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Urban built heritage protection and realistic dilemmas: the development process, protection system, and critical thinking of historic districts in Dalian

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Abstract

In China, the northeastern region has preserved many valuable modern built heritage buildings, which are undergoing difficult exploratory protection during the industrial and urbanisation process. Taking Dalian city as a case study, this article retraces the history of Dalian's opening up and colonial management from the perspective of urban planning and historic district protection and management systems. This article sorts out the influence of national and local institutional policies on Dalian's urban construction and development to analyse the past evolution, current problems and internal causes of the renovation and protection of Dalian's typical historic districts. This influence is mainly reflected in the lack of protection and damage done to unofficial heritage, the disconnection between historic districts and the surrounding environments and urban textures, and the Chinese-style transformation and economic decline of exotic areas. This paper calls for attention to and the rapid clarification of the built heritage list, the improvement of planning and protection systems and related supporting policies, and a focus on the protection of the authenticity of colonial heritage. This paper provides strategic guidance for improving the protection of historic districts in Dalian in Northeast China and hopes to serve as a reference for the protection of built heritage in other nonfamous historic and cultural cities.

Keywords historic districts, built heritage, protection process, management system, critical thinking

1 Introduction

The conflict between built heritage protection and modernisation is deeply rooted in the history of urban development (González Martínez 2017), especially in cities that are not known for their 'history' or 'culture'. The issues of how to balance the cost of maintenance without compromising heritage protection and how to use the cultural drive to revitalise districts and the 'collective memories' of the city as a political resource in a specific

social context are urgent topics for city leaders to address (Lu and Li 2019). The process of built heritage protection in China reflects the competition between urbanisation destruction and heritage protection, as well as the voicelessness of unofficial heritage in the top-down protection system. In the unique three-level protection system of 'famous city – district - cultural relic' in China, Famous Historic and Cultural Cities (FHCCs) are the most significant urban cultural brands; furthermore, the establishment of the concept of 'Historic and Cultural Districts' may have given built heritage actual discourse power over non-FHCCs, which requires in-depth discussion. Furthermore, the protection and research of modern and contemporary built heritage in China have become increasingly marginalised. This phenomenon may be due

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to two reasons. First, the style and form of contemporary buildings are similar to those of modern buildings, but their quality and function cannot meet the demands of modern life, making them easily regarded as 'valueless buildings'. Second, a considerable part of modern and contemporary architectural heritage is colonial legacy. Some individuals choose to completely demolish these buildings to dull the history of invasion, which causes the destruction of some buildings and districts with significant historical and cultural value (Wang, DiMeolo, and Gao 2021). These issues demonstrate the need for critical thinking and further discussion about the protection process, management system, and political implications behind them.

Dalian is both a typical and unique case. It is not only a famous tourist city, port city, and megacity in Northeast China but also the site of many significant events in modern Chinese history. It was under colonial rule for 47 years, and the establishment and evolution of the city were deeply affected. On the one hand, with the transformation of heavy industry in Northeast China in the 1980s, the conflict between the city's functional positioning and the attributes of its built heritage became increasingly prominent. Moreover, the protection and regeneration of Dalian's historic districts started relatively late and were not given sufficient attention in early Chinese built heritage protection practices. This led to the rapid disappearance, serious damage and loss of cultural value in most functionally lagging historic districts under the multiple impacts of commercialisation, major urban demolition and spontaneous renovation by residents, which is a microcosm of the issues related to the protection of cultural heritage built in both Northeast China and the remainder of China. On the other hand, Dalian is a city founded by colonisation, and some high-quality Western-style colonial buildings have been preserved and renewed, becoming the symbol of the city's cultural landscape and the economic tool for industrial transformation. The results of such renewal and renovation reflect similar problems that occur in most of China's historic districts, especially the modern historic districts, such as the high homogenisation level of business formats, lagging infrastructure and functions, a non-humanised spatial scale, the sinicisation of the Western style, inadequate public participation, etc., which are representative to a certain extent. Therefore, this paper takes Dalian's historic districts as an example to explore the following issues: (1) how built heritage without 'identity' survives or perishes in urban development, (2) the problems of the local historic district preservation system and its implementation, and (3) whether colonial heritage discourse has been manipulated by the government to form an effective economic tool.

Based on these issues, this study examines the historical evolution of urban construction and the social development background from the colonial period to the present in Dalian. Through the analysis of relevant systems and local policies for the protection of historic districts, a critical viewpoint and perspective is used to analyse the evolution and typical case of the protection status of historic districts in Dalian. This process provides a review of the past and the future, with the aim of preserving the incomplete and pursuing completeness, ambiguity and variation in interpretation, tradition and colonialism. Rough protection strategies are proposed. This analysis also provides an in-depth reference for preparing relevant conservation plans and implementing conservation projects for modern historic districts.

2 Built heritage: international and Chinese review

The concept of urban built heritage preservation emerged in the 19th century after the French Revolution and subsequently found application in Europe and the United States before gradually spreading to Western European colonies in Asia and Africa. Since the 20th century, there has been a continuous strengthening of national control over heritage, resulting in an increasing legal and regulatory framework pertaining to heritage. The term 'heritage' now encompasses a growing range of objects, buildings, or landscapes, and its preservation has become a regulatory process associated with bureaucratic and highly modernist planning, as defined by James Scott (1998). During this process, localities find themselves increasingly subjected to centralised management. This phenomenon was particularly prominent in the 1960s, when there was a surge in the number of laws and the expanding role of the state in defining and governing heritage through official planning (Cowell 2008). From the 1970s onwards, the emergence of new forms of economy in the postindustrial and postmodern capitalist society led to fundamental changes in public values, resulting in a surge of interest in the past and a restructuring of the tourism economy. This led to the diversification and subdivision of heritage for various public markets, as well as the widespread commercialisation of the past, making built heritage an important and widely recognised area of public concern by the beginning of the 21st century. As a result, heritage research has taken a general compound trend, focusing on the politics of representation, marketing heritage as an 'experience', adding the use of virtual media in displaying and interpreting heritage (Parry 2007), and viewing heritage as a government tool. Built heritage has become a specialised field that is managed and maintained by professionals, technicians, and 'experts', and it is increasingly included in official planning processes. This has largely resulted in heritage being

taken away from local people and becoming a specialised practice controlled by the government (Jameson 1997), with the definition of ‘heritage’ and how it is defined being determined by the state.

In this context, heritage, as a reflection of attitudes towards and relationships with the past (Walsh 1992), has been applied to different social and political purposes, which has caused an evolution towards the bureaucratisation of heritage and the professionalisation of heritage for marginalised groups. The bureaucratisation of heritage focuses the issue of heritage protection on the discourse of heritage, which not only establishes who has the power or ‘responsibility’ to define and speak for the past but also involves the continuous process of creating and recreating a series of social relations, values, and meanings about the past and the present (Smith 2006). The issue of ‘speaking for’ heritage is a continuous debate in the development of heritage protection. Furthermore, because authoritative groups always have diverse understandings of heritage actions, the definition of heritage changes depending on its relationship with other social, political, and economic forces. This results in a division between ‘official heritage’ (professional practices authorised by the state or facilitated by legislation and written charters) and ‘unofficial heritage’ (practices that extensively use the language of heritage but have not been officially recognised by legislation) (Harrison and Schofield 2010). When architectural heritage is not classified as ‘official’ or ‘protected’, it seems that such places no longer possess any discourse power. The most famous example is the unsuccessful movement in 1963 to prevent the demolition of the old Penn Station building in New York City. Similar issues are evident in many countries, where the value of architectural heritage is determined by experts or relevant authorities, whose viewpoints are recognised and enforced by the government (Smith and Robinson 2006).

Chinese built heritage seems to consist of both official heritage with stronger political connotations and the unofficial heritage of the public. The protection system has a significant top-down feature and is similar to a widely derived political construct that considers built heritage in the context of specific political discourses and ongoing social changes. The evolution of historic buildings, districts, and urban areas is the product of different periods of social and economic development and major national policy orientations in the process of urban construction (Jiang 2013). Since the State Council approved the ‘Request for Instructions on the Protection of China’s Famous Historic and Cultural Cities’ (RIPCF-HCC) in February 1982, three batches of FHCCs have been announced (Liu 2006), gradually forming a three-tier protection system of ‘FHCCs–Historic and Cultural

Districts - Cultural Relics protection units’ and a deepening protection system of FHCCs, towns, and villages. The appellation of FHCCs has become an important political tool for promoting urban culture and boosting tourism in China. Interestingly, the 142 FHCCs currently approved by the State Council are almost all well-known ancient capital cities, prefecture cities and fortresses. Furthermore, only 40% of the FHCCs are located north of the Qinling Mountains and the Huaihe River. Especially in the Northeast region, there are only 7 FHCCs, which is a significant disadvantage for the protection of the built heritage of modern cities that are mainly focused on heavy industry. Some cities that still possess precious built heritage and urban texture have yet to receive legal protection, such as Dalian, Anshan, Chaoyang, and Daqing. Although the ‘*Interim Measures for the Protection and Management of Tunxi Old Street Historic and Cultural Protection Zone in Huangshan City*’ proposed by China’s Ministry of Construction in 1997 demonstrates that the protection of built heritage (historic districts) in non-FHCCs has received government attention, whether this heritage has actual discursive power remains to be discussed. In addition, the protection measures for FHCCs mentioned in the ‘*Historic and Cultural City Protection Law*’ and the ‘*Regulations on the Protection of Historic and Cultural Cities*’ often face lengthy delays due to administrative departmental interests, power allocation, systems, and technical issues. Relying solely on administrative documents to regulate and manage the protection work of FHCCs lacks not only strength but also the actual practice of heritage preservation and more in-depth theoretical research for non-FHCCs.

Dalian is one of China’s megacities; it is an important northern port and an industrial, commercial, financial, and tourist city. It is also a key coastal central city in the northern region, as designated by the State Council; in sum, it is a leading and open window for Northeast China. Its urban construction originated from the colonial development of Tsarist Russia and Japan and has typical levels of modernity and colonialism. Despite retaining many historic districts and unique urban texture, Dalian has not been included in the list of FHCCs. Therefore, studying the preservation of built heritage and protection issues in Dalian is representative of the protection of non-FHCCs in other regions or unofficial heritage in other countries. Furthermore, the colonial legacy has been the subject of long-standing debate and practice. Colonial legacy is a process, a political resource, and a social action (Lu and Li 2019). Unpacking the power and discourse involved in the production of colonial heritage involves a reflection on not only the past but also the present and the future (Harrison and Schofield 2010; Adewumi 2022). Academia, politics, and many social

organisations have gradually realised that the reasonable use of architectural heritage to showcase their own historical and cultural values on the basis of full protection is undoubtedly the most effective way to achieve the sustainable preservation of colonial architectural heritage (Xu 2020). Recently, China has undergone a significant transformation from the exclusion and destruction of its colonial legacy to the inclusion of this legacy as an important part of its heritage protection system (Wei and Wang 2022). It is worth exploring whether the colonial heritage in the Northeast region or non-FHCCs is effectively protected and utilised.

Overall, there are few critical and reflective comments regarding the relationship between heritage protection practices and the social and political use of heritage in the field of built heritage protection. Complex issues such as protection systems, political issues, tourism development, and management systems in built heritage have become the focus of discussions on sustainable heritage protection and practice (Bujdosó et al. 2015; Seyfi, Michael Hall, and Fagnoni 2019). In particular, there are intense conflicts in the development of heritage discourse power, protection legislation, and tourism development, especially in developing countries (Li, Wu, and Cai 2008). With the inclusion of various types of built heritage in China into the World Cultural Heritage List, significant tourism effects and local economic stimulation have been generated, leading to increased attention from local governments and academia towards the market-oriented development and management of cultural heritage (Gao 2021). In particular, in the Northeast region, the reuse of industrial heritage has become an important field of heritage preservation research. Industrial heritage sites in Dalian, such as the port and locomotive factory, have already undergone systematic examination (Han, Tong, and Zhang 2010; Gong and Huang 2017). In addition, there have been numerous studies on the historic districts of Dalian. However, most of these studies have focused on the tourism development of individual areas or buildings within the historic districts (Jin et al. 2019), as well as the enhancement of the district's vitality and partial renovation (Hu, Wang, and Zhao 2018; Che, Li, and Han 2012; Yu 2010). There is a relative lack of comprehensive research on the protection system, legislative management, and historical and social backgrounds, particularly in relation to critical discussions on modern and contemporary heritage or colonial heritage (Zhang and Zhou 2005).

In summary, built heritage is protected, restored, and continued under the discourse of 'official heritage', while discussions, development, and practices of unofficial heritage are still lacking. This study takes Dalian as an example. Through critical discussions on urban construction, planning and development, heritage

protection systems and local policies, as well as the current situation and evolution of historic districts, this research attempts to re-examine the dilemma of built heritage protection, bridge the knowledge gap, and provide references for the protection practices of unofficial heritage and colonial heritage.

3 Historic district protection systems and planning during the colonial period and urbanisation process

Dalian is a modern city, which, although very young, has a unique history and social background that have a profound impact on the preservation of built heritage; thus, it is necessary to discuss the development of its historic districts in different periods. In terms of architectural form, the 'traditional' buildings in Dalian are Western-style buildings because this part of the city was built and developed entirely by foreigners; unlike in colonial cities such as Tianjin and Shanghai, there is no conflict between local and foreign architecture. From a modern perspective, Dalian's original architectural form and urban texture were broken by the Chinese-style slab buildings constructed during the high-speed development period. From the cultural inheritance point of view, most of the buildings left over from the colonial period represent the highest level of architectural skills and international aesthetics at that time. Therefore, these Russian-style buildings, as well as the Western-style buildings of the Japanese in the latter period, which represent a combination of classicism, eclecticism and functionalism, form the unique Western genes and cutting-edge aesthetics of the built heritage of Dalian, all of which contribute to the inclusiveness of the city and its public culture and aesthetics. From the perspective of urbanisation and economisation, the development and preservation of Dalian's historic districts have experienced ups and downs under the influence of the city's economic development and industrial transformation, including the 'abandoned conservation' after the reform and opening up, the 'preservation of the west but not the center' in the transformation of the tourism industry in the 2000s and the demolition and abandonment of historic districts under campaigns in the 2010s, and the comprehensive conservation and institutional soundness of Dalian's built heritage preservation under the present policies of territorial spatial planning and urban renewal. Dalian's history of built heritage preservation not only reflects a common problem in urban development across the country but can also serve as a model for cities that were born out of colonisation or are attempting to undergo cultural transformation.

3.1 The opening of the port city and the urban development of Dalian during the colonial period

The basic pattern of Dalian as a Garden City and Square City began with the opening of the port city by the Russian Empire (1888–1904), as outlined in the First City Planning Map by Sakharov (Fig. 1a). In 1899, Skolimowski was invited to join the construction team in Dalian and found that the ‘American square’ layout was not suitable for the hilly terrain. Thus, based on the most advanced design concepts and practical experience from European cities in the 19th century, Skolimowski adopted a block layout radiating outwards with a square at the centre and made full use of Dalian’s hilly landscape to build 15 squares, including Nikolaev Square (now Zhongshan Square). These squares were connected to each other to form a multicore, open, radial block layout, thus laying the foundation for the square city of Dalian today (Fig. 1b). During the 40-year period of Japanese colonial rule (1904–1945) after Russian occupation, urban planning and construction went through broad three stages (Jiang 2013), namely, what was inherited from the planning used under Russian rule (1904–1919), regional expansion and the beginning of construction (1919–1930), and comprehensive urban planning and construction (1930–1945). The Japanese preserved and continued the Western planning ideas, maintaining the multicore and radial layout pattern in the central area while expanding the western area into a grid block layout. These roads also established the unique style of Dalian’s urban texture with a radial pattern in the east and a tessellated pattern in the west (Sun and Liang 2002).

The early urban planning of Dalian, from the opening of the port and the foundation of the city by the Tsarist colonial authorities to the inheritance and expansion by the Japanese colonial authorities, was quite avant-garde. This approach created the pattern for the continued

development of modern urban construction in Dalian. Notably, when the city was still expanding while under construction, the Japanese authorities prospectively mapped architectural preservation areas (Fig. 2), which represents the earliest block protection map of Dalian. The entire area is almost identical to the protection area delineated in the recently promulgated ‘Famous Historic and Cultural City Protection Planning in Dalian’. The area is divided into three levels, among which five primary preservation areas are delineated, including Zhongshan Square, Shengli Bridge, Nanshan district, and the People’s Square; these areas are exactly the same historic preservation areas recognised by Dalian city today.

3.2 Related system and planning of historic districts under the urbanisation process

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, the Soviet Union took over control of Dalian and Lvshun until the return of Lvda (now Dalian) in 1955. Although industry became the focus of national investment in Northeast China during the first Five-Year Plan period, as China went through difficult stages such as the Great Leap Forwards (1958–1960), the Great Famine (1959–1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), agricultural problems caused by the economic recession and the abolition of urban institutions led to the long-term abrogation of urban planning and the destruction of many scenic spots and cultural relics.

After the reform and opening up in 1978, China established a major policy of focusing on economic construction, and development and construction activities that centred around cities and the renovation of old cities rapidly took place. This brought about a certain degree of ‘construction-related damage’ to ancient buildings, cultural relics and historic sites, as well as the surrounding environment (Cao 2009). These problems

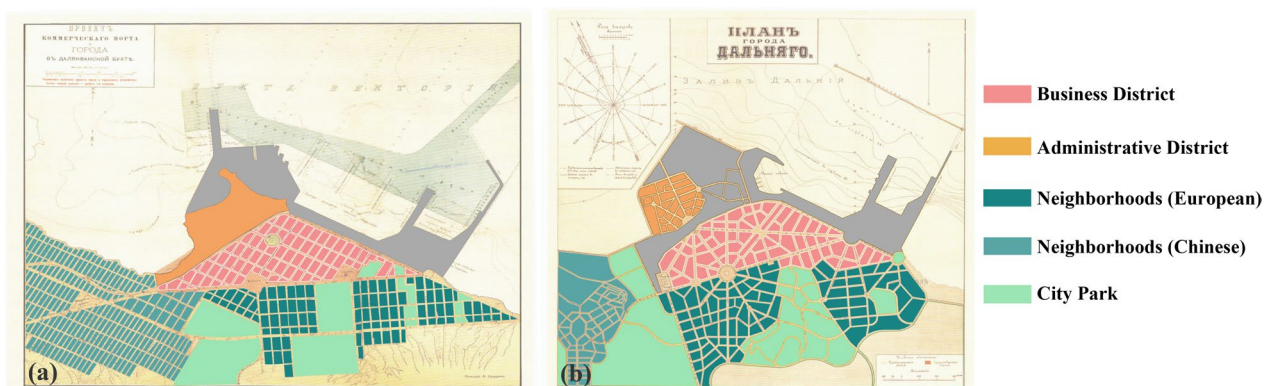


Fig. 1 Dalian city planning during the Russian occupation period. **a** Sakharov's urban plan; **b** Skolimowski's urban plan (Source: Jiang 2013)

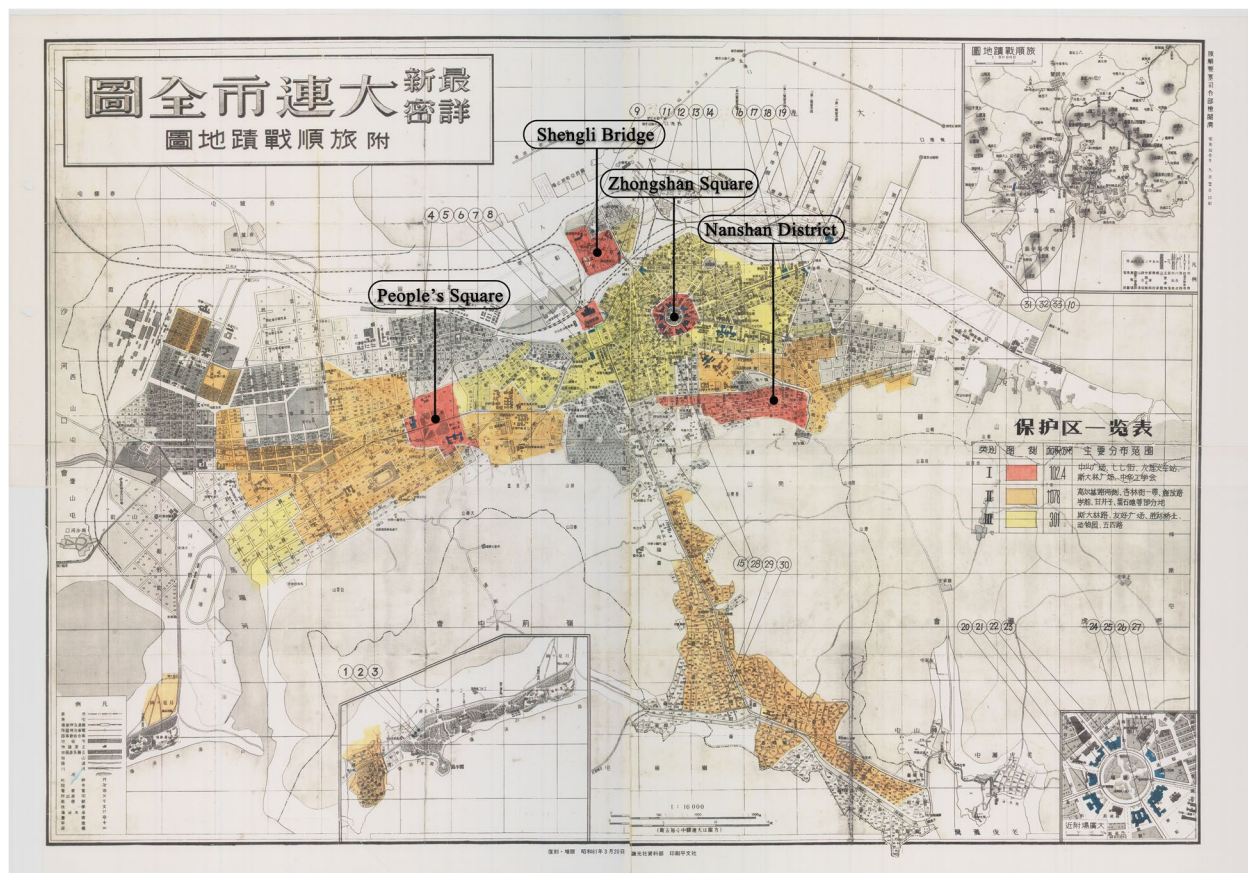


Fig. 2 Urban conservation areas in Dalian during the Japanese colonial period (Source: Jiang 2013)

attracted the attention of the China National Political Consultative Conference and other high-ranking authorities; thus, with the development of international cultural exchanges, intellectuals in China proposed the idea of preserving famous historic cities. China formally initiated the exploration and development of historic heritage protection, namely, the initial establishment stage of national cultural relic protection and the FHCC system (1978–2000), the exploration and coordination stage of urban planning and the historic district protection system (2000–2010), and the systematic development stage of the historic district protection system (2010–present). The establishment of built heritage conservation systems and systems in Dalian is relatively lagging (Fig. 3). Since the development of Dalian's historic districts is highly related to the special socioeconomic development and political context, such development can be divided into the following three stages:

- (1) Industrial transformation and construction of style streets (1995–2003)

In the 1990s, although Dalian was not an FHCC, cultural heritage units had not yet been established at all levels, and the protection of some districts was unsatisfactory; most of the old buildings and landscape districts still retained their original appearance due to the impact of Dalian's economic development. In the early 1990s, the Dalian Technological Development Zone (DTDZ) was established and had the authority to import and export trade; the excellent geographic location combined with the historical and cultural factors attracted many foreign investments, mainly from Japanese companies. Dalian's GDP was once among the top 10 in the country, and the government benchmarked against Hong Kong's economic leader and proposed an industrial transformation, shifting the centre of economic development to tertiary industries such as finance, tourism, and services; therefore, the city's leftover Western-style buildings became the best reference points with which to advertise the 'international' metropolis, which means that the creation of a Western-style financial street and a tourist district

Nation	1950 'Liang Chen Plan'	1978 'Interim Measures for the Restoration Management of Revolutionary Monuments, Historic Monuments, Ancient Architecture, and Carving Caves'	2002 'Cultural Heritage Protection Law'	2010 'National Historical and Cultural City Protection Assessment Standards'
	1961 'Interim Regulations on the Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage'	1980 'Report on Strengthening the Conservation and Management of Ancient Architecture and Cultural Heritage Sites'	2004 'The Management of Purple Line Planning Method'	2012 'Notice on the Issuance of the National Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the Construction of Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection Facilities'
Local	1963 'Interim Measures for the Restoration Management of Revolutionary Monuments, Historic Monuments, Ancient Architecture, and Carving Caves'	1982 'Request for Instructions on the Protection of China's Famous Historic and Cultural Cities' (mother batch)	2005 'Protection Planning Specification of Famous Historic and Cultural City'	2012 'Evaluation Standard of Historical and Cultural City Protection'
		1982 'Cultural Heritage Protection Law'	2005 'Historical and Cultural City Protection Planning Norms'	2014 'National New Urbanization Plan (2014-2020)'
		1986 'Request for Instructions on the Protection of China's Famous Historic and Cultural Cities' (second batch)	2005 'Circular of the State Council on Strengthening the Protection of Cultural Heritage'	2016 'Some Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Further Strengthening the Management of Urban Planning and Construction'
		1989 'Cultural Heritage Protection Law' Revision	2008 'Urban and Rural Planning Law'	2016 'Delimitation of Historical and Cultural Blocks and Determination of Historical Buildings Work Plan'
		1990 'Urban Planning Law of the People's Republic of China'	2008 'Regulations on the Conservation of Famous Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages'	2018 'Conservation Planning Standards for Historic and Cultural Cities'
		1992 'Rules for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics'		
		1994 'Suggestion on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Cities in China' (mother batch)		
		1994 'Protection Planning Requirements for Historic and Cultural Cities'		
		1997 'Provisional Measures for the Protection and Management of Historic and Cultural Reserves in Tunxi Old Street, Huangshan City'		
<div> <div>Special Liberated Areas Period Early Days (1945-1955)</div> <div>Exploration Period / Initial Establishment of Historic and Cultural City Protection (1978-2000)</div> <div>Independent Cultural Relics and Historic Building Protection (2000-2008)</div> <div>Holistic Protection of Historic Districts (2008-Present)</div> </div>				
<div> <div>Initial Stage of Socialist Construction Period (1949-1978)</div> <div>Urban Development Stagnation Period (1955-1978)</div> <div>The Period of Urban Rise (1978-1995)</div> <div>Rapid Economic Development in the Period of Conflict between Urban Construction and Old Urban Areas (1995-2010)</div> <div>Stable Economic Growth Period (2010-2017)</div> <div>New Era : Territorial Spatial Planning (2017-Present)</div> </div>				
Local	1958 'Overall Planning of Dalian City'	1980 'Overall Planning of Dalian City'	2000 'Overall Planning of Dalian City'	2012 'Regulations on the Protection of Unmovable Cultural Relics in Dalian'
		1986 'Liaoning Province on the Implementation Measures'	2002 'Dalian First Batch of Key Building Protection List'	2015 'Management Measures of Special Subsidy Fund for Unmovable Cultural Relics Protection in Dalian'
		1990 'Dalian City Planning Regulations'	2004 'Dalian City Master Plan (2001-2020)'	'Dalian Cultural Relics Protection unit Care Management Implementation Measures'
		1990 'Overall Planning of Dalian City'	2004 'Dalian Second Batch of Key Building Protection List'	2017 'Interim Measures for the Protection and Management of Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns, Villages and Historic Districts in Liaoning Province'
			2006 'Circular of the People's Government of Liaoning Province on Strengthening the Protection of Cultural Heritage'	2017 'Notice on Listing 37 Cities Such as Shanghai as the Second Batch of Pilot Cities for Urban Design'
			2007 'Maintenance Management Measures for Key Protected Buildings in Dalian'	2017 'Dalian Urban Master Plan (2001-2020) (2017 revision)'
			2009-2012 'Dalian Third Batch of Key Building Protection List'	2019 'Dongguan Street Historic District Protection Planning'
			2009 'Dalian First Unmovable Protection List'	'Dalian Zhongshan Square Historic District Protection Planning'
			2009 'The Second Unmovable Protection List of Dalian'	'Protection Planning of Sungou Historic and Cultural Block in Lushun'
			2010 'Dalian City Master Plan (2009-2020)'	2020 'Famous Historic and Cultural City Protection Planning in Dalian'
			2011 'Dalian City Master Plan (2010-2020)'	'Regulations on Famous Historic and Cultural City Planning in Dalian'
				2021 'Dalian 2049 City Long-range Planning'
				2021 'Territorial Spatial Master Plan of Dalian City (2021-2035)'

Fig. 3 Development of national, Dalian city and district protection systems (Source: the author)

became a top priority. Since 1999, the neighbourhood of Shengli Bridge, with its concentration of European-style buildings, has been gradually developed into 'the most exotic-style street' and a model community for human habitation; it has become the most attractive cultural and tourist attraction in Dalian since 1999, bringing great economic benefits to the development of Dalian.

(2) Urbanisation and the destruction of historic districts (2003–2015)

This is a period in which Dalian's urban development ran counter to the national heritage protection system, which is inextricably linked to the national context of urbanisation and economisation. At that time, the state enacted and implemented numerous regulations to resolve the conflict between urbanisation and conservation, such as the revised CHPL (2002) (Li 2011), the '*Management of Purple Line Planning Method*' (2004), the '*Protection Planning Specification of Famous Historic and Cultural Cities*' (2005), URPL (2008) and the '*Regulations on the Conservation of Famous Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages*' (2008). Dalian also responded to the state by successively formulating and promulgating the '*Maintenance Management Measures for Key Protected Buildings in Dalian*' (2002), the '*Notice on Strengthening Enclosure Management of Key Protected Buildings*' (2002), the '*Protection Management Measures for Key Protected Buildings in Dalian*' (PMMKPBD) (2007) and other building protection rules. During this period, three batches of key protected architecture sites totalling 207 buildings, two batches of immovable cultural relics totalling 143 sites, and 43 municipal-level cultural relic protection units were established (Table 1); Dalian also identified five historic and cultural districts and four historic sites in the two editions of the urban master plan formulated in 2010 and 2011, with the historic districts being officially certified for the first time.

However, the actual protection of Dalian's historic buildings and historic districts was shelved and neglected due to the failure of urbanisation and industrial transformation. In 2003, Dalian put forwards the 'Great Dalian' strategy in an attempt to expand the city's territory and reshape the development advantages by scale; this blind pursuit of large and comprehensive projects to make a new round of large-scale urban infrastructure projects has placed a heavy burden of debt on Dalian. Due to this debt burden and the inability to promote industrial restructuring, the

financial support for European-style historic districts such as style streets was also suspended. During this time, under heavy financial pressure and the introduction of chemical projects that were no longer favoured into the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta, the positioning of the city returned to the heavy industry stage. The city's economic and industrial transformation directly triggered a series of problems related to the protection of historic districts, such as the city's economic downturn, population loss, part of the historic districts being lost due to 'nobody' being 'forced to protect' them, the construction of exotic streets being halted by the return of the city's industrial orientation, and the complete destruction of some historic districts due to hasty urbanisation.

(3) A blueprint and the establishment of the protection system of historic districts (2015–present)

In 2016, the issuance of '*Some Opinions on Further Strengthening the Management of Urban Planning and Construction*' and the Ministry of Housing and Construction's Work Plan for the '*Delimitation of Historic and Cultural Districts and Determination of Historic Buildings Work Plan*' directly promoted the work of delineating historic and cultural districts and identifying historic buildings in cities across the country. The following year, Dalian was selected as part of the second batch of national pilot cities for urban design. As a result, 2017 became the starting point for the systematic development of protection for Dalian's historic districts. First, in the 2017 edition of the city's master plan, the basic scope of each historic and cultural district and the scope of the core protection zone were clarified, followed by the urban design of Dongguan Street, the historic district of Shengli Bridge and the surrounding areas, in conjunction with the urban design work outlined for pilot cities. In 2018, the preparation of the '*Famous Historic and Cultural City Protection Plan for Dalian*' (FHCCPPD) (2021) was started in preparation for Dalian's inclusion on the list of national FHCCs. In 2019, protection plans for three provincial-level historic and cultural districts were formulated, and in 2020, the '*Regulations on Famous Historic and Cultural City Planning in Dalian*' were formulated. In 2021, Dalian successively released plans for the future, i.e., the '*Dalian 2049 City Long-range Planning*' and the '*Territorial Spatial Master Plan of Dalian City (2021–2035)*'. In these two future-oriented, programmatic documents, the planning for 2 historic urban areas, 2 historic sites, 4 historic and cultural neighbourhoods, and 24 historic and cultural scenic areas in Dalian was finally established (Table 2).

Table 1 Basic information of key protected buildings in Dalian over the years

Legislations and Regulations	Release Time	Quantity	Main Information
'Dalian Key Building Protection List: First Batch'	March 2002	101 areas	A total of 81 places were built during the Japanese and Russian colonial periods, and 18 places were built in ancient China.
'Dalian Key Building Protection List: Second Batch'	August 2004	38 areas	Information is unknown
'Dalian Key Building Protection List: Third Batch'	2009–2012	68 areas	The buildings in the main urban area are mainly the houses left over from the colonial period. The buildings in Lvshunkou district are all wartime industrial buildings. The buildings in other areas are mainly ancient temple buildings.
'The First Unmovable Heritage Protection List of Dalian'	July 2009	58 areas	Information is unknown, identified in the CRD as 126.
'The Second Unmovable Heritage Protection List of Dalian'	December 2009	85 areas	A total of 39 buildings, 46 ancient sites.
'Notice of Dalian Municipal People's Government on the Publication of the First Batch of Dalian Historical Buildings'	September 2019	37 areas (43 buildings)	A total of 38 buildings were built during the Russian and Japanese colonial periods, 10 of which were located in the Lvshunkou area.
'Notice of Dalian Municipal People's Government on the Publication of the Second Batch of Dalian Historical Buildings'	October 2020	39 areas (52 buildings)	A total of 40 buildings were built during the Russian and Japanese colonial periods, and 12 were built during the Soviet takeover period. Seven of these buildings are located in the Lvshunkou district.
'Notice of the Dalian Municipal People's Government on the Announcement of the Third Batch of Dalian Historical Buildings'	May 2022	146 areas (162 buildings)	A total of 130 sites were built before the founding of the PRC, and 16 sites were built after the founding.

Table 2 Basic information of the historic districts identified in Dalian

File Name	Release Time	Quantity	Identifying neighbourhood information
'The members of the CPPCC visited the protected historic districts in our city'—Dalian Daily	2006	5 historic and cultural blocks	Historic and cultural blocks: 1. Zhongshan Square (~15 ha) 2. Shengli Bridge (~9 ha) 3. Nanshan District (~40 ha) 4. Blackstone Reef (~18 ha) 5. Taiyanggou, Lvshun (~350 ha)
'Dalian City Master Plan (2009–2020)'	2010	5 historic and cultural blocks, 4 new historic sites	Historic sites: 1. 87 Sanatoriums (~5 ha) 2. Xiaolong Street Cadre Sanatoriums (~6 ha) 3. Xinghai Street Lot (~9 ha) 4. Russian Army Barracks Site (~5 ha)
'Dalian City Master Plan (2010–2020)'	2011	5 historic and cultural blocks	Historic and cultural blocks: 1. Zhongshan Square ^a (~15 ha), core area 9.1 ha; 2. Shengli Bridge (~13.4 ha), core area 9.6 ha; 3. Nanshan District (~41.4 ha), core area 26.5 ha; 4. Blackstone Reef (~18.3 ha), core area 5.2 ha; 5. Taiyanggou, Lvshun (~350 ha), core area 28.6 ha.
FHCCPPD	January 2021	2 historic urban areas 4 historic and cultural blocks 6 historic and cultural scenic areas 20 sites with historic conditions (not listed)	Historic urban areas: Lvshun historic urban area, Dalian historic urban area Historic sites: Lvshun Old Market historic site Jinzhou ancient city historic site
'Dalian 2049 city long-range planning'	May 2021	2 historic urban areas	Historic and cultural blocks: Zhongshan Square ^a , Dongguan Street ^a , Shengli Bridge, Taiyanggou (Lvshun) ^a
'TSMPPDC (2021–2035)' draft	September 2021	2 historic sites 4 historic and cultural blocks 24 historic and cultural scenic areas	Historic and cultural scenic areas: Nanshan District, the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics, Fengming Street, Liansuo Street, People's Square, Golden Hill, and others.

^a Certified provincial historical and cultural blocks

Overall, the demolition of Dalian's historic districts continued to occur after 2010. The protection of historic districts in Dalian did not formally begin until 2015. During this period, Dalian approved for four provincial-level historic and cultural districts, namely, Zhongshan Square (2015), Dongguan Street (2020), Taiyanggou (2020), and Shengli Bridge (2022). Two batches of historic buildings were published, with a total of 76 locations and 95 buildings, and the relevant policies and regulations for historic and cultural protection were expanded and standardised. However, compared with the protection of domestic and international FHCCs, there is still an enormous gap. On the one hand, the special planning for the protection of Dalian's historic districts covers only four provincial-level historic and cultural districts and lacks constructive indicators and detailed systems for protection planning. Other historic districts are similar to 'unofficial

heritage', which lack substance. On the other hand, there is not only a lack of dedicated funding and public participation for the dynamic protection of urban heritage, especially historic districts, but also a severe shortage of practices that aim to enhance cultural tourism and cultural communication.

4 Current situation and problems in the protection of typical historic districts in Dalian

Since the 21st century, the protection of built heritage in Dalian has faced numerous challenges in urban development. Many outstanding historic buildings and districts have been reluctantly dismantled due to insufficient protection levels or not being included on the protection list at all. Some historic districts that were once bustling with people are also falling into disuse. From 'old city reconstruction' to 'urban renewal', we attempt to gain critical inspiration from the evolution and development of some

typical historic districts. Has the protection system of Dalian's historic districts improved under the national and local government's protection regulations? What are the internal causes of the formation of decaying or abandoned buildings and districts, and how can they be restored? Has colonial heritage or culture become a political tool that plays an important role in the tourism economy?

4.1 The destruction and abandonment of 'nameless' districts

Fengming Street is located in the centre of the main city of Dalian and is one of the important nodes connecting east and west. It used to be the most well-preserved street in Dalian, with more than 200 'Japanese and foreign style' buildings lining its sides. The old buildings on Fengming Street belong to residential areas built during the Japanese invasion in the 1920s and 1940s and are rare examples of architecture not found elsewhere in the country, with mainly brick and wood construction. The sister city of Dalian, Kitakyushu, Japan, selected 10 houses to be relocated to Japan in the 1990s, reflecting their historical and cultural value. Since 2010, the Dalian Municipal Government and Planning Bureau have been 'renovating' this area, and the neighbourhood's appearance has been severely damaged (Ji 2020). As seen in Fig. 4, before the demolition, the neighbourhood maintained the texture of single-family houses and apartment complexes, the internal space was very full, and the interface of the neighbourhood was relatively complete. From 2011 to 2013, Site 6 and Site 9 were basically completely demolished, while Sites 3, 4 and 5 were partially preserved; furthermore, many

temporary boarding houses were erected within the block due to the demolition of new commercial buildings in the stadium on the north side. Between 2014 and 2016, some of the independent houses in Site 1 and Site 2 and several apartment buildings along the street in Site 4 were demolished and most of the open space in the block was converted into a parking lot; this morphological texture has been preserved to this day.

Unlike Fengming Street, which was 'forced to be demolished', the residents of Dongguan Street are eager to see its renovation and demolition. Dongguan Street was established as a gathering place for Chinese merchants and an early Chinese consumer area and as historical and cultural importance as the birthplace of national commerce and the origin of the Red Revolution. It has a unique urban texture of street space and enclosed courtyard space and is the only historical street that is compatible with the traditional Chinese courtyard format and the Japanese and Russian architectural style; however, currently, it is truly one of the most dilapidated neighbourhoods in Dalian (Fig. 5). Originally, the government planned to 'renovate' Dongguan Street in 2015 due to the delay in housing acquisition and demolition work, as well as the intervention of the Cultural Heritage Protection Bureau in the demolition of Dongguan Street neighbourhood to the maximum extent possible, with the aim of preserving it; however, this situation also caused an embarrassing situation that continues to this day in which the district has been completely abandoned, and some residents have no housing to rely on.

Fengming Street and Dongguan Street, as the most famous districts in the collective memory of Dalian, are



Fig. 4 Evolution of Fengming Street (Source: Ji 2020)



Fig. 5 Local status quo of Dongguan Street (Source: the author)

in a state of disrepair, which is lamentable. We conducted extensive research on Fengming Street and Dongguan Street and found that the main reason for their destruction and abandonment was the lack of official recognition, leading to a 'lack of identity' for the historic districts. In July 2009, the 'Fengming Street Modern Building Group' and 'Dongguan Street Building Group' were listed as the first batch of immovable cultural sites in Dalian. In October of the same year, the historical significance of these two districts was reiterated by the Dalian Cultural Radio and Television Bureau in their publication of the '*Cultural Relics Directory*' (CRD). There is a perplexing discrepancy between this recognition and the 2010 draft of the '*Dalian City Master Plan (2009–2020)*', which expanded the original five historic and cultural districts by adding four more but omitted any mention of Fengming Street and Dongguan Street. The absence of content regarding these two districts, which provided the 'political convenience' of Fengming Street and Dongguan

Street, successively forced their demolition. Similar situations for unofficial heritage are also very common internationally. The protection of historic districts involves administrative units such as planning authorities, local governments, and cultural protection departments. Due to the lack of coordination between local departments in terms of responsibility and value orientation, the development of protection plans often involves game playing and conflicts between administrative organisations. Therefore, old buildings or districts that are not on the 'list' naturally become 'obstacles' to urban economic development, which means that their demolition is only a matter of time.

4.2 Isolated historic district protection

Dalian is one of the Chinese cities with the most squares, with multiple circular squares at the centre of the urban layout, which was first planned during the Russian occupation period (Fig. 6a). The circular radial roads form a

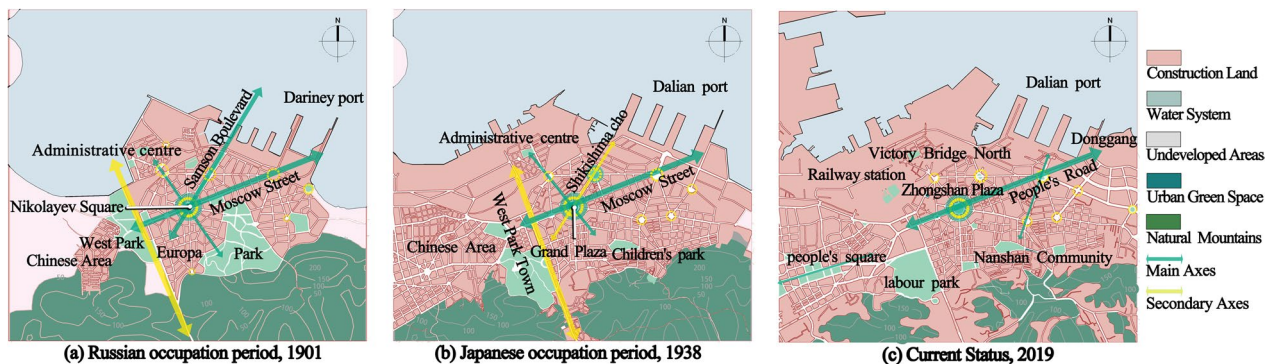


Fig. 6 Evolution of urban texture in the main city of Dalian (Source: the author)

spider-web-like urban form, with several scenic corridors connecting the mountains and the sea, such as the three main axes running through Nikolaev Square (now Zhongshan Square), Samsonov Boulevard, Moscow Street, the road connecting the administrative centre and the Europa district, and the visual corridor extending through West Park to the sea. During the Japanese occupation period (Fig. 6b), the Baroque style was preserved in Grand Square (now Zhongshan Square) as the core of the older part of the city, but modernism and a square grid of roads dominated the new urban expansion in the west. The original 2.9-hm² Samsonov Boulevard (renamed Shikishima cho) almost disappeared, the visual corridor through West Park was weakened by reclamation, and Moscow Street was strengthened by the rapid construction of western towns. In the modern development period (Fig. 6c), after city-centred development and construction activities, many commercial super high-rise buildings were built around Zhongshan Square, which completely cut off the visual corridor

between the square and the surrounding natural environment (Zhang et al. 2020).

Currently, Zhongshan Square benefits from its core urban location and its financial, tourism, leisure and entertainment attributes. The government allocates special funds for the reasonable protection of the district throughout the year. The architectural style and artistic value of its building complex have been relatively well preserved, and each building exhibits strong consistency and coordination in terms of spatial scale, volume relationship, facade details, and other aspects. However, in the city centre with towering skyscrapers, the square appears so lonely (Fig. 7). The destruction of Dalian's historical and cultural texture is manifested in the fact that the upper-level planning did not consider historical and cultural resources or urban cultural characteristics, which led to the destruction of the visual corridors centred around Zhongshan Square. Even though the FHCCPPD and the TSMPDDC (2021–2035) provide a relatively complete legal basis and urban planning



Fig. 7 Zhongshan Square historic district (Source: the author)

blueprint for the protection of Dalian's historic districts, they were administered too late.

4.3 Historic districts with various architectural styles

Nanshan district was established as a high-class residential area during the Russian-Japanese era. Due to its positioning as the leader's residence of the invaders, its building materials, structure, and detailed shapes are better than those of Fengming Street and Dongguan Street; in addition, because of its superior location near both mountains and water, it is still a neighbourhood currently dominated by villa clusters. The whole neighbourhood has relatively complete living facilities, with a regional building coverage rate of 20% to less than 25% and green coverage of more than 30%. The Nanshan district was approved by the State Council in 1985 as a 'Historic Features Protection Area', and the Dalian Urban Housing Management System subsequently carried out the piecemeal maintenance of some of the public housing in the neighbourhood. After 2000, the interior of the neighbourhood experienced a variety of development modes, such as cultural tourism and high-end residential and modern commercial renewal, forming the current situation of regional properties that are mainly residential and commercial, with office space and a small number of areas dedicated to cultural and educational purposes (Li, Wang, and Xia 2019). On the whole, the neighbourhood maintains its original grid-like texture and single building layout (Fig. 8). Renovation activities have improved the environmental facilities and architectural appearance of the neighbourhood to a certain extent. We can see some of the exquisite repairs of 'Japanese-style Western houses' in the Nanshan district, which are mainly reflected in the 'Japanese-style district' area, with catering as the main business and commerce as the auxiliary business. However, some historic buildings have been demolished and

rebuilt, causing a significant difference in the overall historic district style. The main reason why the current situation of the Nanshan district is relatively well preserved is that most of the building properties are privately owned, and some of the property rights belong to the actual users of the Housing Management Bureau, who can make repairs to the houses. However, due to the lack of unified standards, regulations, and behavioural constraints for district management, property owners and users can arbitrarily decorate, rebuild, or even add to the buildings, resulting in problems such as significant differences in style and discontinuous facades throughout the district.

4.4 'Exotic-style streets' as economic tools

Shengli Bridge was a municipal district during the colonial period of Tsarist Russia, the centre of Dalian city and the original point of urban development. The many historic buildings in the area and the spatial texture of the streets that have lasted for a century have an irreplaceable position in the history of Dalian's urban development. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Dalian municipal government intended to redevelop the area through the commercialisation of housing, but the renovation project did not begin until the end of the 1990s due to the booming development of the tertiary industry. The first phase of the project (Russian-style streets) was completed in 2000. The initial publicity and commercial investment in the Russian-style streets attracted many tourists and initially became a must-visit tourist spot in Dalian. However, the supporting facilities gradually disappeared, leaving the area with the problem of being a single-function industry. Due to environmental degradation and traffic congestion, the commercial development of Shengli Bridge failed to achieve the expected results. Moreover, the blind transformation of the multistyled residential buildings completely destroyed the appearance of the original historic district and had a significant negative impact on

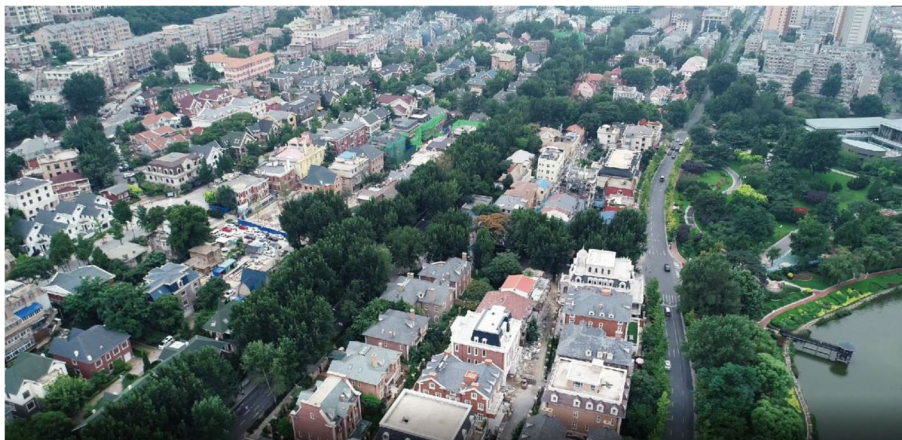


Fig. 8 Part of the Nanshan district (Source: the author)

the preservation of Shengli Bridge (Lu, Liu, and Deng 2012). After a one-time, large-scale, ‘thorough’ repair and renovation of historic districts, it was easy for the region to fall into a ‘shock,’ even with the loss of sustainable motivation for the maintenance of the physical environment, the preservation of historical features, and the continuous operation of functional business in the latter stages of construction. Consequently, the historic district once again fell into environmental deterioration, disorderly appearance, and functional disorder (Xiao 2018).

Upon re-opening after the spread of China’s coronavirus disease, the Dalian government, in order to stimulate tourism, recovered the simple renovation of Russian-style streets, mainly referring to the painting of façades and the addition of fake flowers. Although there will still be foreign tourists who visit here in the festival period, as seen on the network platform, the evaluations of tourists are mostly more negative; for example, they state that the streets are not exotic, and there are many fake products and high prices (Sun 2022; Yang 2021). After the holidays end, the Russian-style street returns to being deserted again (Fig. 9). According to Baudrillard, ‘to become an object of consumption, an item must become a symbol’. Exotic-style streets in China have become a symbolised metaphor and a tool for government consumption. This has resulted in cultural inheritors, who are the agents of cultural tradition reproduction, being the most powerless in the development of exotic-style streets. They have become voiceless; thus, exotic-style streets fail to reflect the expected level of exoticism, becoming instead monotonous and bland displays where tradition is not transformed into appreciable art. The ubiquitous presence of counterfeit goods undermines tourists’ imagination of ‘time-space transformation’.

5 Discussion

Through a comprehensive study of Dalian’s built heritage, we find that policies and practices for preserving Dalian’s built heritage lag far behind international standards. This

is due to Dalian not being recognised as an FHCC and the local government’s lack of emphasis on urban cultural resource preservation. Through the critical examination of the protection system for Dalian’s built heritage, the spatial evolution of typical historic districts, and current issues, we attempt to explore and propose rough protection recommendations.

5.1 Lack of identity causes irreversible destruction of built heritage

Although the protection content and planning regulations for immovable cultural relics have been clearly proposed, the demolition and damage of historic buildings still occur from time to time, as seen from the building or heritage protection information formulated by the Dalian municipal government over the past 20 years. First, the PMMKPBD, as the main legal guarantee and basis for the protection of historic buildings in Dalian, lacks specific implementation details and effective rewards and punishments. Second, the list of buildings, districts, and sites with cultural attributes constantly changes, and the standards for identification are unclear and varied on both websites and paper records, making it difficult to resolve some of the ‘ambiguity’ of the buildings. Third, there is a lack of continuity in the assessment of built heritage and list-making, and the heritage list information available for query is concentrated in approximately 2002, 2009, and 2020, with no new or replacement lists being added for nearly 15 years (Table 1).

Some neighbourhoods in Dalian have suffered irreversible damage due to the lack of recognition and protection. This is similar to the international problem of ‘unofficial heritage’, where even traditional districts in designated FHCCs, such as Zhiji Street in Changsha from during the Ming Dynasty, Dengfu Lane in Nanjing from during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Xiaojing Old Street in Suzhou, and Xiaohao Old Street in Chongqing, are not exempt from destruction. The urgent task is for the government

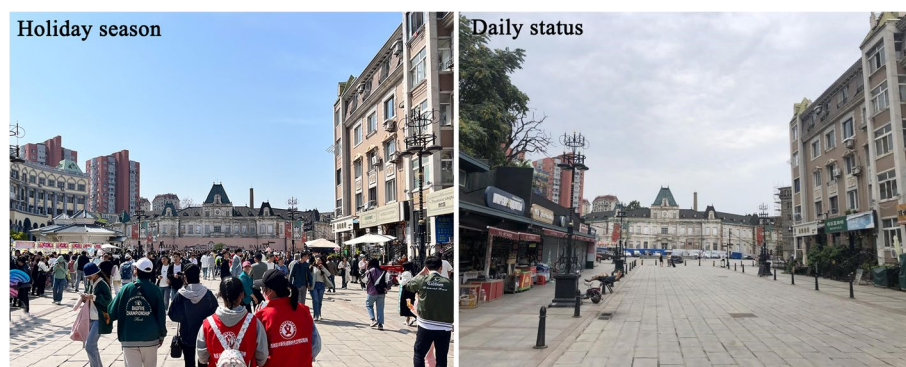


Fig. 9 Status of Russian-style street (Source: the author)

to strengthen the survey and recognition process and to promptly improve the protection list. The surveyed areas should be expanded to ensure that all historic buildings, districts, and monuments that meet the standards in all cities and counties are included in the protection list to avoid the destruction and demolition of historic districts, such as Dongguan Street and Fengming Street, due to uncertain 'legal status'.

In regard to non-FHCCs, the evaluation and identification of built heritage, such as historic buildings and districts, is a fundamental reason to ensure that these facilities are not destroyed. Three approaches may effectively improve the development of protection lists for built heritage. First, we can establish a paradigm and criteria for the valuation of built heritage and simplify the basic rules and procedures for the recognition of historic buildings, districts, and cultural relics. Second, strengthening public participation may be an effective means by which to improve the recognition of built heritage. Stimulating public participation and decision-making and encouraging public participation and decision-making through 'collective memory' can quickly identify valuable architectural heritage, thereby not only efficiently promoting the development of protection lists but also effectively enhancing public supervision and social influence in heritage protection. Lima, Peru, has had an experience very similar to that of Dalian in regard to the development of built heritage preservation. Although much of the city's built heritage has been destroyed due to the confusion of national policies and the incoordination between the functional departments,

the associations organised by the residents, historians, educators, volunteers, and planners have achieved heritage protection and community autonomy and have achieved a good social response (Alexandrino Ocaña 2023). Third, it is necessary to establish a standardised database for built heritage. The basic information on heritage protection, protection policies, and local regulations related to historic heritage should be sorted out, and paper-based and oral materials should be archived electronically to form a comprehensive legal database. This approach can effectively solve problems such as the untraceability of policy documents, the untimely and inaccurate coordination between departments, unclear ownership, and outdated material information, providing a basic information guarantee for the recognition of built heritage.

5.2 The incomplete planning and protection system at all levels has caused the destruction of historical texture and the environment

The reform of China's land system and rapid urbanisation have promoted the large-scale transformation of old cities within a flood of economic change. The protection of famous historic cities and historic urban areas in the traditional sense has been essentially changed towards a policy of urban construction by 'designating historic districts as key protection zones', which targets these zones for development and undoubtedly irreversibly damages the original historical spatial texture (Zhang 2020; Chang 2017) (Fig. 10). The case of Qingdao in China seems to provide a good



Fig. 10 The historic district surrounded by modern architecture -- Liansuo Street historic district (Source: the author)

example for Dalian. Qingdao is also a colonial harbour city; it was founded only 100 years ago, and it has also experienced urbanisation at the cost of demolishing historic buildings. However, it has recently achieved a certain degree of success in terms of both urbanisation and heritage preservation. This is mainly because Qingdao's government emphasised heritage conservation in its early years, and as early as 1984, the master plan of Qingdao made legal provisions for the management and construction of relics and heritage, which led to the city becoming an FHCC (in the third batch). At a later period, a complete hierarchical list of immovable cultural relics was established, and a system for the conservation and utilisation of cultural relics with a sound mechanism and complete policies was constructed. Notably, the overall control of urban heritage in the early period effectively preserved the visual corridor connecting the mountains and the sea. Therefore, we believe that the perfect planning and protection system is an important foundation for the remodelling of Dalian's historical spatial pattern and texture.

First, from the perspective of urban scale, national territorial spatial planning serves as a guide for China's national spatial development and a spatial blueprint for sustainable development. The planning and preservation of historic districts play a crucial role in the current urban renewal process. Therefore, there is an urgent need to complement the cultural spatial elements from the perspective of national territorial space; construct a multilevel, comprehensive coverage protection system; clarify various planning control elements and indicators for construction projects and preservation planning; and express these factors in the same, authoritative detailed planning management document. This approach integrates preservation and construction planning within historic districts, ensuring that preservation planning is effectively implemented in the planning management mechanism and preventing the reoccurrence of isolated historic districts (Zhang et al. 2020).

At the district scale, it is necessary to establish street-level protection and management measures, with 'streets' serving as the basic unit. On the one hand, this approach is in line with the grassroots structure of urban management in China, which is conducive to clarifying responsibilities and rights. On the other hand, it is beneficial to combine upper-level planning and management documents to quickly establish a 'street-level planning control map' and develop detailed data regulations. This approach will help to constrain new construction and disordered repair behaviours, achieve effective control at the 'quantitative' level, and avoid limitations in protecting the internal attributes of historic districts due to the omission of relevant construction projects or protection

plans that affect the heritage value of historic districts while neglecting the control of external attributes (Redaelli 2021).

5.3 The political significance and authenticity protection of colonial heritage

Obviously, the discussion of Dalian's colonial heritage is not suitable for expansion to a wider scope, as the value and significance of colonial heritage are influenced by wider societal processes, including nationalist movements, domestic and international conflicts, immigration, urbanisation, postcolonial politics, economy, the exploitation and depletion of natural resources, and development and tourism industries (Meskell 1998; Lowenthal 2005; Cleere 1991). However, we can explore and discuss some challenges that arise from the political utilisation of Dalian's colonial heritage.

First, in China, the discourse surrounding colonial architectural heritage does not appear to be completely negative. Apart from the discussion of Dalian in this article, research on colonial heritage in Xiamen (Wei and Wang 2022) and Shanghai (Chang 2009) has also confirmed the presence of inclusive sentiment among the Chinese people. The issue of how to perceive the value and utilisation of colonial heritage depends on a country's political, economic, and psychological factors (Porter 2008). Due to different standards of national economic, cultural, and social values in different periods, the power that is formed by aggregating these factors will also be transferred, and the same power will create new capital through 'reproduction'. In this interaction between power and capital, the meaning of architecture is constantly generated and transformed (Bourdieu 1989). China's 'exotics-style streets' are a product of this transformation, serving as an economically driven tool of 'protective development' with Chinese characteristics that is extensively utilised by the government. This transformation has become a focal point of the tourism industry in famous colonial cities such as Tianjin (Wang 2005; Li 2018), Shanghai (Wang 2016), Qingdao (Liu 2021), and Xiamen (Wei and Wang 2022). As this transformation continues to occur, not only are the original meanings gradually disappearing but other implicit meanings are emerging, while new meanings are being added. Regardless of the purpose, this transformation reflects the increasingly important role that traditional Chinese culture and history have played in enhancing civic cultural confidence and strengthening China's soft power since the 1980s and how China's national ideological orientation has shifted towards a more open and inclusive cultural approach.

From disdain and curiosity to appreciation and imitation and then to choice and tolerance, foreign elements

have gradually transformed China's own architectural aesthetic orientation, reflecting the concept of 'Chinese worldism' (Chang 2009). However, this inclusive sentiment is not without boundaries; it is built upon the authenticity of colonial heritage. This preservation of authenticity should be reflected in two aspects: the preservation of authentic spaces and authentic experiences. Preserving the authentic spaces of colonial architecture means preserving the true history. A case study in Taiwan has shown that iconic buildings or architectural complexes can evoke public historical consciousness and a sense of the past (Hsu 2023). This implies that the public is more accepting of a genuine, unadorned historical appearance rather than developer-replicated imports. The public resistance to the Dalian Shengtangxiaojingdu residential area serves as a testament to this fact. Second, authentic experiences are particularly important. While the commodification of culture has a dual nature, in the current market-driven economy, supporting the positive functions of commercialisation is necessary (Cohen 1988). However, the discussion on how to preserve authentic experiential aspects needs to be explored more deeply. Research on Gulangyu Island in Xiamen has found that the conflicts between the government and tourists are not inherently rooted in colonial history but rather reflect the differences between tourists' demand for independent engagement with heritage and the selective interpretation and presentation of heritage by the authorities (Wei and Wang 2022). In fact, how people use and interact with this heritage is a crucial factor in shaping its historical and cultural significance (Meskell 2015; Schiffer 1992; Silverman and Ruggles 2007).

6 Conclusion

This paper traces the colonial history and urban pattern of Dalian since its founding; through the development agenda of China's heritage system and local protection policies, as well as the analysis of past and present typical cases, it attempts to critically examine the institutional, spatial, and cultural issues existing in Dalian's historic districts. The aim is to serve as a reference for the protection of heritage in Northeast China and other non-FHCCs. However, while this paper has limitations related to its discussion of Dalian's historic districts and built heritage, the following conclusions are worthy of reflection:

- (1) Heritage lists are the most effective text and fundamental prerequisite for cultural heritage protection, especially in cities that are not known for their 'history' or 'culture'. Dalian's historic districts, such as Fengming Street, Dongguan Street, and Liansuo Street, which have important historic value and urban memory, have been severely damaged and

destroyed since these districts were not determined to meet the grade for protection in the early stages of heritage protection. In contrast, some smaller, shorter historic districts or buildings located outside the core areas have been relatively well preserved due to their inclusion in the protection registry. Therefore, clarifying the heritage registry is an important foundation for the overall strategy of 'preservation, renovation, and demolition' of local built heritage protection. Such foundation not only clarifies the question of 'what to protect' but also becomes a powerful tool for the heritage protection system to play its role while also promoting active participation from the public and social organisations in heritage protection work.

- (2) The conflict between higher-level planning and local protection systems is a long-standing and common problem worldwide. Currently, an integrated planning system, represented by a blueprint, may be the best answer with which to address issues such as insufficient constraints on construction behaviour, conflicts in urban planning management and policies, and unclear departmental powers. From the perspective of urban master planning, a blueprint can clarify the main functional areas and land-use planning, thereby maximising the preservation of urban historical textures and corridors. From the perspective of block protection and planning, historic buildings, district protection maps, and economic indicators can be designed specifically based on higher-level planning, effectively avoiding the disorderly spread of construction behaviour and self-repair actions.
- (3) Dalian's experience with the commercialisation of colonial heritage is evidently a failure that is closely tied to the backdrop of economisation and industrial transformation. While the public exhibits a high level of inclusivity towards colonial heritage, it is more concerned with the authentic expression and experience of colonial heritage or exotic cultures. However, the analysis and exposition of colonial districts in this article may not be applicable to other countries, as such applicability depends more on the cultural background and political implications at the macro level.

Abbreviations

RIPCFHCC	Request for Instructions on the Protection of China's Famous Historic and Cultural Cities
CHPL	Cultural Heritage Protection Law (PRC)
CRD	Cultural Relics Directory
PMMKPB	Protection Management Measures for Key Protected Buildings in Dalian
FHCCs	Famous Historic and Cultural Cities

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Authors' contributions

ZH: conceptualisation, writing, images, research; WF: writing, editing, review, research; GF: conceptualisation, strategy; CJ: review and editing; DJ: review and editing. Co-authors: all authors revised the manuscript and discussed and agreed on each of the suggestions made by the reviewers and editors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declarations

Competing interests

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