

# Boosting traditional village protection

Authorities being urged to put rural heritage to better use

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China has added 1,336 traditional villages to the State protection list amid efforts to promote heritage conservation, according to a notice issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development late last month.

It urges local authorities to establish or improve their archives of traditional villages and draw up plans to strengthen the villages' protection and use.

Together with five other government organs, including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the National Cultural Heritage Administration and the Ministry of Finance, the ministry has placed a total of 8,155 traditional villages under State protection.

Traditional Chinese villages generally refer to those with lengthy histories, which retain folk customs, and have not undergone significant changes to their architectural appearance, according to Chen Xingyi, professor at the Traditional Village Architectural Culture and Art Research Center at Henan Polytechnic University.

To be selected, villages must meet certain criteria, including rich history and culture, a well-preserved layout, traditional buildings with conservation value, the living practice of local intangible cultural heritage and the preservation of village vitality.

"The value of traditional Chinese villages is diverse and irreplaceable. They reflect historical memory and methods of production, living wisdom, as well as cultural and artistic essence, and regional characteristics," Chen said. "They are also an important part of world cultural heritage."

## Renovation and preservation

Most of the country's world heritage sites, along with the vast majority of its national-level and provincial, municipal and county-level intangible cultural heritage areas, are located either in or near clusters of traditional villages, according to Chen.

Protecting the villages to help preserve cultural inheritance is critical and will promote the development of China's stated goal of creating what it refers to as "ecological civilization" while also advancing rural vitalization, he said.

The central government began a survey of traditional villages in 2012. After years of effort, by 2020, it has successfully brought 539,000 historic buildings and traditional dwellings under State protection.

Chen stressed that protecting traditional villages does not mean preserving them exactly as they were. Lifestyles should be modernized in accordance with the times, and villagers have the right to enjoy the conveniences of modern technology.

He proposed integrating modern life into the traditional village setting, while paying close attention to protecting the local environment and culture.

"We should develop while protecting, and protect while developing, transitioning from static preservation to active inheritance," he said. "This transformation is aimed at ensuring better protection. The use of villages under protection not only promotes their development, but also supports efforts to preserve cultural inheritance."

He called for establishing a set of stringent standards, methods and protection mechanisms based on actual circumstances to ensure sustainable development.

As many cities have made a point of developing clusters of the villages, Chen said it's important local authorities take into account the features of each village, including their appearance and industries.

Chen urged authorities to focus not only on tourism, but also on exploring and developing other aspects, such as special farming techniques, local agriculture and distinctive handicrafts.

Cai Suihong, deputy chief engineer with the Guangdong Urban and Rural Planning and Design Institute, suggested that in areas where conditions permit, houses belonging to villagers could be



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transferred to the village collective for vitalization and use. For example, they could be turned into village history museums, public venues, tourist service centers or homestays.

"If the buildings were previously used for purposes such as workshops or mills, we recommend they be restored to their original function," Cai said.

Cai emphasized that the most important aspect of protecting and using traditional villages is to demonstrate the role they play in preserving cultural inheritance.

Experts concurred that minimal renovation should be undertaken in villages, stressing that old buildings and their surrounding environments shouldn't undergo large-scale demolition, and there shouldn't be arbitrary development.

Instead, everything should be carried out on the basis of maintaining the original style of the villages and their environments.

"During renovation, a cautious attitude should be maintained, and the core value of traditional villages should be preserved," said Pan Ying, professor at the School of Architecture at the South China University of Technology.

While introducing modern functions to traditional villages, reasonable scale should be adopted, Pan added.

"For example, it is best to use original buildings for homestays, without changing the spatial structure and cultural

charm of the streets and alleys. New, large-scale construction is not suitable," she said.

## Efforts paying off

Over the past decade, China has stepped up efforts to manage rural housing, train rural artisans and develop village infrastructure and public services, according to Li Xiaolong, an official at the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.

As a result, many now boast beautiful, natural scenery, with significantly improved living conditions.

In particular, rural household waste management has been upgraded, with more than 90 percent of villages now covered.

Moreover, the evaluation mechanism for rural construction has been improved, from overall development down to specifics such as housing construction, Li said, adding that through evaluation, the development status and the effectiveness of construction in villages, as well as outstanding problems and weaknesses, have been identified, and this has paved the way for promoting rural development.

Under a policy aimed at protecting traditional villages, several regions have promoted the vitalization and use of traditional villages.

They have explored the setting, history, culture and landscapes, and have developed rural tourism and cultural indus-

tries related to local conditions.

In 2020, 10 cities and prefectures, including Huangshan in Anhui province and Dali Bai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province, each received 150 million yuan (\$21.8 million) from the central government to carry out protection work in traditional village clusters. Local authorities also encouraged public investment.

Furthermore, a long-term protection and use mechanism has taken shape, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.

In the ancient village of Pengdong, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, authorities have vigorously developed rural tourism and have strengthened agriculture and tourism through government leadership, the introduction of social capital and investments from villagers in the form of houses, land and other resources.

As Pengdong leverages its scenery and culture and history, it is attracting an increasing number of tourists.

On average, the village receives 1,000 visitors per day, and annual per capita incomes have increased to around 40,000 yuan, according to local authorities.

In 2020, villages like Pengdong on the national protection list received 360 million tourists, which increased incomes, enhanced cultural confidence and injected new vitality into those rural areas, according to the ministry.

## Policy Digest

### Tracks already laid for three new high-speed rail lines

Fixed-asset investment in railways expanded 6.6 percent in the first quarter of this year as China continues to modernize its railway infrastructure.

Total fixed-asset investment came in at 113.55 billion yuan (\$16.5 billion), data from the China State Railway Group Co Ltd showed.

During this period, tracks for the main lines of three high-speed services have been laid, the group said, adding that advances have also been made in a number of key projects under construction.

The group said it will continue to improve the accessibility and coverage of the national rail network, and promote interregional connection to aid the coordinated development of the economy and society.

### Trade in services rises to new highs in first two months

China's trade in services was worth 969.5 billion yuan (\$140.88 billion) during the first two months of the year, rising 1.7 percent year-on-year, the Ministry of Commerce announced on Friday.

The value of knowledge-intensive trade in services was 406.9 billion yuan. This represents an increase of 6.4 percent on last year and accounts for 42 percent of China's combined value of services, both exported and imported.

According to the ministry, sectors providing insurance, financial, cultural and entertainment services experienced a rapid growth in the export of knowledge-intensive services, while sectors providing cultural and entertainment, telecommunications, computing and information services experienced rapid growth in the import of knowledge-intensive services.

The January-February period also led to a visible resumption of tourism, with the sector's trade in services valued at around 209.4 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 39.8 percent.

### China Post says parcel volume increasing faster than ever

China's postal services have dealt with 30 billion parcels as of 8 am on April 6, the State Post Bureau said.

The benchmark was reached 99 days earlier than in 2019 and 18 days earlier than last year.

According to the bureau, the national courier sector now respectively receives and delivers more than 300 million parcels per day, playing an increasingly prominent role in spending, meeting daily needs and stimulating the economy.

### Four elder care campaigns to be launched this year

The National Health Commission said on Friday that it will run four campaigns this year to step up national elder care services in terms of mental health, oral health, nutritional improvement and dementia prevention.

During a meeting in Beijing, the commission said that this year's efforts will also focus on enhancing the capacity to prevent and control disease, and perfect a medical emergency system capable of quick response in both normal and emergency periods.

According to the commission, efforts to improve policies for boosting the birthrate and developing public-interest child care systems will be intensified and action plans for maternal and infant health, and the prevention and treatment of birth defects will be implemented.



CHINA DAILY-XINHUA

## More of Anhui's rural heritage on protection list

By WANG QIAN  
and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

Surrounded by mountains and overlooking lakes and streams, Zhang Shunzhi's four-story guesthouse welcomes visitors from all over for blossom season.

After years spent driving across the country as a long-haul trucker, Zhang finds that there is no better place than home. In 2021, he turned his house in Nanping village, Huangshan city, Anhui province, into a guesthouse.

"For many urbanites, Nanping is like a

wonderland far from the bustle of city life," Zhang said.

"As more visitors come to the village, I have to hire people to help me with business during peak season," the 61-year-old said, adding that in 2021, his guesthouse earned him about 100,000 yuan (\$14,582).

This past Spring Festival has been Zhang's busiest period, and his seven-room guesthouse was fully booked thanks to the relaxation of COVID-19 policies.

Official statistics show that in January, Huangshan city's 66 scenic spots received 2.12 million visits, a 50.3 percent increase

on the January figure from 2019, the year before the pandemic.

Steeped in history, Nanping village has rows of intact Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasty houses in a maze of 72 lanes. It has eight well-preserved ancestral halls and is often described as a "hidden gem" by travel influencers. After serving as the backdrop for the 1990 film *Ju Dou* directed by Zhang Yimou and as a set for the Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000, the village has become popular with tourists.

Boasting typical Anhui architecture and carvings, Nanping is one of the 1,336 ancient

villages included in the sixth batch inscribed on the national protection list, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.

This is good news for Zhang Fenbin, village head, who has been busy coordinating with related departments to preserve Nanping's rustic charm and character, while making sure that everyone feels at home.

"To meet the increase in tourism, we will expand the parking lot to accommodate about 200 vehicles, up from the current 100," Zhang Fenbin said.

The rise in tourists will also generate more waste and so Zhang Fenbin has also planned for more trash bins to be installed and for the village's waste management to be enhanced.

For the four guesthouses in the village, a 2-million-yuan project is planned to improve their access to safe electricity, according to Zhang Fenbin.

In addition to Nanping, 70 villages in Anhui are on the list. Wu Zhaohua, head of Laotian village in Chizhou city, is happy that the village is listed and said that this will be a good opportunity for Laotian to become known by more people.

At the foot of the Jiuhua Mountain scenic spot, Laotian is restoring its stone pavements.

"Although it is a lesser-known village, our unique scenery is an ideal alternative vacation for tourists to explore," Wu said.

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