

# Conserving the Changing Place Attachment of Tourist-Infested Heritage Places Through the Participatory Planning Process

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## ABSTRACT

Rampant urbanization and economic development in mainland China over the past thirty years have contributed widespread changes to the physical and social fabric of the country's historic environment. Despite significant changes, the evaluation of social value and place attachment within heritage and urban design remains in its infancy and has not been examined empirically. The historic water town Zhujiajiao in Shanghai and Tongli in Suzhou have been chosen as comparative case studies. In the case of Tongli, UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach was applied to engage local communities in identifying physical elements to which values were attached during the conservation process. In contrast, Zhujiajiao underwent an expert-led planning process that excluded local community participation. Current research underscores the importance of engaging local communities in conservation planning process. Accordingly, this study examines how the components of place attachment (people, place, processes) influence long-term communities' place attachment to both historical water towns. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both local communities and professionals to discern differences in the understanding of social values and place attachment between these groups. Ultimately, this research compares how place attachment has developed differently in Tongli and Zhujiajiao since the conservation practices in Tongli strove to engage local communities and to realize local values. However, the findings challenge the prevailing assumption that community involvement necessarily enhances conservation outcomes.

This discrepancy underscores the necessity of adapting an efficiency conservation planning processes to fit China's top-down planning frameworks, thereby enabling local communities to actively participate in decision-making and be effectively integrated into conservation plans.

**Keywords:** Heritage Place; Over Tourism; Social Value; Community Engagement; Place Attachment; Urban Design

**Abbreviations:** DDCP: Detailed Development Control Plan; HUL: Historic Urban Landscape; PPP: Person-Process-Place; TJPDI: Tongji Planning and Design Institute

## Introduction

This research explores how social value identified by heritage professionals can be translated into physical form by urban designers through the engagement of local community in a participatory planning process, contributing to sustain the qualitative conservation plan. The worldwide trend of exploiting heritage sites primarily for tourist consumption has often led to the marginalization of local communities (Millar, et al. [1-2]). This approach to heritage has been

criticized for its oversimplification and commodification, raising crucial questions about the multiple histories of places and the selective nature of their preservation (Ashworth, et al. [3-6]). Global tourism is increasingly criticized for its impact on the conservation of heritage sites (Rindasih, et al. [7]). This trend often leads to local people leaving their ancestral homes, as seen in cities like Venice, Barcelona, and Amsterdam. In fact, it is not surprising to see Venice without Venetians, as now happening in the heritage places worldwide. Venice, for example, the surge in tourism has displaced the local population,

altering the city's cultural fabric, leading to overcrowding and infrastructure strain (McKenna, et al. [8]). Barcelona faces similar issues. The growth of short-term rentals, supported by platforms such as Airbnb, has escalated housing costs and displaced local residents (Cànoves, et al. [9]). This gentrification, favoring tourists over locals, is transforming the city's character (Colau, et al. [10]). In the 1990s, intensive urban development became a controversial feature in many Chinese cities and other developing countries.

This period marked a shift from merely conservation to regeneration a heritage site, merging place-making with economic development strategies amid a real estate boom (Shin, et al. [11-13]). However, regeneration projects often negatively impacted the social fabric of local communities, causing residents to relocate from historical centers (Hardoy, et al. [14]). A notable example is Shanghai's Xintian-di, where the original historic neighborhoods were transformed into a commercial hub for mass tourism, prioritizing economic gain over community needs (Giulio Verdini, et al. [15]). This redevelopment turned the area into a luxury retail district, increasing land value but overlooking the actual needs of the local community. As a result, the on-going physical changes risk eroding the local significance and place attachment local communities attached to these places (Grenni, et al. [16]). Indeed, China is a country with numerous historic water towns that continue to accommodate active community life as 'living heritage' (Ruan, et al. [17]). As the primary users of historic contexts, the residents who live in these heritage settings, occupy buildings and develop place attachment in their surroundings, must be involved in the decision-making and design process (Manzo, et al. [18]). Integrating place attachment into heritage conservation planning practice is a complex challenge for heritage professionals and urban designers. The assessment of social value and place attachment in heritage and urban design is still in its infancy and largely unexplored empirically (Hu, et al. [19-20]).

This study therefore fills in this gap by examining the interplay between heritage and urban design, recognizing their distinct yet interrelated roles in the conservation of heritage places. The confluence of these disciplines often results in a unified perspective on values. Through exploration, it becomes clear that social value in heritage studies is closely linked to the concept of place attachment in urban design in this research. Moreover, there's a noted gap between professionals' and local communities' understanding of a place's value (Mason, et al. [21]). While social value represents the professional

judgement of values (Frankel, et al. [22]), place attachment reflects the bond between an individual or group to a place, which can vary in terms of the social or physical features of the place, and is manifested through affective, cognitive and behavioral psychological processes (Scannell, et al. [23]). Public participation is widely acknowledged as a crucial element for the success of planning practice, and it is recommended at each stage of the planning process (Haklay et al. [24-25]). Scholars have suggested that leveraging place attachment can be an effective strategy to encourage local engagement in participatory planning processes (Li, et al. [26-27]). This is especially true in historical towns, which are dynamic environments needing to evolve with the needs and aspirations of their communities (Poulios, et al. [28-29]). Accordingly, incorporating public perspectives, especially the local communities' place attachment into the overall conservation planning process is essential.

Globally, in Western countries, urban planning has evolved to integrate strongly with heritage conservation. This evolution encompasses a strategic participatory planning process, employing diverse management, participatory, and design tools to address the needs of cities and their communities (Cidre, et al. [30]). However, from a Chinese perspective, where traditionally, urban development has focused on a highly institutionalized planning system, where key decisions are often influenced by political motives and developers' interests (Abramson, et al. [31-32]). Conservation planning within this system is predominantly expert-led and lacks comprehensive stakeholder involvement, especially from local communities in valuing heritage sites (He, et al. [33]). This leads to challenges in implementing conservation plans that resonate with communities' place attachment (Giulio Verdini, et al. [15, 34-35]). The research builds upon previous discussions by examining two scenarios: whether community-based regeneration in China can achieve better conservation outcomes with or without local community engagement. Additionally, it also critiques relevant social issues, such as the violent demolition of existing built environments for irrational real estate development. Finally, the research proposes a theoretical framework and outlines a procedure for incorporating place attachment into the conservation planning process (Figure 1). The framework is suggested to be conducted from the perspectives of both professionals and local communities, capturing their social values and place attachment. This helps to spot and fix any gaps between the proposed conservation plans and the views of the local communities, leading to more informed conservation efforts.

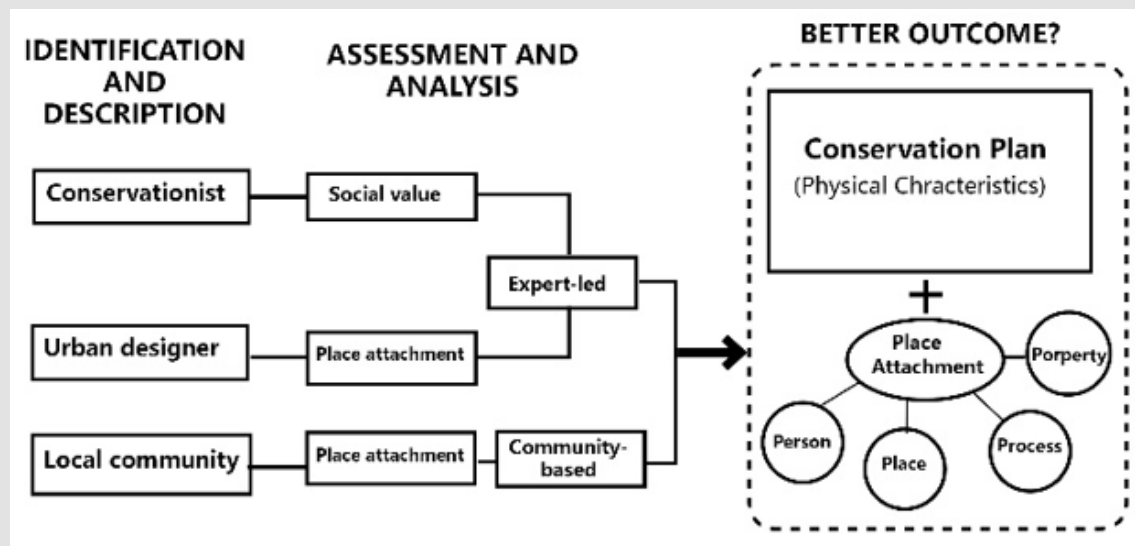


Figure 1: A conceptual Framework.

## Methodology

The research conducts a comparative case study to understand how community engagement in conservation planning affects the outcomes in two cases. It aims to compare Tongli residents, who have benefited from tourism development and participatory processes, with Zhujiajiao residents, assessing whether the former have higher place attachment. Zhujiajiao in Shanghai and Tongli in Jiangsu were chosen as comparative case studies due to their differing involvement communities during the planning process. This approach ensures a consistent context while highlighting the variable of community engagement, providing compelling evidence for the study (Yin, et al. [36]). Both towns are historic water towns located outside metropolitan areas and share similar conservation and development statuses. The Tongli case study supposed to offers contemporary insights into community engagement, serving as a learning lesson for Zhujiajiao. Professor Ruan Yisan, a pioneer in protecting and planning historic water towns since 1980s, influenced the selection of case studies. His conservation planning practice spans towns such as Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Zhujiajiao, and Mudu. Tongli is the only historic water town that has international cooperation and employs the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach to involve communities during the conservation planning process. In contrast, Zhujiajiao underwent a traditional, expert-led conservation process without local community involvement.

Meanwhile, Zhujiajiao, impacted by real estate development in Shanghai (China's most significant metropolitan center, with housing prices ranking sixth in the world), integrates urban design into its Detailed Development Control Plan (DDCP), providing an opportunity to explore urban design's role in conservation practice. The boundaries

of the two cases are defined by the DDCP of each town, focusing on the core conservation area and its development control area. Two Phases data collection was conducted. Phase one involved semi-structured interviews with heritage professionals to understand their perspectives and roles in conservation planning. Phase two included interviews with long-term residents to explore their place attachment and its contributing physical components, supplementing professional perspectives from phase one. Meanwhile, this research is exploratory in nature, aiming to collect diverse perceptions of place from long-term residents rather than to assess majority opinions. Given the extensive transformations experienced by Zhujiajiao, the study considers various components of the long-term resident population. These include the long-established ancient old town communities, relocated communities, and entrepreneurial newcomers, as well as new residents in both the ancient and newly developed neighborhoods. Interview questions were designed based on thematic analysis. Semi-structured interview responses were categorized into themes for analysis. In Phase One, interview questions are proposed from an interdisciplinary perspective, comparing the roles and experiences of stakeholders with different positions. Phase two responses from residents were coded according to the person– process–place (PPP) framework proposed by (Scannell, et al. [23]).

### A Top-down Conservation Planning Process in Zhujiajiao

The conservation planning process in Zhujiajiao predominantly follows a top-down approach, which can be divided into two phases. Initially, from 1997 to 2000, government-led conservation initiatives were implemented but were short-lived, spanning only four years. Subsequently, from 2001 to the present, the Zhujiajiao Investment Company took over, focusing on tourism as the principal economic

driver and property development as the main profit-generating strategy. They commissioned the Tongji Planning and Design Institute (TJPDl) to draft the conservation plan for Zhujiajiao, which included a statutory two-week consultation period and occasional public hearings, limited in scope and accessibility to the public. A notable deficiency in Zhujiajiao's conservation planning process is the minimal involvement of the local community. During interviews, conservation practitioners frequently pointed out that community engagement in regeneration projects is significantly limited. One planner (P2) highlighted the absence of detailed guidelines for implementing community participation in practice: 'Despite encouragement for planners to consider public feedback, there is no legal requirement to integrate community decisions, even when there is substantial public resistance to planning decisions.' Indeed, this often reduces community engagement to a perfunctory task, merely a procedural formality for achieving regulatory compliance (Li, et al. [34-35]).

**Government -Led Conservation Practice (1997-2000):** Prior to 1997, Zhujiajiao retained the spatial form and societal characteristics of traditional Jiangnan water towns. During this period, the population remained relatively stable. Although the idea of developing tourism was considered in the early 1990s, it was not implemented until the end of the decade (Li Zhen, et al. [37]). Conservation efforts began earnestly in 1997 when the Zhujiajiao Township government and QingPu District Government formed the Central Town Development Coordination Group to manage Zhujiajiao's development. Each member government committed approximately RMB 5 million annually from 1998 to 2002 to enhance tourism activities in Zhujiajiao (Qing Pu Year Book Committee,[38]). In response to these government-led initiatives, the first round of formal conservation planning was undertaken by the Tongji Planning and Design Institute (TJPDl). This included documenting historic relics, renovating significant structures such as No. 75 Xi Jing Street, restoring old houses along five historic streets, and developing public spaces outside the ancient town (Wang, et al. [39]). These initiatives laid a foundation for Zhujiajiao's emergence as a major tourist destination.

**Private Developer-Driven Development Practice (2002-Now):** The availability of public funding during this period was directly influenced by Shanghai's economic development policies. In 2000, the 'One City, Nine Towns' suburban urbanization strategy was launched to promote the urbanization of suburbs within the metropolitan administrative area, with Zhujiajiao being one of the nine towns selected for development and the only one primarily focused on tourism (SUPAB, et al. [40]). Subsequently, the responsibility for developing Zhujiajiao was transferred to the Shanghai Zhujiajiao Investment Company, which oversaw an estimated total investment of RMB 7.5 billion from 2002 to 2007 (Zhujiajiao Government, 2005c). During this period, the company acquired significant property rights, amounting to 11,027 square meters of residential properties and 9,899 square meters of commercial properties (Qian Changping, et

al. 2007). Meanwhile, the Zhujiajiao Investment Company developed high-end holiday properties, attracting wealthy individuals and significantly transforming the town's demographic and economic composition (Yi, 2003). Developers have also introduced leisure activities for higher consumer segments, such as replacing traditional teahouses with bars and cafes. This high-end development has resulted in a sharp increase in rental prices within the ancient town, displacing original residents to make room for new inhabitants, such as artists and high-end buyers, aiming to enhance the overall image of the town (Bei Huang, et al. [41]).

### A Participatory Conservation Planning Process in Tongli

Unlike Zhujiajiao, where the local government relocated original residents to convert historical buildings into tourism destinations, Wujiang municipality and Tongli government were sensitive to conservation issues from an early stage (Bellocq, et al. [42]). Most importantly, the local government in Tongli prioritizes community engagement, valuing local voices in the decision-making process. This contrasts with the expert-driven conservation efforts in Zhujiajiao, where professional expertise predominantly directs the process (ZHOU, [43]). Tongli's development benefits from the Government-Universities-Market-Community cooperation model. This multi-party collaboration has increased the income of original inhabitants, maintaining the town's livability. Additionally, the government invested in research facilities and invited universities and institutions to explore new development pathways for the town (ZHOU, [43]). The conservation planning process in Tongli can be divided into three phases. Initially, during the government-initiated stage, tangible heritage conservation projects were prioritized. From 2003 to 2006, the second stage, the focus shifted to an integrated development path and on the construction of public environment. Stage three was symbolized with real estate development and scenic landscape projects. In terms of community engagement, while the local communities were consulted and involved during the decision-making process, most of them are compelled to follow the instructions of local government and professionals. This often leads to challenges in genuinely incorporating residents' perspectives in the early stages of planning (Arnstein, et al. [44]).

**Provincial and Local Government Initiated (1995- 2002):** Heritage conservation in Tongli began in the 1980s with the local government's efforts to develop state-owned assets. During this period, the Pearl Tower Garden and South Garden Tea House were repaired, and the Tuisi Garden and Chen Qubing residence were designated as protected sites in Wujiang District. In 1995, Tongli was added to the first provincial list of small historic towns. The government also leased assets to private collectors, converting a republican-period girls' school into a museum (Zhou, et al. [43]). Since the late 1970s, cultural heritage increasingly became a resource for local development, closely tied to tourism. By the 1990s, domestic tourism had become a major economic pillar for Tongli, with its contribution to the



GDP rising from 10% in 1994 to 52% in 2003. This growth was partly driven by the introduction of a ticketing system in 2003 that provided access to the ancient center (Maylis Bellocq, et al. [42]). It was also during this time, professor Ruan Yisan significantly raised awareness about integrating urban heritage into development projects, receiving provincial authority's invitations to engage more water town project across the region (Ruan, et al. [45]). Local leaders intensified their commitment to heritage protection to boost tourism development. The government managed most accommodation in the ancient center through the Housing Bureau, converting local residents' homes into public sites without compensation due to the confiscations and rental market reforms in the 1970s (Cao, et al. [46]).

**Toward an integrated conservation approach (2003- 2006):** Like Zhujiajiao, tourism development in Tongli reconfigured its ancient center. By the 2000s, convenience stores and public services had moved from the historic sector to newly developed streets outside the town. The old town became exclusively associated with tourism, with new facilities such as parking lots, buried electric lines, and imitation arch bridges built for this purpose. In an effort to inscribe the Retreat and Reflection Garden as a UNESCO World Heritage site, several improvement measures were implemented to enhance its environment. In 2003, the local government renovated public spaces and reinvested land-leasing rents into infrastructure projects to benefit both residents and tourists. This included the construction of new facilities and the renovation of Tui Si Yuan Square (Zhou, et al. [43]). From a conservation planning perspective, the government collaborated with Tongji University and international research centers to explore transformation paths in Tongli. Unlike Zhujiajiao, where residents were relocated to convert buildings into tourism destinations, Tongli adopted an integrated Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) conservation approach. As a pilot city, Tongli continues to develop strategies to establish the 'Tongli Model' for historic town protection and development. Key aspects include integrating the town's scenic area with the local community and involving residents in conservation efforts (Wallenwein, et al. [47]).

**The Development of Real Estate and the Change of Spatial Strategies (2007-Now):** During this stage, the local government focused on developing state-owned assets and offering preferential leasing policies to attract market capital. Pilot projects facilitated the functional transformation of old town houses; investments enabled local elites to establish high-class inns and research centers, revealing new developmental pathways for Tongli. However, due to strict land ownership and construction controls, real estate projects within the ancient town remained limited. For instance, the property at 36 Yuxing Bridge, after renovation, went through several transactions before being developed into a private leisure club by a businessman from Wenzhou (zhao, et al. [48]). Local government then shift the target to develop new ecological sites outside the town to transform Tongli's image. Recognizing that unmanaged high visitor rates could damage

the town's image, the government attempted to control tourist influx by diversifying attractions. This strategy included the development of a large ecological park and plans for a cultural river park, distinguishing Tongli's offerings from other water towns.

## A Comparative of the Two Case Studies

**The Conservationist Discourses:** When comes to recognizing historic value, both case studies feature historical buildings, structures and buildings associated with notable figures as important heritage. However, Tongli stands out for its emphasis on social values. Its conservation plan integrates the town's aesthetic appeal with the everyday lives of its residents as a 'living heritage' and actively involving the community in conservation efforts. As Conservationist C7 noted, 'The local communities in Tongli have become an indivisible part of regional tradition.' Tongli also values intangible social values, preserving personal memories, communal practices, and local traditions, making these places significant to daily interactions. In contrast, Zhujiajiao's heritage valuation relies heavily on the continuity of heritage sites. New developments there have caused significant physical and social changes, often neglecting the crucial aspect of place attachment among the local community. In terms of the value assessment tool, WHITRAP has adapted HUL to fit the Chinese context in the case of Tongli, emphasizing practical application over theoretical concepts. However, challenges arise in implementing these approaches in China. As senior conservationist C9 noted:

*'Western approaches adhere to universal standards of protection, drawing on international urban heritage expertise from organizations like UNESCO, WHITRAP, and ICOMOS, while local planning institutions in China emphasize national expertise, highlighting Chinese characteristics in their planning. However, in the case of Tongli, although terms like "social value" and "living heritage" are rarely mentioned in formal conservation plans, professionals' objectives often align with the essence of the HUL approach, even if not explicitly stated.'*

Indeed, both cases acknowledge the importance of economic values in promoting heritage conservation, even if it sometimes comes at the expense of the site's authenticity. In Zhujiajiao, the tension between new developments and historical authenticity is evident. For example, the 'Holiday Mall' project employs the approach of 'rebuilding the old to appear old,' enhancing the town's appeal as a tourist destination, sometimes at the expense of genuine historical preservation. This aligns with Urry's (1990) concept of the 'tourist gaze,' where heritage sites are tailored to meet tourists' expectations, potentially commodifying heritage (Smith, et al. [49]). However, some scholars argue that using heritage for financial gain can benefit local residents by balancing economic gain and conservation (Chen, et al. [50]). In Zhujiajiao, the prevalence of privately-owned commercial housing led to a compensation policy requiring developers to provide new neighborhoods for residents of demolished ones (Lu et al., 2004). This market-driven approach has increased tourism, income genera-

tion, and ongoing investments in heritage, demonstrating how strategic emphasis on heritage can contribute to both economic development and community satisfaction. Conversely, Tongli advocates for a human-centric approach to heritage, emphasizing the well-being of local communities. Conservation efforts have shifted from extensive demolition to a focus on preserving the site's authenticity, while also considering economic values in heritage promotion.

The trend in Tongli of local residents converting their homes into guesthouses to afford new housing outside the historic town underscores this dynamic approach in facilitating active participation in the tourism sector. However, the conservation process in Tongli is predominantly led by professionals and often lacks substantial community input. This approach tends to prioritize professionals' theoretical knowledge and local government commitments to authenticity over the actual concerns of local communities. Most importantly, not all residents have the financial means to operate a guesthouse or manage the associated maintenance costs. Thus, preserving the social values and communal attachments to place necessitates a deeper understanding and support of the social processes inherent to the communities residing within the heritage site, extending beyond the mere upkeep of its physical aspects.

**The Urban Design Discourses:** Urban design in the case studies attempted to link different aspirations related to different regeneration scales. In Zhujiajiao, urban design interventions aimed to manage changes at the town level, creating a new Jiangnan-style neighborhood. This contrasts with Tongli's approach, which focused on housing preservation and community services improvement at the neighborhood-level. Urban design in Zhujiajiao serves as a mechanism for public control through design guidance for future applications, emphasizing design standards to improve the built environment (ZJJCP, 2004.p29). While high-quality urban design was emphasized, it primarily focused on aesthetic appeal to attract buyers, rather than genuinely reflecting community requirements and preferences. For instance, the design-led approach with the 'holiday mall' concept involved large-scale demolition and redevelopment to attract wealthy homeowners. In fact, many local residents expected little expectations from this urban design project; they actually preferred the favorable compensation that accompanies large-scale redevelopment and did not share the professionals' view of inheriting the historic architectural value from the Qing Dynasty. As a senior planner (R8) involved in Zhujiajiao's urban design project explained:

*'Urban design primarily echoed each stage of planning document, but detailed designs couldn't be implemented due to the illegal status of urban design. The focus was on creating visually appealing drawings rather than addressing local communities' needs.'*

In contrast, Tongli's urban design approach leaned more towards neighborhood-level aspirations, with a stronger emphasis on community involvement compared to Zhujiajiao. The local government en-

gaged TJUPDI to produce designs that not only improved living conditions but also conformed to regulations. Local communities were encouraged to open guesthouses but were informed that all designs had to adhere to regulations governing private construction. While most residents indicated that the restrictive regulations had not altered their place attachment to the site, some expressed a disconnect between the interests and priorities of the local government and the local community, as noted by R8:

*'The regulations were seen as overly restrictive, mainly because they prohibited any expansion of existing building structures and façades. Additionally, the public space outside the houses was reserved for tourists, forbidding any private modifications or occupation, all in an effort to maintain the historical integrity of Tongli.'*

Considering the built environment as a product of urban design, providing design guidance can improve and maintain quality through public control. However, the primary challenge is determining 'whose place' it is in relation to existing communities and how urban design translates their place attachment into the built environment.

**Likely Influence on Social Value and Place Attachment:** The research presents a crucial debate on the differing perspectives between expert evaluations of social values and the laypeople's understanding of place attachment. Comparing these perspectives in both historical and contemporary contexts help highlight the distinctions. Such comparisons reveal why local communities form attachments to specific places, underscoring the necessity of including community attachment in the conservation planning process. It ensures that conservation efforts should not only extend beyond preserving physical structures but also integrate the social fabric that imbues these places with meaning. There is an undeniable discrepancy between how experts and communities value places. In Zhujiajiao, the top-down conservation approach contrasts sharply with Tongli's more inclusive, community-centric methods. Tongli's example underscores the importance of preserving the social and communal aspects of heritage. Internationally, it's recognized that heritage gains significance only when it is valued by the community (Jones, et al. [51-52]). Without local engagement and a vibrant tourism sector, heritage sites risk becoming disconnected and ultimately forgotten. As a local official in Tongli emphasized that: *'Their conservation efforts in Tongli aim not just to preserve history but to enhance the present and future by fostering ongoing social and cultural interactions.'*

In Zhujiajiao, on the other hand, the heritage statement praises its architectural and landscape achievements,

focusing on material aspects to enhance tourism appeal while often overlooking significant local connections. The emphasis on physical manifestations tends to overshadow the deep-seated social values and connections that residents have with these places (Pendlebury, et al. [53]). Yet, Zhujiajiao's emphasis on developing the tourist market shows an extreme example of a conservation plan which proposes

separation of tourism-related functions from local residents, as seen with the displacement of schools and markets using government funding (Zheng, et al. [54]). Furthermore, urban design master plans treat Zhujiyajiao primarily as a commodity for tourism. The top-down approach to heritage conservation often focuses on the authenticity of objects and fails to recognize the heritage remains in the case of Taiguli, contrasting starkly with the values of long-term residents, who see these elements as integral to their place attachment and narratives of the past. Both cases emphasize the significant role of heritage in promoting tourism development. In Zhujiyajiao, the conservation strategy explicitly seeks economic benefits by capitalizing on heritage to boost tourism and enhance the town's competitiveness as a regional tourist destination. Within the ancient town, it prioritizes preserving Qing Dynasty historical architecture and widening streets to serve regional traffic. Conversely, Tongli focuses on the principle of "repairing the old to appear old," prioritizing aesthetic authenticity to evoke a sense of historical ambiance of Ming Dynasties over preserving original structures.

In both cases, a stylistically varied selection of buildings based on experts' expertise reflects buildings as if they belonged to a single time period, considering the whole street's historic architectural value. From the local community's perspective, residents' attachments are often rooted in their understanding of historical features, aligning with the street-canal layout and landmarks emphasized in conservation plans. In both cases, participants may not distinguish between historical structures and new constructions but rather recognize settings based on their personal knowledge and memories of the area.

*'In my memory, the core ancient town of Zhujiyajiao is about the North Street and Xihu Street; the scope is not as big as nowadays.'*(R6)

*'Tuisi Garden has become one of the key figures in the revolutionary period and represented local and national identity in Tong Li.'*(R11)

Point-references in descriptions also suggest that residents identify significant nodes or landmarks based on functional importance, whereas conservation plans focus on historically valuable features. For example, in Tongli, Tuisi Garden serves not only as a notable landmark but also functioned as a primary school during many local residents' childhoods. Place attachment is also closely linked to individuals' social and behavioral patterns.

The way local residents perceive pathways is influenced by local behavioral patterns, such as gathering on the path to chat, washing clothes, and vehicle accessibility. Conversely, in conservation plans, these paths are categorized based on their relationships with buildings, streets, and water. To enhance the value of the street-canal layout and preserve local lifestyles, physical interventions are tailored to the width of paths as Main Street and Secondary Street on the plan (TLCP, et al. [55]). The social dimension is reflexively attached to the physical dimension of place attachment. Geographically, the ancient

center became a 'gated old town' with an entry fee in the case of Tongli. The mono-activity of Tongli ancient town is perceived as an isolated island in the collective mindset (Wallenwein, et al. [47]). This situation echoes the expressions of edge and district concept in the conservation plan physically, particularly when connected with geographical characteristics. Moreover, informed by the 'living heritage concept,' heritage protection frequently prioritizes tourists' perspectives, who are regarded as primary consumers. Accordingly, the heritage building is commoditized, promoted through various rituals, histories, and legends designed to attract visitors. However, this emphasis on external consumption often relegates local inhabitants to a secondary position, overshadowing their role and connection to the heritage site. Certain elements not highlighted in the plan are also appreciated by the local communities.

For instance, the ginkgo tree with the bell in Tongli, historically used to warn or gather locals, is cherished as an integral part of local memory and place attachment. Accordingly, the comparison outcomes inform the conservation plan and regeneration practices. Assisted with the historic values pointed out in the conservation plan, the physical forms valued by the local residents are suggested to prioritize in the new regeneration project.

**Tongli is Seen as a Relatively More Successfully Case of Community Engagement than Zhujiyajiao Case?:** Despite advocating public involvement in Tongli, both Tongli and Zhujiyajiao exhibit professional-led approaches, generally lacking substantial community input. In Tongli, the range of mechanisms for community engagement was limited to conveying information about the regulations that sometimes disrupted their daily routines, which was already decided by the local government rather than designing in collaboration with the community. Moreover, local communities are not likely to be actively engaged because of the fundamental mismatch between the objectives of heritage-led regeneration and local communities' motivations. For instance, many elderly and financially disadvantaged residents in Tongli are uncertainty about their property rights and at the risk of displacement due to new developments proposed by the local government. As indicated by R9:

*'Many residents, like myself, do not own their homes and live with the constant possibility of being asked to move out for new development by the Tongli government or Tourism Company. Due to the overwhelming number of tourists, I actually prefer the favourable compensation that accompanies large-scale redevelopment and do not interest the planning authority's view of the street's historic architectural value.'*

Moreover, conservation efforts and physical improvements in Tongli do not directly enhance the local community's place attachment, particularly when these efforts are accompanied by broader social issues and neglected community needs. For instance, the ancient town suffers from parking problems; newly planned parking spaces still do not meet local inhabitants' needs. Observations show that Tu-

isi Garden, the largest public space in Tongli, serves as a parking lot at night, causing conflicts over limited parking spaces. Additionally, Tongli residents often avoid tourist areas for shopping and social activities, preferring markets in newer neighbourhoods. In Zhujiajiao, while displacement and demolition typically sever connections to heritage, the relocated old town communities of Zhujiajiao have adapted by reconstructing their place attachment (Cao, et al. [46]). Many residents appreciate the improved living standards and infrastructural enhancements more than the preservation of old structures specified in the conservation plan. Not surprisingly, most participants in Zhujiajiao express their satisfactions with current conditions and hold positive views of the future, linking their property ownership to their sense of place attachment. For instance, R7 asserts her intention to stay, linking her ownership of three apartments directly to her sense of attachment. In other case, former residents of Zhujiajiao old town have gained from the town's growth and the ensuing redistribution of property rights (Bei Huang, et al. [41]).

Instead of being landless farmers adversely affected by urban expansion, the rise of tourism in Zhujiajiao has allowed these residents to join the 'privileged rentier class.' They achieve this by renting out housing that they received as compensation. As pointed by R10.

*'The relocation project changed my life as a farmer; we can live in high-rise buildings like Shanghainese in the city. I feel grateful to the Shanghai government. I have been compensated with three apartments due to land use transformation.'*

These findings highlight a significant link between apartment ownership and community attachment. Research indicates that higher place attachment in Zhujiajiao is associated with a greater sense of belonging (property ownership) and increased satisfaction with the physical environment. Notably, Zhujiajiao's local communities have developed a stronger attachment to newly relocated housing, surpassing that of the older, community-engaged neighborhoods in Tongli. In contrast, Tongli communities are experiencing a decline in neighborhood attachment and diminished social interactions.

## Conclusion

These findings challenge the common belief that increased community involvement during the conservation planning process necessarily leads to better conservation outcomes, as illustrated by the case of Tongli. This discrepancy underscores the necessity of adapting efficiency conservation planning processes to fit China's top-down planning frameworks, thereby enabling local communities to actively participate in decision-making process. The research advances the debate by demonstrating that place attachment for both resettled residents and long-term communities is not purely a resident-driven regeneration process but is also influenced by state decisions during and after resettlement. As evidenced in the case of Zhujiajiao, the research finds that higher residential place attachment is associated

with a stronger sense of belonging and improved neighbourly relations. Although residential place attachment depends on the subjective feelings of residents, it is also shaped by state decisions during the conservation planning process, such as the transparency of compensation and resettlement procedures, adequate compensation levels, and the physical quality of relocation settlements (Jiang, et al. [56-57]). More generous compensation, increased living space, and high-quality housing help residents feel they have benefited, rather than feeling disadvantaged by the resettlement in the case of Tongli, which in turn motivates them to engage with their new neighbours and new place. Furthermore, the research calls for a more transparent and fair compensation and resettlement process, allowing local communities to decide whether to relocate or stay for tourism-related business.

Increased state investment in social infrastructure is also essential to support both long-term and local residents' livelihoods and place attachment. From the perspective of conservation practitioners, this discrepancy underscores the need for a more participatory conservation planning process. The relationships among stakeholders are therefore crucial; thus, roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and well understood by all parties involved, with effective conflict resolution processes in place (Avrami, et al. [58-60]). Moreover, collaboration with professionals from diverse but complementary specializations helps identify and mitigate unconscious biases and supports a multi-methods approach (Robson, et al. [61]). Despite advocating public involvement as illustrated in the case of Tongli, the process often relied on professional judgments presented as objective and constant process, without genuine input from local communities. This research therefore highlights that conservation practice extends beyond technical matters, necessitating new approaches to collaboration with local communities, who are experts in their own place-based relationships. In doing so, a participatory, responsive planning process can disrupt the traditional reliance, transforming practitioners from sole experts and custodians of built heritage to collaborative partners (Robson, et al. [61]). While this shift in power dynamics presents challenges, it facilitates new, shared understandings of community place attachment associated with heritage sites, ultimately enhancing conservation outcomes.

Lastly, given the dynamic, fluid, and evolving nature of social value and place attachment, regularly updating value assessments should be an integral part of the responsibilities of conservation practitioners. Additionally, conservationists and urban designers should be regarded both as coordinators and experts (Getty Conservation, et al. [59]). Urban designer, in particular, should not only be a physical carrier, but also communities' place attachment carrier, acting as intermediaries between communities and local government (Carmona, et al. [62-64]). In doing so, balancing stakeholder perspectives can be achieved by prioritizing the voices and desires of local residents within the conservation planning process.



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