



Pingyao Wall in need of restoration. Photo by Kuang-Han Li

Pingyao Ancient City, China

China's First Banking Capital

Site Significance

Pingyao Ancient City was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 1997 for its exceptional preservation of an intact, classic Han Chinese city from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). There are close to 4,000 extant Ming-and Qing-era courtyard buildings, out of which close to 400 are intact. Such quantity and concentration of historic vernacular architecture is unparalleled elsewhere in China.

Pingyao Ancient City has been continuously occupied since the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 424). It is one of only two Chinese ancient cities with UNESCO World Heritage status and the only one with an intact historic city wall. Its urban fabric shows the evolution of architectural styles and town planning in Imperial China over five centuries. In retaining its features, Pingyao Ancient City provides a remarkably complete picture of cultural, social, economic and religious development during one of the most seminal periods of Chinese history.

Project Goals

The Pingyao County Government and Global Heritage Fund are undertaking a collaborative effort to better preserve the cultural heritage of Pingyao ancient city in more comprehensive and systematic approaches as part of an integrated planning, conservation and development program. The Pingyao Cultural Heritage Development Program aims to preserve the vernacular architecture, revitalize and stimulate the traditional arts and establish special historic areas.

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Planning

A Master Conservation Plan is in preparation by Shanghai Tongji University and has been approved by a 17-member expert panel review that took place in January 2009. Upon completion, the Master Conservation Plan will be presented to the Pingyao government for approval and implementation.



Threats

- Poverty
- Neglect
- Lack of resources
- Mass tourism
- Uncontrolled development

Start Date

2007

Project Partnerships

- Pingyao County People's Government
- Shanghai Tongji University, Urban Planning and Design Institute

Conservation Science

Working with the Pingyao County Government along with academic and research institutions, GHF is supporting a comprehensive survey of the tangible and intangible cultural resources in Pingyao. This thorough survey will inform and enrich the Heritage Development Program and identify appropriate adaptive reuse of the historic buildings. The data collected will contribute to the development of a comprehensive and informed interpretation plan. Upon completion of this survey, a pilot courtyard restoration project will be conducted, and the completed pilot courtyard will be used as GHF field office and community center where classes on local history, traditional building crafts, conservation techniques and other topics will be held. During the restoration,

traditional materials and techniques will be employed and carefully documented, and the results from this pilot project will serve to inform the rehabilitation of other courtyards.

Community

The Heritage Development Program will support training for the remaining skilled craftspeople and artisans to pass on and preserve Pingyao's unique living heritage of arts, crafts, cuisines and performing arts to the next generation through apprenticeships. A selection of restored courtyards will serve as a venue where creation of traditional arts and specialty products and participation and observation by visitors is possible; community classes will also be conducted at the restored courtyards. This integrated, sustainable program addresses the economic imbalance of the current tourism landscape and preserves the last remaining endangered historic courtyards and living arts and cultural heritage, thereby realizing and sustaining the authenticity and character of Pingyao Ancient City.

Recent Accomplishments

- Launched the China Heritage Program
- Completion of documentation and conservation plans for two courtyard houses.
- Restoration underway for pilot courtyard.
- Documentation completed for all courtyards in a selected historic district, Fanjia Jie.
- Creation of a searchable digital database that contains updated information on the traditional courtyards.
- Four-day workshop on conservation techniques, led by GHF Director of Conservation John Hurd and China Program Manager Kuanghan Li, for 40-60 staff from the Pingyao Planning, Cultural Heritage and Tourism bureaus.
- Completion of master conservation plan and management plan.
- Installation of Pingyao-GHF collaborative field office.
- GHF is co-funding the master planning and authentic restorations of the best examples of Qing Dynasty courtyard buildings with local families.



No.12 Mijia Xiang Courtyard before (left) and after (right). Photo by © Global Heritage Fund

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