

# Balancing Urban Development and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case Study of Kowloon City

Ziqi Wang

Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Hong Kong, 999077, China

**Abstract.** With the faster pace of urbanization, the conflict between urban development and cultural heritage protection has become more and more obvious. This paper takes the redevelopment plan of Kowloon City in Hong Kong as a specific case to explore practical ways to balance these two aspects. First, it makes clear the core ideas of cultural heritage and sustainable development by sorting out related papers and materials. Then it analyzes the multi-aspect values of cultural heritage, gives responses to some heated argumentative opinions, and puts forward targeted strategies. These strategies include perfecting relevant policy systems, encouraging more public participation and using new innovative technologies in protection work. The research results show that cultural heritage protection is a key support for sustainable urban development. It not only helps cities develop in a long-term and healthy way, but also provides useful theoretical references and practical experience for urban management workers. In conclusion, urban development should not be at the cost of cultural heritage. Instead, we need to find a way to achieve the best of both worlds, ensuring that urban development and cultural relic protection go hand in hand, and building a better city.

**Keywords:** urban development, cultural heritage, sustainable development, Kowloon City, protection strategies.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

With global urbanization speeding up, cities now have two key tasks: expanding development and preserving cultural heritage [1]. Urban redevelopment helps optimize space layout, but it often puts historical areas and old traditional buildings at risk. This makes the conflict between urban development and cultural heritage protection a hot topic for both academics and the public [2]. As an international city, Hong Kong's Kowloon City has many old buildings that hold local historical memories. The redevelopment plan for Kowloon City proposed by Hong Kong's Urban Redevelopment Authority will tear down some of these traditional buildings. This has caused heated public debates, and it also shows the common problem many places face: how to balance city expansion and cultural heritage protection [3]. Such problems can be seen all over the world. When cities only chase short-term economic gains blindly, they will lose their unique cultural features. This makes it more urgent than ever to find ways for both to develop together [4].

### 1.2 Research Purpose

Taking Kowloon City's redevelopment plan as a case, this study tries to deeply analyze the value of cultural heritage and the problems of destroying heritage for development. It also puts forward effective ways to balance the two. To be specific, it makes clear the meaning of core concepts, proves that Kowloon City's cultural heritage is irreplaceable, responds to controversial views, and provides references for urban managers to make decisions.

### 1.3 Research Value

In theory, this study enriches the theories about the relationship between urban development and cultural heritage protection. It adds to existing theories by analyzing real situations in Kowloon City in detail, and further broadens the research views on cultural heritage protection in the process of urbanization. In practice, it not only provides practical references to improve Kowloon City's redevelopment plan, but also shares useful experience for other cities facing similar development and

protection problems. Besides, it helps raise public awareness of cultural heritage protection, so as to build a good social foundation for promoting the coordinated development of the two aspects.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Core Concept Definition**

Cultural heritage includes tangible (ancient buildings, historical sites) and intangible (traditional customs, folk art) forms, with irreplaceable uniqueness and carrying regional historical memory and cultural genes[5]. Kowloon City's traditional buildings are typical tangible cultural heritage, reflecting the architectural style and living customs of specific historical periods. Sustainable development emphasizes meeting contemporary needs without compromising future generations' interests, and cultural heritage protection is an important part of it, with mutual promotion between the two[6].

### **2.2 Research Progress at Home and Abroad**

Foreign research started earlier, initially focusing on the historical and artistic value of heritage, and later shifting to the integration of protection and development. Scholars have verified the economic value of heritage through case studies and emphasized the role of policies and public participation[7]. Advanced digital technologies and restoration materials are widely used in foreign heritage protection[8]. Domestic research has developed rapidly in recent years, introducing foreign theories and conducting a large number of case studies, while there are deficiencies such as insufficient in-depth research on economic value and backward application of innovative technologies.

### **2.3 Research Gaps and Directions**

Existing research has three main shortcomings: it lacks holistic studies on the coordinated development of urban development and cultural heritage protection, has insufficient quantitative research data and analysis, and does not do enough comparative studies on different practical cases. To make up for these gaps, this study explores the internal mechanism behind their coordinated development from a holistic perspective. It adopts a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, and takes Kowloon City as a specific case to conduct in-depth analysis, so as to put forward universal and practical cultural heritage protection strategies for similar cities.

## **3. Multidimensional Value of Cultural Heritage in Urban Development**

### **3.1 Historical and Cultural Value**

Cultural heritage is the carrier of a city's history. The traditional buildings in Kowloon City have witnessed Hong Kong's development from a small fishing village into an international city, keeping precious historical records of different periods [3]. For researchers, these buildings offer first-hand materials for historical and cultural studies. For the public, they strengthen people's sense of identity and belonging to the city, and also serve as important educational resources to help young people build cultural confidence [9].

### **3.2 Economic Value**

Cultural heritage has great economic potential. It draws a large number of tourists every year, which directly drives the growth of local tourism and boosts related industries like catering, accommodation and souvenirs sales [10]. It also provides rich creative resources for the cultural and creative industry, helping develop distinctive products that are popular among people and bring in good economic benefits. Besides, it greatly boosts the city's overall competitiveness, which helps

attract more investment and excellent talents and further pushes forward the city's steady long-term economic development.

### **3.3 Social Value**

Cultural heritage strengthens social cohesion by stirring up residents' emotional resonance and encouraging people to communicate more and build mutual trust. Its protection and rational use help optimize urban space layout, improve people's living environment, and enrich residents' spiritual and cultural life with diverse activities. This makes daily life more colorful and meaningful for everyone. It also promotes social fairness, as it ensures all residents—no matter their background—can take part in heritage protection work and share the benefits brought by these valuable cultural treasures.

## **4. Response to Controversial Views**

### **4.1 The View that "Cultural Heritage is Replaceable by Recording Means"**

Some people hold the view that we can replace cultural heritage with various recording methods, but this idea totally ignores the essential and unique value of real cultural heritage. Although modern technologies like 3D scanning can clearly record the look and detailed structure of old buildings, they cannot capture the intangible elements hidden behind these buildings, such as their precious historical stories and the deep emotions of local people they carry over time. Physical cultural heritage offers people a special immersive experience that simple audio and video recordings can never replace. For example, the rich cultural connotation of the Forbidden City can only be truly felt and deeply understood when people visit the site in person, rather than through flat photos or virtual videos. Standing on the spot, people can feel the thick sense of history and the charm of traditional culture, which no recording tool can fully reproduce or convey to people.

### **4.2 The View that "Cultural Heritage Occupies Land and Has Low Economic Benefits"**

This view is quite one-sided and short-sighted. The economic benefits brought by cultural heritage are not just direct income from tourism. They also include many indirect gains from driving the growth of related industries, and these benefits are far more sustainable than those from ordinary commercial facilities. Commercial facilities are mostly homogeneous and easy to copy, while cultural heritage is unique and totally irreplaceable. This uniqueness helps cities gain stable long-term competitive advantages that other places cannot match. For example, the well-protected ancient towns in Suzhou have kept bringing in more and more economic benefits year by year, and this steady growth has lasted for a long time, which fully proves the lasting economic value of cultural heritage [11].

## **5. Balancing Paths**

### **5.1 Improve Policy and Regulatory System**

We should make comprehensive laws for cultural heritage protection, take heritage protection into urban development planning, and strengthen the connection between related policies to form a complete protection system [12]. Meanwhile, we need to encourage builders to integrate traditional heritage elements into modern construction works, and set up clear reward mechanisms to praise those who actively participate in protection. In addition, we must strengthen daily supervision and strict law enforcement. Once someone destroys cultural heritage, we should seriously investigate their legal responsibilities according to the rules. Only by doing so can we keep the seriousness of relevant laws and ensure that all heritage protection measures can be put into practice smoothly.

## 5.2 Encourage Public Participation

We should strengthen publicity and education through different kinds of media to raise public awareness of cultural heritage protection [13]. We can use platforms like TV, social media and community posters to spread knowledge about heritage value and protection importance, so that more people can understand and pay attention to this work. Meanwhile, we need to set up participation mechanisms such as public hearings, to make sure the public have the right to know relevant information and supervise the whole protection process. Besides, we should actively encourage people to take part in heritage protection and reasonable utilization, and give strong support to community-based protection organizations. This way, we can gather public strength to build a solid social foundation for long-term heritage protection.

## 5.3 Apply Innovative Protection Technologies

We can use digital technologies like 3D scanning to build complete heritage digital archives, which provide solid technical support for cultural heritage protection and rational utilization. Meanwhile, we should promote the use of environmentally friendly restoration materials to raise the quality of heritage repair work effectively. We also need to combine heritage protection technology with urban intelligent management, and apply the Internet of Things and big data to conduct real-time monitoring of heritage sites and offer data support for scientific decision-making in protection work.

## 6. Conclusion

Cultural heritage has unique multidimensional values that cannot be replaced. Balancing urban development and cultural heritage protection requires us to stick to the principle of sustainable development all the time. This study takes Kowloon City as a specific case, clarifies core research concepts at first, then analyzes the multi-aspect values of local cultural heritage in detail, responds to controversial views in the field, and finally puts forward targeted and practical paths to balance the two aspects. The research results show that cultural heritage protection is an important support for sustainable urban development, instead of an obstacle to urban construction. This study still has some limitations: it lacks enough quantitative research on the economic value of heritage, and there is also a shortage of empirical research on innovative technologies applied in protection. Future research will focus on strengthening these two weak aspects. In general, balancing urban development and heritage protection needs joint efforts from the government, the public and enterprises. Only in this way can we truly realize the harmonious coexistence of urban modernization and the inheritance of historical and cultural treasures.

## References

- [1] Abouelmagd, D., & Elrawy, S. (2022). Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development: the Case of Port Said city in Egypt. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2088460>.
- [2] Billore, S. (2021). Cultural Consumption and Citizen Engagement—Strategies for Built Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development. A Case Study of Indore City, India. *Sustainability*, 13, 2878. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052878>.
- [3] Blewitt, J. (2012). Understanding sustainable development. In Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781849773645>.
- [4] Hosagrahar, J., Soule, J., Fusco Girard, L., & Potts, A. (2016). Cultural heritage, the UN sustainable development goals, and the new urban agenda. *Bollettino Del Centro Calza Bini*, 16(1), 37-54. <https://doi.org/10.6092/2284-4732/4113>.
- [5] Vecco, M. (2010). A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible. *Journal of cultural heritage*, 11(3), 321-324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2010.01.006>.

- [6] Petti, L., Trillo, C., & Makore, B. N. (2020). Cultural heritage and sustainable development targets: a possible harmonisation? Insights from the European Perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(3), 926. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/10926955>.
- [7] Rizzo, I., & Throsby, D. (2006). Cultural heritage: economic analysis and public policy. *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, 1, 983-1016. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0676\(06\)01028-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0676(06)01028-3).
- [8] Neglia, G., Angrisano, M., Mecca, I., & Fabbrocino, F. (2024). Cultural heritage at risk in world conflicts: digital tools' contribution to its preservation. *Heritage*, 7(11), 6343. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3133042361?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>.
- [9] Arsenijević, J. M., & Perić, N. N. (2025). Heritage and future: Cultural and national identity management in the light of educational practices. *Baština*, 35(65). <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina35-54256>.
- [10] Bowitz, E., & Ibenholt, K. (2009). Economic impacts of cultural heritage—Research and perspectives. *Journal of cultural heritage*, 10(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2008.09.002>.
- [11] Qiu, D. (2021). Protecting Suzhou: study of the conservation of cultural heritage in the cities along China's Grand Canal (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania). <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/37287>.
- [12] Zhao, L., Li, Y., Zhang, N., & Zhang, Z. (2023). Public policies and conservation plans of historic urban landscapes under the sustainable heritage tourism milieu: discussions on the equilibrium model on Kulangsu Island, UNESCO World Heritage site. *Built Heritage*, 7(1), 6. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s43238-023-00086-0>.
- [13] Ibrahim, S. (2024). Raising Public Awareness to Preserve Cultural Heritage (A Case Study of Rawalpindi). *AL-JAMEI Research Journal*, 2(1), 51-58. <https://aljamei.com/index.php/ajrj/article/view/17>.