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Transforming Urban Landscapes: Reuse of Heritage Sites through Multi-Value Interpretations in Xi'an, China

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Abstract: As a catalyst for urban landscape transformation, the reuse of heritage sites plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary urban spaces and influencing socio-economic development. However, this phenomenon is not without controversy, particularly regarding the quality of preservation and the potential risks associated with over-commodification. Consequently, there has been an increasing research focus on reconciling these conflicting aspects. This study employs a multi-value interpretation framework to delve into the reuse of heritage sites in the urban area of Xi'an within the broader context of China's urbanization. Utilizing a comparative case study method, this research specifically examines the burgeoning phenomenon of heritage parks. This exploration sheds light on how the reuse of heritage intertwines with urbanization processes, by taking into account environmental, economic, social, and cultural values. The findings suggest that a multi-value interpretation framework is crucial to address the limitations of the current heritagization. Heritage sites in Xi'an have been integrated into the urban transformation process through heritage conservation and the production of new heritage spaces. However, the evolving multi-value evaluation of these heritage sites continues to influence the city's interpretation of its significant and fading past in planning. This study highlights the dynamic nature of heritage sites in the urban context and underscores the need for nuanced approaches to balance heritage preservation with the evolving demands of contemporary urban development.

Keywords: urban landscape transformation; heritage sites; heritagization; multi-value; Xi'an

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, global cities, particularly those with a rich heritage, have been grappling with a substantial building stock, with the aim of preserving historic buildings and historical monuments in their original form as much as possible [1]. However, beyond mere preservation considerations, the promotion of active social life and economic development are considered equally crucial aspects of urbanization processes. Instead of transforming into stagnant museums frozen in the past, heritage reuse emerges as a proper approach for urban landscape transformation, shaping contemporary urban space and influencing socio-economic development [2,3]. In this context, heritage has transformed from relying on government funding to being recognized as a resource with tourism, cultural, social, and economic values for society [4]. As a result, urban heritage is no longer perceived as an obstacle to development but embodies values for development [5].

According to the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, "sites" fall under the category of cultural heritage, embodying Outstanding Universal Value spanning history, esthetics, ethnology, and anthropology

values [6]. In exploring the effects of heritage in urban transformation, diverse forms of values tend to reshape people's actions and perspectives. However, these processes involve conflicts and contestations regarding the creation of heritage space [7]. The significance of heritage is characterized by an ever-changing multiplicity. Scholars contend that local service providers often misuse the values and meanings of heritage strategically for tourism development [8]. Consequently, the values associated with heritage sites undergo reinterpretation and are prone to shifting in specific cases and geographical contexts.

Post-reform China has become a focal point for urbanization and landscape transformation. The land reform and tax-sharing systems actively encourage local governments to engage in urban (re)development, utilizing market principles to pursue land value appreciation and infrastructure construction. In this process, heritage has evolved into a catalyst for urban (re)development, albeit with contentious issues related to social costs and preservation quality. Scholars have criticized the widespread demolition of areas surrounding heritage sites due to its role in gentrification, commodification, and the destruction of local life [2,9–11]. Since 2008, integrating heritage park construction with the redevelopment of surrounding areas has emerged as a reuse strategy for cities, aiming to achieve multiple goals including heritage preservation, infrastructure upgrading, city branding, and cultural tourism. Among various reuse modes, heritage parks can be referred to as 'museums without walls', with spaces designed to represent or reconstruct past environments or ways of life. This definition emphasizes the role of these parks in preserving, displaying, and interpreting historical and cultural heritage for the public [12]. Generally, heritage sites are valued for their role in contemporary urban life; for instance, redevelopment projects at these sites often incorporate elements of urban greening and sustainable design [13]. These interventions reinterpret the multi-value embedded with the reuse of heritage sites. Multi-value refers to the concept where a single heritage site, object, or phenomenon can simultaneously hold multiple meanings or significances to achieve the re-interpreting of heritage values [14]. Nevertheless, there remains a limited understanding of how heritage values are intricately woven into the urban transformation process via heritage park construction.

The reuse of heritage sites in China is a multifaceted process involving the reuse of historic buildings, the construction of heritage parks, and the comprehensive redevelopment of the surrounding area [2]. Central to successful reuse is the re-interpretation of heritage values and the integration of heritage places into modern life, focusing on balancing heritage preservation and contemporary socio-economic needs. While scholars have extensively investigated the multi-value of heritage sites, including controversies like gentrification, commodification, and challenges to the preservation quality of heritage sites [15], few have focused on specific heritage sites during the ever-changing stages of urban development [16]. Additionally, there exists a notable absence of research on value options when facing these challenges. We contend that when heritage sites are subjected to interests beyond culture, they require value-based foundations to support their own 'experiential' definition of heritage values. Therefore, this research will develop a framework for the multi-value reuse of heritage sites in China through changing stages of urban transformation. In particular, two steps help to explain the multi-value reuse of heritage sites. First, we explain the heritage features, reuse modes, and contradictions in the urbanization process. In addition, we further investigate the multi-value and coupled relationship between multi-values and heritagization. To achieve these goals, we employ a comparative case study approach to clarify two research questions: (1) How is the multi-value of heritage sites (re)interpreted through reuse as heritage parks in urban areas of Xi'an? (2) What are the value options available for the reuse of heritage sites when considering heritagization, and what are the associated positive and negative aspects of impact on the urban transformation? Here, we define 'heritagization' as a process where heritage sites, structures, and memorabilia from spontaneous memorials are claimed as heritage, implying a revaluation and reinvention of certain elements for present and future use, often within a context of cultural and touristic interest [17,18].

Xi'an, known as Chang'an in ancient times, was China's capital for 13 dynasties, and it is currently one of the nation's most significant historic cities spanning the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang Dynasties. It hosts numerous heritage sites that carry profound historical and cultural significance. Heritage sites in Xi'an not only represent historic relics but also significantly contribute to contemporary urban life [19]. Currently, Xi'an's extensive heritage sites enhance the city's esthetic appeal and cultural vitality. However, rapid urbanization poses a challenge to the preservation of these notable sites. One solution that has emerged is transforming these heritage sites into parks, integrating and preserving their value within the urban landscape. Drawing on case studies from heritage site areas in Xi'an, this research explains how the reuse of heritage sites is integrated with urban planning and construction processes through multi-value interpretation [19].

The structure of this paper unfolds as follows: initially, we review heritage and urban studies literature to offer a context of heritage preservation and utilization during urbanization, particularly focusing on the localized heritage values in the urban transformation process in China. The objective is to probe the evolving heritage values in urban transformation and recognize the current challenges faced when incorporating Western understandings into a local Chinese context. Following a brief introduction to Xi'an and the methodology adopted, we undertake an in-depth exploration of the urban and social studies on the heritage sites cases in Xi'an, including a comparative analysis of the multi-value in reusing urban heritage sites and an investigation into the coupled relationship between multi-value interpretation and heritagization. Lastly, we discuss the positive and negative aspects linked to the reuse of heritage sites in Xi'an and its long-term implications for sustainable urban development.

2. Heritagization in Urban Landscape Transformation and Heritage Reuse in China

2.1. Understanding Heritage, Heritagization, and the Context of Heritage Reuse

The perception of cultural heritage has undergone significant metamorphosis over time. UNESCO's definition of heritage stands as a worldwide reference and guideline [6]. The Venice Charter of 1964 used the term "monuments of antiquity" and emphasized its scope to include not just individual buildings but also the encompassing environment, thus underlining the need to consider the existence of physical remains in a specific context. Although heritage initially referred primarily to physical remains categorized as "monuments, groups of buildings, and sites", the 1972 UNESCO Convention's definition of a heritage site as an "area of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) from a historical, esthetic, ethnological, or anthropological perspective" introduced the distinct concept of an area [6]. This interpretation suggests that these sites and their surroundings are not only physical structures for conservation but also hold unique abstract values. Consequently, OUV emerged as a crucial factor in the heritagization of historical remnants, a term that denotes a process wherein memories, patterns of use, and the meanings associated with a place shape people's understanding of that locale. This process embodies a byproduct of the present, historically contextualized and not necessarily grounded in the past [20]. Heritagization thus plays a role in redefining cultural and historical meanings and identities [21,22]. The visual manifestation of this heritagization process during urbanization typically involves screening (for preservation or demolition), grading (based on appropriate preservation measures), and use, often involving the adaptation of physical remains. However, the adaptation of physical remains is often examined for the authenticity of the heritage. The Nara Document on Authenticity, adopted in 1944 in Nara, Japan, is a response to the expanding scope of cultural heritage considerations around the world. It addresses the challenges and paradigms emerging regarding the concepts of authenticity and diversity as they pertain to cultural heritage. The Nara Document underscores the significance of preserving the authenticity of cultural relics and supports the variety in conservation methods. The document also brings attention to the pivotal role that cultural context plays in interpreting authenticity. This indirectly implies that the Western notions of authenticity and preservation strategies may not be entirely suitable for the heritage of the East.

Furthermore, heritagization is inextricably linked to expediting decision-making, especially in the context of China's accelerated urbanization in recent decades. This highlights the significance of heritagization in the intellectual and social life of the current generation, thus cultivating a context that incentivizes the reuse of heritage. Heritage sites occupy a dual role, contributing not just to the shaping of urban landscapes and the vitality of urban life but also to the forging of collective memory, "so that both holders and appreciators of heritage can confidently look forward to the future, instead of just being a sad watchman." [23].

Research on urban heritage reuse underscores its dual function in historical preservation and the promotion of socio-economic vitality. In Western contexts, urban restoration and heritage reuse highlight the diversity of needs and resources, as well as the importance of sustainable strategies at different stages of urban development [24]. Scholars have also highlighted the challenges to maintain the essence of historic areas while adapting to contemporary needs [25,26]. For instance, the reuse of heritage sites in Oberschöneweide, Berlin points out that communities participate in the reuse process in multiple ways, culminating in the phenomenon referred to as "vernacular adaptation" [25]. Similarly, the case of Cuenca, Ecuador has shown that the appropriation of urbanism by higher-income groups manifests a new kind of dispossession of heritage values [26]. Meanwhile, the complexity of heritage reuse projects is composed of diverse understandings and interests of different goals and stakeholders. Additionally, interdisciplinary comparative research emphasized the reuse of heritage sites across varying urban contexts, as well as the necessity of integrating environmental, economic, social, and cultural factors into implementation [27]. Chen et al.'s study on the impact of policy transfer on heritage reuse reveals that local circumstances have triggered shifts in heritage perspectives [28]. In conclusion, heritage reuse not only preserves the past but also forms a vital component of future sustainability strategies, necessitating a comprehensive approach.

2.2. Recognizing Heritage Values in China's Urban Landscapes Transformation

Originating in Europe, the idea of heritage preservation has deepened and broadened its concept and conservation practices since the 1990s [29]. However, the introduction of this idea to China involved a necessary and inevitable process of localization, motivating fresh explorations. In 1982, The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention underscored the rarity of OUV with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) drafting the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Gardens as an annex to the Venice Charter, aiming to provide clear provisions for the conservation of historic gardens; yet, the research and preservation of the considerably broader scope of China's ancient heritage are reliant upon tangible practices that may fluctuate based on time, region, and policy.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, established in 1972, identified Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as the primary standard for evaluating heritage values [6]. Subsequently, in 1977, the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention emphasized the scarcity of OUV. The notion of "scarcity" underscores that only a few sites globally can meet these stringent criteria for designation as World Heritage Sites [30]. Meanwhile, in the actual situation of China's huge number of cultural relics, assessing OUV necessitates a profound grasp of contextualization and temporal progression. In 2011, UNESCO adopted the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) recommendation, which addresses the city as a whole and provides a toolkit for implementing an integrated value-based landscape approach. However, the operationalization of value-based discourse remains broad and lacks complete contextualization in relation to local circumstances [31–33]. Therefore, adapting the value-based approach presents a significant challenge to localizing the HUL. The localized conservation practices adapted to China's national conditions over the past decades have provided rich experience and prompted considerable rethinking on how we perceive, value, and conserve heritage in the midst of fluctuating global and local forces. The understanding and use of

heritage values, aligned with relevant laws, provisions, regulations, and urban planning, especially in the context of significant changes and construction in Chinese cities over the past century, have distinct local characteristics, especially regarding the harmonious coexistence of historical tradition and modernism. Reassessing heritage value from the vantage of regeneration in contemporary China reveals a transformation in the comprehension of heritage value and the practices of heritagization and urbanization, forming the crux of this paper.

Since the 1990s, the introduction of the concept of cultural heritage into China via international conservation translations have laid the groundwork for the Chinese contextualization of cultural heritage in academic circles. This process has extended both the definition of heritage and the exploration of preservation theories. Heritage preservation practice in China began with the inception of the People's Republic of China, although the awareness of cultural heritage, different from the contemporary understanding of "heritage", has a lengthy history of transmission across dynasties through local communities. For instance, historical records of urban landscape, local chronicles, and classical poetry document historical buildings and sites such as city walls, temples, and local scenic vistas, which were characterized by their iconicity and often associated with significant people and events. A comparative analysis of chronicles from disparate regions unveils similarities in the nomenclature and content of these sites, indicating a form of regional uniformity documented in the historic records.

Since 1949, three crucial stages of heritagization have been recognized in the People's Republic of China, primarily partitioned according to the three national-level heritage census reports. The first phase took place during the country's establishment with the inaugural national heritage census, conducted from 1956 to 1959, encompassing over 36,000 sets of above-ground cultural relics. The second national census was carried out from 1981 to 1989 and registered over 400,000 immovable cultural relics but also counted a loss of around 700 sites of cultural relic recorded during in the first census [34]. Subsequently, the Protection of Cultural Relics Law of the People's Republic of China, introduced in 1982, underwent five revisions by 2017. This legal framework specified that immovable cultural relics include ancient cultural sites, tombs, buildings, grottoes, temples, stone carvings, mural paintings, historically significant sites, and modern representative buildings with historical, artistic, and scientific values. The third national cultural heritage census, extending from 2007 to 2011, covered immovable cultural relics on the ground, underground, and underwater. This extensive effort registered over 760,000 immovable cultural relics nationwide, indicative of the continuous expansion of the scope of cultural heritage conservation. Simultaneously, institutional advancements, such as the revised Guidelines for the Protection of Cultural Relics and Monuments in 2002, which quoted the Venice Charter, emphasized that the value of cultural relics encompasses historical, artistic, scientific, and social-cultural facets. The Xi'an Declaration of 2005 broadened the concept of heritage value even more, underlining its functional role in social, economic, and cultural spheres.

Immovable tangible cultural heritage sites, often characterized by partial destruction and incompleteness, require preservation and assessment that are not only based on remains but also take into account the surrounding environment. To cater to the cultural heritage preservation requirements amidst rapid urbanization, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage endorsed the concept of "large sites" in the late 1990s. The Overall Plan for the Protection of Large Sites—belonging to the 11th Five-Year Plan Period (2006)—specified that large sites encompass grand-scale spaces with considerable value and extensive influence, spanning diverse types and contexts. Scholars, such as Chen Tongbin, have categorized site preservation into overall and partial preservation associated with utilization forms [35,36]. The former includes site parks, tourist attractions, forest parks, and historical–cultural agricultural parks that integrate heritage site preservation with the creation of green landscape. The latter pertains to transforming partial sites into display spaces or museums. Though the heritagization process chiefly banks on the original authenticity of physical

remains, faced with the disappearance of numerous entities, conservation measures employ varied methods, such as document testimony, oral histories, photography, visual materials, and archeological discoveries, to revive the spiritual embodiment of heritage.

Nationally, the continual refinement of particular guidance on conservation and repurposing, exemplified by the 2009 proposition for "national archeological sites parks", highlights the commitment to preserving significant archeological sites. The 2020 Guidelines for the Utilization of Large Archeological Sites (Trial) proposed two categories for reutilization: value-based and compatible utilization. The former involves cultural relics display, scientific research, education dissemination, and industrial transformation. While national-level guidance adheres to a top-down approach, the bottom-up reporting mechanism for the national cultural heritage census leads to variations among participants and different regions. This discrepancy stirs worries about inadequate evaluation, incorrect utilization, deviation from conservation strategies, and potential adverse impacts on safety, value promotion, and the sustainable use of heritage sites. The challenge of balancing heritage site preservation and urban development amidst rapid urbanization, aiming to strike a win–win scenario between safeguarding and growth, has emerged as a crucial conundrum in China's heritage preservation efforts [37].

3. Research Framework of Interpreting Multi-Values and Comparative Case Study Methods

3.1. Study Area

Xi'an, heralding a rich history of over 3100 years, served as the ancient capital of China for more than 1100 years. Specifically, it served as the capital for the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC), the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC), the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–9 AD and 23–220 AD), the Sui Dynasty (581–618 AD), and the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). Claiming the prestigious title as the capital for 13 diverse dynasties, UNESCO has recognized Xi'an as a globally historical and cultural significant city. Xi'an was also listed as one of the first batch of China's historical and cultural cities by the State Council in 1982. As the origin of the Silk Road and custodian of the Terracotta Army, Xi'an boasts a significant position in both international realm and China's profound historical and cultural legacy. The urban archeological sites in Xi'an present unique features such as broad distribution, abundant quantity, extensive scale, varied types, and notable historical significance. Ranging from ancient human settlement sites dating back to the Stone Age to the ruins of capital cities, palaces, imperial gardens, tombs of emperors, religious structures, and ritual buildings from the prosperous periods of the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang Dynasties, Xi'an's archeological sites exhibit striking diversity. Large heritage sites encompass Fenghao from the Zhou Dynasty, the Afang Palace from the Qin Dynasty, Chang'an City from the Han Dynasty, and Chang'an City from the Sui and Tang Dynasties, collectively covering an area exceeding 190 km^2. Notably, the primary urban area of Xi'an extensively overlaps with these ancient heritage sites (Figure 1), with 37 percent of the urban development space characterized by the convergence of different historical periods. This conjures a distinctive urban landscape, mirroring the city's evolution over time and presenting a fusion of traditional and modern facets, along with a mix of influences from differing epochs. However, against the backdrop of rapid urbanization, the conflict between the preservation of historical sites in Xi'an and urban development is intensifying.

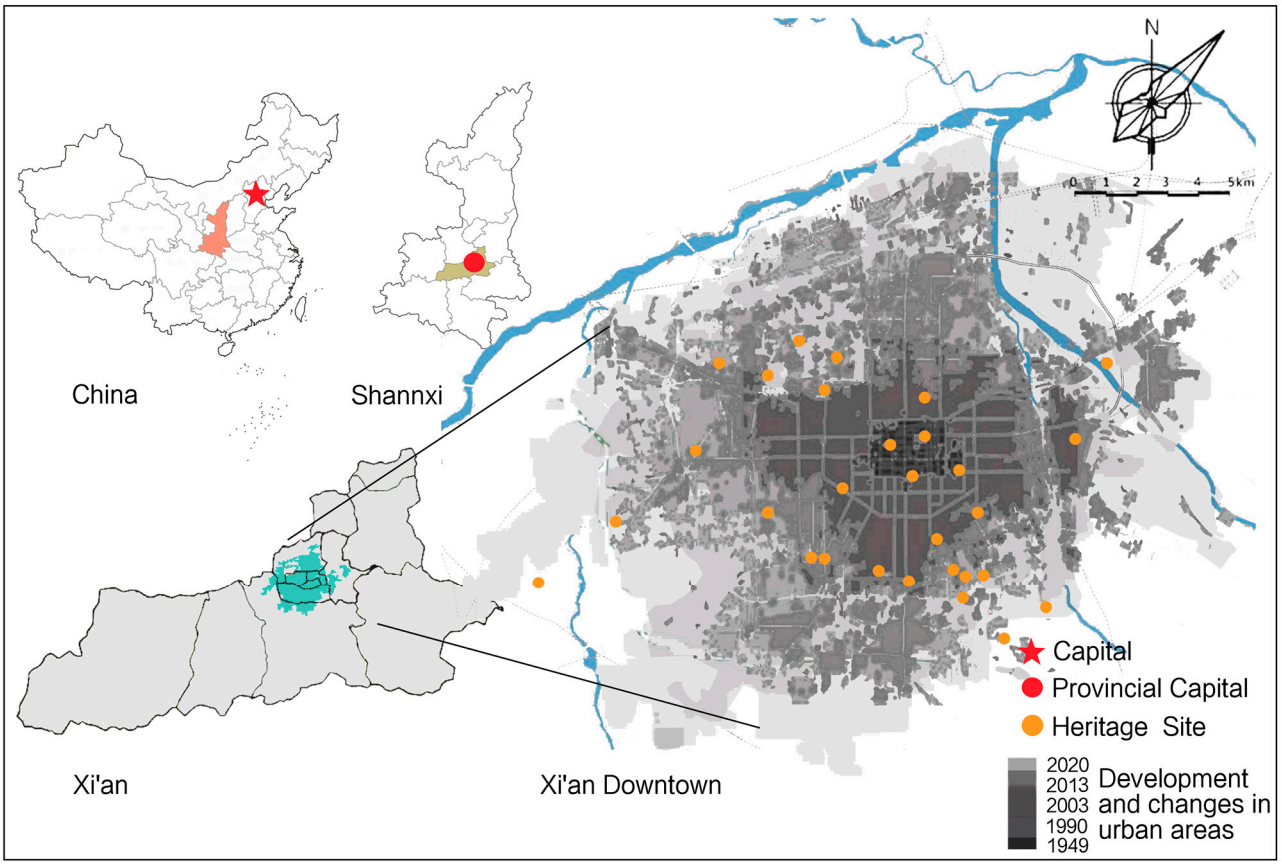


Figure 1. Location map of Xi'an city (Source: Authors).

The heritage sites in Xi'an were chosen as comparative cases, guided by a variety of criteria to ensure that they portray a blend of urban development stages, types of heritage sites, and heritage preservation methodologies. The selected areas include heritage sites that are being transformed from the old urban region into suburban areas, adorned with green spaces or residential areas, and eventually merging into heritage parks. Within the 28 national-, provincial-, and municipal-level officially protected heritage sites in Xi'an, representative sites were picked via comparative case studies with a focus on the level and scope of protection that each site receives. The authors have developed a set of standards to guarantee the distinctiveness and universality of these instances, considering the specific forms and locations of the heritage sites. Specific selection criteria encompass the historical and cultural significance of the site, the diversity of geographical location, and the comprehensiveness of practical implementations for site protection and reuse. During the research process, the data regarding transformations and site preservation are distinctly divided into urban evolution data and case evolution data concerning site preservation. By managing the website of the site's scenic area, in conjunction with historical atlases, satellite map extraction from Google Earth, and other links, data are separately extracted. An illustration includes the urban evolution literature that refers to authoritative government development reports, specialized provincial map extraction websites, and urban atlas monographs such as Xi'an Historical Atlas (1996) and the Atlas of Xi'an Urban Area Changes (2014). To guarantee accuracy and authority, representative instances of the site evolution process will be primarily sourced from nationally protected sites.

In Xi'an, the complex interplay of multi-value associated with heritage sites, including environmental, ecological, economic, social, and culture values, exerts an influence on both heritage preservation and landscape transformation. Consequently, we employ a multi-value interpretation framework (Figure 2) to delve into the intricacies of how the

construction of heritage parks integrates these diverse values, facilitating the reuse of heritage sites to achieve urban transformation goals.

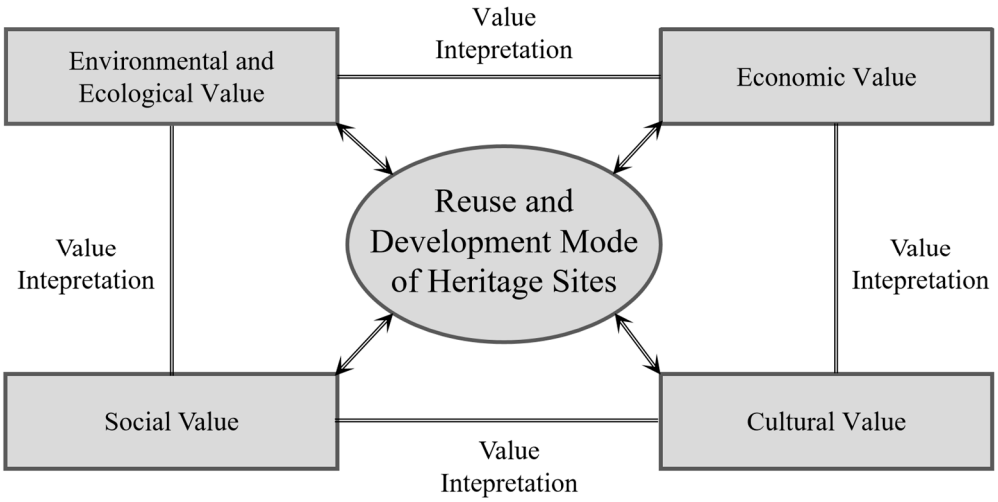


Figure 2. The conceptual framework of multi-value comparative analysis of heritage sites (Source: Authors).

3.2. Materials and Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach, employing a comparative case study method to conduct an in-depth investigation of the changes and integration of values in heritage-led urban transformation. The comparative case study method can provide a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data, offering broader themes, patterns and trends across different cases [38,39]. This approach could synthesize the overall reuse of heritage sites in Xi'an and investigate in-depth the multi-value interpretations and coupled relationships involved in urban landscape transformation. The process of transformation in Xi'an and the reuse of heritage sties over time are studied through the comparison of various sources, including a field survey of the built environment, online policy data, mapping exercises, and semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders. This comprehensive approach aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the heritage sites in Xi'an and how values are interpreted within the context of the new heritage space.

As Figure 3 shows, first, we reviewed literature, planning, and policy documents on urban development and heritage site reuse to identify whether they provided insights into heritage values and heritagization process in China and Xi'an, with particular attention to the change in urban area land use in Xi'an. A systematic historical tracing and mapping approach is used to track the transformation of heritage sites, which start from their original formation of the ancient urban area, transitioning to suburban spaces with green areas or residential zones in the 1990s, and eventually evolving into heritage parks integrated into the contemporary urban landscape. Furthermore, to scrutinize the process of value shifting, we conducted multiple visits to the selected sites spanning the period from 2016 to 2024. Second, an in-depth field survey of the long-term transformation was conducted based on official plans, urban maps, urban and heritage policies, and on-site surveys complemented by photographs. The objective is to clarify the modes and characteristics of heritage site preservation and reuse in Xi'an. The amalgamation of data and visual representations contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how multi-value gradually becomes embedded in the urban transformation process, particularly through the conversion of heritage sites into heritage parks. Socio-economic data on housing prices and the relocation of households were included, sourced from interviews.

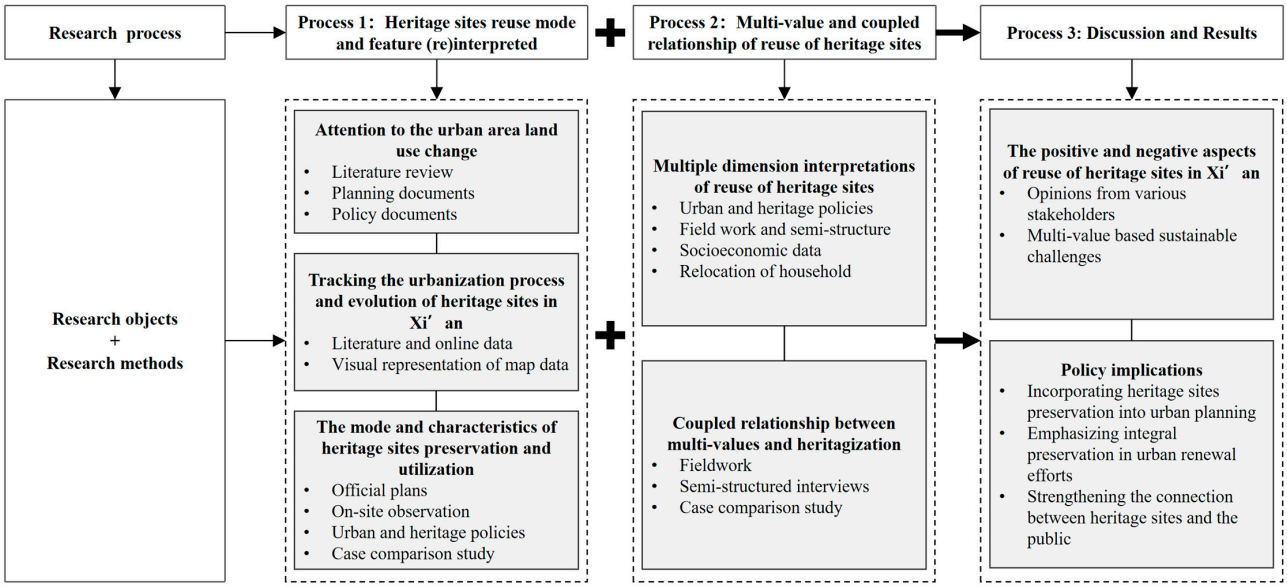


Figure 3. The methodological diagram (Sources: Authors).

Third, fieldwork and semi-structured interviews are important forms of data collection for this study. Field investigations utilized basic operational tools like photographic evidence and on-site analyses to identify the dynamics of landscape transformation. This process allowed us to directly observe and record the multi-faceted factors associated with the studied cases. We analyzed the coupled relationship between the multi-value of heritage sites and urban construction factors, updated and identified the current reuse situation informed by the existing literature, and highlighted their adaptability to complex urban construction conditions. In addition to fieldwork, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 18 stakeholders, which included local government officials, architects, planners, scholars, and residents. During the interviews, we encouraged the interviewees to actively share their views, experiences, and feelings with a neutral and open attitude. We ensured that the interviewees fully understood the research purpose and we flexibly adjusted the interview questions according to different interviewees. During the interview process, the content was preserved in the form of recordings and notes, and privacy was maintained. After going through the content again, we confirmed and summarized it and extracted key information.

These interviews aimed to provide additional insights into how values are integrated into the process of urban transformation through the reuse of heritage sites. The interviews also contributed to data collection regarding the positive and negative aspects of heritage site reuse. Questions for local government officials, architects, and planners included how they consider heritage value presentation in the decision-making and planning process, how they integrate heritage sites reuse with urban landscape planning, and the current challenges in sustainable development in heritage parks. The questions for scholars focused on their attitudes toward the overall redevelopment of heritage site areas and on how to integrate multi-value into the current reuse mode and the critical aspects of heritage site preservation quality. The questions for local residents included their attitudes toward the heritage park, the impact on their lifestyle before and after redevelopment, and how they interact with other stakeholders and the new environment. This approach provides detailed insights to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of reused heritage sites in Xi'an, and it further clarifies the long-term implications and sustainability of the findings.

We acknowledge the potential biases and limitations inherent in the methodologies of this study. First, the long-term transformation field survey could be limited by the accuracy of reported data or the depth of data made available for public scrutiny. Limited or inaccurately reported data may compromise the integrity of conclusions drawn from these datasets. Second, the in-depth investigation into the shifts and value integration in heritage-

led urban transformation and heritage site reuse in Xi'an, despite its robustness, may be constrained by the unique socio-economic and cultural context of Xi'an, China. Lastly, the semi-structured interviews with stakeholders might have limitations regarding the depth and diversity of the collected data, potentially overlooking the perspectives of other stakeholders like tourists, historians, and conservationists. This could restrict the breadth of our understanding of how values are integrated into the urban transformation process. To mitigate these limitations, a number of measures could be considered. A larger participant pool for the semi-structured interviews can be utilized to incorporate a more diverse set of viewpoints. Additionally, it would be beneficial to undertake comparative studies in various other urban settings where heritage plays a significant role in urban development. This would add depth and provide a diversified perspective on the transformative shifts in the built environments of heritage sites. Also, to ensure the integrity of data, access to a more comprehensive dataset should be sought, which ensures the use of reliable and accurate statistics when analyzing heritage site preservation and urban development measures. These mitigation measures will provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of heritage-driven urban transformation, adding greater depth to future discussions.

4. Case Study: Multiple-Dimension Interpretations of the Reuse of Heritage Sites and the Coupled Relationship between Values and Heritagization

4.1. Multiple-Dimension Interpretations of the Reuse of Heritage Sites

As Figure 4 shows, the conflict between heritage preservation and urban expansion has manifested itself particularly in the use of land and space resources. Since the 1990s, heritage sites originally located in suburban or peri-urban areas have been integrated into urban development zones. Although these heritage sites have considerable potential for land value appreciation, their development has been hampered by the construction of essential urban infrastructure. As a result, as redevelopment projects progressed, some heritage sites found themselves surrounded by towering buildings that contrasted sharply with their historical ambiance. As a result, conservation areas became isolated patches, leading to a crisis in the isolation of urban heritage sites. Another dimension of conflict has emerged between traditional, static, and restrictive approaches to heritage preservation and the evolving urban living environment. The prolonged coexistence of large heritage areas with urban and rural development has posed a significant threat to these sites. For instance, within the Han Chang'an City site, the presence of 55 administrative villages and nearly 60,000 residents engaged in daily activities posed a significant threat to the site. The inadequate control of unauthorized businesses within the site exacerbated the situation. Inequalities in employment, income, facilities, and environment within and outside the heritage site led to a scenario of "preservation constraining development and development constraining preservation". Furthermore, profit-driven actions during the heritage site development process conflicted with preservation goals. Economic interests led to excessive tourism development and the irrational use of the sites, culminating in the commercialization and amusement park-like transformation of heritage spaces, causing damage to the sites and their surroundings. In conclusion, with rapid urbanization, there are significant complexities and contradictions in the relationships between heritage preservation and urban spatial expansion, financial investment and returns, as well as public services and improvements in people's livelihoods.

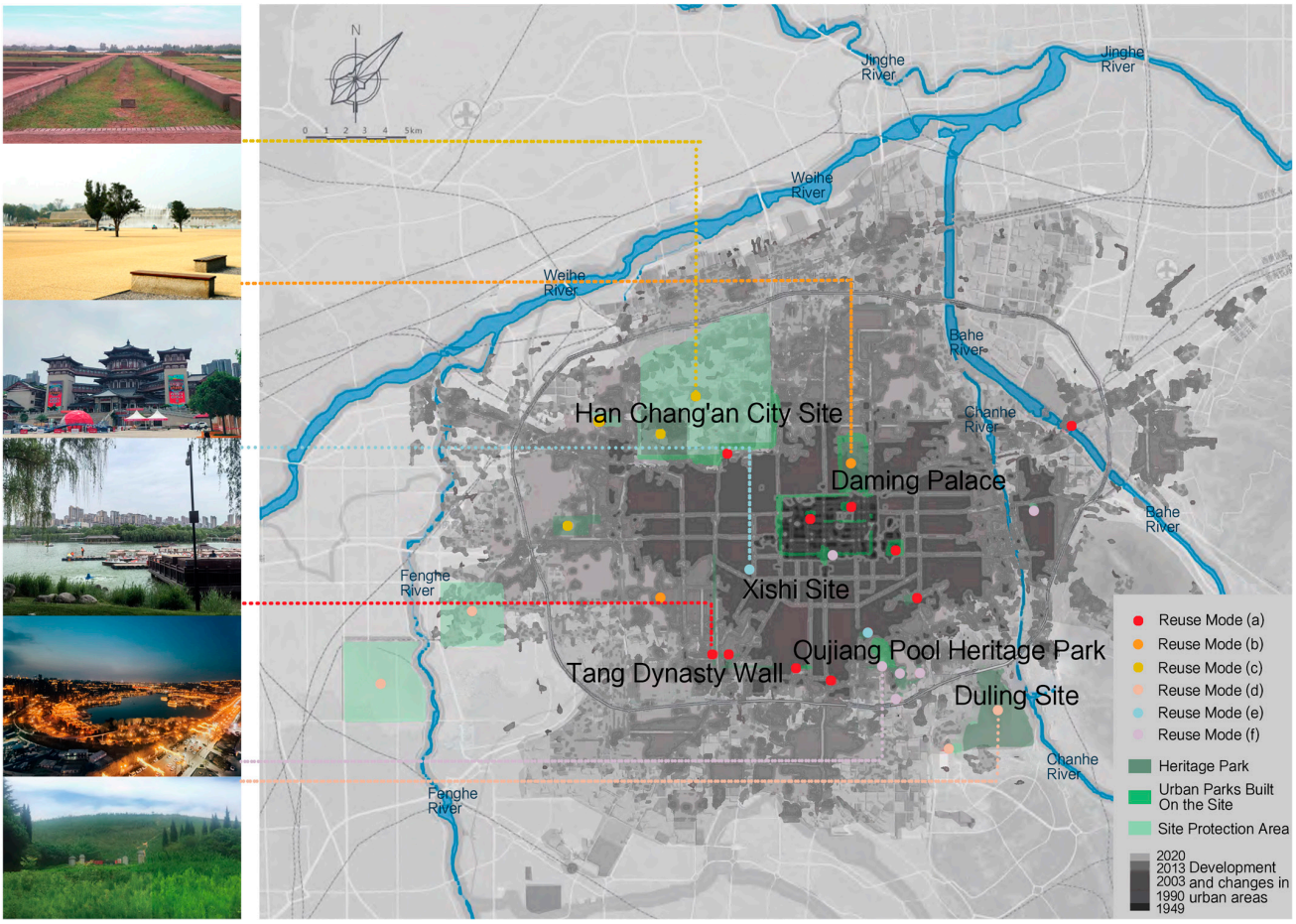


Figure 4. Changes in Xi'an urban area and distribution of historical sites (Source: Tang Dynasty Wall, Daming Palace, and Qujiang Pool Heritage Park were photographed by authors on 21 November 2019 and 10 and 15 January 2020. Han Chang' an City Site, Duling Site, and Xishi Site are reprinted with permission from Ref. [40]. 2022, Dingqing Zhang, Yiqing Zhao and Shanyao Zhu).

Given the diverse nature of heritage sites in Xi'an, which encompasses variations in scale, status, preservation conditions, preservation needs, and the developmental goals of their surrounding areas, the city has systematically explored a myriad of solutions for the preservation and utilization of its urban heritage sites. This exploration has yielded a spectrum of preservation and utilization models. When examining preservation objectives and implementation outcomes, the reuse of heritage sites in Xi'an includes various forms, such as museums with commercial development, heritage parks with ecological development, heritage parks with renovations of old district, heritage parks that cater to public daily needs, and heritage park clusters that cater to cultural tourism needs. Heritage parks have been a typical reuse mode to integrate various urban landscape transformation goals. Based on the relationship between the reuse of heritage sites and urban landscape transformation, the reuse of heritage sites in Xi'an can be broadly categorized into the following types (Figure 4, Table 1):

1. Integration with Public Parks (a)
2. Amalgamation with the Renovation of Old Districts (b)
3. Alignment with Suburban Rural Construction (c)
4. Harmonization with Ecological Development (d)
5. Incorporation into Commercial Development (e)
6. Preserving Heritage Clusters in Relation to the Agglomeration Effect of Cultural Tourism (f)

Table 1. Heritage site preservation and utilization in urban area (10,096.89 km^2) of Xi'an (Source: Authors).

Preservation and Utilization Type	Typical Cases and Features of the Site	Principal Contradiction	Reuse and Development Mode
Integration with Public Parks	Tang City Wall Heritage Park The remains of the rammed earth wall foundation, city gate, inner road, and moat.	Contradiction between the construction plan of the new area and the ruins area.	Reuse as a cluster of public parks with museums, artificial lakes, gardens and new building structures with a historical look for both public and commercial use. Utilize the cultural elements of the ruins to construct urban green parks and improve the living environment.
Amalgamation with the Renovation of Old Districts	Daming Palace National Heritage Park The site area is overlapped by the city, leaving large, rammed earth platform ruins on the ground, while the rest remains deeply buried under farmland.	The contradiction between the occupation of the site area by urbanization and the preservation of the site.	Reuse as National Archaeological Heritage Park (3.2 km^2) with 19.16 km^2 redevelopment area, including industrial heritage park construction, commercial center, real estate development, improve the living environment of the site area, promote cultural tourism, trade, and dissemination.
Alignment with Suburban Rural Construction	Han Chang'an City Site Existing ruins of city walls and large palace building bases. Rural construction activities have caused great damage to the site.	The single preservation mode of the site contradicts the improvement of people's living standards.	Reuse as heritage sites preservation demonstration area with coordinate cultural relics preservation and urban-rural construction, preserving historical agricultural landscapes, practices, and lifestyles. Integrating resident employment with the heritage preservation industry chain.
Harmonization with Ecological Development	Duling Heritage Park The ground remains of the emperor and empress tombs, and the excavation of the accompanying tombs sites have been found. The environment of the site area has been damaged by the living behavior of residents.	The preservation of suburban ruins faces the contradiction between financial difficulties and the rapid pace of urban construction.	Reuse as ecological heritage park, combined with the preservation of the cemetery, forms urban forest parks. Further develop the cultural tourism and leisure industry to stimulate regional economic development.
Incorporation into Commercial Development	Datang West Market Most of the ruins are completely overlaid under the city, and archeological investigations have shown that only some of the street and ditch ruins are partially preserved.	The archeological remains of the site contradict the new urban construction project.	Reuse as heritage museums with commercial development, including shopping mall, commercial district, investing funds in advance to implement the site preservation and exhibition projects, and then using commercial, cultural, and tourism development to obtain investment returns.
Preserving Heritage Clusters in Relation to the Agglomeration Effect of Cultural Tourism	Qujiang Heritage Park Group The heritage is rich with surrounding farmland villages near the Dayan Pagoda site. Renovation plans were implemented in the 1980s and 1990s.	Limited use of heritage, contradictions between urban development and construction requiring a large amount of land resources.	Reuse as heritage parks for cultural and tourist attractions, promoting tourism, commerce, and real estate development through policy driven and market-oriented investments.

These diverse approaches encompass various methods for the preservation and presentation of heritage sites and their environment. These methods are intricately woven into the tapestry of urban construction and development, resulting in a substantial enhancement of the local environment. The multiplicity of strategies reflects the city's commitment to addressing the unique needs and characteristics of each heritage site while contributing to the broader urban development goals of Xi'an.

(1) Environmental Dimension

Heritage sites play a pivotal role in shaping the urban landscape through scale, spatial form, and land use. A notable illustration is the impact of heritage-led urban development projects led by the Qujiang New District, where the construction of clusters of heritage parks has contributed to the transformation of the new town in Xi'an. Within five years, a substantial green space area totaling 398.92 hectares has been established, achieving an impressive greening rate of 49.56%. As reported by the Xi'an Cultural Relics Bureau, more than 30 heritage sites are anticipated to be transformed into publicly accessible parks, urban landscapes, leisure squares, and city green spaces in the future. Throughout the heritage preservation implementation, a concerted effort is made towards environmental remediation, ecological construction, and landscape creation. These initiatives aim to optimize the urban spatial structure. Consequently, these heritage sites have evolved into "green lungs" dispersed throughout the urban area, thereby realizing the environmental and ecological value embedded in heritage preservation efforts.

(2) Economic Dimension

Xi'an's heritage sites are emerging as major urban tourism destinations, playing a vital role in stimulating the local economy through the promotion of tourism and related services. As catalysts for economic growth, these heritage sites contribute significantly to the city's economic landscape. The strategic development of parks and attractions is a key approach that seamlessly integrates heritage preservation with the tourism and cultural sectors. This integration not only enhances the city's industrial fabric but also injects vitality into the city's economic framework. The enhanced environment surrounding these heritage sites creates peripheral economic benefits, with development projects centered around these sites effectively driving regional economic development. This strategic use of heritage sites realizes their economic potential, creating a symbiotic relationship between heritage preservation, tourism, and economic prosperity in Xi'an.

(3) Social Dimension

The preservation of heritage sites in Xi'an has catalyzed the transformation of urban space and land use, leading to a significant improvement in the living conditions of the community. Notable sites such as Daming Palace and Han Chang'an City exemplify the dual progress of heritage preservation and urban development, with the common goal of improving the quality of life and overall well-being of the community. Through the strategic construction of infrastructure and the optimization of industrial structures, these initiatives have triggered a widespread improvement in residential living conditions. The resettlement of residents in the vicinity of these sites ensures that communities share in the benefits of development. In addition, local residents have seen their incomes increase as a result of their engagement in the preservation and maintenance of these heritage sites. This inclusive approach ensures that the benefits of heritage preservation are shared by the wider community, thereby fulfilling the social value of heritage preservation.

(4) Cultural Dimension

The preservation of heritage sites in Xi'an highlights the significance of urban cultural resources, which are both scarce and unique. This process plays a pivotal role in preserving traditional culture and shaping a distinctive cultural image for the city. For example, the cultural industries that have developed around the Daming Palace Heritage Site include heritage exhibitions, cultural research, heritage tourism, and the creation of related cultural products and performances. By taking advantage of the Qujiang Heritage Park cluster,

a comprehensive "cultural experience" tourism industry system has been established. This developmental model integrates various elements, including dining, accommodation, travel, entertainment, and shopping, as well as a diverse range of cultural and tourism products. This integrated approach has become a key support system for the city's urban cultural industry structure. Through initiatives focused on public education and cultural dissemination, there has been a remarkable deepening of residents' emotional awareness and recognition of the city's history and traditional culture.

4.2. Coupled Relationship between Multi-Values and Heritagization

As shown in Figure 5, an analysis of the method of preservation and utilization of heritage sites in Xi'an, along with their multi-values, reveals a clearly coupled relationship. The intrinsic factors, representing the characteristics of the sites, are closely linked to the extrinsic factors related to urban development. This relationship guides the selection of different preservation and utilization approaches during the urban development process. These approaches may include preservation-oriented heritage parks, development-oriented commercial cultural tourism projects, or the cultural areas that emerge from clusters of archeological parks. At the same time, heritage museums can operate independently or in conjunction with broader preservation strategies such as urban parks, heritage parks, and suburban ecological forests. This coupled relationship highlights the dynamic interplay between the inherent qualities of heritage sites and the external factors that influence urban development decisions. It underlines the need for a nuanced and context-specific approach to heritage preservation and reuse that takes into account both the intrinsic and extrinsic elements shaping the urban landscape in China. These approaches interact to varying degrees with the environmental, economic, social, and cultural drivers of the city, ultimately realizing the diverse values of the site. Heritage sites with large scale, high rank, and rich heritage require significant construction efforts and financial investments, profoundly influencing the urban spatial and industrial restructuring and generating a diversified set of benefits.

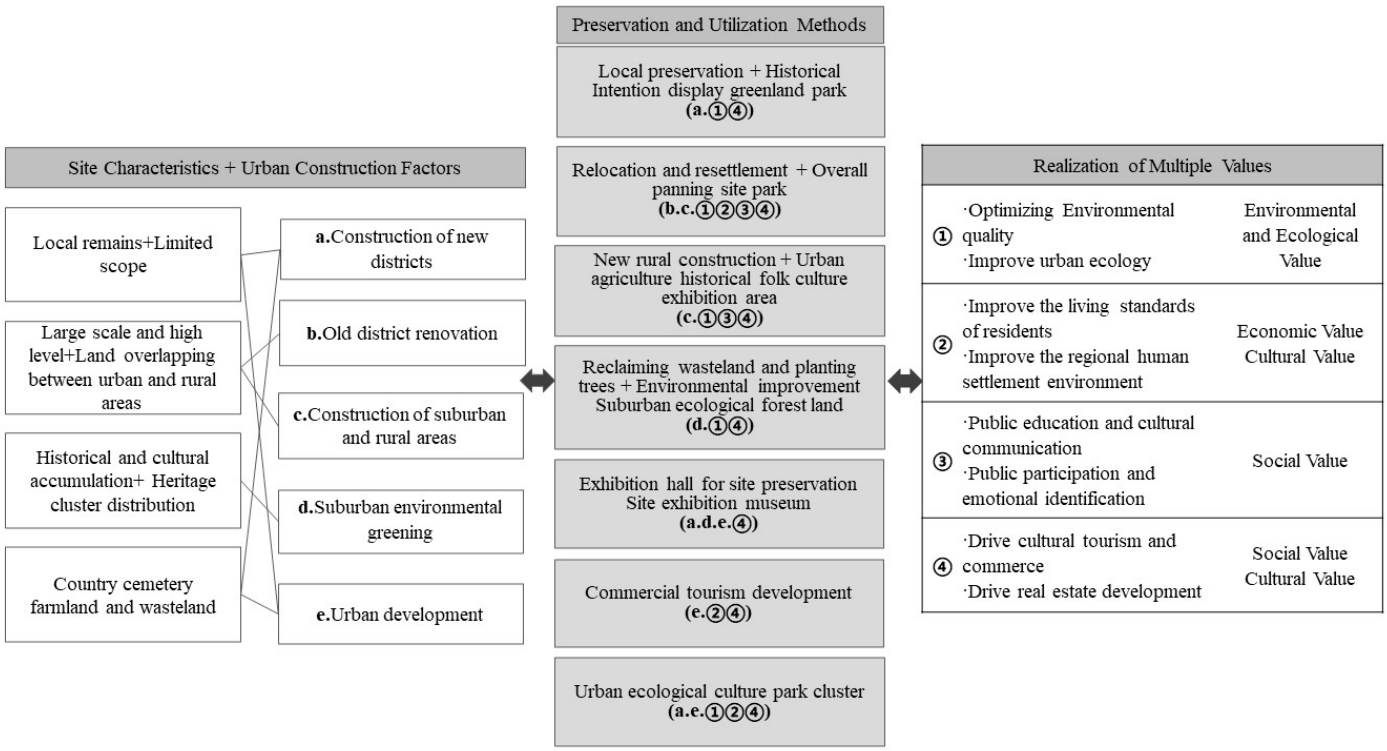


Figure 5. Integration of heritage site preservation and utilization with the realization of multi-value in Xi'an (Source: Authors).

The integration of heritage preservation with urban green spaces inherently achieves environmental and ecological goals. The social value of heritage preservation is closely linked to public participation and the enhancement of people's well-being. To fully realize its cultural value, heritage preservation must be seamlessly integrated into the urban cultural system. It is essential to recognize that different values may conflict with each other and that maximizing all values simultaneously is impractical. The recognition of the contemporary value of heritage sites should be based on core values such as historical significance, with economic considerations being secondary and contingent upon the preservation of these core values. Therefore, ensuring the safety of heritage sites and their environment becomes a critical prerequisite for their preservation and utilization.

The case that could illustrate the interweaving of multi-values in heritage sites is the redevelopment of the Daming Palace Site. Through reuse and integration with the renovation of old districts, the Daming Palace area has evolved from a Tang Dynasty Imperial Palace to a suburban green space with abandoned heritage sites, and then to an urban village with heritage elements, and finally to an archeological heritage park and the northern growth pole of Xi'an. The decision to build the heritage park has seamlessly integrated different values, demonstrating a conscious effort to reconcile historical and cultural preservation with urban development goals. It is a testament to the city's commitment to balancing modernization with the preservation of its rich historical heritage. The construction of the Daming Palace Heritage Park not only contributes to the preservation of a significant archeological site but also enhances the overall cultural landscape of the urban environment. Specifically, the museum within the heritage park showcases the Hanyuan Palace Heritage Site and aims to provide education, encourage public participation, and convey cultural meanings to highlight the cultural values of the heritage site. Covering an area of 3.2 km^2, the heritage park expands the green space and ecological environment in the northern area of Xi'an. With the relocation of over 100,000 residents and the demolition of 3.5 million square meters of urban village area in the Daming Palace area, the redevelopment uses heritage as a catalyst for social and economic development. As a result, multi-values are intricately embedded in the reuse of heritage sites and the redevelopment of the heritage site area.

5. Discussion

5.1. Reuse of Heritage Sites in Xi'an: Positive and Negative Aspects

After nearly three decades, Xi'an's multi-value approach to heritage preservation has gradually integrated various functions of urban development, including education, cultural tourism, ecological conservation, the creation of daily public parks for citizens, and economic development. Depending on the location, type, and preservation status of urban heritage sites, a variety of preservation modes have been adopted, such as heritage parks or landscape areas, including civic parks, ecological parks, and cultural theme parks. These modes are intricately combined with the renovation of the old urban district, suburban rural construction, cultural and tourism industries, and commercial development. Through various approaches, significant benefits have been achieved in terms of improving urban space and environmental quality, promoting economic development, enhancing residents' well-being, and promoting the education and dissemination of urban culture. In 2022, China's main urban park evaluation report ranked Xi'an as the 13th most park-friendly city, with 65.99 per cent coverage of integrated park services, 58.62 per cent coverage rate of community park services, and 24.80 per cent coverage of park services [41]. The forms of preservation and utilization of heritage parks in Xi'an have, to a certain extent, achieved a balance between heritage preservation and meeting people's living needs. By capitalizing on the scarcity of heritage resources, heritage parks have, to some extent, driven the development of surrounding real estate and tourism facilities. For example, the completion of the Tang Dynasty Wall Heritage Park has significantly increased land prices around the Qujiang Pool. As of 2024, residential prices in the Qujiang Pool area have surpassed the average level in Xi'an, reaching 40,000 RMB per square meter (compared with

the average price in Xi'an of around 15,000-20,000 RMB). In addition, the reuse of heritage sites by integrating heritage preservation with museums, green spaces, heritage parks, and other urban development goals in Xi'an has significant long-term implications. The integration of multi-value into heritage park areas can also contribute to the establishment of cultural brands and the fostering of a sense of cultural identity, providing the public with a satisfying and enriching cultural experience. By strengthening cultural self-awareness and self-confidence, these efforts have further enhanced the city's cultural influence and soft power, ultimately realizing the profound cultural value of heritage preservation. In addition, these heritage parks can serve as "living museums", providing immersive educational experiences for students and researchers interested in history and culture.

However, rapid redevelopment has also created challenges in terms of sustainability. First, the current focus of heritage preservation is primarily on physical remains, with planning measures limited to the preservation zone. The historic environment of heritage sites is challenged by the lack of control over the surrounding built-up areas. "If you go to visit heritage parks in Xi'an, sometimes it is difficult to find heritage sites, some people get lost, they experience the newly built modern buildings with historical look, breathe the fresh air by the park and lake, the surrounding areas are filled with many high-end residential and commercial facilities" (Interview 2019). There is an inherent contradiction between heritage preservation and its economic benefits. Overexploitation for short-term gain, coupled with the prioritization of real estate development, inevitably weakens or erases the deep historical sense of cultural heritage. For instance, the Tang Ci'en Temple Heritage Park is located near the Big Wild Goose Pagoda World Heritage Site, and the excessive commercialization and Disneyfication of the surrounding environment have posed persistent challenges to the historic environment of the heritage site, isolating the heritage site with noisy tourists. The Never Sleep Tang Dynasty Commercial District was a completely redesigned heritage space for tourism experience and cultural facilities; with the growing importance of economic and environmental values, the cultural values have been cut down. In addition, heritage sites, being relatively independent and scattered, lack synergy at the overall urban spatial level, resulting in uneven spatial development (Figure 1).

In addition, social issues arise when large-scale heritage preservation and utilization occurs, including fractured social networks, marginalized resettled communities, and the significant displacement of low-income communities by higher-income populations. Scholars have drawn attention to the issue of heritage gentrification. While escalating property prices and environmental renewal contribute to more affluent, high-end, and fashionable development, they also promote differentiation and conflict in cultural characteristics. For instance, when the Daming Palace Heritage Site was redeveloped into a heritage park, some of the residents were relocated to gated communities at the edge of the redevelopment area. Most residents tend to be satisfied with exchanging their dilapidated housing for a new location in a gated community. However, some of them still complain about the unequal relocation and the time it takes to receive their title deeds. During the interview with one community leader, she explained, "The commercial feedback around the new gated communities has been shared among the villagers, but I am still worried about the safety issue of the relocation communities due to the lack of a fire safety channel. "(Interview 2017). Moreover, the reuse of the Daming Palace Heritage Site as a heritage park also brought a new twist to the challenge of social inclusion. Although the villages near Daming Palace Heritage Site were relocated to a new gated community, the villagers could not adapt to the urban life, so the tradition of the marriage ceremony extended to a new gated community. In the Xianfeng community, the marriage ceremony inherited from the village started on 20 December 2017 (Figure 6). In addition, the cultural interpretation and exhibition aspects of current heritage preservation need improvement. Public participation and interaction are limited, and a sustainable propaganda and education mechanism has yet to be established. The current single reuse mode of heritage sites has not formed a complete cultural industry system, which affects the realization of social and cultural values in heritage preservation.

Although heritage parks provide sufficient green space and bring more cultural facilities to the city, the social sustainability of how local communities adapt to urban life and how to enhance social inclusion remains a key challenge.

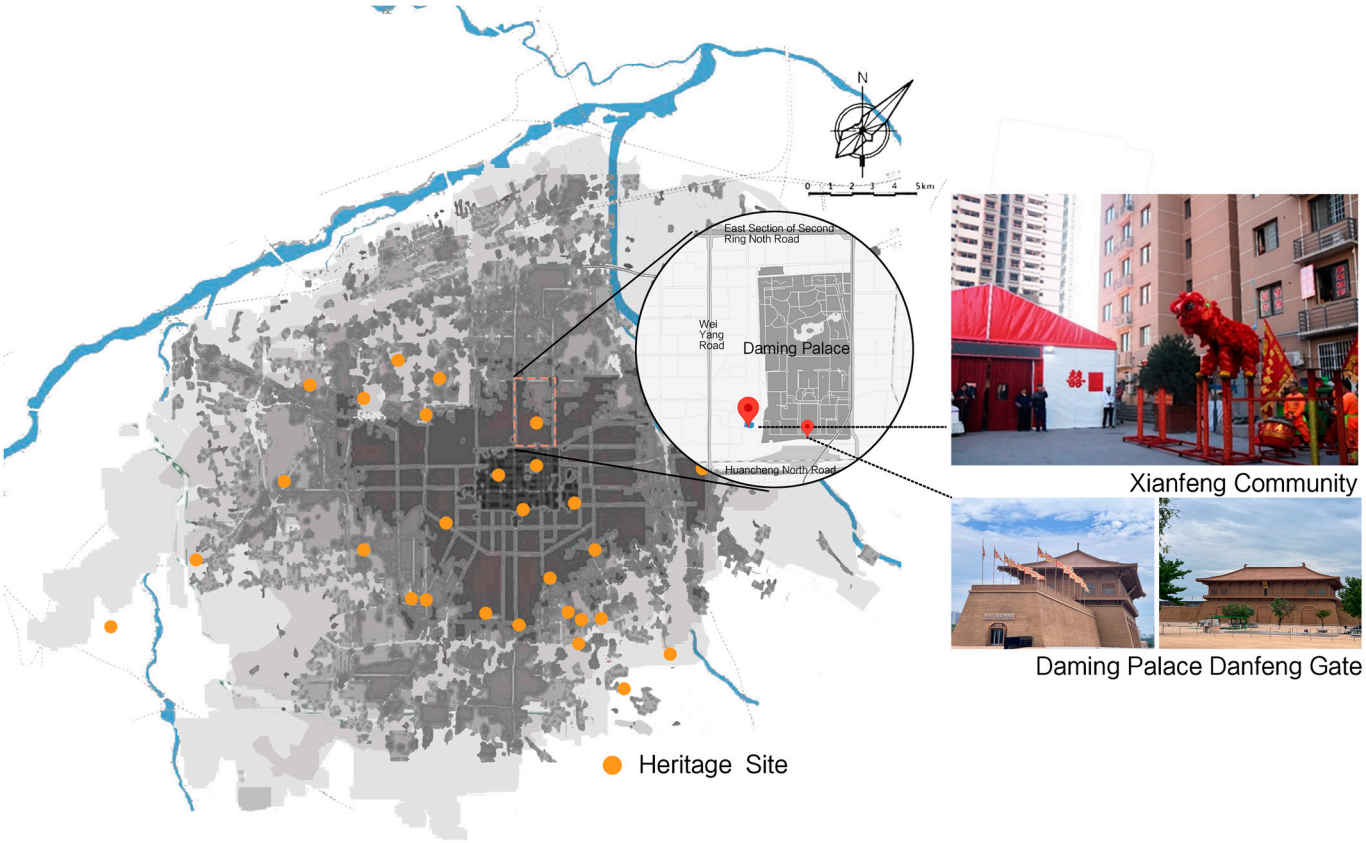


Figure 6. The relocation community near Daming Palace Heritage Park Area (Source: Photographed by Yiqing Zhao on 20 December 2017 and 26 May 2019).

5.2. Policy Implications of Heritage Site Preservation and Utilization

The multi-value approach has emerged as a new trend in the coordinated integration of heritage site preservation, utilization, and urban development. This approach establishes links between conservation goals and the broader desires and needs of society. In order to better integrate the multi-value framework of heritage preservation with urban development, several recommendations are proposed. First, it is suggested that heritage sites and their surroundings be actively included in spatial planning and that their coordination with overall urban development be prioritized. Scientific assessments of the intrinsic value of heritage sites, including a preliminary assessment of their multi-value, should be carried out during the planning phase. Attention should be paid to land use around heritage sites, understanding potential conflicts with the environment, and pre-studying possible solutions. Second, it is suggested to emphasize integral preservation in the urban renewal process and to recognize the vulnerability and non-renewability of heritage sites. Policies and project assessments should be used to mitigate the impact of tourism development on these sites, with continuous evaluation and monitoring of the impact of tourism activities on the lives of heritage site residents. Third, efforts should be made to strengthen the link between heritage sites and the public. This includes highlighting the importance of public participation in the presentation, interpretation, dissemination, and promotion of heritage sites. It is beneficial to use digital technology and new media to facilitate a multifaceted and diverse presentation of cultural content at heritage sites. Providing a range of tourism experiences, including heritage education, cultural activities, and vocational training, alongside other public cultural services, can enhance public awareness and

preservation consciousness. We advocate for the integration of heritage preservation and management with efforts to improve the quality of life of local communities. Finally, policy makers and urban planners should introduce policy or planning guidelines to monitor the long-term social sustainability of the heritage sites being redeveloped. Based on the multi-value interpretation of the reuse of heritage sites, social inclusion, local communities' living conditions, and local communities' participation in cultural events can help to balance economic growth with preservation and ensure that the local communities benefit from redevelopment.

6. Conclusions: Interweaving the Six Models of Multi-Value of Heritage Sites with Urban Development

The research makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the growing body of knowledge concerned with heritage preservation, the reuse of heritage sites, and urban redevelopment. This study provides new insights into the multi-value interpretation of heritage, empowering heritage as a catalyst for development rather than an obstacle. The study also explores the reuse of heritage with urbanization and critically examines the conflicts associated with shifting value interpretations in different heritage park construction cases. Through the reuse of the past in contemporary discourse, heritage sites have been integrated into the global tourism industry, transforming the past into a market commodity [42,43]. The evolutionary process and reuse of heritage sites in Xi'an serves as an example of Chinese efforts to weave the multi-value of heritage into the production of space to achieve urban development goals of real estate appreciation, sustainability communities, and cultural brand creation [40]. The theoretical exploration paves the way for understanding the delicate balance required to maintain the values of heritage sites while adapting to contemporary socio-economic needs. In this process, positive and negative aspects of heritage reuse often arise and interact in terms of pro-growth initiatives and considerations of social benefits. From a practical point of view, the research focuses on urban landscape transformation in post-reform China, implying a global application, especially in regions facing similar preservation and urbanization challenges. By considering these complex challenges, the research provides practical policy implications through the different cases of heritage park construction in Xi'an.

In conclusion, it is essential to include the development of the heritage environment in the evaluation criteria for heritage projects, if the rehabilitation of urban heritage areas aims to treat the heritage environment as a whole and consider long-term value realization. This can alleviate problems such as "heritage commodification", which can be explained as a process whereby objects, traditions, or places of cultural value are turned into heritage sites as products that can be sold or traded for cultural tourism [44], and the "unequal distribution of benefits" in the development of heritage areas. Finally, it is crucial to emphasize and strengthen the link between the multi-value of heritage sites and the public. This multi-target orientation has become a new trend in the coordination of heritage preservation and urban development. Therefore, it is crucial to involve different stakeholders, such as multidisciplinary experts, policy makers, residents of heritage sites, and the public, in a comprehensive preservation framework to work together to establish a link between preservation goals and the balance of social aspirations and needs. This includes highlighting the unique value and historical cultural information of heritage sites, maintaining a positive and healthy cultural orientation, and enhancing public esthetic awareness. This can be achieved through various means, such as digital communication platforms, the creation of a complete cultural industry chain that integrates creativity, product manufacturing, communication, service, and exchange, as well as the involvement of the public in heritage preservation, community management, and the integration of heritage sites into social life.

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