

Conservation and Revitalization of Song Dynasty Historic Districts in Zhejiang from the Perspective of Cultural-Tourism Integration

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ABSTRACT

As a vital component of urban space, historic districts play a significant role in the contemporary transmission of outstanding traditional culture and the innovative development of the tourism economy. Song Dynasty cultural heritage, known as Song Yun Culture, represents a distinctive and emblematic form of traditional culture in Zhejiang Province in the new era. The integration of Song Yun Culture with historic districts is crucial to both the revitalization of these urban areas and the preservation and promotion of Song cultural heritage. This paper explores the relationship between Song Yun Culture and historic districts, and analyzes the challenges faced in the conservation and revitalization of such areas within the framework of cultural-tourism integration. These challenges include inadequate policy mechanisms, shortage of skilled professionals, monotonous cultural carriers and presentation formats, and insufficient publicity and support systems. In response, the paper proposes targeted strategies such as improving top-level planning, excavating Song Yun cultural resources, creating distinctive landmarks, enhancing training systems, and strengthening promotional mechanisms. These approaches aim to offer theoretical insights and practical guidance for the transmission of Song Yun Culture through the revitalization of historic districts.

Keywords: Cultural-tourism integration, Song Yun Culture, Historic districts, Conservation and revitalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, historic districts serve as vital carriers of urban history and culture. They not only bear witness to the economic and cultural transformations of cities across various stages of development but also constitute key platforms for the transmission of traditional culture and the innovative growth of the tourism economy. As culturally rich spatial entities, historic districts represent significant urban landscapes. Uncovering the cultural connotations and inherent value behind these spaces contributes to the advancement of cultural space development and supports broader efforts in urban cultural construction.[1]

Song Yun Culture, a brilliant gem within the broader tapestry of China's traditional cultural heritage, plays a pivotal role in highlighting regional cultural identity and enhancing a city's

cultural soft power in the context of the new era. As a major birthplace of Song Yun Culture, Zhejiang Province has actively explored paths for integrating historic districts with this cultural heritage. Such integration not only facilitates the conservation and revitalization of historic districts but also provides a broad platform for the inheritance and innovation of Song Yun Culture. However, the protection and revitalization of Zhejiang's historic districts, when viewed through the lens of cultural-tourism integration, still face numerous challenges that demand thorough analysis and the development of effective strategies.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SONG YUN CULTURE AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS

As integral components of human living and production environments, historic districts provide

a direct reflection of the economic, social, and cultural conditions of specific regions across various historical periods. From a traditional perspective, historic districts function as three-dimensional historical chronicles, encapsulating a wealth of socio-cultural traditions, folk customs, and architectural heritage. The layout of streets and alleys, the styles of architecture, and traditional ways of life vividly embody the cultural characteristics and values of particular historical eras. Closely intertwined with the broader fabric of China's outstanding traditional culture, historic districts serve as tangible carriers that enable the continuation and transmission of such cultural legacies.

In contemporary society, historic districts are entrusted with the mission of preserving, promoting, and revitalizing traditional Chinese culture. Through their unique spatial configurations and cultural atmospheres, they serve as vital conduits for conveying traditional culture to diverse audiences. By offering both visually intuitive experiences and immersive cultural encounters, historic districts expand cultural horizons and enhance public recognition and appreciation of traditional heritage. Moreover, as essential components of urban culture, the protection and development of historic districts play a crucial role in shaping distinctive urban identities, improving overall urban quality, and enhancing a city's attractiveness.

Song Yun Culture, as a distinguished branch of China's traditional cultural heritage, brings unique cultural charm and profound historical depth to the cultural connotation of historic districts. Grounded in local Song Yun resources, historic districts should actively explore and harness the rich array of cultural materials—such as Song Dynasty achievements in literature, arts, philosophy, science and technology, and aesthetics of daily life—by integrating these elements into the processes of conservation, renovation, and development. This approach continuously enriches both the connotation and the extension of Song Yun Culture.

By incorporating Song Yun cultural elements into innovative historic district projects, a diverse platform can be created for visitors to study, understand, and appreciate the beauty of Song Yun Culture. As visitors stroll through these districts, they are transported through time, immersed in the cultural ambiance and daily scenes of the Song Dynasty, experiencing its distinct charm firsthand. At the same time, Song Yun Culture endows

historic districts with a unique spiritual temperament and cultural appeal, allowing them to stand out among other heritage sites. This facilitates the development of historic district brands with strong regional identities, transforming them into cultural, tourism, and economic landmarks, and realizing the organic integration of cultural, social, and economic value.

3. CHALLENGES IN THE CONSERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF SONG YUN CULTURAL-TOURISM INTEGRATION

3.1 Inadequate Policy Mechanisms

Since China's reform and opening-up, the rapid urbanization process has led to a decline in the vitality of many modern historic districts. Traditional business and residential models have largely deteriorated. On one hand, the inability to establish suitable economic development models in the new historical context has resulted in the marginalization of urban functions and further decline in regional economic value. On the other hand, due to prolonged lack of effective protection, many modern buildings have fallen into disrepair, leading to the destruction of both the historical appearance and cultural value of these districts.[2]

Research into Zhejiang Province's relevant policies on the "Transmission and Promotion of Song Yun Culture" reveals the absence of a comprehensive top-level design. The existing policy framework is insufficient in guiding the integration of historic districts with Song Yun Culture and in supporting the revitalization and protection of this cultural heritage. Although general goals have been proposed within the domain of Song Yun cultural heritage—such as multi-department coordination mechanisms, a "Three-Year Action Plan (2021–2023)," and mid-to-long-term objectives under the "Song Yun Cultural Tourism Development" initiative—specific policies related to the integration of Song Yun Culture with historic districts remain vague. As a result, there is a lack of clear implementation strategies, regulatory systems, and institutional support, leading to disorganized, unsystematic, and purposeless efforts in cultural revitalization, often without dedicated management teams or guiding authorities.

3.2 Shortage of Skilled Professionals

Surveys conducted in Hangzhou and Shaoxing—two representative cities of Song Yun Culture—highlight that a lack of qualified professionals is a significant barrier to both the preservation of historic districts and the promotion of Song Yun Culture. First, individuals engaged in the development and transformation of historic districts often lack comprehensive and systematic understanding of Song Yun Culture. This results in insufficient awareness of its historical and cultural value, inadequate capacity to apply its content in district renewal, and weak execution in localized revitalization projects.

Second, there is an absence of specialized, task-oriented teams dedicated to the integration of historic district conservation with Song Yun Culture. Given the relatively short period since the theme of Song Yun Culture gained attention, research and coordination efforts are still in their formative stages. Existing teams are often fragmented, with expertise limited to narrow fields, lacking interdisciplinary integration, and facing difficulties in talent continuity due to an aging workforce and insufficient new-generation successors.

Third, there is a lack of comprehensive training systems. Professionals involved in the revitalization of historic districts through Song Yun Culture are expected to possess solid theoretical knowledge in traditional culture preservation, urban renewal, and deep understanding of the Song Dynasty's cultural context. However, related training and educational initiatives are limited within the province, hindering continuous professional development and slowing project progress.

3.3 Homogeneity in Cultural Carriers and Presentation Formats

Following the introduction of the term “Song Yun Culture” and the implementation of the “Song Yun Cultural Heritage Project” in Zhejiang, cities such as Hangzhou and Shaoxing have launched several related cultural-tourism initiatives. However, within the scope of historic district revitalization, efforts have mainly focused on restoring ancient buildings, constructing Song-style replicas, and renovating commercial streets. These projects rely primarily on tangible heritage elements such as traditional crafts, intangible cultural heritage practices, and Song architectural motifs. This approach results in limited variety, insufficient

expression of the cultural essence and aesthetic appeal of Song Yun Culture, and weakens its broader impact.

In the long term, such homogeneous project design risks blending into the existing landscape of traditional cultural tourism offerings in other historic districts, making it difficult to attract audiences unfamiliar with Song Yun Culture or to sustain economic benefits. The lack of diversification prevents these projects from achieving competitive advantage and limits the development of a self-reinforcing, sustainable cultural-tourism model.

3.4 Insufficient Publicity Channels and Support

In the digital age, the dissemination of cultural content relies heavily on information accessibility, content richness, and platform efficiency. To secure long-term value and create opportunities for in-depth research and application of Song Yun Culture, historic districts must enhance their commercial appeal and branding as part of the Song Yun Cultural Heritage Project, transforming into iconic cultural assets for Zhejiang Province. However, current practices in cities such as Hangzhou and Shaoxing indicate deficiencies in promotion mechanisms. On one hand, publicity channels are overly limited. Although emerging platforms like Douyin (TikTok China), WeChat video accounts, and official accounts are used, they have yet to demonstrate strong follower bases or engagement levels, failing to leverage the full potential of new media. On the other hand, promotional content often lacks creativity and audience-centered design. The focus remains on basic visual materials that introduce the districts' historical features without offering unique or compelling narratives. This narrow focus impairs the synergistic effect between commercial and cultural value and makes it difficult for historic districts to gain competitive positioning in a saturated market.

4. STRATEGIES FOR THE CONSERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF SONG YUN CULTURAL-TOURISM INTEGRATION

4.1 Enhancing Top-Level Planning to Guide the Conservation and Revitalization of Historic Districts through Song Yun Culture

The conservation and revitalization of historic districts in alignment with Song Yun Culture represent a comprehensive, systematic, and standardized undertaking. It is essential to ensure that Song Yun Culture is historically verifiable and that related projects align with local sustainable development principles, while also balancing ecological, commercial, and artistic considerations. As a critical instrument of government governance, top-level design plays a guiding role in the coordination of resources, goal-setting, and project planning. Government agencies should improve the overall strategic framework by formulating mid- and long-term development plans specifically targeting the integration of historic district conservation with Song Yun Culture. These plans should outline clear objectives, core tasks, implementation mechanisms, and training pathways for human resources. They should also support resource development and define key projects within historic districts. Such institutional guidance will encourage sustained research into Song Yun Culture, incentivize private sector participation, and promote standardized, goal-oriented management practices.

4.2 Excavating Song Yun Cultural Resources to Enrich the Cultural Connotation of Historic Districts

Urban historic districts are not isolated heritage units; they are embedded within the broader functional system of cities and thus closely linked to overall urban development and public cultural life.[3] As one of the most prosperous periods in Chinese history, the Song Dynasty offers a rich repository of cultural elements. In the contemporary era, the protection and revitalization of Song Yun Culture must integrate with modern lifestyles to gain relevance and vitality. The development of historic districts should focus on deep excavation of

Song Yun cultural elements to enrich their historical and humanistic significance. Stakeholders should draw from Zhejiang's unique historical context, identify localized expressions of Song Yun Culture, and use these materials as a foundation for project development, thereby enhancing the artistic and cultural appeal of historic spaces. For Song Yun Culture to achieve effective protection, broad dissemination, and sustainable revitalization, it must be organically embedded into contemporary society, allowing it to flourish in a modern cultural ecosystem.

4.3 Creating Song Yun Cultural Landmarks Based on Local Characteristics

In the process of integrating Song Yun cultural elements, historic districts should incorporate them into landmark projects that reflect local characteristics. By doing so, they can create distinctive cultural-tourism offerings that differentiate them from homogenized cultural products and breathe new life into the districts. This not only attracts a broader audience but also enhances urban identity. For instance, in the early stages of cultural-tourism development, small-scale public facilities such as community canteens or cultural-creative spaces can serve both residents and tourists, boosting local vitality. When tourism matures and demand for boutique accommodations rises, the residential function of state-owned properties should be preserved to maintain the authenticity and daily life rhythm of the old city, preventing excessive commercialization.[4]

Meanwhile, digital technologies can be employed to enrich the modes of Song Yun cultural presentation. For example, themed activities such as Song Yun cultural theater performances—centered on topics like daily life in the Song Dynasty, Confucian scholar-official values, maritime trade, and classical poetry—can be staged in historic districts through immersive formats like night shows, micro-theaters, and main-stage productions. These experiences allow visitors to engage with Song Yun Culture in an interactive manner, deepening their appreciation of its historical charm.

4.4 Establishing Comprehensive Training Mechanisms to Cultivate Professional Talent

To build a professional talent pool for the protection and revitalization of Song Yun Culture in historic districts, a dual-track training approach is essential. On one hand, Song Yun Culture should be integrated into the formal education system through “Song Yun Culture in Schools” initiatives targeting primary, secondary, and higher education. Through academic projects, specialized courses, and themed activities, young talent can be cultivated to support future development, preservation, and promotion efforts.

On the other hand, government authorities and relevant institutions should jointly offer targeted training programs for current professionals engaged in historic district revitalization. These programs could involve inviting leading archaeological and academic experts in Song Yun Culture to conduct intensive training, improving participants’ understanding of the cultural context. Additionally, staff should be organized to visit domestic and international benchmark cities with successful traditional culture preservation models to gain practical insights and experience.

4.5 Strengthening Publicity Mechanisms to Enhance Commercial Value

Commercial value is fundamental to sustaining the artistic vitality of historic districts. Only by generating tangible economic benefits can historic districts support the long-term development and transmission of Song Yun Culture. To enhance commercial value, publicity mechanisms must be improved in two key areas: building a diversified new media matrix and innovating content strategies.

In terms of media infrastructure, efforts should focus on expanding the reach and functionality of platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), WeChat video channels, and Xiaohongshu (RED), aligning with the media consumption habits of contemporary audiences. In terms of content development, immersive promotional experiences should highlight the uniqueness of Song Yun cultural landmarks within historic districts. This approach will enhance communication effectiveness, boost audience engagement, and reinforce the dual cultural and commercial identity of the district.

5. CONCLUSION

The conservation and revitalization of historic districts through the lens of Song Yun Culture represent a deeply significant yet complex and multifaceted undertaking. It demands coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, enterprises, and professional talent. Only through such collaborative synergy can substantial progress be achieved.

Step-by-step enhancement of top-level policy design will offer clear guidance and institutional guarantees for implementation. A well-structured training mechanism will provide essential human capital by cultivating a high-quality, specialized professional workforce. In-depth excavation of Song Yun cultural resources will enrich the content and project base of historic districts, enabling the creation of culturally compelling and attractive tourism experiences. Meanwhile, robust promotional mechanisms will enhance the visibility and influence of these districts, ensuring the integration of commercial viability with cultural value.

Through coordinated advancement on these fronts, an enabling environment—both internal and external—can be fostered for the successful transmission of Song Yun Culture within historic districts. This approach will unlock new possibilities and opportunities for revitalization, breathing renewed vitality into Zhejiang’s historical urban landscapes. Ultimately, such efforts will help transform these districts into vital strongholds for the inheritance and promotion of China’s outstanding traditional culture. In doing so, Song Yun Culture will radiate even more brilliantly in the new era, and the sustainable development of historic districts will contribute meaningfully to Zhejiang’s broader cultural and tourism advancement.

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