

## **Heritage counts**

### **Cultural heritage planning in China's ancient banking capital, Pingyao**

#### **Section 1**

Pingyao is an ancient walled City in Shanxi Province, China, founded in the Western Zhou Dynasty between 827 and 782 B.C. Almost 200 years ago, Pingyao became the banking capital of China due to the acumen of its legendary businessmen. Although the walled city was typical in ancient China, it has become an 'endangered species'<sup>1</sup> in modern society and Pingyao is one of only two remaining and the most well-preserved.<sup>2</sup> 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 and it provides a remarkably complete picture of cultural, social, economic and religious development during one of the most seminal periods of Chinese history.<sup>3</sup>

Today the 35,000 residents of Pingyao Ancient City live far from the prosperous coast, with significant levels in underemployment and out migration of youth because of the lack of economic opportunity and amenities to modern living. Since becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site, development and economic pressure brought about by the rapid growth of tourism has increased along with the need for a master plan to manage and resolve the challenge of balancing development and protection of the Ancient City.<sup>4</sup> Pingyao welcomes around 1 million sightseers a year but these are mostly short, low quality tourist visits and the revenue captured by local residents, particularly those away from the main streets, is quite low. Because of access control, the city centre has become a place for tourists instead of locals<sup>5</sup> but despite entrance ticket revenues, Pingyao has been lacking funds for the upkeep of its historic buildings, especially the historic courtyard home that are in private ownership.<sup>6</sup>

To address these issues, the Pingyao County Government and Global Heritage Fund reached a cooperative agreement in 2006 for the comprehensive and systematic conservation and protection of Pingyao Ancient City as part of an integrated planning, conservation and development program.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Section 2**

The Pingyao Cultural Heritage Development Program aims to preserve the vernacular architecture, revitalize and stimulate the traditional arts and establish special historic areas.<sup>8</sup> The project plan can be divided into 4 main components:

- The development of the Pingyao Ancient City Master Conservation Plan with clear, sustainable development goals and strategy providing a technical basis for all future plans
- In addition to the above a Management Plan was needed for the World Heritage Site, which had been absent at the time of inscription in 1997 and with the development pressure, very much needed
- A comprehensive survey of both tangible and intangible cultural resources within the ancient to inform and enrich the Cultural Heritage Development Program and support the implementation of the Master Conservation Plan
- Preservation and rehabilitation of the vernacular courtyard houses and historic streetscape
- Community development program including revitalization of traditional arts and crafts to ensure Pingyao's future as a living city<sup>9</sup>

### **Section 3**

The partners in this project are:

- GHF provides match funding and technical support in areas of historic structure repair and rehabilitation, restoration fund incentives for qualifying property owners
- Pingyao Government is responsible for match funding, improvements in infrastructure, demolition of inappropriate structures, relocation of overcrowding historic courtyards, and restoration fund incentives for qualifying property owners
- The Shanxi Province Ministry of Construction has provided a budget of 10million RMB (approx. \$1.46M USD) to the Pingyao municipality for the Fanjia Jie Historic Street Ward conservation and rehabilitation project.
- GHF and Pingyao Government jointly appointed The Urban Planning Institute of Shanghai Tongji University to design the Pingyao Ancient City Management Plan and Master Conservation Plan, which incorporates both the conservation of important buildings and streetscapes, as well as essential issues of waste and water management, transportation and other elements “essential to the success of heritage conservation as a development modality.” The plans were approved by an expert panel review in January 2009.<sup>10</sup>
- UNESCO Beijing is leading work on the Preservation Manuals of historic courtyard houses and environs currently being prepared.

On May 23rd 2009, GHF Executive Director Jeff Morgan and Pingyao County Magistrate Li Feizhong, signed a 3-year agreement to continue the partnership in preserving Pingyao Ancient City.

A comprehensive survey of tangible and intangible cultural resources began in summer 2008. Focusing mainly on historic courtyard residences, the survey was carried out by a local team of planners, historians, and traditional craftsmen using photography, sketches, video and text descriptions to create a digital archive, recording social history alongside architectural history for the first time.

The pilot courtyard conservation project at No. 12 Mijia Xiang, began in September 2008 and the former bank premises now serve as GHF's field office, as well as a visitor and community center.

The partnership is also working to save the entire historic street area of Fanjia Jie, with its 31 courtyards. The aim is to create a pleasant living environment in historic residences while maintaining building integrity and the larger plan envisions restoring the entire street - not as a museum, but as a living place.

Pingyao's unique traditional crafts and folk arts were also researched, documented and after consultation with local experts, selected traditional arts and crafts were listed as protection and development subjects.

#### **Section 4**

The Heritage Development Program demonstrates that development can be tasteful, responsible and of benefit to the local community. Visitor stays can be lengthened and visitor management improved. Improvements can be made to the lives of local residents who lack basic community facilities. The Program has supported 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. Today the restored courtyard at 12 Mijia Xiang serves as a space for local residents to present their history on a weekly basis and has a reading room open to the public. Local artisans use the facilities as workshops and exhibition space and many of them will not be able to continue without support of the partnership.

According to Dr. Vincent Michael of the Institute of Chicago School of the Art and Trustee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation "Preserving historic buildings is not a challenge to development, it is a kind of development, and it is inherently a more sustainable development model because it incorporates those aspects of a community's history which the community has determined are central to its identity."<sup>11</sup>

#### **Section 5**

The Program shows that:

- A clear Master Plan, agreed by all the stakeholders, is essential for sustainable development
- Local people and town leaders can succeed, even when they lack expertise in planning and conservation, or human and financial resources
- Because the tasks involved in heritage restoration need to be provided on-site locally, governments can be confident that these jobs will not be outsourced to another part of the world when the economy strengthens.<sup>12</sup>

Through organisations like UNESCO and the Global Heritage Fund, public partners can tap into established inter-country cooperation mechanisms for heritage resources and this study shows the benefit to governments of embracing such opportunities.

"This is not the China of the headlines: the China of six-lane ring roads, Trump-like shopping plazas and Olympian architectural aspirations executed by international gold-medal architects. But in a country that is reinventing itself more rapidly than any other in modern history, whisking away thousands of historic buildings in the process, the precarious survival of Pingyao, a rare repository of Ming and Qing vernacular architecture and urban aesthetics—sadly in poor repair—may be the most novel development of all." Patricia Leigh Brown, *Architectural Digest*, December 2007<sup>13</sup>

"We are grateful for the vision and support from GHF in our work to preserve Pingyao Ancient City. Private sector investment, technical and scientific assistances, and international partnerships are critical to our efforts to protect and successfully preserve Pingyao Ancient City, one of China's finest jewels" says Wang Jianzhong, Former Magistrate of Pingyao.

Professor Ruan Yisan of Tongji University says that in Pingyao, "Tourism is like a sword with double edge. Without careful planning in advance, it could bring unrenowable consequences to the heritage site, while it brings economic chances to the locals".<sup>14</sup>

## **Section 6**

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## **Section 7**

<sup>1</sup> Bruce, D. & Creighton, O. (2006) Contested identities: The dissonant heritage of European town walls and walled towns, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12 (3), p234-254

<sup>2</sup> Wang, Shu-Yi, Ph.D., Tradition, memory and the culture of place: Continuity and change in the ancient city of Pingyao, China. University of Colorado at Denver, 2008 p 68

<sup>3</sup> Pingyao Ancient City, China: China's First Banking Capital, Global Heritage Fund p 1

<sup>4</sup> Li, Kuanghan (2009) Pingyao Cultural Heritage Development Program Progress Report, Global Heritage Fund, p 2

<sup>5</sup> Wang, Shu-Yi, Urban Conservation and Heritage Tourism in the Ancient City of Pingyao, China, *Heritage and Development: Papers and recommendations of the 12th International Conference of National Trusts New Delhi 3rd -5th December 2007*, INTACH 2008 p144

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable World Heritage Preservation in Developing Economies - A Model for Integrated Community-based Conservation and Development, GHF White Paper, September 2008, Global Heritage Fund p6

<sup>7</sup> Ibid Pingyao Ancient City p 1

<sup>8</sup> Ibid Pingyao Ancient City p 1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid Li 2009

<sup>10</sup> Website of Global Heritage Fund  
[http://globalheritagefund.org/what\\_we\\_do/updates/current\\_projects/pingyao\\_china](http://globalheritagefund.org/what_we_do/updates/current_projects/pingyao_china)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Rypkema, Donovan D, The Role of Public-Private Partnerships Donovan, *Heritage and Development: Papers and recommendations of the 12th International Conference of National Trusts New Delhi 3rd -5th December 2007*, INTACH 2008 p 173

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in GHF White Paper 2008 p 6

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Wang 2008 p 138

## **Author profile**

Catherine Leonard joined the UK National Trust in 1999, when she was responsible for the Trust's work with overseas heritage groups and managing the European Network of National Heritage Organisations. Catherine now heads the Secretariat of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) and is the strategic lead for the organisation's international co-

***Managing Heritage Cities in Asia and Europe:  
The Role of Public-Private Partnerships***

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ordination, including resource management, programme development, communications and relationships with INTO members, other ngos, policy makers and institutions worldwide. Catherine studied languages and literature at university and has spent time living and working abroad. Prior to joining the National Trust, Catherine worked for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. She visited Pingyao in April 2012.