

Heavy crown: The dilemma of the protection of the Vernacular dwellings as a “Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection”

——Take the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses as an example

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Abstract

Vernacular dwellings are treasures of traditional architecture and important evidence of history and culture. The world's attention to and protection of Vernacular dwellings has been carried out as early as the beginning of the last century¹. Based on the field study of the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses, this paper makes an empirical study on the protection and development of the Vernacular dwellings. In China, Vernacular dwellings with conservation value are given different levels of titles such as “Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection”. These titles will naturally give it more honor and security. However, the title is also a double-edged sword, bringing with it restrictions and shackles: complicated renovation approval procedures, the lack of autonomy of residents, and the squeeze of urbanization. The protection and development of Vernacular dwellings with “crowns” are struggling. The Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses were announced as “Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection” in 2001. With this title, more than a decade has passed, its protection and utilization is not satisfactory. This article tries to learn from the relevant theories and practical experience of Vernacular dwellings, and reflect on and criticize the current policies and practical results in China. After that, I hope to explore the scientific protection and effective development, and to put forward relevant suggestions, in order to provide certain reference for the protection and development of similar Vernacular dwelling.

Introduction

The Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses are known as the "grand view garden of Minnan architecture". It is located in Quanzhou, a famous hometown of overseas Chinese. From the perspective of its location and cultural roots, this is not only the immigrant society in Chinese history, but also the starting point of the "maritime silk road"², presenting the integration of diverse cultures in an all-round way. At the same time, the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses as Quanzhou's oldest existing ancient dwellings, except its spatial pattern, the historic value of architectural art, recorded one hundred years Tsai's descendant of traditional life, bearing is the common memory of the villagers and overseas Chinese from South of Fujian.

The Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses were listed as "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection"³ in 2001, and the place where they are located, Liao natural village in Zhangzhou, was also listed as "Chinese traditional village" by UNESCO in 2013. Moreover, the red brick buildings of South of Fujian represented by the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses were included in the preparatory list of China's world cultural heritage. Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses have many honor, but their present situation does not fully reflect their values in culture, art, history and other aspects. The author visited it many times and found: the key protection areas of the dwellings were empty, though clean and well-repaired (figure1); The sanitary condition and infrastructure in the general protected areas are poorly maintained; The production of ceramic tile factories and other enterprises in the expansion prohibited zone polluted the surrounding ecological environment.

Investigation and problem analysis

The Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses cover an area



Figure 1. Clean but Empty Dwelling. Source: Author Shot.

of about three hectares, and there are 23 existing ancient buildings. All the houses were built in Qing dynasty, and were built by Tsai Qichang, the first ancestor of Tsai clan, and his son Tsai Zishen. At present, there are 41 households and 174 people living in the dwelling. Through field visits to the dwellings, questionnaire surveys of residents, and interviews with Mr. Tsai Changjin, the party secretary of the village, and managers of the Quanzhou cultural heritage bureau, the article analyzes and summarizes the reasons for the predicament of Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses.

First, the protection force is single and the residents lose their subjectivity.

At present, the protection of ancient dwellings is mainly funded by the state financial allocation. Ancient dwellings maintenance takes nine steps, the procedure is complicated, the application time span is long. The protection system of ancient residential houses formulated by the government was originally intended to better protect the historical features of ancient buildings from excessive damage by villagers. However, it also discouraged villagers from protecting ancient buildings, and the basic development rights and interests of villagers were not well paid attention to. The complicated maintenance system made many residents lose the enthusiasm of maintaining the old houses. Some residents went to live in

other places, empty nest phenomenon serious, leading to the destruction of some uninhabited ancient buildings.

This passive protect model brings more disadvantages. People's awareness of protection is very weak. After the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses had become "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection", DeDian house in the dwelling was stolen, the brick carvings on both sides of the doorways were taken away (figure 2). On the one hand, the house is no longer inhabited; on the other hand, the administration office and the security team are only responsible for daily protection and management, lacking the attention and maintenance of local residents at the forefront.



Figure 2. The Brick Carvings of DeDian House was Stolen. Source: Author Shot.

Second, the lack of policy leads to the squeeze of urbanization on the protected areas.

The valuable traditional dwellings in the center of the city will be carefully cared for and become a delicate exhibition hall, while the less valuable dwellings will develop into a unique tourism business district. The awkward the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses are on the outskirts, surrounded by natural villages and industrial zones. Cultural relic protection policy can only protect the important buildings, at most to the surrounding ecological conservation area, while the environmental protection in the periphery is powerless. The expansion of the city has gradually swallowed up the natural environment surrounding the dwellings, making the "Feng shui" pattern disappear (figure 3). This makes the ancient dwellings protected like an enclave become rootless trees. The waste gas and sewage from the industries have made the local farmland impossible to grow, and some ancient trees have begun to die. At the same time, the local humid Marine climate, the reduction of surrounding greening and air pollution together led to a certain degree of corrosion and cracking of wooden structures in ancient dwellings, and the peeling and fading of color paintings and paints. At present, the protection only pays attention to the cultural landscape, ignores the protection and utilization of the rural ecological landscape, and separates the rural ecological landscape from the traditional culture.

Thirdly, the negative impact of tourism development in other "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection".

China's tourism development of traditional ancient dwellings is a relatively mature

industry. But at the same time bringing high profits also produced a huge irreversible damage. Such as the comprehensive commercialization of the water town Wuzhen, commercial high profit evicted local residents, the ancient town has no inhabitant. Fenghuang ancient town in Hunan province has caused strong protests and a backlash because the sale of high ticket prices has brought great inconvenience to residents' travel and visits by relatives and friends. This series of negative effects make the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses tourism development is very cautious.

Nearly two decades after it was listed as "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection", its tourism development is limited to selling tickets. And, the ticket sales were not strictly enforced because of the number of residents living in the area and the roads linking it to surrounding villages. Furthermore, there is no sign system for the ancient dwellings, no public transportation system to reach it, and nearby hotels and restaurants are relatively rare. The Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses are like a shy girl hiding in a boudoir. Through interviewing local heritage protection bureau we learned: in addition to the fear of the shortcomings of tourism development, Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses development has its particularity, the dwellings of the ownership issue hasn't been solved yet, because Tsai's ancestor is overseas Chinese, their many descendant also development in southeast Asia, after several generations of breeding and expanding, each building houses ownership may not less than 10, and spread around the world, it is difficult to discuss effective residential development work.



Figure 3. "Feng shui" Pattern of Facing Water and Back Mountain. Source: By Wen-guo Zeng, "On the protection and utilization of CAI's ancient residential buildings in Quanzhou city." Fujian Culture Expo. (March, 2015): 79-82

Therefore, at present, the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses adopt a conservative "museum" style of protection, taking the buildings as specimens only for observation, without getting rid of the mode of "limited protection", whose value has not been fully exploited and utilized, resulting in that the whole ancient dwellings are now in a state of no attention. At present, there is only one guide in the village, and there is no systematic introduction method. Visitors can't know the cultural history of folk houses and the artistic characteristics of South of Fujian architecture. It is a passive and passive way to protect the dwelling from sufficient support of government without tourism industry.

Finally, when the spirit disappears, so will the matter.

According to Norberg-Schulz, it is precisely because of the same or similar cultural background, language, and the blood relationship that people have generated two different spatial concepts, the Pragmatic Space that reflects the physical behavior, and the Existential Space that reflects the place Concretization and structuration, in the years of common life.⁵

Built from 1862 to 1911, the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses is the product of the hierarchical ethical system in Chinese feudal society. The formation of the pattern of the settlement can be attributed to the traditional Chinese clan concept and the way of living together. As Ban Gu said in Bai Hu Tong, "Clans, gather, together". This clan consciousness is embodied in the residential houses, which form a defensive and self-sufficient living place.

The distribution of functions in the ancient house, such as the main room, the protective room and the hall, reflected the tradition of Confucian culture in which there was a distinction between the superior and the inferior, and the order between the young and the old. The hall is a place to worship ancestors and gods; The main room is the place where the master lives; the side rooms is servant place or make sundry store. The distribution of the room is also exquisite, east room for the eldest son, the west room belongs to the second son, the rest analogize, never change the rules. The walls around the big house, has made it a

independent feudal society. (figure 4)

It can be said that the space of the South of Fujian House is the embodiment of the ideology of an era. But it is in great contradiction with modern life. Modern life has led to the development of family structure from the traditional large family to the small family. In order to meet the requirements of modern material life, some residents transform the internal space without design, changing the original spatial pattern and causing the loss of traditional living space. The traditional hall space is endowed with some living functions and private attributes, and the subjectivity is weakened and even replaced by the private core of a small family.

We unilaterally classify some ancient dwellings into the category of material cultural heritage, and eventually the dwellings are just empty-shell, and the spirit in them disappears completely. The disappearance of spirit will further aggravate the deterioration and extinction of matter.

Research on the protection and sustainable utilization of ancient dwellings

From the Athens Charter to Xi'an declaration, the scope of protection has changed from the protection of individual buildings to the protection of regional historical environment. The focus of protection has expanded from cultural relics and historic sites to paying attention to natural environment and residents' life.⁶ The protection and utilization of the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses should not only focus on the material and cultural subjects such as related architecture, sculpture and cultural relics, but also consider the real heritage background environment constituted by the collection of surrounding spaces as well as the immaterial cultural factors accumulated in the lot. Areas of historical and artistic value should be protected as part of the overall environment.⁷

Public participation and introducing tourism management

The villagers are the inheritors and creators of the culture, especially the owners of the ancient dwellings like the Tsai-clan. The protection and development of the ancient dwellings are closely related to their immediate interests, and

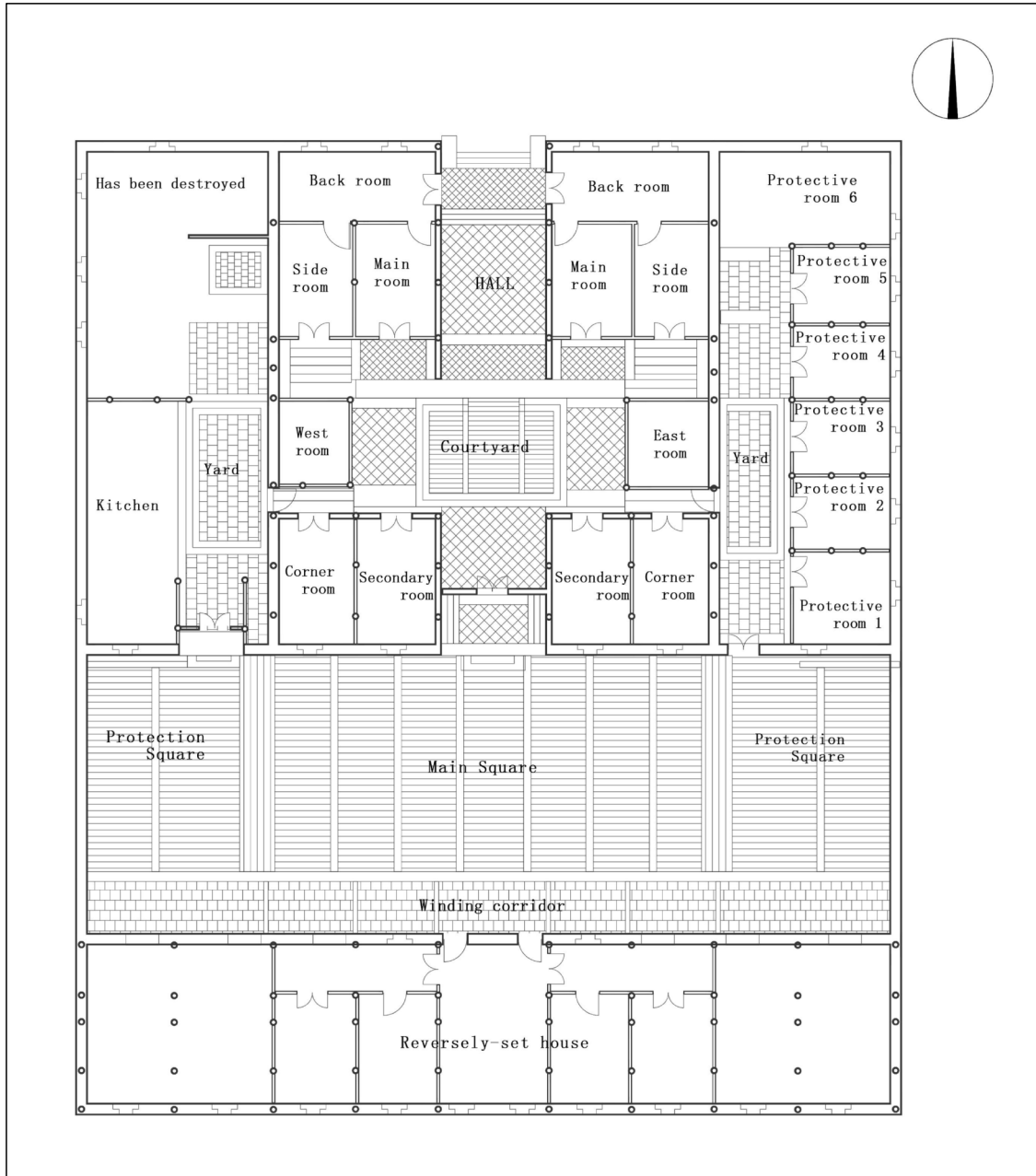


Figure 4. Tsai's House. Source: The author drew it from the map

the cultural ecology evolution of the ancient dwellings should be completed by them. Therefore, it is necessary to help residents to establish an institutional system suitable for the protection and development. The villagers and the owners can participate in planning and design and put forward the opinion, emphasizes the residents of community consciousness, the original plan by the government's decisions to open. At the same time, the introduction of professional tourism management concept, under the supervision of village committees and heritage protection Bureau, to ensure that personal interests and public interests and win-win.

The government can provide a variety of incentive measures, such as residential subsidies for residential houses, and more tax-free policies for residential houses as original ecological homestays, etc.

The establishment of ecomuseum combined with tourism development

On the one hand, through the joint efforts of the heritage protection Bureau and the education system, the Tsai's Ancient Folk Houses are regarded as the popular science place of overseas Chinese culture. On the other hand, part of the space outside the ancient dwellings was made public, and a visitor service center was set up to systematically introduce the history and culture. At the same time, the space as a daily living place used by local elderly and children, folk activities are held regularly. While injecting vitality into ancient dwellings, it also maximizes the participation of local residents.

Reconstruction of rural ecological landscape system

The protection and utilization of ancient dwellings should stand at the height of the whole village's ecological landscape system to balance the relationship among residents, dwellings, village environment and landscape agriculture and forestry.

Move production enterprises out of the scope of protection and treatment pollution before. Then carry out conservation and refarming of abandoned farmland to encourage residents to engage in agricultural production. Last, the concept of "Nongchan" was introduced to drive the surrounding ancient villages to carry out meditation, home stay, and participate in

agricultural activities.

Combined with the above protection methods, it not only protects the traditional form of historical buildings, but also protects the living style of people in the residential buildings. Visitors can see and experience the real residential buildings and the culture of overseas Chinese. All kinds of preferential policies can make the original gradually lost residents return to the residential houses, bringing back the living atmosphere as well as the traditional culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ancient dwellings are not only "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection", but production and living base, is the most basic unit of social composition.⁸ In addition to curing material elements, it also contains a large number of unique historical memory, analyzes the clan offspring, slang dialect, village's conventions, production methods and so on, they alone as a spiritual and cultural connotation, for residential material existence, and makes the traditional village fresh and alive, is also a material element cannot be separated from the "life soil".

Therefore, the protection of ancient dwellings should break free from the honor and shackles brought by the crown and adopt a more diversified protection perspective. The most important thing is to increase the participation of local residents, protect their interests on the premise of protecting material culture, guide them to participate in the protection and inheritance of spiritual culture. Above, can change at present either the blind development of the tourism industry, or the status quo of complacent, resulting in the village only shell without spirit.

Endnotes

1. Paul Oliver, *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Cambridge :Cambridge University Press,1998.
2. Xiao-zhuo Ning. "A Miraculous Flower of Folk House Rooted in Plural Culture—Analysis for the Characters and Cause of Formation of Cai-Clan Traditional Residential Buildings in Min'nan." *Chinese and Overseas Architecture*.no.9(September 2007):58-63

3. "Key Cultural Relics Site Under the State Protection" is the highest level of protection approved by the state administration of cultural heritage for immovable cultural relics in China. By the end of 2019, the state council had announced eight batches of key sites totaling 5,058. But dwellings are one of the special ones. Unlike ruins, tombs and temples, it is inhabited, a place of dwelling customs and traditional memories.
4. Residents to apply for residence maintenance steps is: the villagers submit applications, the village committee research, village field verification report of the public, then submit applications to township government, township government staff verify, house repair association research, the township government ruling order maintenance, the villagers Submit maintenance plan, the county government audit, finally, unified maintenance.
5. Christian Norberg-Schulz. Existence, Space and Architecture. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971
6. Fang-zhe Gu. "Formation and Enlightenment of European Ancient Architecture Protection System". Journal of Shandong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences). 2013(3):135-142.
7. International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS): The Declaration of Amsterdam: Congress on the European Architectural Heritage, 21-25 October 1975: <http://www.icomos.org/docs/amsterdam.html>
8. Ji-cai Feng "The Dilemma and Way Out of Traditional Villages." Traditional Village 218, no.1 (January 2013): 7-12