

Planning Heritage in World Heritage: Distributions, Values, and Classification

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Abstract: As an emerging field in urban heritage preservation, existing research on planning heritage has predominantly focused on individual case studies. Given the lack of large-scale data analysis, the universal planning heritage values embedded within urban heritage projects remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining planning heritage within world heritage. Employing text analysis and data statistics as primary research methods, the study examines urban heritage projects with specific planning heritage values from the World Heritage List. The findings reveal that: planning heritage, with its universal values, is an integral component of urban heritage projects; the values of planning heritage exhibit three characteristics: relative concentration, wide geographic distribution, and diverse combination of attributes; planning heritage serves as an important medium for expressing the cultural connotations of integrity urban built environment. This study demonstrates the universality and diversity of planning heritage values, contributing to a deeper understanding of the integrity in urban heritage.

Keywords: planning heritage; world heritage; urban heritage; planning heritage values; planning heritage classification

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In recent years, the concept of planning heritage has gained increasing prominence and emerged as a new field in urban-heritage research in China and abroad. Because foundational research remains at an early stage, however, planning heritage has received far less attention than familiar urban-heritage concepts such as historic buildings, historic sites, and historic urban areas. To help planning heritage develop into an extensible theme and type of urban heritage, it is necessary, on the basis of earlier studies, to extract a substantial sample of urban-heritage properties from the World Heritage List for empirical examination and data analysis. Doing so can reveal the planning-heritage values embedded in these properties and attract greater scholarly attention to the concept.

In domestic conservation practice, the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting on the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Asia-Pacific Region, reviewed in 2023, identified 233 categories of attributes across China's 37 World Cultural Heritage properties^[1]. Attributes such as overall configuration, spatial layout, and urban fabric are not only major components of urban-heritage value but also core expressions of planning heritage. This indicates an inherent and close relationship between urban heritage and planning heritage. Clarifying the logic of that relationship is therefore a

prerequisite for moving planning-heritage research from theoretical conceptualization toward practical application.

Against this theoretical and practical background, and on the basis of a review of relevant research and issues, this article focuses on planning-heritage values and conducts an empirical study of urban-heritage properties on the World Heritage List. It has two principal objectives. First, it brings the concept of planning heritage into the field of World Heritage studies and traces the planning-heritage values implicit in different types of urban-heritage properties. Second, it seeks to strengthen the accumulation of foundational knowledge and provide a more comprehensive reference for subsequent theoretical and practical exploration.

1 Review of Planning-Heritage Research

Since the British scholar Taylor first used the term “planning heritage” in 1975, scholars in Australia, the United States, Russia, China, and other countries have continually explored the subject. Especially in recent years, as academic dissemination and professional interest have grown, scholars in China and abroad^[2-11] have produced a series of studies on key themes including the conceptual understanding of planning heritage, evaluation criteria, and conservation practice. Planning-heritage research has thus increasingly entered a global context.

Among the representative scholars in this field, the international planning historian Robert Freestone has maintained a sustained focus on planning heritage since 2000. He has not only established a relatively systematic theoretical foundation for the concept but also actively promoted the successful listing of the Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout on the Australian National Heritage List, providing an especially influential example for both theoretical research and conservation practice. A review of the literature nevertheless shows that Freestone and his colleagues have concentrated primarily on the conservation of planning heritage in Australia^[12-13] and have not extended their inquiry to a broader range of World Heritage properties. Research by other scholars^[14-15] has likewise centered mainly on representative national cases.

Overall, although the importance of planning-heritage research has become increasingly apparent, the limited body of scholarship still relies predominantly on individual cases. The absence of research based on a sufficiently large sample has made it difficult for the concept to gain broad consensus. The maturation of any new cultural-heritage concept depends on robust foundational research. Similarly, the continued development of planning-heritage studies requires empirical evidence of wider relevance, from which a stronger cognitive foundation and deeper theoretical insight can be derived.

2 Conceptual Interpretation and Research Object

With urban-planning value as its cultural core, planning heritage is a new urban-heritage concept formed through an examination of the distinctive spatial and cultural creativity of the urban-planning discipline. It encompasses the built-environment systems produced through intentional planning activity, together with the theoretical ideas and technical methods generated in that process. The material evidence and cultural imprints accumulated by these two dimensions ultimately produce forms of urban heritage endowed with specific planning values. This is the basic logical thread for understanding planning heritage. The decision to use World Heritage as the object of study and to approach planning heritage through urban-heritage properties rests on two considerations.

First, World Heritage represents the highest level of international heritage protection and is therefore highly representative and persuasive. The World Heritage List includes urban-heritage properties whose core significance is explicitly grounded in planning-heritage values, such as Brasília,

the capital of Brazil; Asmara, the capital of Eritrea; and the Swiss watchmaking towns of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle. From the perspective of value compatibility, a World Heritage property commonly embodies multiple heritage values, and planning heritage is also an indispensable component of many other properties, such as the historic city of Djémila in Algeria and the port city of Tarraco in Spain. Together, these two groups of cases provide a basis for objectively demonstrating the widespread presence of planning-heritage values in World Heritage properties.

Second, like all other forms of cultural heritage, planning heritage must have material carriers. Its value core shows that cities—the principal objects of urban-planning practice—are among the most concentrated manifestations of humanity’s spatial and cultural creativity. Urban heritage is therefore naturally an important outcome of planning heritage and should be a major focus of research. At present, planning heritage has not evolved from a theoretical academic concept into a clearly defined heritage type. Under these circumstances, a practical research strategy is to use diverse urban-heritage properties to build broader consensus around the concept.

3 Data Sources and Research Methods

3.1 Data Sources

The data were collected from the official World Heritage List published by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Collection was completed in December 2023 and covered 1,199 properties in 168 States Parties, thereby encompassing the entire List at that time. Five categories of information were gathered from each nomination dossier: the basic profile of the property, selection criteria, expressions of authenticity, expressions of integrity, and property components. For analytical purposes, the year of inscription, country and region, and geographic coordinates of each property were also recorded.

3.2 Research Methods

The methodological challenge was to identify, as objectively and comprehensively as possible, urban-heritage properties on the World Heritage List that contain planning value. Because World Heritage properties have highly complex value structures, the study established a four-step research procedure comprising list retrieval, close textual reading, value screening, and property extraction.

First, the text of each nomination dossier was processed to create a complete baseline database. Second, in accordance with the basic meaning of urban heritage, an initial selection was conducted by property location. A total of 792 urban-heritage properties were extracted, and their documentation was read individually to understand each property and identify evidence of planning-heritage value. Third, the five categories of collected text were searched against the six criteria for World Cultural Heritage, using Freestone’s planning-term list^① as a reference. Other professional terms strongly associated with planning heritage were then incorporated, and keywords capable of adequately expressing planning-heritage attributes were selected as search targets^②. Machine reading was used to obtain preliminary results. Fourth, every selected property was closely reread, checked, and verified; properties only weakly related to the research theme were removed, producing a dedicated planning-heritage database.

Using this method, 420 urban-heritage properties with planning-heritage values were extracted from the World Heritage List. Their shared planning-heritage characteristics provide an ample empirical sample. Two qualifications should be noted. First, because of the vast volume of text, data collection and analysis took nearly two years, and a small number of properties may have been overlooked; this does not materially affect the overall results. Second, some World Heritage properties

outside urban areas possess particular planning values, but because this article focuses on urban heritage, they were excluded from the database.

4 Research Findings

Planning heritage is a relatively recent theoretical concept in urban-heritage studies, and a number of fundamental questions remain open. Using information on geographic coordinates, inscription dates, and selection criteria, the following sections examine the spatial-temporal distribution of selected properties, their value criteria, their relationship with urban heritage, and the classification of planning heritage. The aim is to identify the issues and causes concealed within the data and to advance propositions for further discussion.

4.1 Structural Distribution and Development Trends

4.1.1 Regional and National Distribution

By region, Europe accounts for 192 selected properties, or 46% of the database, while Asia accounts for 123 properties, or 29%. Africa, North and South America, and Oceania contain substantially fewer properties: 37 in Africa (9%), 34 in North America and 32 in South America (approximately 16% combined), and only 2 in Oceania (less than 1%) (Fig.1).

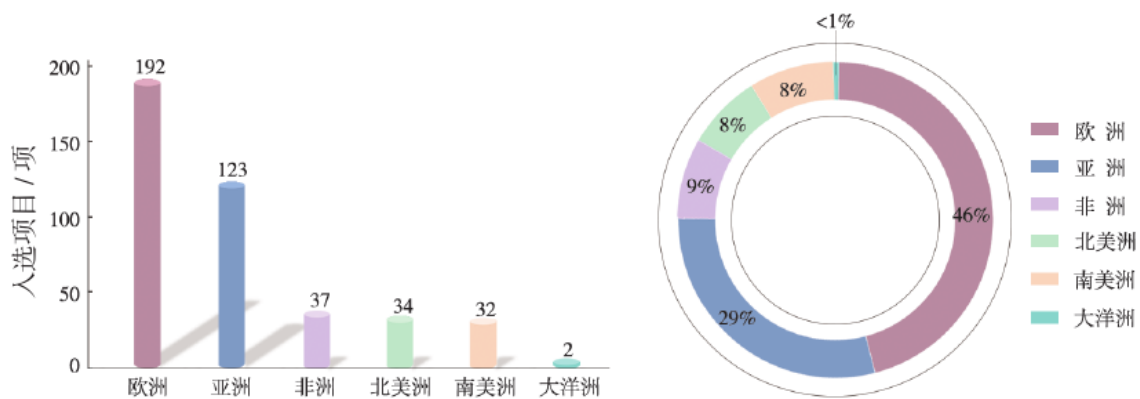


Fig.1 Distribution and proportion of selected projects in different regions

At the national level, the ten States Parties with the largest numbers of selected properties among the 112 represented in the database are shown in Fig.2. Italy ranks first with 28 properties, Mexico second with 20, and Spain and Brazil joint third with 19 each. Fifty-six States Parties, including Andorra and Armenia, have no properties in the database; twenty-seven of these had not yet inscribed any property on the World Heritage List.



Fig.2 Number of selected projects by each country (the top ten countries)

Overall, the selected properties are numerous and geographically extensive, confirming that planning-heritage value is not only an important component of World Heritage but also a widely relevant element of urban heritage. At the same time, the number and proportion of selected properties vary greatly among States Parties, reflecting marked differences in the recognition and conservation of planning-heritage value. China has 18 World Heritage properties in the database and ranks joint fifth with Iran among the 112 States Parties. Yet these properties represent only 32% of China's total World Heritage holdings, a relatively low proportion (Fig.3).

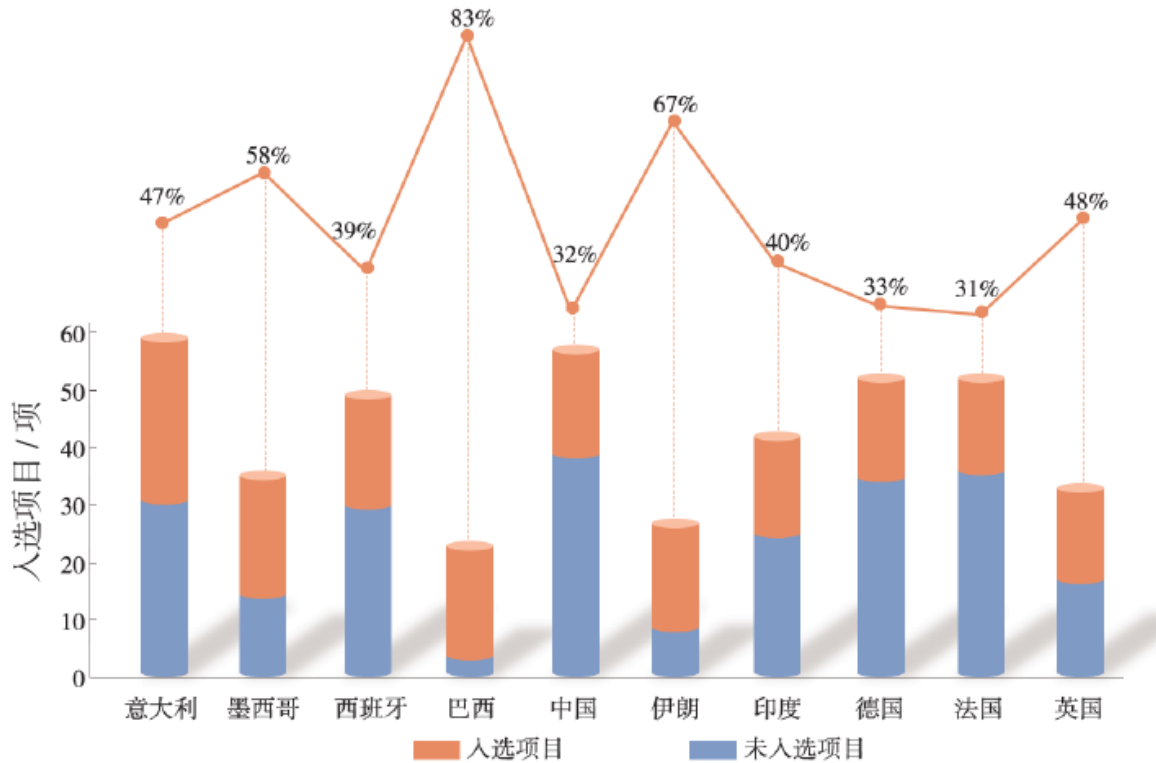


Fig.3 Proportion of selected projects and total world heritage in each country (the top ten countries)

These findings suggest that, within the discourse system of World Heritage, the planning-heritage values embedded in China's urban heritage remain underexplored. The Ancient City of Ping Yao illustrates this point. Its 1997 nomination dossier emphasized the representative value of the city's historic buildings^③, whereas the regional spatial structure described as "one city, five forts, and two fortified villages," together with an urban system integrating the productive, residential, and defensive functions of agrarian society^[16], received insufficient attention despite their close relationship to the distinctive wisdom of ancient Chinese urban planning.

The treatment of Ping Yao primarily as an architectural ensemble reveals the historically limited depth and importance accorded to planning-heritage value. Fundamentally, this is a question of value recognition, and similar conditions remain evident in the conservation of World Cultural Heritage properties, National Historic and Cultural Cities, and other forms of urban heritage. Only by strengthening planning-heritage research and developing a more professional cognitive foundation can values evolve, the concept gain greater attention, and foundational research fully demonstrate its practical significance.

4.1.2 Current Development and Future Trends

A review of inscription dates shows that, when the first twelve World Heritage properties were created in 1978, the only two historic cities among them—the City of Quito in Ecuador and the Historic Centre of Kraków in Poland—already embodied explicit planning-heritage values. In 1987, the inscription of Brasília marked the first appearance on the World Heritage List of an urban-heritage property whose principal nomination theme was urban-planning value. Since then, many properties rich in planning-heritage content have been inscribed, producing an overall trend of sustained development.

As Fig.4 shows, the number of properties in the database has remained generally stable but declined slightly after 2000, displaying a degree of periodic fluctuation. This pattern is related to the Cairns Decision adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2000, which limited each State Party already possessing World Heritage properties to one nomination per year. Although the revised decision of 2004 permitted two nominations, one had to be a natural property. The change in nomination rules is therefore an objective explanation for the overall decline.

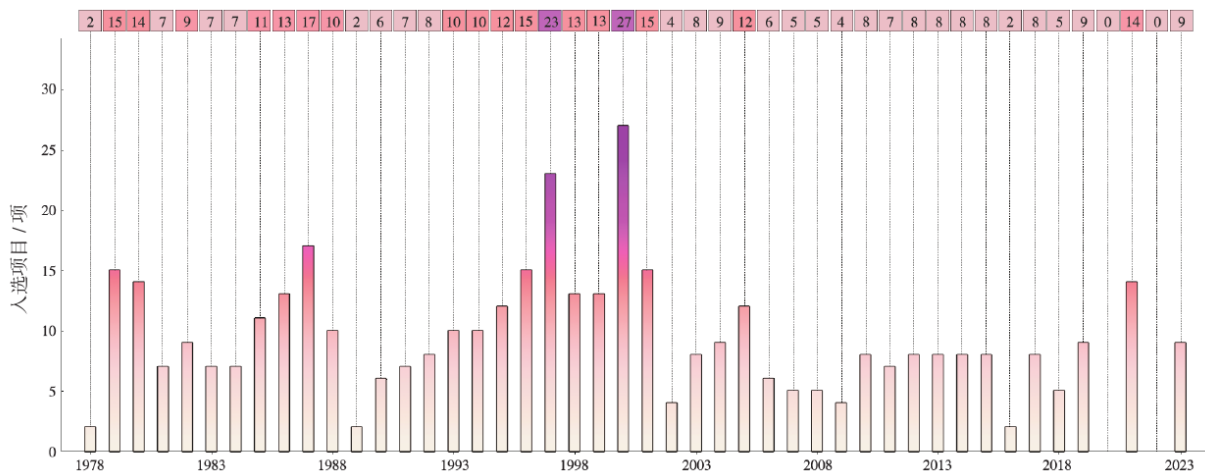


Fig.4 Statistics of project listing time and number

Internationally, recent instruments such as the Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture—Managing the Historic Urban Landscape^④ and the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape^⑤ have called for urban heritage to be viewed holistically, integrating built-environment elements with broader social, economic, and cultural factors into an organic heritage system. These ideas are highly compatible with planning heritage. Some conservation specialists argue that urban-heritage conservation in China is still commonly guided by “townscape conservation”^[17], with systems centered on historic character paying greater attention to the external environment^[18], while urban structure and spatial form are often treated merely as the backdrop to monuments or protected buildings^[19]. As conservation expands from individual buildings to the city as a whole, urban heritage can no longer be confined to monuments or landmark structures^[20]. Questions concerning the cultural-heritage value of urban structure and spatial form, and the integrity of the urban built environment, can and should be addressed through planning-heritage research.

Domestically, Chinese scholarship has produced a substantial body of landmark research on ancient, modern, and contemporary planning theory, cultural traditions, and technical methods. This work has strengthened the academic foundation of planning-heritage studies and subtly influenced World Heritage conservation. The trajectory extends from recognition of the creative spirit of urban construction in the 1997 Old Town of Lijiang nomination, through the 2012 interpretation of the ethnic-cultural significance of Chinese planning at the Site of Xanadu^⑥, to the comprehensive explanation of the traditional Chinese capital-planning paradigm in the 2024 Beijing Central Axis nomination^⑦. Qingdao has also recently proposed “an Asian model of livability under twentieth-

century new-town planning ideas” as the nomination theme for its historic urban area. All these cases demonstrate the importance and necessity of planning history and planning-heritage research.

This sequence shows that, in China’s World Heritage conservation process, planning-heritage values and their cultural meanings have become progressively clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive. It also indicates that strengthening the study of planning history and planning heritage through an approach of respecting, learning from, and drawing upon history can provide crucial support for World Heritage conservation practice.

4.2 Analysis of Selection Criteria and Their Reference Significance

The database was analyzed against the six criteria for World Cultural Heritage (Fig.5), with the results summarized in Tabs.1 and 2. Forty-eight properties, or approximately 11%, meet a single criterion; 194 properties, or 46%, meet two criteria; and 178 properties, or 43%, meet three or more. Aggregating the frequency of all six criteria shows that Criteria IV and II occur most often, in 317 and 263 properties respectively, accounting for 75% and 62% of the database.

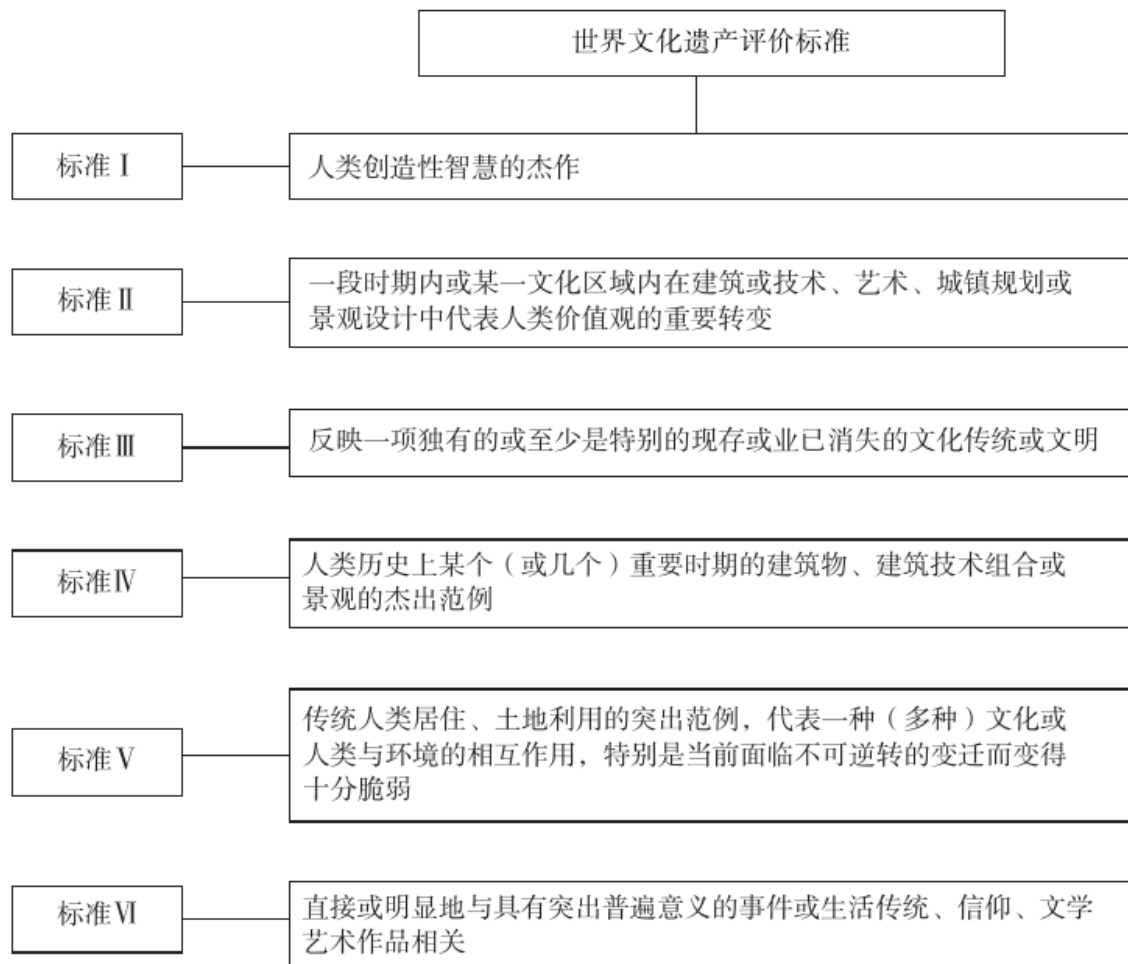


Fig.5 Six criteria for world cultural heritage

Tab.1 Summary of selection criteria

入选标准	项目数量 / 项	项目占比 / %
满足 1 条标准	48	11.4
满足 2 条标准	194	46.1
满足 3 条标准	122	29.0
满足 4 条标准	40	9.5
满足 5 条标准	15	3.8
满足 6 条标准	1	0.2

Tab.2 Summary of selection frequency

入选标准	出现频次 / 次	频次占比 / %
标准(I)	103	24.5
标准(II)	263	62.6
标准(III)	195	46.3
标准(IV)	317	75.4
标准(V)	74	17.6
标准(VI)	91	21.6

These results indicate that, within the World Cultural Heritage evaluation system, the selection criteria associated with planning-heritage value display three prominent characteristics: relative concentration, broad distribution, and multiple combinations. The reasons can be understood from three perspectives.

First, with respect to relative concentration, a close reading of the six criteria shows that Criterion II contains direct language specifically addressing urban-planning value, while the “outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape” in Criterion IV likewise embodies the spatial creativity of urban planning. Consistent with this interpretation, Criteria II and IV occur and combine far more frequently than the other four criteria, explaining the concentration of selected properties around these two criteria.

Second, examination of the distribution of the six criteria reveals a previously underappreciated issue of value boundaries. In contrast to the relatively explicit value domains of Criteria II and IV, the other four criteria cover much broader fields. Criterion V, for example, refers to an outstanding example of traditional human settlement, land use, or human interaction with the environment and therefore encompasses exceptionally rich meanings. As historical evidence of interaction between urban planning and the environment, planning-heritage value can also be interpreted through Criterion V. Thus, despite relative concentration, the selected criteria also show a distinctly diverse distribution across all six World Heritage criteria.

Finally, in terms of combination, many properties meet two or more mutually complementary criteria, producing diverse patterns of value aggregation. Calculating the relationships and frequencies of these combinations comprehensively reveals how the six criteria are combined. This both verifies the integrated value created by planning heritage and provides an experiential reference for

identifying the criteria to which planning-heritage values may correspond in future World Heritage nominations (Fig.6).

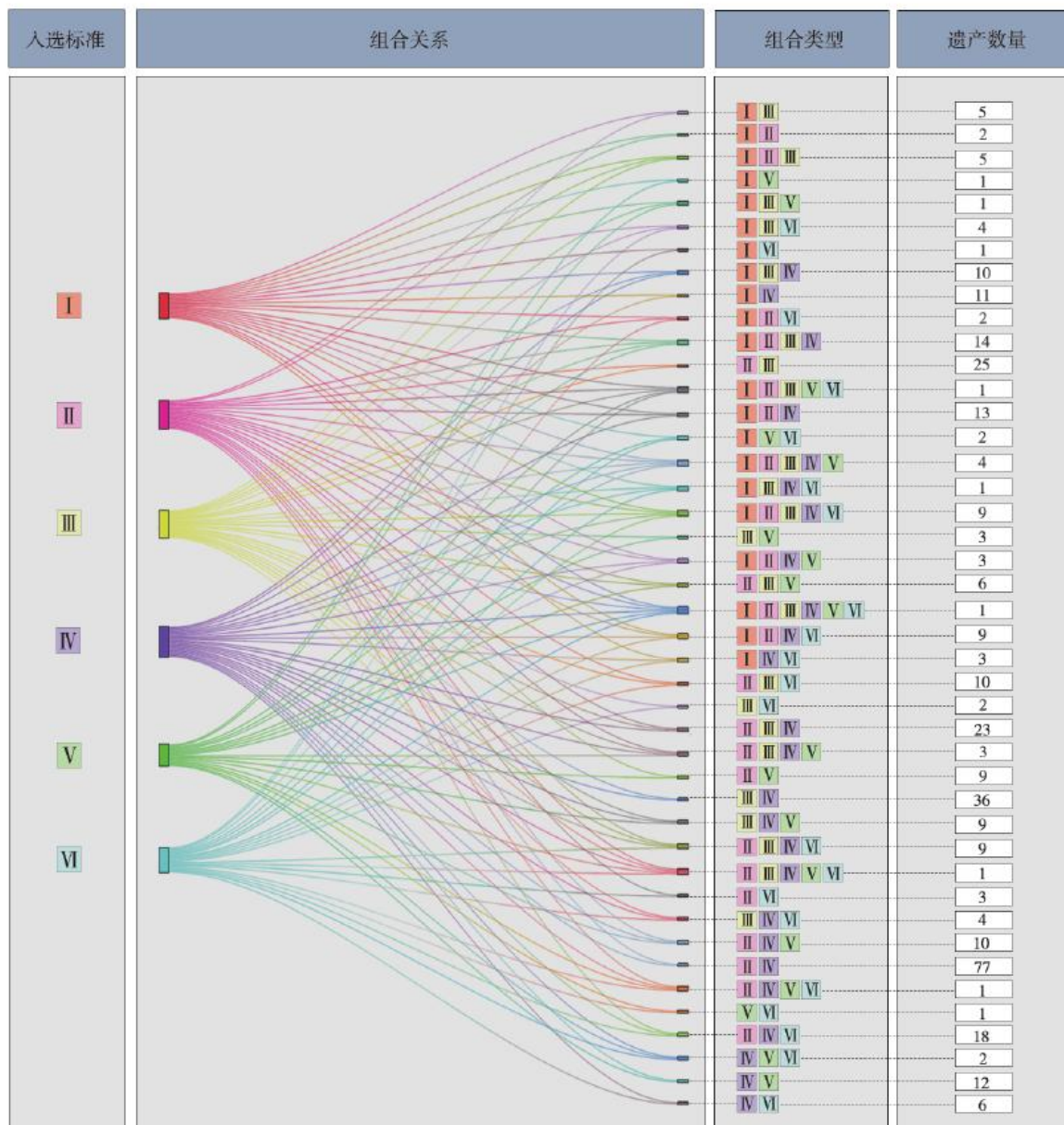


Fig.6 Statistics of criteria relations

Taken together, the findings correspond to three defining attributes of planning heritage: its dominant, extensible, and composite values. In future conservation practice, planning-heritage value should be used as an analytical point of departure in relation to the six World Heritage criteria. Research should identify the principal criteria while broadening its perspective and overcoming the traditional emphasis on material objects. Value elements that have been separated and fragmented should be transformed into a multidimensional whole. The historical, artistic, and scientific values of planning heritage, together with its broader political, economic, social, and cultural meanings, should be incorporated into a comprehensive interpretive framework aligned with all World Heritage criteria and capable of combining depth of understanding with breadth of perspective.

4.3 Relationship with Urban Heritage and Classification of Planning Heritage

4.3.1 Relationship with Urban Heritage

As a broad theoretical concept, urban heritage has two basic meanings. First, in a general sense, it refers to the various forms of historical and cultural heritage located in urban areas. Second, as an integrated concept, it understands urban heritage as a built-environment system with complete cultural meaning and as a new form of built heritage embodying holistic conservation content and systemic conservation objectives^[21]. To explore the value orientation of planning heritage, this study classified the database according to these two meanings.

Under the first meaning, the World Heritage List encompasses historic buildings and building ensembles, monuments, historic gardens, and other forms of built heritage. There are 381 such properties. Although their nomination dossiers generally emphasize architectural heritage, 105 properties—approximately 28%—explicitly interpret some form of planning value, demonstrating from different perspectives the planning-heritage content of each property (Fig.7).

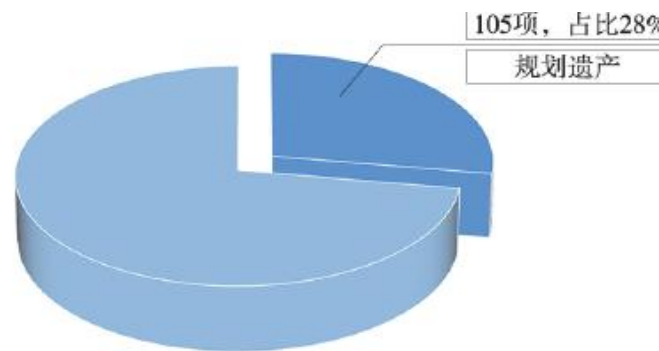


Fig.7 Urban heritage projects including historic buildings and building complexes, historic monuments, and historic gardens

Under the second, more integrated meaning, the database contains 363 properties at broader conservation scales, including historic centers, historic urban areas, and historic cities. Of these, 315 properties, or 87%, display planning-heritage attributes (Fig.8). Close reading of their nomination dossiers shows that the sections on authenticity and integrity commonly contain shared values relating to material space and urban-planning meaning, demonstrating the particularly strong planning-heritage character of these properties.

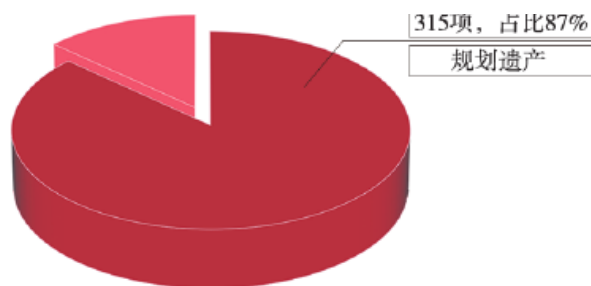


Fig.8 Integrated urban heritage projects including historic centers, historic urban areas, and historic cities

Many of these properties are also closely associated with planning ideas and planning cultures from different historical periods, particular planning events, or influential figures in planning history, producing highly distinctive planning-heritage themes.

Value recognition is the central issue in all cultural-heritage research. When urban heritage is examined only through a broad concept, its value profile can easily become blurred. In reality, urban-heritage conservation has long encompassed many values closely related to planning heritage. Yet

planning heritage has not been treated as a relatively independent heritage concept, and its identity has remained obscured by the greater visual recognizability of architectural heritage. This is the root of the problem. Once planning heritage is incorporated into World Heritage research, value discussion cannot remain at the level of broad and indistinct statements; it must identify the specific value attributes and themes carried by urban heritage.

In recent years, holistic recognition of historical and cultural value has become a professional consensus^[22], and both scholarship and practice increasingly emphasize integrated conservation. Yet there is still no consensus on how integrity should be understood or achieved^[23]. Urban planning is one of the most important technical means by which humanity creates urban heritage, and the value core of planning heritage lies precisely in the cultural meaning of constructing an “integrated” urban space. The statistical findings likewise show that the principal value orientation of planning heritage is to endow urban heritage with a holistic core distinct from other forms of cultural heritage.

Urban heritage is, of course, highly composite, commonly encompassing multiple heritage types and values. Throughout the formation and development of a city and its eventual recognition as cultural heritage, planning activities necessarily play a crucial role. Conversely, because urban heritage has broad connotations and extensions, different disciplines can excavate and interpret particular value themes within it and thereby redefine and reinterpret the concept from different perspectives. This process has continually expanded urban heritage over more than a century. The key insight from this dual analysis is that, if the city is understood as a practical outcome of human planning activity, urban heritage can likewise be understood as an external manifestation of planning heritage.

The point is that planning heritage is not merely a new heritage idea; it is also a question of value recognition bearing directly on the expansion of urban-heritage meaning. Its theoretical basis must be demonstrated through urban heritage, while analysis of the overall spatial order and cultural meaning of urban heritage likewise depends on planning-heritage research. The two therefore have an intersecting, nested, and mutually corroborating relationship. By reading nomination dossiers for a large body of urban-heritage cases on the World Heritage List, this study provides substantial empirical support for examining the value orientation of planning heritage. Given their close interaction, planning heritage is an indispensable component of urban heritage and should be incorporated into urban-heritage conservation systems as a constituent type, thereby contributing to the protection, inheritance, and development of urban-planning culture with Chinese characteristics.

4.3.2 Classification of Planning Heritage

Planning-heritage research has accumulated a certain academic foundation, but classification has received little discussion and now constrains further theoretical and practical development. Cultural heritage is generally divided into tangible and intangible heritage. From the perspective of value cognition, however, planning heritage emphasizes the logical relationship between physical space and planning meaning and the reciprocal influence of planning action and its outcomes. It is therefore an integrated concept combining tangible and intangible heritage. Its constituent elements include values that the two traditional categories cannot fully encompass, and, because theoretical research remains insufficient, it may also contain value domains that have yet to be identified. The principal purpose of classification is therefore to create additional space for the expansion of planning-heritage values.

Like other cultural-heritage concepts, the classification of planning heritage is shaped by the subjectivity of cognition and represents a particular relationship between people and heritage. In theory, any built environment created through human planning activity may fall within the concept, making its constituent system necessarily vast and complex. To establish a limited and workable

structure, this study synthesizes the value domains embodied in the six World Cultural Heritage criteria and draws on other heritage-classification approaches. Planning heritage can be classified along three basic dimensions. First, using chronology as in conventional classifications of built heritage, it can be divided into ancient planning heritage, modern and contemporary planning heritage, and historically layered planning heritage. Second, in terms of the state of cultural continuity emphasized in World Heritage, it can be divided into planning remains and living planning heritage. Third, according to the thematic characteristics of properties in the database, it includes a rich range of types such as comprehensive urban planning, regional planning, residential-area planning, and industrial-area planning.

Developing a classification is necessary if planning heritage is to mature from a theoretical concept into a constituent type of urban heritage and become applicable in conservation practice. Different scholars will inevitably formulate classifications differently. As foundational research advances, planning heritage should establish an open and extensible classification mechanism. The three approaches proposed here are preliminary and are offered for discussion. Future research should supplement and refine them, communicate the diversity of planning heritage, enrich the meaning of urban heritage, and provide useful references for theory and conservation practice.

5 Conclusions and Prospects

The study reaches three principal conclusions. First, urban-heritage properties with planning-heritage value are numerous and account for a substantial proportion of the World Heritage List, while the total number and proportion of such properties vary markedly among States Parties. Second, as understanding has deepened, planning-heritage value has received increasing attention in China's World Heritage conservation practice and has become an important point of entry and focus for interpreting the cultural meaning of urban heritage. Third, planning-heritage value is especially prominent in urban-heritage properties characterized by integrated conservation. Given the close relationship between planning heritage and urban heritage, examining the possibility of treating planning heritage as a constituent urban-heritage type, and further considering its classification, has practical significance for the development of both fields.

Two basic conditions are required to advance planning-heritage research. One is the foundational support of planning-history studies; the other is sustained integration between urban-rural planning and heritage studies. The emergence of every cultural-heritage type is a cognitive process in which a new concept develops into a complete value system. To demonstrate the importance of planning heritage, research must be rooted in the discipline's own knowledge system, establish a value profile corresponding to the scope of urban-planning knowledge, and identify, demonstrate, and present planning-heritage values through professional methods. Only then can the concept acquire sufficient interpretive authority and discursive power.

Research concerning cultural continuity and historical conservation has attracted growing attention in recent years^[24-25]. Although planning heritage has not yet become a clearly recognized heritage type, many urban-heritage properties contain rich planning-heritage content and may be said to possess its substance without its name. Establishing the concept and achieving broad social recognition will require thematic studies of representative properties in China and abroad that display distinctive planning values. Only through sustained effort and a large body of empirical cases can the concept be understood more scientifically, deeply, and comprehensively. The ultimate objective is to create a systematic theoretical framework centered on planning-heritage value and encompassing conservation standards, content, and methods, thereby enabling the concept to be applied in urban

conservation practice. Such work will promote interdisciplinary integration between urban planning and heritage studies at the levels of values and methodology.

In summary, the core significance of planning-heritage research lies in its capacity to reveal the logic of the creation, generation, and development of urban space from holistic and systemic perspectives. It thereby provides theoretical support for identifying, understanding, and protecting the universal and particular planning values embedded in urban heritage. Its long-term significance should also not be overlooked: the concept of planning heritage is undoubtedly the most professional scientific route through which the urban-planning discipline can communicate its capacity to create cultural heritage.

Recognizing this point makes clear that, by engaging directly with planning heritage and shifting its identity from a “tool of heritage conservation” to a “subject of heritage creation,” the urban-planning discipline can achieve greater visibility of its value within the heritage field and exert a broader cultural influence.

Notes

- ① The planning-term list is derived from Reference [2]. On the basis of a detailed account of the selection criteria and evaluation indicators used for Australian national planning-heritage properties, Freestone compiled a list of professional terms suitable for identifying planning-heritage value. Terms expressing “major historical events and stories with a planning dimension,” for example, include settlement, substantiation, and urban infrastructure. These terms provided an important reference for selecting planning-heritage properties in this study.
- ② Combining Freestone’s terminology with close reading and semantic analysis of each World Heritage nomination dossier, the study further selected urban (city, town) planning, urban (city, town) fabric, urban (city, town) form, urban (city, town) layout, zoning, townscape, and space pattern as search keywords. As the smallest units used to quantify textual themes, these terms express specific planning-heritage values and provide a feasible method for selecting properties from World Heritage nomination dossiers.
- ③ In 1997, the International Council on Monuments and Sites issued its evaluation of the nomination of the Ancient City of Ping Yao. The document explained in detail the city’s architectural history, structures, technologies, and styles, emphasizing its architectural-heritage value.
- ④ In 2005, the World Heritage Committee adopted the Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture—Managing the Historic Urban Landscape. It described urban heritage as the totality of any group of buildings, urban structures, and open spaces within their natural and ecological setting. This definition incorporated a broader range of conservation elements and greatly expanded both the objects and meaning of urban-heritage conservation.
- ⑤ In 2011, UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in Paris. It defined the historic urban landscape as an urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes. By viewing the city as a dynamic accumulation of historical processes and attending to the forms and developmental characteristics of different periods, the concept exceeded earlier value frameworks and provided new theoretical and methodological guidance for comprehensively examining urban-heritage integrity within broader historical, natural, and cultural contexts.
- ⑥ In the 2012 UNESCO nomination dossier for the Site of Xanadu, the property’s outstanding universal value and distinctive value were comprehensively interpreted against the World Cultural Heritage criteria. The planning model of Xanadu was described as an organic integration of the

settlement patterns of northern nomadic peoples and the Han society of the Central Plains, and as an outstanding urban example combining agrarian civilization with grassland culture, giving it a unique position in the histories of world civilization and urban planning.

- ⑦ In 2024, at its 46th session, the World Heritage Committee inscribed China's nomination "Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital" on the World Heritage List. Corresponding to Criteria III and IV, the nomination comprehensively and systematically explained the planning concept and configuration of the Beijing Central Axis and its rich philosophical, ritual, and historical meanings.

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