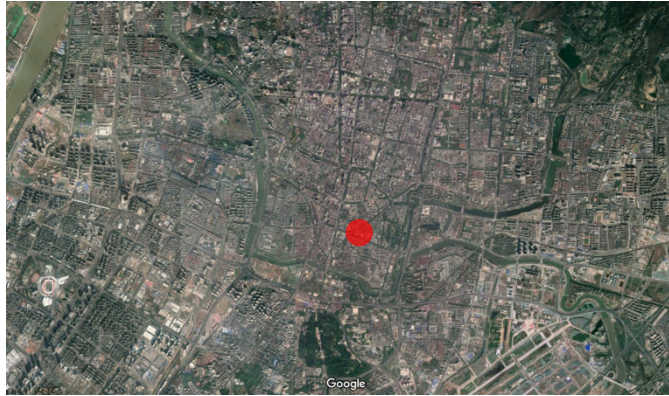


Figure 4. The Location of the Confucius Temple  
Source: Google map (edited by author)



Figure 5. The morphological map  
Source: by author

### *Leisure*

According to statistics, the daily tourist flow of Confucius Temple is nearly 10,000 to 15,000. Visitors can enter the Confucius Temple area for free from different entrances. Some scenic spots are needed to payment for entrance, such as Confucius Temple, Jiangnan Gongyuan and so on. According to the fieldwork, the types of activities in the Confucius Temple area can be divided into eight categories (Table 3). In addition, there will be a large number of traditional activities during the festival, such as lantern festivals.

Table 3. The leisure experience types

Types	Number	Proportion
Shops	162	79%
Museum	5	3%
The former celebrity residence	13	5%
Hotel	25	12%
Others	3	1%

\* Fieldwork data,2021  
(Table is edited by author)

### *Commerce*

After restoration, historical buildings combined with diverse commercial types that shows strong vitality in the development process of the Confucius Temple area. Diversified commercial patterns have gradually formed in this area, such as general shop (clothing shop, food shop, etc.),

local traditional shop (curio shops, traditional food shops), and international brand shop (Starbucks, McDonald, etc.). (Table 4)

Table 4. The commercial types

Types	Number	Proportion
General shops	138	85%
Traditional shops	18	12%
International shops	6	3%

\* Fieldwork data,2021

(Table is edited by author)

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Since 1990s, local governments have expanded the list of historical buildings and set up "historical feature area" in urban planning. Corresponding heritage protection laws have also been gradually improved, and many historical buildings have been protected to varying degrees. This essay has examined the heritage-commerce-leisure as a study perspective to interpret urban heritage area. Two case areas in different urban context have been examined through the proposed analytical framework. The core element of the heritage-commerce-leisure is heritage, which provides the physical space for promoting leisure and commerce. The analysis reveals that similar spatial characteristics of urban heritage area among heritage-commerce-leisure. These three elements interact each other and form the urban heritage area. This study also provides visual and data of how urban heritage areas show the homogeneous in different urban contexts.

This article aims to propose a research agenda for studying similarities of Chinese urban heritage area. In different urban contexts, the convergence of heritage areas reveals that the similar goals of heritage space in urban development. In the further study, the differences behind the similarity are needed to be investigated, which can provide further theoretical research for urban heritage research.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wants to thank the assistance of "Transitional Morphologies Research Unit" (Politecnico di Torino, Italy).

#### FUNDING

This study is supported by Philosophy and Social Science of Jiangsu Higher Education, the project number is 2021SJA0913, and is also supported by the Natural Science foundation of Jiangsu Higher Education, the project number is 20KJB560011.

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