

The Implications of European Heritage Protection Charter and Practices of Urban Heritage Conservation in China

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Abstract: It is widely acknowledged that countries successfully achieving integrated urban heritage conservation possess a robust legal system. To establish and improve China's heritage conservation mechanism, advanced concepts and practices from other countries around the world must be drawn upon as references. The paper traces the trajectory of formulating a series of charters, resolutions, and other official documents on urban conservation in Europe since the 1960s. It summarizes ideas of heritage and management policies, particularly emphasizing the adoption of integrated and comprehensive approach to heritage conservation and urban development. The paper argues that in order to achieve comprehensive protection of cultural heritage, China must establish relevant national policies to ensure proactive protection supported by sound institutional mechanisms in law, public policy, financing, and planning governance.

Keywords: urban conservation; positive preservation; national heritage; idea of heritage; cultural continuity

In February 1982, China began to announce its national historical and cultural cities, which, in comparison to the urban conservation practices of European countries that started in the 1960s, was not too late in terms of timing. Looking back at history, during the 1930s, the mainstream consciousness in Chinese society was largely focused on "improving," "rectifying," and even "destroying" the old cities. "Before the Anti-Japanese War, the extent and rate of deterioration of old buildings in China were far beyond the normal trend" [1]. In 1948, Mr. Liang Sicheng from Tsinghua University presided over and compiled the "Summary of Important Architectural Relics in the Country," ranking "the entire city of Beijing" as the first item, classified as the highest level of importance. Subsequently, to preserve the old city of Beijing as a whole, he, alongside Chen Zhanxiang, proposed the "Liang-Chen Plan" [2]. The system of historical and cultural cities that started in the 1980s was undoubtedly influenced by Liang Sicheng's thoughts on ancient city preservation, thus the "Liang-Chen Plan" can be referred to as the "prelude to ancient city preservation."

After more than 40 years of exploration in the practice of protecting famous cities in China, a framework system for the protection of historical and cultural cities with Chinese characteristics has been basically formed. This has made a positive contribution to inheriting and developing excellent traditional Chinese culture, maintaining the unique characteristics of urban cultural heritage, and enriching the material and spiritual lives of the people. There has also been some systematic review and in-depth discussion on the characteristics and management models of the famous city system [3-7]. However, while significant overall achievements have been made in the practice of protecting famous cities, destructive actions in some regions remain prevalent. Under the guise of improving people's livelihoods and revitalizing use, large-scale demolitions and constructions, genuine demolitions creating false facades, and the tearing down of old buildings to build new ones have seriously damaged the historical environment and landscape, and these phenomena have not been thoroughly curbed.

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed: "Increase efforts to protect cultural relics and cultural heritage, strengthen the protection and inheritance of historical culture in urban and rural construction, and effectively utilize national cultural parks." Since 2023, central and national relevant departments have accelerated the legislative work on the protection of historical and cultural heritage, including urban protection. Strengthening the

protection and inheritance of urban and rural cultural heritage has received unprecedented attention as an important aspect of strengthening cultural confidence, building a culturally strong nation, and undertaking new cultural missions.

1 The European Cultural Convention Lays the Foundation for Heritage Protection

1.1 Historical Contributions of European Protection

Europe is one of the continents with a high standard of living, beautiful environment, and suitability for habitation, and it is also an active practitioner of urban protection, accumulating valuable experiences in legal systems, policy measures, and planning practices [8-9]. European protection not only makes significant contributions to the research and practice of urban heritage protection in Europe and various European countries but also has important influences on international cultural heritage protection. Since 1970, international documents such as protection conventions, resolutions, and recommendations have played an essential role in urban protection, heritage tourism, and cultural prosperity. The concepts of protection, policy mechanisms, and methodological systems embedded in European protection can provide inspiration and ideas for the construction of urban protection systems in China.

Since the 1950s, the Council of Europe has developed a series of important legal documents and policies that have played a crucial role in consolidating and coordinating the heritage policies of European countries. This includes key concepts and a series of practical explorations, such as the "European Architectural Heritage Year" (EAHY) in 1975 and the "European Architectural Heritage Charter," the "European Convention on the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe" (referred to as the "Granada Convention") in 1985, as well as the "integrated protection" policies and measures established by these conventions. The 2005 "Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society" (referred to as the "Faro Convention") emphasizes the social value of heritage protection and the active role of architectural heritage in contemporary social life.

1.2 Formation of the Concept of "Common Heritage"

The concept of "common heritage" (un heritage commun) was first proposed by Abbé Grégoire, who is posthumously referred to as the "citizen priest" of France, in 1794. After World War II, it became a basic consensus in Europe for the legislative protection of cultural heritage [10]. The Council of Europe, founded on May 5, 1949, initially comprised ten Western European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, and Italy, and now has 46 member countries. The Council of Europe is an organization through which European countries promote unity and solidarity in legal, cultural, and social aspects. Its purpose is "to achieve greater unity among its members in order to safeguard and realize the ideals and principles that constitute their common heritage, and to promote economic and social progress."

In December 1954, following World War II, the Council of Europe adopted the "European Cultural Convention," aimed at achieving unity in future Europe. It seeks to enhance mutual understanding among European countries and peoples, appreciate cultural diversity, jointly maintain European culture, encourage contributions from all countries to European common cultural heritage, and promote coordinated actions and cultural activities that enhance European interest.

The "European Cultural Convention" marks the beginning of the post-war European cultural heritage protection movement. The convention advocates mutual respect and recognition of each country's historical regions and sites, and establishes the concept of "the common cultural heritage of Europe." The "European Cultural Convention" is a very concise international treaty, consisting of only 11 articles, of which two directly relate to cultural heritage protection: each contracting party shall take appropriate measures to protect the common cultural heritage of Europe and encourage contributions from their own country (Article 1); and each contracting party shall regard objects of

European cultural value under its control as part of the common cultural heritage of Europe, and must take appropriate measures to protect them and ensure their suitable openness (Article 5) [11].

1.3 Overview of European Heritage Protection Documents

Under the framework of the "European Cultural Convention," Europe has initiated a series of cooperative actions at the intergovernmental, non-governmental organization, and local government levels to actively maintain and manage cultural heritage of European significance in a sustainable manner. From thematic seminars organized by the Cultural Cooperation Committee to the European Ministers of Culture Conferences, the Conference of Historical Towns organized by the Council of Europe, and relevant resolutions issued by institutions such as the European Council and the European Parliament, these actions have comprehensively promoted the construction of mechanisms, policy implementation, and planning practices for heritage protection in Europe. See Table 1.

Tab.1 List of relevant documents to the protection of European architectural heritage

Promulgation Date	Conventions	Resolutions, Recommendations, and Declarations
December 1954	European Cultural Convention	
June 1958		Resolution on the Cultural Fund of the Council of Europe
December 1961		Resolution on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation—Establishment of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation
May 1963		Recommendation on the Preservation and Development of Ancient Buildings and Historic or Artistic Sites (Recommendation 365)
May 1963		Recommendation on Implementing the Pilot Project for the Protection and Development of the Historic Area of Venice (Recommendation 366)
April 1964		Recommendation on Regional Planning and the Development of Ancient Buildings and Historic or Artistic Sites
March 1966		Resolution on Standards and Methods for Inventories of Ancient Buildings and Historic or Artistic Sites
March 1966		Resolution on the Revival of Monuments
October 1966		Recommendation on Principles and Practices of the Active Conservation and Rehabilitation of Groups and Areas of Buildings of Historical or Artistic Interest (Bath Recommendation)
April 1968		Resolution on Principles and Practices for the Active Conservation and Rehabilitation of Groups and Areas of Buildings of Historical or Artistic Interest
April 1968		Resolution on the Active Conservation of Monuments, Groups of Buildings, and Areas of Historical or Artistic Interest within Regional Planning
May 1968		Resolution on Organizing a Conference of Ministers Most Directly Responsible for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Groups of Buildings and Sites of Historical or Artistic Interest
May 1969	European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage	
November 1969		Resolution of the Conference of Ministers on the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Monuments and Sites of Cultural Heritage
November 1969		Resolution on Organizing a Year of Activities for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Monuments and Sites of Cultural Heritage
January 1970		Recommendation of the European Conference of Ministers Responsible for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Cultural Heritage

January 1970		Recommendation on the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Venice
January 1970		Resolution on the "Save Venice" Campaign
September 1970		Recommendation on the Draft European Outline Law for the Active Protection of Immovable (Cultural) Property
October 1970		Resolution on the Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Implementing Policies for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Ancient Buildings and Historic or Artistic Sites
October 1971		Declaration of the Seminar on European Historic Towns (Split Declaration)
May 1972		Resolution on the Conservation and Restoration of Venice
May 1972		Resolution on Interim Measures for the Protection of Monuments and Sites of Cultural Heritage
May 1972		Resolution on Compiling National Inventories of Monuments, Groups of Buildings, and Sites of Historical and Artistic Interest
January 1973		Resolution on Rural Revival Policy within Urban and Rural Balance
September 1975	European Charter of the Architectural Heritage	
October 1975		Amsterdam Declaration
April 1976		Resolution on Adapting Legal Regulations to Meet the Requirements of the Integrated Conservation of the Architectural Heritage
October 1979		Recommendation on the Protection of Europe's Architectural Heritage
October 1979		Resolution on the Role of Local and Regional Authorities in the Protection of the Architectural Heritage
October 1979		Resolution on the Role of Independent Associations in the Protection of the Architectural Heritage
December 1980		Recommendation on the Professional Training of Architects, Town Planners, Civil Engineers, and Landscape Designers
July 1981		Recommendation on Support Actions for Certain Declining Trades in the Context of Handicraft Activities
November 1983		Resolution on Contemporary Architecture
June 1985	Convention on Offenses Related to Cultural Property	
October 1985	European Convention on the Protection of the Architectural Heritage	
October 1986		Recommendation on Promoting Craftsmanship Involved in the Protection of the Architectural Heritage
September 1986		Recommendation on Urban Open Spaces
October 1987		Recommendation on European Industrial Towns
March 1988		Recommendation on Controlling Material Deterioration of the Architectural Heritage Caused by Pollution
April 1989		Recommendation on the Protection and Enhancement of the Archaeological Heritage Environment in Urban and Rural Planning Actions
April 1989		Recommendation on the Protection and Enhancement of Rural Architectural Heritage
September 1990		Recommendation on the Conservation of Europe's Industrial, Technological, and Engineering Heritage
April 1991		Recommendation on Possible Measures to Promote Financial Support for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage
September 1991		Recommendation on the Protection of 20th Century Architectural Heritage
January 1992	Revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage	

February 1992		Recommendation on the State of Cultural Heritage in Central and Eastern Europe
November 1993		Recommendation on the Protection of Architectural Heritage Against Natural Disasters
September 1995		Recommendation on the Integrated Protection of Cultural Landscape Areas as Part of Landscape Policy
January 1995		Recommendation on the Coordination of Methods and Systems for Preparing Documents Related to Historic Buildings and Monuments
May 1996		Recommendation on the Protection of Cultural Heritage from Illegal Activities
February 1997		Recommendation on Sustained Protection of Cultural Heritage from Physical Damage Caused by Pollution and Similar Factors
March 1998		Recommendation on Measures to Promote Integrated Protection of Historic Complexes Composed of Movable and Immovable Assets
March 1998		Recommendation on Heritage Education
March 1998		Resolution on Cultural Routes
May 1998		Recommendation on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Property
March 2000	European Landscape Convention	
May 2000		Recommendation on the Council of Europe Campaign "Europe, A Common Heritage"
May 2000		Resolution on European Historic Towns
November 2000		Recommendation on Abandoned Hospitals and Military Buildings
November 2000		Recommendation on Maritime and River Cultural Heritage
November 2000		Recommendation on the Management of Cathedrals and Other Major Religious Buildings in Use
December 2000		Declaration on Cultural Diversity
November 2001	European Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage	
January 2003		Recommendation on Promoting Tourism as a Factor of Sustainable Development for Cultural Heritage
September 2003		Recommendation on Promoting Art History in Europe
November 2003		Recommendation on Tax Incentives for the Protection of Cultural Heritage
October 2005	Framework Convention on the Social Value of Cultural Heritage	
November 2005		Recommendation on the Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Preserving the Cultural Character of Urban Surroundings
November 2005		Recommendation on the Private Management of Cultural Property
December 2005		Recommendation on the Governance and Management of University Heritage
June 2006		Recommendation on the Coordination of Heritage and Modernity
November 2008		Recommendation on Craftsmanship and Cultural Heritage Protection Skills
March 2009		Recommendation on the Future of Cultural Tourism—Towards a Sustainable Model
November 2010		Recommendation on Balanced Approaches to Salvaging Archaeological Finds in Development Projects
March 2014		Recommendation on Endangered European Heritage
January 2015		Recommendation on Intercultural Integration
April 2015		Namur Declaration
May 2015		Recommendation on Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis and Post-Crisis
August 2016	Council of Europe Landscape Convention	
February 2017		Recommendation on the Strategy for Europe's Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century

May 2017	Convention on Offenses Related to Cultural Property (Replaces the 1985 Convention)	
October 2020		Recommendation on Promoting Risk Prevention in Daily Management of Cultural Heritage
May 2022		Recommendation on the Role of Culture, Cultural Heritage, and Landscape in Addressing Global Challenges

Source: Based on information collected and organized from the official website of the Council of Europe
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/herein-system/council-of-europe>

2. The Emergence of Urban Protection Policies and Practices in Europe

2.1 The Venice Crisis and the Protection of Historical Centers

After World War II, rapid economic development posed various threats to historical cities. In Europe, the city of Venice quickly found itself in crisis due to modern development pressures, with skyscrapers looming over its famous island and plans for modern highways being drafted. This situation garnered widespread attention and initiated a far-reaching "Save Venice" movement, raising awareness among European citizens about the importance of protecting historical cities.

At the end of 1960, in response to expert proposals, the Cultural and Scientific Committee of the Council of Europe began to consider formulating a European plan for the protection of monuments and historical centers, aimed at implementing collective actions of European significance. Recognizing the increasingly severe threats posed by industrial expansion, population growth, real estate speculation, and unwise urban planning measures to European cultural heritage during peacetime, people acknowledged the cultural importance of historical towns to Europe. According to the objectives of the "European Cultural Convention," countries have an obligation to fully protect historical centers, including monuments, which serve not only as historical witnesses but are also fundamental characteristics of Europe's spiritual and material environment.

2.2 The "Prime Importance" of Heritage Protection

On January 1, 1962, the Council of Europe established the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CCC), reflecting the willingness of most European governments to collaborate closely on education and cultural affairs, thus initiating a process of deepening cultural cooperation in Europe.

At the outset, the CCC passed a resolution proposing collective actions to ensure effective protection of historical centers with European value. The purpose of this resolution was to transfer the slowly progressing world project plan initiated by UNESCO to the European region, while also seeking to take concrete action to protect and develop the common heritage advocated by the "European Cultural Convention."

In May 1963, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted recommendations for "Preserving and Developing Ancient Buildings and Historical or Artistic Sites" (referred to as Recommendation 365), launching cooperation at the intergovernmental, non-governmental organization, and local government levels in Europe. This marked significant development in the policy mechanisms for the protection of architectural heritage in European cities. Alongside the adoption of Recommendation 365, the Parliament passed a resolution urging local governments to recognize the "prime importance" of monument and site protection and suggested that local governments fully consider the protection of ancient buildings and historical or artistic sites during discussions on relevant regional planning [12].

2.3 Three-Year Action Plan for Protecting Ancient Buildings and Sites

On March 1, 1965, during the 134th consultative assembly of the European Parliament, the proposal advocated by Recommendation 365 for the preservation and development of historical or artistic architectural complexes and sites was submitted to the CCC for review within the framework of the proposal, along with related financial resources.

In this context, the CCC developed an action plan to promote cooperation in preserving and developing buildings and areas of historical or artistic significance. According to this action plan, the following three thematic discussions were scheduled to take place between 1965 and 1966:

Theme One: Standards and methods for registering ancient buildings and historical or artistic sites for the purpose of preservation and development.

Theme Two: Finding new uses for buildings that have cultural significance but no longer serve their original purposes within natural or aesthetic environments.

Theme Three: Analyzing preservation and development issues related to historical or artistic architectural complexes and areas in connection with regional planning.

3. The Formation of Urban Protection in Europe During the 1960s

3.1 Thematic Seminars on Preservation and Development

From May 1965 to October 1968, five seminars themed "Preservation and Rehabilitation" were held in historical cities such as Barcelona, where European protection policies and principles were clearly and comprehensively defined. These seminars were typically hosted by the government of the organizing country and attended by senior officials responsible for monuments and other high-level experts from various European countries. On one hand, these events facilitated in-depth exchanges on theoretical issues; on the other hand, they provided an opportunity to better understand specific issues through field visits and in-depth discussions in the host country, focusing on certain universally significant problems.

In fact, five thematic seminars were held over four years, addressing topics such as the standards and methods for protection listings, the revitalization of monuments, the principles and practices of active protection, the relationship between active maintenance and regional planning, and policies for preservation and rehabilitation. This expanded and deepened the originally planned three thematic discussions [13]. See Table 2.

Tab.2 Five symposiums on the preservation and development

Sequence	Conference Theme	Main Outcome	Date	Location
Seminar A	Standards and methods for the protection and registration of ensembles and areas of historical or artistic significance	The Parma Recommendation	May 17-19, 1965	Barcelona, Spain
Seminar B	Finding new uses for buildings of cultural significance that no longer fulfill their original purposes, within natural or aesthetic environments	The Vienna Recommendation	October 4-8, 1965	Vienna, Austria
Seminar C	Principles and practices for actively preserving and	The Bath Recommendation	October 3-7, 1966	Bath, United Kingdom

	rehabilitating ensembles and areas of historical or artistic significance			
Seminar D	Active preservation of monuments, ensembles, and areas of historical or artistic significance in the context of regional planning	The Hague Recommendation	May 22-27, 1967	The Hague, Netherlands
Seminar E	Implementation policies for the preservation and rehabilitation of ensembles and areas of historical or artistic significance	The Avignon Recommendation	September 30-October 5, 1968	Avignon, France

Source: Compiled and organized based on information from the official website of the Council of Europe

3.2 The European Ministers of Culture Conferences

The five seminars organized by the CCC ultimately led to the first European Ministers of Culture Conference, held in Brussels in November 1969. This marked the culmination of the influence of the previous seminars. The conclusions drawn from these seminars clearly emphasized the full value of monuments and site cultural heritage from cultural, human, economic, and social perspectives. As a result, the Council of Europe urged all member states to pay close attention to the numerous threats posed by rapid social, economic, and demographic changes to European heritage.

The increasingly serious threats were unsettling, and the imbalance between the means to address these risks and the risks to be avoided was stark. Therefore, since 1969, six ministerial conferences have been held on the theme of "Preservation and Rehabilitation of Monuments and Site Cultural Heritage," during which European protective measures and action plans have been discussed. See Table 3.

Tab.3 Six conferences of European cultural heritage ministers

Sequence	Conference Name	Date	Location
First	European Conference of Ministers Responsible for the Preservation and Rehabilitation of Monuments and Sites of Cultural Heritage	November 25-27, 1969	Brussels, Belgium
Second	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Architectural Heritage	October 3-4, 1985	Granada, Spain
Third	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Cultural Heritage	January 16-17, 1992	Valletta, Malta

Fourth	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Cultural Heritage	May 30–31, 1996	Helsinki, Finland
Fifth	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Cultural Heritage	April 6–7, 2001	Portorož, Slovenia
Sixth	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Cultural Heritage	April 23–24, 2015	Namur, Belgium

Source: Compiled based on information from the official website of the Council of Europe.

A review of the key topics addressed in these six European Ministers' Conferences reveals that Europe's historical and cultural heritage protection is not limited to individual monuments but also extends to historic sites, which represent the overall "European culture" embodied by historic towns. Furthermore, the conferences emphasized that local governments should prioritize and fully consider the protection of ancient buildings, and historical or artistic sites in urban and regional planning.

3.3 The European Historic Towns Seminar

In October 1971, the first European Historic Towns Seminar was held in Split, Yugoslavia, organized by the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and the Council of Europe. Over 200 representatives attended, including delegates from member states of the Council of Europe and more than 100 historic towns, as well as representatives from international governmental and non-governmental organizations such as UNESCO and Europa Nostra. The seminar addressed issues related to the economic, social, financial, and urban planning aspects of the rehabilitation of historic centers [14].

The first European Historic Towns Seminar recognized the extreme importance of Recommendation 365, which was the origin of the five previous seminars on the protection of historic sites. It transformed the preservation of cultural heritage, particularly ancient buildings and historical or artistic sites, into a clear political commitment and specific responsibility for politicians, thus establishing the political significance of historic town protection amid contemporary pressing issues.

In September 1992, the seventh European Historic Towns Seminar took place in Istanbul, Turkey, with the theme of "Achieving a Balance between Historical Protection and Urban Development." Over the span of more than 20 years, a total of seven historic towns seminars were held. The resolutions and declarations passed during these meetings provided guidance and practical references for local urban protection and development, and the main contents of these documents were later integrated into the "European City Charter" (1992), which became a universal guiding principle and method for enhancing the quality of life in European towns. The "European City Charter" represented a pioneering policy initiative aimed at achieving sustainable development and creating better urban living conditions in Europe.

3.4 The Split Declaration

Representatives of historic towns attending the first European Historic Towns Seminar believed that the common political and technical interests made cooperation between European historic towns a desirable endeavor. As part of Europe's common cultural heritage, the efforts of the guardians and managers of historic towns should be viewed as a collective effort belonging to a single European entity (A single European), inspired by shared ideals and directed toward common goals.

The seminar adopted the "Split Declaration," which addressed issues related to the reanimation of historical and artistic building heritage, integrated dynamic urban and

regional planning management, as well as technical and financial aspects. Conceptually, the declaration pointed out that a new idea of human habitat is emerging in urban thinking, aimed at satisfying people's deep desire for beauty, diversity, and a healthy environment. This includes the recognition and understanding of the diverse values of urban environments, which is a crucial aspect often overlooked by industrialized societies.

Regarding principles and technical methods for protection, the "Split Declaration" asserted that the protection of historic towns must increasingly be regarded as one of the primary goals of balanced development. The main objective of preserving monuments, historical complexes, and sites should be to promote their reanimation, allowing them to play a vital role in modern cities while respecting their original functions and social contexts as much as possible. Reanimation operations should be integrated into urban and regional development planning, where such operations can serve as a catalyst and be implemented through long-term cooperation among various stakeholders at different levels [15].

Consequently, the "Split Declaration" further promoted the issuance of policies by the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and, in collaboration with the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities, facilitated the integration of town planning with historical protection, the active participation of local community residents, and effective cooperation among European historic towns.

4. The Progress of Integrated Protection Practices in European Cities

4.1 The Integrated Conservation Movement in Europe in the 1970s

Since the 1960s, relevant international documents have begun to emphasize the need for an integrated approach to heritage and urban development, as balancing the interests of social, economic, and urban development with cultural heritage protection has become increasingly important [16].

In 1970, the European Parliament adopted recommendations for "Preserving and Rehabilitation of Monuments and Site Cultural Heritage," calling on European countries to take active actions in the field of protection, particularly to establish mechanisms that promote the formulation and implementation of European protection policies. Specific measures included the immediate drafting of a general principle document for the protection of historical site cultural heritage, known as the "European Charter," and subsequently drafting a "European Convention" based on the charter. Another important item was to support the "European Architectural Heritage Year" (EAHY) campaign organized by the Council of Europe under the theme of "A Future for Our Past," urging countries to take necessary measures and actions to make urban heritage an indispensable part of daily life [17].

The 1975 "European Architectural Heritage Year" campaign was the first to draw public attention to heritage protection issues, awakening a collective sense of responsibility for urban conservation. The main concept promoted by this Heritage Year campaign was integrated conservation, which prioritized heritage protection within urban development planning. Since then, this new, comprehensive approach to protection has become the policy foundation for humane urban and regional planning.

4.2 European Historic Towns and Regions Association

In October 1997, the second meeting of European heads of state and government decided to launch a campaign themed "Europe, A Common Heritage," aimed at respecting cultural diversity and strengthening European heritage based on existing or future partnerships

among governments, educational and cultural institutions, and the industrial sector. Recognizing the common heritage of all of Europe allowed integrated conservation to expand from urban planning to the environment, broadening the concept of heritage from buildings to objects, from archaeological sites to museums, and from tangible cultural heritage related to religion, customs, language, or music to intangible cultural heritage.

Compared to the 1975 Architectural Heritage Year, the 1999 "Europe, A Common Heritage" campaign communicated a more comprehensive message, encompassing political goals along with social, ethical, cultural, economic, and environmental aspirations. This not only maintained but also expanded the concept of integrated conservation, emphasizing the protection, planning, funding, and promotion of urban heritage, as well as related considerations involving policies and methods across social, economic, educational, and material environmental fields.

As part of the "Europe, A Common Heritage" initiative, the European Association of Historic Towns and Regions (EAHTR), also known as Heritage Europe, was established by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in October 1999. The association aims to promote cooperation and collaboration among European historic towns, enhancing their significance and advocating for the preservation of cultural heritage to facilitate economic and social development. It seeks to improve the vitality and sustainability of historic towns.

By establishing a network of European historic towns associations, the initiative also supports countries without established associations in promptly forming national historic towns associations. It promotes appropriate protective legislation in various countries, ensuring that related decisions reflect the interests and needs of the residents of historic towns. Additionally, it effectively raises public awareness of the importance and value of European cultural heritage and facilitates education and training in urban management and cultural heritage at the local level.

4.3 Resolution on European Historic Towns

In May 2000, the European Parliament adopted the "Resolution on European Historic Towns" (Resolution No. 98 of 2000). The resolution consists of six sections, apart from the preamble, covering environmental and urban planning, economic, social, financial, resource and partnership, promotion and publicity, among others.

The preamble states that the historic towns throughout Europe provide a context for experiencing and enjoying many of the world's most significant cultural heritage. They narrate the stories of the evolution of European society, economy, and material culture, and they are the homes of exemplary architecture across generations.

Given that historic towns are always at the heart of regional cultural life, attracting millions of tourists and making substantial contributions to the economies of nations and Europe, they face unprecedented challenges as the third millennium begins. However, they also possess unique records of experience in adapting to change, serving as models for all efforts aimed at achieving sustainable urban regions.

One of the primary challenges facing these communities is achieving a balance between historical protection and economic development. It should be recognized that protecting past heritage is an investment in the future. Protection policies can promote economic growth, help reduce unemployment, and enhance social cohesion by strengthening community pride and continuity.

5. The Reconstruction of Urban Protection Mechanisms and the Updating of Concepts

5.1 Historical Cities as National Heritage

On June 2, 2023, President Xi articulated the five prominent characteristics of Chinese civilization during a symposium on cultural inheritance and development: continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness. He emphasized the need to strengthen cultural confidence, uphold openness and inclusiveness, adhere to integrity and innovation, and continue the historical cultural lineage.

Thirty years ago, Mr. Dong Jianhong and Mr. Ruan Yisan [18] discussed the relationship between ancient Chinese cities and cultural continuity in their book "Cultural Appreciation and Protection of Famous Cities." They argued that the long-standing vitality of ancient Chinese culture is related to the absence of urban decline throughout history. One significant manifestation of the continuity of ancient Chinese culture is the ongoing development and evolution of the city planning system.

Today, we live in an era that often prioritizes "change" over continuity. In some places, a civilization's heritage might vanish at the moment of its material triumph. The notion of Europe as a cultural space—shared by "Europeans" and uniting them—first emerged in the early decades of the 19th century [19]. This idea fosters a belief in a "common heritage of Europe" based on understanding and communication among various nations, largely due to the enduring practical achievements of urban protection through "European plans."

Cities are not only carriers of various economic activities and engines of economic development but also reservoirs of civilization and cultural creation [20]. "Cities should be understood simultaneously as urban areas, civic communities, and city-states, meaning they represent built environments, civic social collectives, and political communities" [21]. Cities serve as cultural centers for nations, regions, and locales; historic towns are vital cultural heritage, and historical cities are part of the national heritage. In the practice of building a culturally strong nation and comprehensively enhancing the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage, the integrated protection of historical cities plays a pivotal role.

5.2 National Policies for Comprehensive Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage

To better protect and inherit excellent traditional culture, it is urgent to improve and perfect the protection management mechanism. First, a comprehensive national law, the "Law on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage," should be urgently formulated. Through top-level institutional design, cultural heritage protection should be established as a fundamental national policy, further clarifying the basic rules for collaborative protection and coordinated management of historical cities [22].

Mr. Dong Jianhong and Mr. Ruan Yisan [18], referencing the ideas of Carl O. Sauer, defined historical and cultural famous cities as "urban cultural landscapes with special cultural value." American cultural geographer Carl O. Sauer defined cultural landscapes as "the forms of human activity added to natural landscapes." The formation of cultural landscapes is a long historical process, with each era contributing to their development.

For China, the protection of urban cultural heritage should not be limited to historical relics or significant landmark buildings. The protection of historical and cultural famous cities should focus on historically valuable urban "cultural landscapes." It can be argued that the integrated and systematic protection of historical and cultural famous cities entails

safeguarding any urban historical cultural landscape with cultural value and relevance, rather than merely preserving historical districts and isolated historical cultural blocks.

In the past, Liang Sicheng [23] emphasized the importance of comprehensive protection of the urban layout that constitutes "Beijing's unique majestic order" in his article "Beijing: An Unparalleled Masterpiece of Urban Planning," elaborating on the cultural value of the grand Beijing central axis and asserting that "this is a great heritage, the most precious possession of our people." Today, the central axis of Beijing is on the verge of being successfully listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Cultural inheritance is a prerequisite for promoting cultural prosperity. "If biology ensures the diversity of life through genes, then humanity ensures the diversity of culture through cultural heritage" [24]. Integrated protection of historical cities constitutes systematic policy measures that include specific regulations, finance, planning, management, technology, and implementation guarantees, as well as practical actions and civic participation [25]. It is essential to incorporate national heritage protection policies into all departmental policies affecting urban and rural built environments and to concretely implement the national will to protect cultural heritage within a multi-level governance framework. Europe places significant emphasis on the educational role of urban culture, creating a conducive social environment for urban cultural prosperity. By establishing non-profit historical town protection organizations to comprehensively participate in urban heritage protection management, secular spirit and cultural spaces unite diverse European nations.

5.3 Education in Heritage Protection within Urban Planning Development

In October 2005, during the second forum on the development of urban planning disciplines in China, Mr. Wu Zhiqiang, then the dean of the academy, highlighted ecological cities, green buildings, digital virtual spaces, and historical heritage as the four major directions for future urban and rural planning discipline development in his keynote report on "The Future Development of Urban Planning Disciplines." Nearly 20 years of development in urban and rural planning education in China has validated this perspective. However, in comparison to subjects like ecological cities, green buildings, and digital virtualization, the field of historical heritage studies requires comprehensive strengthening, both in theoretical exploration and practical accumulation, as well as in responding to significant national policies on cultural inheritance and development.

Information, advocacy, and policy improvements play a fundamental role in successful heritage protection project planning. In November 2023, UNESCO held the 21st Century Cultural Heritage Conference in Naples, launching the "Naples Spirit Initiative," which called for "the systematic integration of all aspects of cultural heritage in all formal, informal, and non-formal educational environments to promote quality education, ensuring that knowledge, skills, practices, forms of expression, and expressions are transmitted to future generations in a comprehensive, coherent, and sustainable manner" [26].

The protection and inheritance of historical and cultural heritage are essential components of sustainable urbanization and green urban development in China. The philosophy of urban protection must be given high priority in the construction of land and space planning disciplines, and research on the fundamental principles, core technologies, and governance policies for urban heritage protection must be comprehensively strengthened. This will contribute positively to the scientific development of urban protection practices in China

and promote cultural inheritance and innovative development in urban settings.

6. Conclusion

"Cities are carriers of a nation's culture and emotional memory, and historical culture is key to a city's charm." Our country boasts a long history, brilliant culture, and vast territory. The rich and diverse ethnic cultures, distinct regional landscapes, and varied living environments are important resources for building a beautiful China. These must be systematically protected, comprehensively preserved, and inherited to play a positive role in constructing a culturally strong nation.

The comprehensive protection and revitalization of our common heritage require a shift in mindset and innovative institutional mechanisms. It is recommended to establish a comprehensive protection framework based on a historical and cultural city protection system with Chinese characteristics, forming a matching and improved protection management mechanism. This should involve the strictest regulations and the most rigorous rule of law to safeguard historical and cultural heritage, particularly built heritage that is highly related to urban and rural environments and land use.

High-level protection is a vital support for achieving high-quality development and a high quality of life. Shaping regional cultural characteristics and continuing the historical context of cities are essential components of building a beautiful China. The transition from "fragmented protection management" to "integrated holistic governance," and from "passive preservation" to "active protection, inheritance, and development," necessitates scientifically organized and practical exploration, creative transformation, and innovative development.

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