

Public perceptions of historical authenticity under the perspective of Historic Urban Landscape——A case study of The Five Avenues in Tianjin

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Abstract: Cities have been our most elaborate creation since the beginning of human society, therefore urban heritages would always be the carrier of culture and collective memory of a place. Nowadays, however, there are already globally developed system for the conservation of tangible urban heritages, in most cases, monuments, with the loss of historic meaning, which means, the public, including local residents and tourists, can hardly perceive the historical authenticity of the city in the modern society. As a result, they can barely understand the sense of place and historical layering process of the city. From the perspective of Historic Urban Landscape, this paper sets out the experience and approaches of public perceptions of historical authenticity in China through literature review, comprehensive survey and network data analysis, and take The Five Avenues District in Tianjin as a case study in order to propose strategies for enhancing the public's perceived authenticity of the historic area, in other words, make up for the gap between the expression of urban heritages and the acceptance of the public. By doing this, the public can have a better understanding of the meaning of urban heritage conservation, which would contribute to its distinctive identity, sense of place, as well as the management of change and sustainable use of urban heritages.

Key words: Historic Urban Landscape; public perception; historical authenticity; sustainable use; The Five Avenues District

1. Introduction

It has been hundreds of years since the concept of heritage conservation has emerged. During this period, with the joint efforts of scholars, governments, institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders, the theory and practice of heritage conservation have been greatly developed all over the world, and the theory of urban heritage conservation has also gone through the process of preserving the monument at the very beginning, then preserving historic districts, and now conserving the whole historic city. Because the public gradually realized that although maybe not all of the individual buildings in some historic blocks have outstanding historical and cultural values, the overall environment they constitute reflects the characteristics of a certain historical period, and it is an important carrier of the public memory and the spirit of the place, and thus the value of the single building has been sublimated. In addition, in the face of new crises that have emerged since the beginning of the 21st century, such as climate change, urbanization, market exploitation, mass tourism, etc., the circumstance of heritage conservation is much more complicated than before, and it is no longer possible to focus simply on heritage preservation. Instead, we should analyse and respond to these emerging challenges with an overall view. As a result, in recent years, people are constantly trying.

For example, in 2011, UNESCO passed the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*. According to the definition of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) in the recommendation, the HUL can be seen as an object that need to be conserved:

“The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of ‘historic centre’ or ‘ensemble’ to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting¹.”

In the meantime, it can also be seen as a conservation approach:

“The historic urban landscape approach is aimed at preserving the quality of the human environment, enhancing the productive and sustainable use of urban spaces, while recognizing their dynamic character, and promoting social and functional diversity. It integrates the goals of urban heritage conservation and those of social and economic development. It is rooted in a balanced and sustainable relationship between the urban and natural environment, between the needs of present and future generations and the legacy from the past².”

Compared with the previous urban protection theory, its main innovations are:

- Emphasize the shift from the protection of a single, highly valued historic monument to the conservation of the historic environment in order to enhance the visual experience of people;
- Promote civic engagement, from “top-down” protection to “bottom-up” conservation, in order to retain the collective memory and sense of place;
- Taking heritage as an important part of sustainable development and regard it as an irreplaceable resource for future development. In doing so, we need to transfer our perspective from the traditional static protection to the dynamic conservation, thus alleviating the contradiction between historic conservation and urban development, etc.

To do this, HUL theory provides four actions, including knowledge and planning tools, civic engagement tools, financial tools and regulatory systems³. The public perceptions of historical authenticity studied in this paper can be regarded as an important part of civic engagement tools, because only by making the public aware of the importance of heritage conservation can they fundamentally arouse their enthusiasm for participating in the action of heritage conservation. After all, for the urban heritage, the most understandable and affectionate people can only be the community residents who live with them day and night, their help is essential in the development of conservation planning.

Although the unique historical buildings and urban landscapes in historical districts are scarce, and they also have multiple values, such as social values, cultural values, aesthetic values, environmental values, resource values, urban context values, architectural values, historic values, economic and commercial values, and the values of the sense of place, etc.⁴ heritage conservation still seems to remain in the discussion

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¹UNESCO, “Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions”. [This seems a little incomplete – full ref should have date published, etc.]

²UNESCO, “Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions”.

³World Heritage Centre, “The historic urban landscape approach explained.”

⁴Steven Tiesdell, Taner Oc and Tim Heath, “Revitalizing historic urban quarters”.

of relevant professionals, especially in developing countries, like China, where there is a big gap between the public perceptions of historical authenticity of heritage and the expectations of practitioners. It directly affects the public's understanding of the multiple values of the heritage. In short, the public may not really understand the reasons for conserving urban heritage. And in order to solve that problem, the first thing we need to do is to strengthen the public perception of historical authenticity of the heritage. As Mohsen Mostafavi said:

“We cannot really recreate the historic city as it was in the past, as this would be a nostalgic project and is not even possible⁵.”

While the public's *perception of historical authenticity* is an abstract concept, which is different from the authenticity of the heritage. The heritage authenticity is objective and has clear criteria for judgment. However, the public's perception of historical authenticity emphasizes “perception”, which is based on the objective authenticity of the heritage itself, but needs to be perceived by the public through a series of activities and experiences (media) that ultimately translate into the subjective understanding of the public. In a word, the public's perception of historical authenticity is a subjective state of perception, which is related to the authenticity of the objective heritage and the participatory process of the subject⁶. Since the changes in urban form are inevitable, and all the material entities of the heritage will eventually disappear, the only thing we can do is to try our best to delay this process. Therefore, it is important to transform the culture and multiple values carried by the heritage onto people, by mapping in the brain, and passed down from generation to generation, which is also the practical significance of studying the public perceptions of historical authenticity.

In a word, although new theories and methods of urban conservation have emerged in recent years, they still fail to change the fact that conservation practitioners are always keen on the protection of the physical entities of the ontology, which has already been done very well in many countries, but to some extent ignore whether the public can perceive the important value carried by them. As Rem Koolhaas said:

“The real question you have to ask in dealing with preservation is what you want to achieve, and I think that the only thing that is legitimate is the idea of transmitting the past to future generations. This means that we cannot only transmit the monuments, because they do not speak about the conditions of life, about how things used to be and work⁷.”

This is also the issue that this article focuses on, which is, the significance of public perceptions of historical authenticity of urban heritages in historic cities.

⁵Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, “Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage”, 176. [is this quote from a chapter within this book by Mostafavi? If so, you should include full details here]

⁶Chengzhao Wu and Jing Wang, “Modeling Tourists Perceived Authenticity and the Sustainable Use of Cultural Heritage”, 98-104.

⁷Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, “Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage”, 313.

2. The Five Avenues Historic District

The Five Avenues Historic District in Tianjin is a good example of China's urban heritage conservation. Since the British occupied the first British concession in Tianjin in 1860, France, the United States, Japan, Germany, Italy, Russia, Austria, Belgium and other eight countries had also occupied their respective concession areas on both sides of the Haihe River. These concessions had a profound impact on the development of Tianjin. The Five Avenues Historic District that we see today is the third stage that originated in the British Concession (Figure 1): In the 1930s, a large number of various types of dwellings were built in the New District of the British Concession (from formerly Qiangzi River to present south of Nanjing Road), which formed the high-ranking residential area of the British Concession, consisting of the present Machang Avenue, Munan Avenue, Dali Avenue, Changde Avenue, and Chongqing Avenue, as known as the concentrated area of “Tianjin Western-style buildings”⁸. [Word missing here] went through decades of construction and conservation after the founding of People's Republic of China, today's Five Avenues have become an important identity of Tianjin. Not only is it a well-known historic district in Tianjin, but also attracts a large number of tourists from the whole country, even the whole world, to come here every year. This is inseparable from the efforts of relevant scholars, practitioners and governors, since in addition to national laws, Tianjin has also introduced many local regulations to regulate and guide the conservation and management work of the Five Avenues District. For example, since the 1990s, through the introduction of the *Five Avenues Construction Management and Protection Plan*, comprehensive management and renovation of the block, including buildings, roads, landscapes and infrastructure, has begun⁹; the *Regulations on the protection of historic buildings in Tianjin City* passed in 2005 clearly showed the definition of “historical style and features building”¹⁰, and the municipal government invested in the establishment of “Tianjin Historical Architecture Restoration and Development Finishing Co. Ltd.”, which is mainly responsible for the repairment, decoration, renovation, leasing, transfer, environmental construction and related technical consultation of historical style and features buildings¹¹; The *Technical Standards for the Conservation Planning of Tianjin Historical and Cultural Streets* adopted in 2011 has detailedly divided historical buildings and historical streets and put forward clear requirements for each category, and standardized the repair and protection process for historical blocks, as well as

⁸Zhe Li, “Land use displacement of dynamic conservation in Tianjin Five Road Historic District”.

⁹Qingnan Zhao, “A Study on Dynamic Conservation and Control Implementation Guidelines of Tianjin Wudadao Historic District”.

¹⁰The “historical style and features building” is a legal term in the *Regulations on the protection of historic buildings in Tianjin City*. It refers to “the building that has been built for more than 50 years, with architectural art characteristics and scientific value in architectural style, structure, construction technology and engineering technology; reflecting the characteristics of culture and folk custom, with the characteristics of the times and regional characteristics; with the characteristics of exotic architecture; the representative works of famous architects; having special commemorative significance in the history of revolutionary development; representative workshops, shops, factories and warehouses in the history of industrial development; celebrities' former residences and other buildings of special historical significance.”

¹¹Tianjin Planning Bureau, “Regulations on the protection of historic buildings in Tianjin City”.

provided technical guidance for specific protection measures¹². The implementation of these measures has made the historic buildings in the district well conserved, while also remaining the historical environment around the building to the utmost extent, so that people can feel the history and culture when they walk in the block. Therefore, as one of the most successful conserved historic district cases in China, taking the Five Avenues Historic District of Tianjin as an example of public perceptions of historical authenticity research will help to reveal China's experience and lessons in conservation work of historical environment, and lay the foundation for the future development and practice of urban conservation theory.

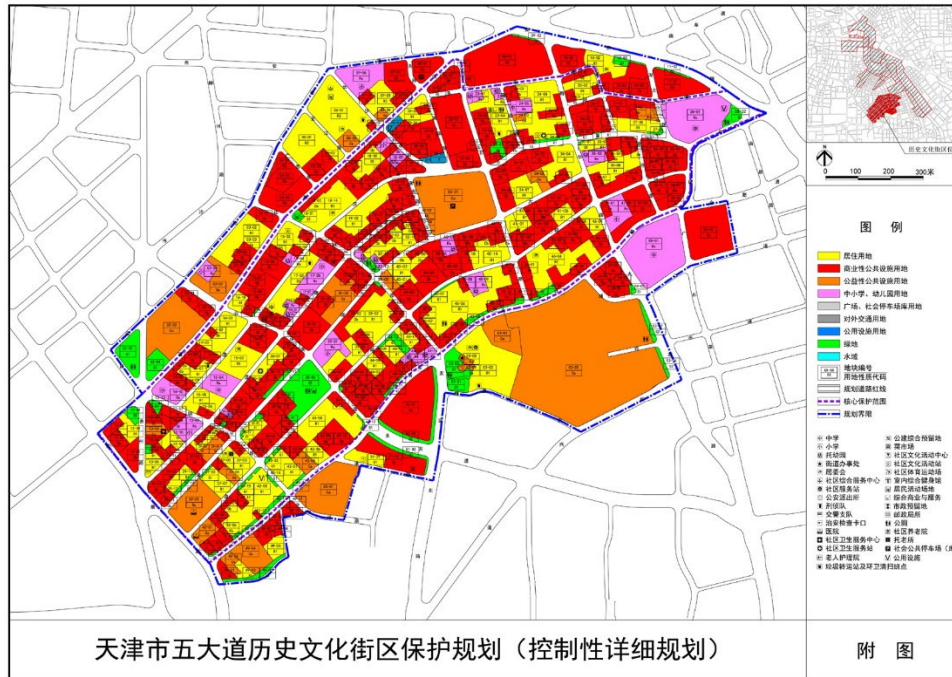


Figure 1. Tianjin Five Avenues Historic District Protection Plan
 (Source: <http://gh.tj.gov.cn/news.aspx?id=8581>)

3. The current conservation strategies of the Five Avenues Historic District

3.1 Vision level

The rectification and renovation of the Five Avenues Historic District in Tianjin can be traced back to the 1950s. However, due to the historical conditions at that time, the focus of work was not on heritage conservation, but on the construction of civil construction supporting projects, including housing. Later, after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution and the earthquake, the Five Avenues Historic District suffered an incalculable loss. Since the 1990s, Tianjin [city council? – who?] has issued more than 10 plans for heritage conservation, including *The Five Avenues Construction*

¹²Tianjin Planning Bureau, “Technical Standards for the Conservation Planning of Tianjin Historical and Cultural Streets”.

Management Protection Plan and *Tianjin Five Avenues Historic District Protection Plan* under the guidance of the *Tianjin Master Plan* and *Historical and Cultural City Protection Plan*, provide a scientific basis for the conservation of the historical features of the Five Avenues Historic District.¹³ These plans not only preserve the authenticity of the urban heritages in the district, but also preserve its historical environment, which is the basis for the public perceptions of historical authenticity. As shown in Figure 2 to 6, they are panoramic photos taken by the author on the five main avenues. It can be seen that thanks to the excellent sight control, it is difficult to see the high-rise buildings outside the block from the perspective of people. Besides, the large number of “Western-style buildings” in this area make people feel like they are in European towns.



Figure 2. The panoramic photo of Machang Avenue



Figure 3. The panoramic photo of Munan Avenue



Figure 4. The panoramic photo of Dali Avenue

¹³Qingnan Zhao, “A Study on Dynamic Conservation and Control Implementation Guidelines of Tianjin Wudadao Historic District”.



Figure 5. The panoramic photo of Changde Avenue



Figure 6. The panoramic photo of Chongqing Avenue
(Source: photographed by author)

3.2 Media level

The authenticity of the heritage as the object itself is the basis of the public perceptions of historical authenticity, while the perception of the public as the subject is the purpose, and the media between them plays an irreplaceable role. In this regard, the conservation practitioners of the Five Avenues Historic District have made a lot of efforts, mainly in:

1) There are 4 plaques (Figure 7) in front of each cultural relic building. Even the historic buildings that are not rated as cultural relics are also provided with 2 plaques, which record some basic information of the building, including the building's profile, protection level, protection zone, etc., as well as a QR code can be scanned to help people learn more about them.

2) In October 2014, CCTV broadcasted nine episodes of the humanity documentary "The Stories of Concessions" (Figure 8). The drama was jointly produced by the Propaganda Department of the Tianjin Municipal Committee, the CCTV Recording Channel, and the Tianjin Radio and Television Station. Although it was called "The Stories of Concessions", it shows the transformation of Tianjin during 20th century in front of the audience through the interpretation of the Five Avenues Historic District, since Tianjin's history and culture show the social essence of modern China in a special form¹⁴. As an important testimony of this historical period, every brick and tile of the district seem to record the changes of the times, telling stories, and its value is magnificent.

3) On-site explanation is one of the most important ways to help people perceive the historical authenticity. Therefore, the management department of the district has launched a series of explanation services, including: carriage sightseeing with

¹⁴Xinxia Lai and Weiguo Liu, "History and Culture of Tianjin."
来新夏 and 刘卫国, "天津历史与文化".

commentator (Figure 9), walking with explanation, self-driving with explanation and other forms, you can also download the official APP, enjoy electronic explanations in the museums in this area (Figure 10). Through a variety of explanation activities, people can understand and perceive history, especially for those who know little about it.



Figure 7. Plaques with information about the building
(Source: photographed by author)

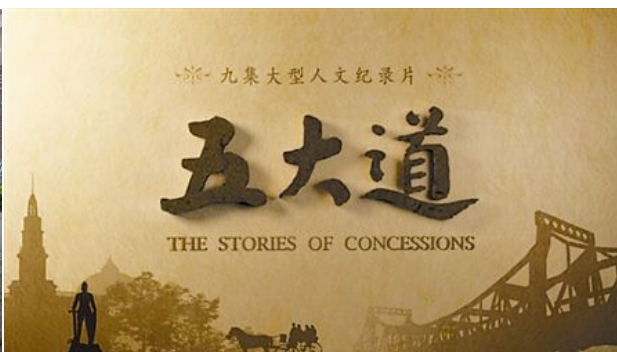


Figure 8. The Stories of Concessions
(Source: http://www.mafengwo.cn/baike/10320_1664.html)



Figure 9. Carriage sightseeing with commentator
(Source: photographed by author)



Figure 10. The official APP of the district
(Source: photographed by author)

4. The current situation of public perceptions of historical authenticity of the Five Avenues Historic District

In order to understand the public perceptions of historical authenticity of the Five Avenues Historic District, it is necessary to understand the public's feelings and evaluations of the block. The sample size of traditional questionnaire survey method is

usually limited by the collection and processing costs, and the researcher's orientation in the questionnaire makes the evaluation information less open. On the contrary, the network platform has a large number of users' evaluation data. If they are collected and analyzed, they can make up for the shortcomings of the traditional method to a certain extent¹⁵. Therefore, this paper conducts word frequency statistics and semantic analysis on the evaluation of the district on the network based on text mining technology to find out the success of current measures and shortcomings that need improvement.

4.1 The application of text mining technology

4.1.1 Data collection

There are three main channels for data collection in online reviews:

- 1) Websites with an evaluation section, such as the Dazhongdianping (public comment) network¹⁶, the evaluation information of them corresponds to the target and has a certain format;
- 2) Social platforms, such as Weibo, WeChat, etc., such evaluation information is not clearly formatted and is usually combined with a large amount of irrelevant information;
- 3) General websites, including news, forum posts, etc., such evaluations are most difficult to collect due to their widespread distribution.¹⁷

This paper collected a total of 2,353 valid comments¹⁸ on Dazhongdianping Network on the Five Avenue as of 12 May, 2018. The reason why the Dazhongdianping Network was selected was because the comments on the website came from local community residents¹⁹, local non-community residents²⁰ and tourists, while the comments on other websites were mostly commented on by tourists, so they were much more convincing. Then, according to the year, through manual semantic analysis, they are judged that 2149 comments belong to "praise", 136 comments belong to "medium", and 68 comments belong to "bad", as Figure 11 shows. As the data was collected manually, without relying upon computer processing software, it has been possible, in general, to avoid issues of data clutter, inaccuracy and other problems that are often encountered in the data collection process, thereby improving the overall quality of the subsequent data analysis.

¹⁵Yue Ma, "Research on Post-occupancy Evaluation of Built Environment Based on Text Mining Technology".

¹⁶Dazhongdianping Network is China's leading city consumer consumption platform and independent third-party consumer review website. With mobile internet, information technology and offline service capabilities, Dazhongdianping Network provides consumers with trusted local businesses, consumer reviews and discounts, as well as O2O closed-loop trading services such as group purchases, reservations, delivery, and electronic membership cards, etc. Almost include all local life service industries such as restaurants, movies, hotels, leisure and entertainment, beauty, marriage, parent-child, home improvement, etc., which makes the website an indispensable tool for consumers in the city.

¹⁷Yue Ma, "Research on Post-occupancy Evaluation of Built Environment Based on Text Mining Technology".

¹⁸The valid comments in this paper refers to filtering out comments that are too short, irrelevant comments, and duplicate comments. [Say exactly what you mean here – how short? What counts as irrelevant?]

¹⁹In the comments, those refer to "grow up here", "living in the Five Avenue District", "study at Tianjin Foreign Studies University" and other similar descriptions are judged as commented by residents of the local community, that is, citizens living or having lived in the district for years.

²⁰In the comments, those refer to "lived nearby", "commuting from work here", "bringing friends here" and other similar descriptions were judged as commented by local non-community residents, that is, citizens living in other communities in Tianjin besides Five Avenues Historic District.

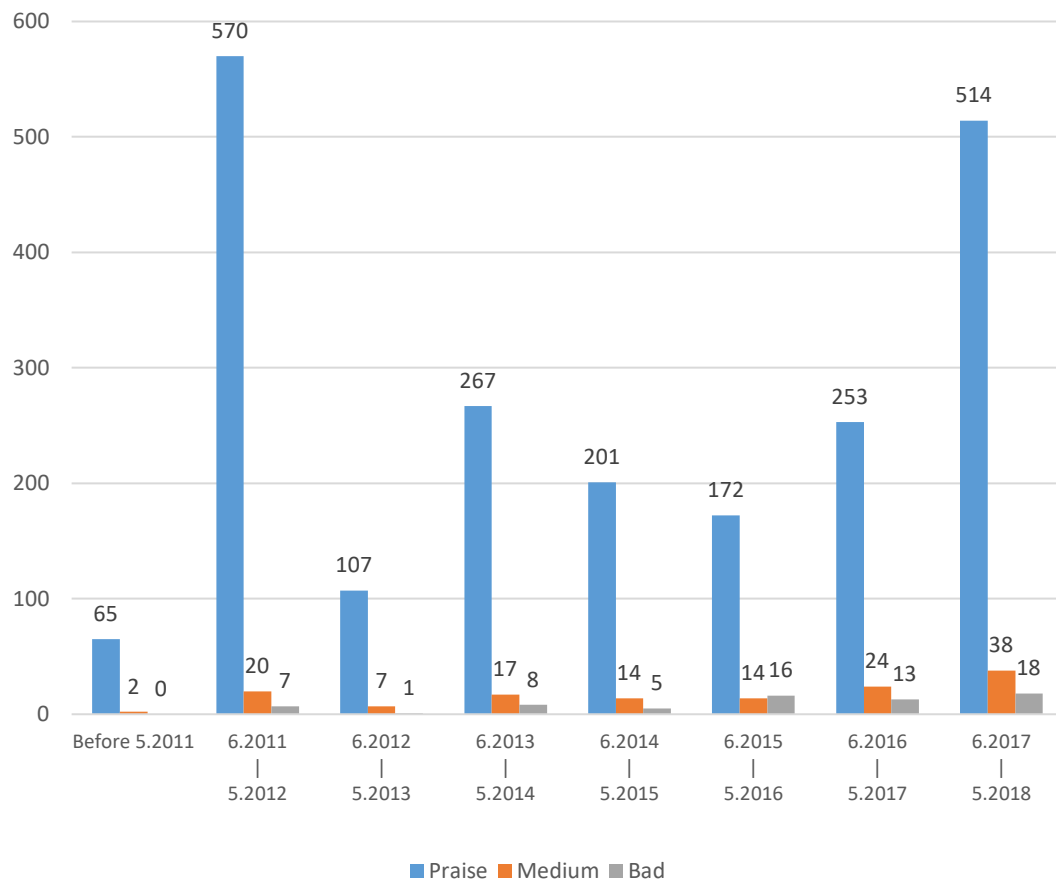


Figure 11. The amount of comments over the years

In addition, the author also noted that among the people who visited the district and left comments over the years, the number of tourists, local non-community residents and local community residents also changed significantly (Figure 12). Since 2012, the proportion of tourists in the five avenues had increased significantly. The author speculates that it is related to the implementation of a series of initiatives, such as in 2010, the block was elected as “China Top 10 Historical and Cultural Streets²¹”; in 2011, the Five Avenues was identified by the Tianjin Planning Bureau as “Historical and Cultural Streets”; in 2013, the “Five Avenues Modern Buildings” was designated as “National Cultural Relics” by the State Council; in 2014, the “Five Avenue Cultural Tourism Areas” received the National Tourism Administration's 4A-level tourist attractions²², so it is much more famous than before. Among the three categories of the public, the proportions of “praise”, “medium” and “bad” are shown in Figure 13. It can be clearly seen that natives in Tianjin have a better impression of the Five Avenues historic district than tourists, since identity, collective memory and emotional factors play a significant role.

²¹The “China Historical and Culture Street Awards” was launched in July 2008 and more than 200 blocks were registered for the competition. The selection refers to six major standards: historical elements, cultural elements, preservation status, economic and cultural vitality, social visibility, conservation and management. The event has been held for five consecutive sessions in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

²²Ruihong Zheng, Niu Zhang and Yangchao Cheng. “Integrated Development of Tourism Value of Historic District of the Five Avenues in Tianjin.”

郑锐洪, 张妞 and 成阳超, “天津市五大道历史街区旅游价值的整合开发”.

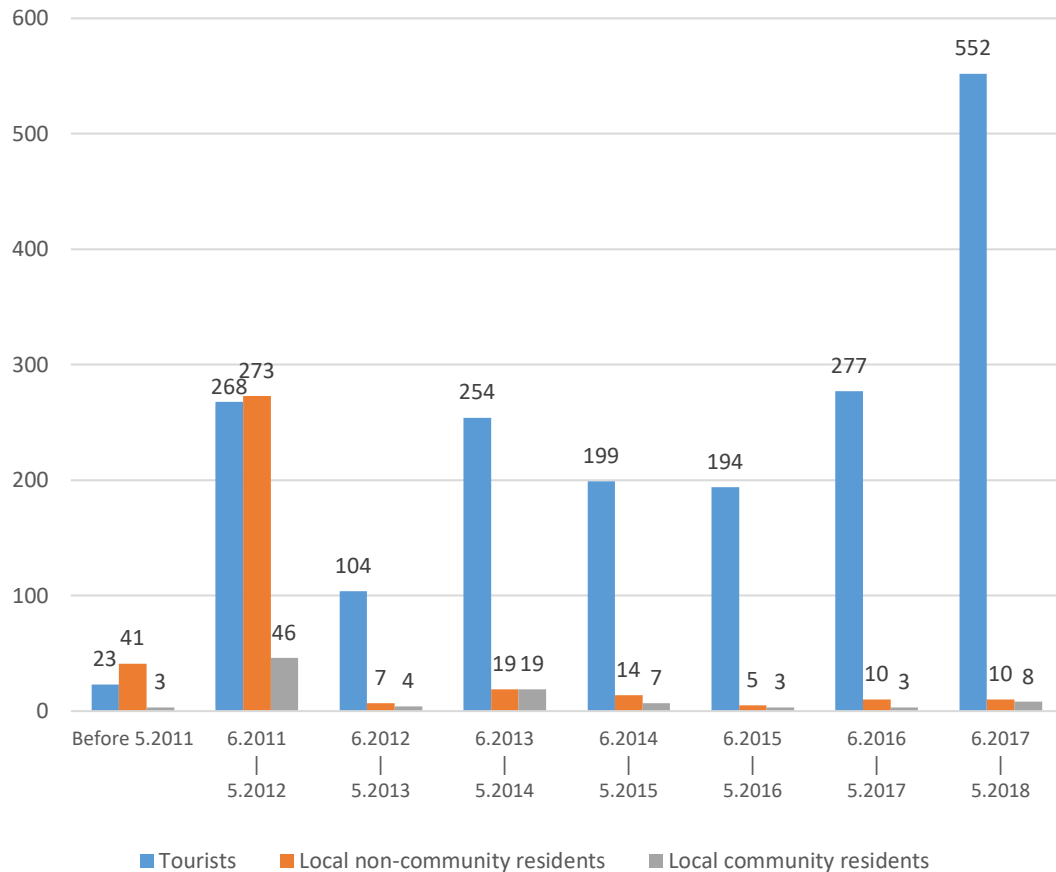


Figure 12. Composition of the population of the Five Avenues over the years

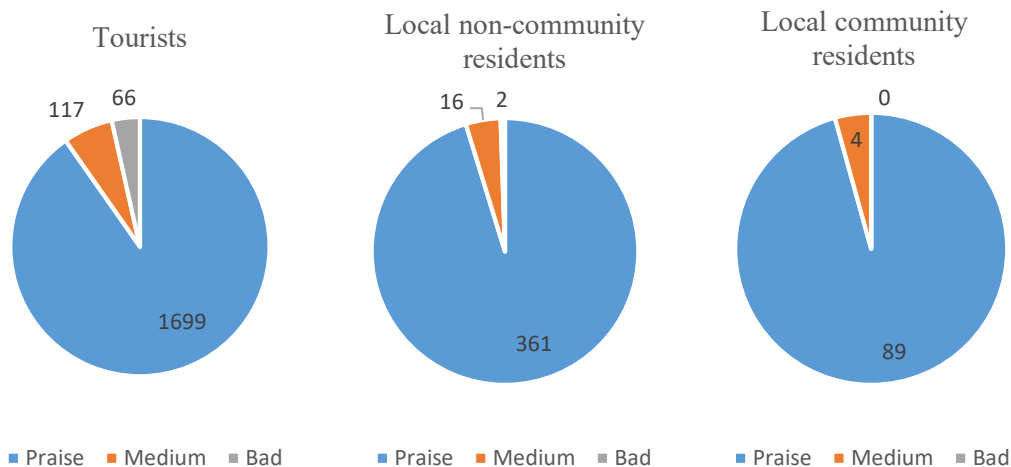


Figure 13. Schematic diagram of the evaluation of tourists, local non-community residents and local community residents

4.1.2 Word frequency statistics

After collecting the required information, it is divided into word segmentation and word frequency statistics. Since people have different expressions of the same meaning, so they need to be manually discriminated and classified. For example, the words “cycling”, “riding a bike”, “riding a mobike”, and “riding an ofo bike” all means

“cycling”, so they all divided into the keyword “cycling”. Thereafter, when we need to measure the importance of a word in the corpus, we often use the TF-IDF weighting method²³. The main idea of it involves two parameters: One is the *term frequency* (TF), which describes the number of times the topic keyword appears in the document. The more times, the higher the similarity between the document and the topic. The other is the *inverse document frequency* (IDF), which describes the degree of discrimination of the topic keyword in the document. The less the topic keyword appears in all documents, the higher the degree of discrimination in the document²⁴. And the TF-IDF is TF multiply by IDF. The TF-IDF idea can be expressed in many different mathematical formulas, and since its role in this paper is only to compare the importance of keywords, rather than to obtain specific values, its simplified formula in this paper is:

$$TF - IDF = \frac{n_k}{\sum_{i=1}^j n_i} * \ln \frac{\sum_{i=1}^j m_i}{m_k}$$

In this formula, n denotes “word frequency”, m denotes “number of terms”, k denotes “ k^{th} word”, and j denotes “ j words in total”. After statistics, the TF-IDF value of the keyword is ranked as shown in Table 1 (because of the limited space, only the top 50 words are displayed).

Table 1. Keywords TF-IDF value ranking table

	Keywords	Word Frequency	Number of Terms	TF-IDF
1	Five Avenues	2124	1140	0.0654
2	Tianjin	1748	1067	0.0588
3	Cycling	908	545	0.0565
4	Catering	822	492	0.0547
5	Architecture	3634	1652	0.0546
6	Different styles	726	403	0.0545
7	Feel the history	932	644	0.0513
8	Tourism	871	622	0.0493
9	Scenic area	913	703	0.0469
10	Carriage	1007	790	0.0467
11	Beautiful	799	603	0.0462
12	Unique	964	763	0.0462
13	Walking	794	707	0.0406
14	Photograph	479	409	0.0356
15	Celebrity	517	468	0.0355

²³Ying Ma, Hui Zhao, Wanlong Li, Hailong Pang and Yan Cui, “Optimization of TF-IDF algorithm combined with improved CHI statistical method”.

²⁴Jingzhong Wang, Tongxiang Qiu, “Focused topic Web crawler based on improved TF-IDF algorithm”.

16	Quiet	424	337	0.0350
17	Love the place	399	342	0.0327
18	Scenery	349	302	0.0305
19	TuttiKiwi	362	328	0.0303
20	Explanation	264	235	0.0259
21	Culture	247	202	0.0258
22	Famous	253	237	0.0247
23	Minyuan Stadium	217	173	0.0241
24	Comfortable	221	199	0.0232
25	Environment	214	214	0.0218
26	Conserve	189	162	0.0215
27	Similar places	162	120	0.0205
28	Be worth going	189	189	0.0203
29	Style and features	144	125	0.0180
30	Recommend	149	138	0.0180
31	Tour guide	139	128	0.0172
32	Museum	124	97	0.0168
33	The Republic of China era	122	101	0.0163
34	Story	127	115	0.0163
35	Garden	117	107	0.0154
36	Film and movie	103	71	0.0153
37	Business	113	98	0.0153
38	Heritage	103	72	0.0153
39	Wedding pictures	98	97	0.0133
40	Have to go	91	88	0.0127
41	Admire	90	86	0.0127
42	Clean	90	87	0.0126
43	Introduce	83	75	0.0122
44	Artistic	75	70	0.0112
45	Integrity	66	66	0.0100
46	Feeling good	59	57	0.0093
47	Experience	52	49	0.0086
48	A combination of Chinese and Western elements	48	48	0.0079
49	Give a hurried and	47	45	0.0079

	cursory glance at			
50	Sentiment	46	46	0.0077

From the top 50 keywords of TF-IDF value, we can select the vocabulary related to the heritage and perceptions of historical authenticity, and combine with the keywords to the overall evaluation of the five avenues, we can get Table 2.

Table 2. History-related keywords evaluation

Keywords	TF-IDF	Praise	Medium	Bad
Architecture	0.0546	1535	85	32
Different styles	0.0545	386	11	6
Feel the history	0.0513	621	14	9
Explanation	0.0259	211	19	5
Culture	0.0258	195	5	2
The Republic of China era	0.0163	95	4	2
Heritage	0.0153	69	3	0
A combination of Chinese and Western elements	0.0079	48	0	0

4.2 Data analysis

It can be seen from the above statistics that the Five Avenues Historic District has achieved positive comments among the public, but in terms of historical authenticity perception, some conclusions can be drawn through further analysis of the above-mentioned commentary data.

4.2.1 Historical authenticity of the heritage

Referring to Wu Chengzhao and Wang Wei's article *Modeling Tourists Perceived Authenticity and the Sustainable Use of Cultural Heritage, performative authenticity*²⁵ has a positive impact on the public perceptions of historical authenticity, which is concentrated in external information and the present event stimulate the public's emotional resonance, physical vitality, fun and association and imagination, which is the implantation point and implementation method of the interpretation and communication strategy of the heritage²⁶. Therefore, the managers of the block have made a series of strategies, including filming documentaries, writing books and

²⁵*performative authenticity* refers to the “behavior” that guide the tourists to experience the authenticity through the “expression” designed by tourism operators; this kind of performative authenticity is not only a relationship between expression and acceptance, but a comprehensive behavioral completion process that creates an atmosphere, attracts participation, and experiences interaction through various mediators.

²⁶Chengzhao Wu and Jing Wang, “Modeling Tourists Perceived Authenticity and the Sustainable Use of Cultural Heritage”, 98-104.

providing various forms of explanation. But it also caused some problems:

1) The time and learning cost of watching documentaries and read related books is too high. This is reflected in only 9 of the 2,353 comments mentioned in *The Stories of Concessions* documentary. Although it can play a very positive role in understanding the history of the Five Avenues and even the whole city, its audience is limited to those who are interested in history, not for the general public. Because of that, its effect on the expression of historical authenticity of the block is very limited.

2) Of the total 2,353 comments, 235 comments mentioned “explanation”. Among them, there are 211 "praise", 19 "medium" and 5 "bad". Through further analysis, the reasons for “medium” and “bad” are mainly “not interested in history”, “many historical buildings are forbidden to visit”, “management chaos”, “need to explain”, etc., only 2 comments mentioned that “the explanation is not good enough”. It can be seen that “explanation” is of great significance to the expression of the authenticity of heritages, but excessive fees are the main reason for most people to give up that. If they can lower the charging standard, I believe that more people can perceive the historical authenticity much better.

4.2.2 Diversification of public demand

As can be seen from Table 1, modern people's activity in the district is various, including leisure, tourism, scenery viewing, photography, etc. The perception of historical authenticity is just one of them, not the only one. And from the TF-IDF value ranking, although there are 89 comments saying that “blocks are boring” and “not interested in history”, most people can experience different styles just like in different countries and feeling the history through architectures, which means that the conserve strategies for the district have been very successful to today. In addition, some people think that the five-street historic district is over-commercialized, but this is precisely to meet the diversified needs of modern people, and the commercial land area in the block is 11 hectares, accounting for only 7% of the total land use, mainly hotels and foreign restaurants²⁷, instead of low-end businesses. Besides, enjoying “foreign food” in a “foreign building” is also a kind of cultural experience.

4.2.3 Management needs to be improved

Although the Five Avenues Historic District has made a lot of efforts in management and made remarkable achievements, there are still areas for improvement. This is reflected in issues of management in the districts are still the main part of the public's opinions among all 68 “bad” and 136 “medium” comments, such as “too few toilets”, “traffic congestion”, “no parking”, etc. Although they are not directly related to public perceptions of historical authenticity of heritages, they have affected the public's visit experience to a certain extent, resulting in a negative impression. Moreover, the operation and maintenance of the website is also very important. When I prepared to scan the QR code on the plaques in front of the building for more information, I found that the scan results could not be displayed (Figure 14), which affects the potential for the public's information acquisition.

²⁷Zhe Li, “Land use displacement of dynamic conservation in Tianjin Five Road Historic District”.

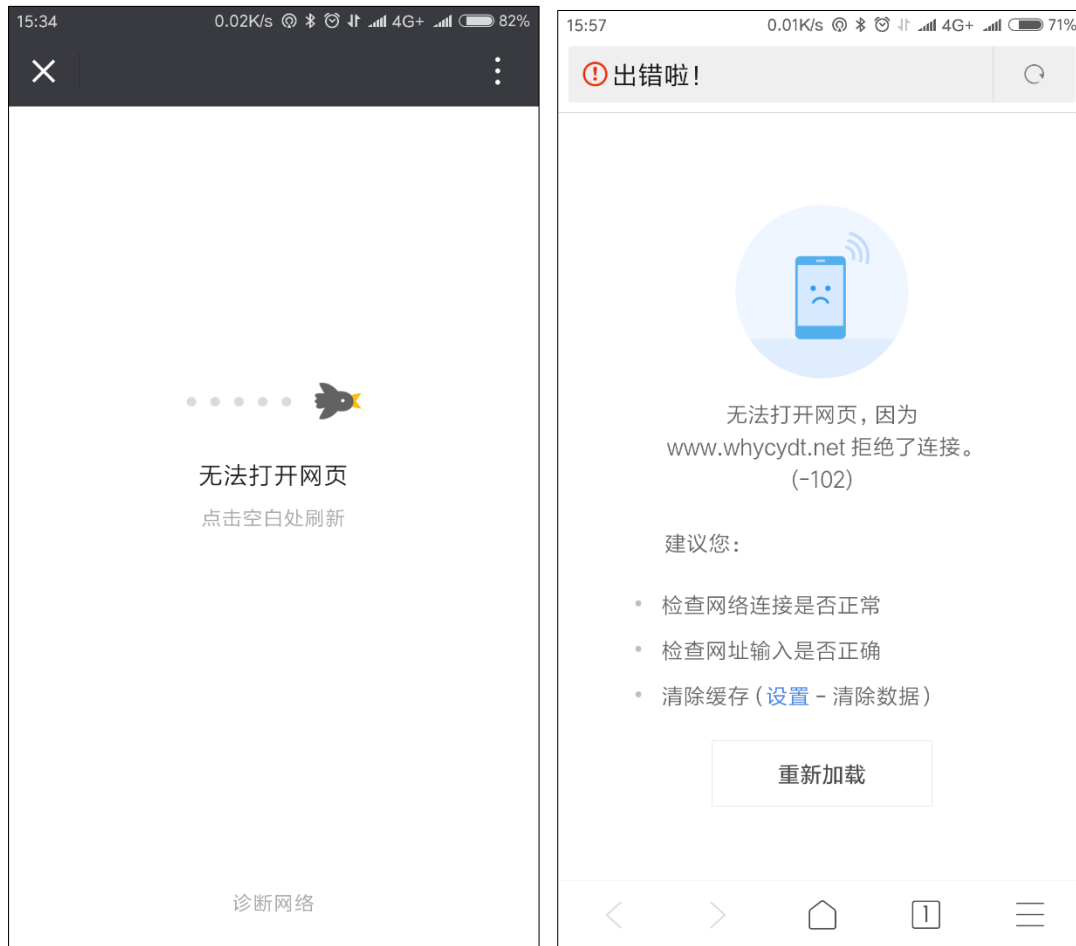


Figure 14 The results after scanning QR codes on the plaque
(Source: Screen shot by author)

5. Discussion on historical authenticity perception strategy

5.1 Subjectivity and objectivity of historical authenticity

The discussion of historical authenticity is more like a philosophical proposition. In my opinion, history is the subjective description of human beings' objective facts in the past. It has objectivity, but in nature it is subjective, and does not mean or can only be a part of the real history. Representing the “true past” is actually a situation or an image that we are willing or need to believe, while the heritage can be the proof of that situation or image. This is one of the reasons why we value the heritage so much. From humankind point of view, what people want to preserve is a familiar relationship, not the old stuff itself, unless these things are related to individuals, such as furniture, souvenirs, etc. Although everything in the past has its meaning in existence, people tend to preserve things that have a long history and to unilaterally reproduce some images of history for political, aesthetic, or educational motives. The danger is that it may prove that the image is invented or irrelevant in the future²⁸. Therefore, the infinite pursuit of

²⁸Kevin Lynch, “What Time is This Place?”, 40-55.

historical authenticity is meaningless, because it can only be infinitely close and cannot be reached. The conservation of heritage and the inheritance of culture should be viewed with a constantly developing and changing perspective.

The history of urban heritage is multiple and continuous, and it is formed by the accumulation of objective facts in time. Mohsen Mostafavi writes:

“I find problematic the systematic attempt to erase the multiple histories of a building or a place and reduce them to a single (ideal) moment of architecture.”²⁹

Hence, with reference to the theory of historic urban landscape, urban heritage should be incorporated into the development framework of the city and play a reasonable role in the contemporary, rather than simply pursuing the maximum authenticity, and protect them in a static way. The Urban Historic Landscape approach aims to re-establish the link between historical environmental management and contemporary urban development and geological environment to ensure a higher degree of sustainability and risk control, as well as the harmony and continuity of urban forms, building structures and materials³⁰. Nor should it be like Venice, the water city of Italy, which is an extreme example of a historical city that has been preserved in its full physical authenticity, with an approach that fully matches the established conservation principles. But at the same time, Venice exemplifies the almost complete loss of social and cultural values, clearly reflected in the out-migration and substitution of most of the population, and in the dominance of a single economic activity: tourism. In this sense, Venice has not been preserved as an historic urban entity³¹. In this respect, the Five Avenues Historic District has set an example for us. It has not been fully planned as a tourist area, historical buildings are also allowed to be used for restaurants, offices, schools, etc. so that they can continue to preserve the authenticity to the maximum extent while continuing bring benefits for the present generation. Admittedly, this is not to say that there is no need for improvement in the district: the contradiction between the users of historical buildings and the need to open to the public, the contradiction between excessive fees and the cost of operation and maintenance of the block, the contradiction between historical street scale and modern transportation needs, etc. still require urban conservation practitioner to continuously explore solutions.

5.2 The truth and virtuality of historical experience

Historical knowledge must be communicated to the public for the dual purpose of entertainment and education. Language and pictures are good mediums, but real objects leave the most impressive impression. The best way to understand the past is to be surrounded by old buildings and facilities, and behave as if in the past³². Today's Five Avenues Historic District can make people surrounded by historical buildings, but it is impossible to continue the way of life in the past because of the transformation of modern people's behaviors and the migration of the local residents. But thanks to the

²⁹Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, “Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage”, 176.

³⁰Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, “Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage”, 330.

³¹Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, “The Historic Urban Landscape: managing heritage in an urban century”, 71.

³²Kevin Lynch, “What Time is This Place?”, 53.

rapid development of mobile Internet, VR (virtual reality), MR (Mixed Reality) and other technologies, the future combination of real and virtual, that is, superimposing historical information on real historical buildings, supplemented by explanation based on users' GPS positioning; or go through the time in a virtual form, experience the historical block completely reconstructed by digital, etc. it will be possible to completely subvert the current tour experience and provide more diversified and personalized services. In this way, the learning and time cost to experience the historical authenticity of the heritage can be greatly reduced, and the interactive link can be increased, the public's sense of participation can be enhanced, and it can be easier to understand, and more easily accepted by the public.

6. Conclusion

Preserving the past can be a way to learn for the future, just as people learn something now to change themselves, and those things that they may use in the future³³. But we are becoming more and more aware that we have no way to preserve all material content. Everything that exists now will disappear into the long river of history. Therefore, we need to find ways to conserve social and political values, and the way that people are attached to somewhere³⁴. This is of great significance to the nature of heritage conservation and the inheritance of culture. However, compared to the traditional one-way transmission process of the heritage value, there is obviously a better solution for the public perceptions of historical authenticity. There may be some irreconcilable contradictions among practitioners, businessmen, governments, property owners and the public. The purpose of the practitioner is to preserve the authenticity of the heritage as much as possible; the purpose of the merchant is to maximize the commercial interests; the role of urban heritage in the urban development process needs to be considered by governors; property owners want to protect their rights and interests; and the needs of the public are diversified. They are like several different sizes of gears that can be engaged with each other, but they are not entirely suitable. Perhaps the perfect solution does not exist, and can only be constantly adjusted in accordance with the actual situation and constantly looking for the balance, in order to meet the trend of history, the requirements of the times.

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³³Kevin Lynch, "What Time is This Place?", 45.

³⁴Francesco Bandarin and Ronald Van Oers, "Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage", 314.

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