

The Origin of Folk Culture in Bengbu Ancient Folk House Exposition Park

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Abstract: Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park is an important cultural heritage protection and display base in Bengbu City, Anhui province, which showcases the essence of traditional Chinese folk houses. Through the combination of online investigation and field investigation, this paper conducts an in-depth study on the development overview, current situation, and future development trend of ancient folk houses in the Expo Park, discusses the methods to promote the protection and development of ancient folk houses, and points out the possible problems and challenges. By showing the actual situation and concrete examples of the Expo Park, this paper aims to let more people know about traditional folk culture and deepen their understanding of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park; Folk culture; Preservation of ancient buildings

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1. Introduction

Under the impact of the modernization process, traditional ancient houses are facing the crisis of disappearing gradually ^[1]. Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park, as a place to display and protect ancient folk houses, provides a valuable resource and platform for the study and promotion of Chinese traditional folk house culture. This paper will focus on the theme of “Exploring the Source of Folk Culture in Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park”, study the development overview, current situation and future development trend of ancient folk houses in the Expo Park, explore ways to promote the protection and development of ancient folk houses, and point out possible problems and challenges.

2. Overview of Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park

Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park is located in Bengbu City, Anhui Province, covering an area of 5,000 mu (about 3.4 million square meters), initiated by Shanghai Xiangjiang Industrial Co., Ltd in 2012. Bengbu Ancient Folk

Houses Expo Park is a comprehensive cultural park integrating the protection, display, research, and education of ancient folk houses. The project saves and restores 450 typical ancient folk houses from all over the country by means of remote reconstruction. Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park not only preserves the artistic value of traditional Chinese architecture but also provides a platform for the public to understand and experience the traditional way of life and is an important window for the public to understand the culture of ancient Chinese folk houses.

2.1. Background and initiation of the project

In response to the reality that numerous ancient structures have been torn down during urbanization, Mr. Ma Guoxiang, the creator of Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park, launched this initiative, driven by his passion for traditional culture and his commitment to preserving historical architecture. Mr. Ma Guoxiang put forward the idea of “saving ancient houses is not for collection, but for inheriting lifestyle and culture”, and rebuilt historical houses through scientific and rigorous methods, and faithfully restored their original production and life scenes, so that visitors can feel the charm of traditional life in an immersive way.

2.2. The challenge of protecting the heritage of ancient folk houses

As urbanization and modernization proceed at a faster pace, numerous historical structures and traditional lifestyles are at risk of vanishing. This is particularly evident during the renovation of old neighborhoods and municipal development, where many buildings rich in historical and cultural significance have either been torn down or damaged. Balancing the protection of these heritage sites with the developmental demands of contemporary society has emerged as a pressing issue that requires immediate attention ^[2].

The conventional approach to cultural heritage preservation emphasizes on-site protection, which involves restoring and safeguarding structures in their original locations whenever possible. Nevertheless, because of the constraints imposed by urban expansion and land availability, protecting heritage sites in their original positions is often unattainable in numerous scenarios ^[3]. Additionally, advancements in modern technology and evolving conservation philosophies have opened up opportunities for reconstructing cultural heritage at alternative locations ^[4].

Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park adopts the strategy of reconstruction in different places. When the original buildings cannot be protected in their original locations, endangered and precious historical houses, ancestral halls, stages, and other ancient buildings scattered in urban and rural areas are collected and reconstructed in different places through scientific and rigorous methods. This method not only preserves the material form of the ancient buildings but also restores their original production and life scenes so that visitors can experience the traditional life personally ^[5].

The approach to conserving structures through remote reconstruction encounters numerous challenges during implementation. These include issues such as the deterioration of architectural elements, the intricacy of restoration techniques, and variations in restoration environments. When a building undergoes deconstruction and reconstruction, each component must be labeled and documented to ensure precise reassembly at the new location. Additionally, the preservation and restoration of construction materials play a crucial role, particularly for valuable resources like wood and stone, which require specialized handling and protection.

Bengbu Ancient Residence Expo Park has a “restoration workshop” and “construction collection museum”, gathering hundreds of craftsmen to display and repair various ancient architectural components, folk articles,

exquisite wood carvings, etc., collected over the past 30 years. All the buildings and their components are restored in the restoration workshop and then moved to the park to build, thus ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the architectural restoration. At present, the restoration workshop has completed all the restoration of 450 ancient residential components and has built more than 300 transported to the garden for restoration.

In the area of material preservation, the Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park employs a restoration technique that integrates traditional methods with modern approaches. The wooden and masonry elements undergo scientific treatments for anti-corrosion and pest resistance to enhance their longevity. For severely damaged parts, skilled artisans utilize traditional craftsmanship to restore them, ensuring that both their artistic and historical significance are maintained. Additionally, advanced technologies like 3D scanning and printing have been incorporated to reconstruct intricate components precisely.

Due to the environmental differences between the original site and the current location, it is crucial to consider how ancient structures can adapt to their new surroundings during reconstruction. The Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park carefully evaluates natural elements such as soil and climate to ensure that the reconstructed buildings effectively acclimate to their new environment. Additionally, to enhance the stability of the structures, the project team carried out necessary reinforcements and improvements to both the foundation and framework while maintaining the traditional architectural appearance. This approach guarantees the safety and durability of the buildings in their revised setting.

2.3. Typical building cases in the park

The first set of restored ancient residences: This is a reception center combining two Ming Dynasty buildings, covering an area of 1,500 square meters, which retains the traditional architectural structure and aesthetic (hanging ancient plaques and old-fashioned furniture) and conveys the traditional charm of China. At the same time, according to the needs of modern life, air conditioning, underfloor heating, Internet, and kitchen facilities have been installed to ensure the convenience of use.

Qimen Ancestral Hall: The original building is the ancestral hall of the Ni Sihui family in Qimen, Anhui Province, which was built in the Ming Dynasty. The original building area is more than 800 square meters, and the area is expanded to 3000 square meters after restoration. The original building forward stone columns stand on the ring, the eaves are high, the patio is open, and the momentum is magnificent, and the rear jin is no longer there because of disrepair and serious damage. After the restoration, the ancient opera stage was built in the rear, and side halls, guest rooms, and courtyards were added on both sides. Now, it is used as an academy to spread academy culture so that traditional culture can come to people's side from classical books, and feel the humanistic connotation of traditional Chinese culture represented by "academy."

An ancient village in southern Fujian: composed of 7 old houses of the Yan and CAI ethnic groups and one ancestral hall of the Yan family, which is 500 years old, it was rescued from an ancient village in Quanzhou, southern Fujian. The first name of the village is Yan family, and it is the descendants of Yan Hui, a great disciple of Confucius. The complex records the deeds of ancient sages and also witnesses the beginning of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Jiangxi Ye Clan Ancestral Hall: Built in the 14th year of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty (1888) in Leping, Jiangxi Province, it is a two-story brick-and-wood structure with spacious halls and spacious corridors. It is a rare indoor ancient opera stage. When it was rebuilt, a dressing room and other auxiliary rooms were added behind the entrance of the main entrance. Now, it is the national intangible cultural heritage flower drum lantern and Sizhou

opera teaching base.

Shanghai Shikumen: Covering an area of 300 square meters, it is named “Shikumen” because it uses stone as the door frame and black lacquer solid thick wood as the door fan. It is a combination of Chinese and Western architecture and is the most distinctive residential house in Shanghai during the Republic of China. The restoration of Shikumen not only expresses nostalgia for the traditional way of life but also expresses historical respect for the Communist Party of China.

3. The current situation of Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park

3.1. Layout and architectural features of the park

The ancient residential buildings in the Bengbu Ancient Residential Buildings Exposition Park come from 17 provinces and cities (Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Shanxi, Henan, Shanghai, Shaanxi, etc.), among which many ancient residential buildings have experienced wind and rain for more than 500 years. The park as a whole is in the shape of a “dragon”, and the architectural layout not only reflects the inheritance of traditional culture but also integrates modern aesthetics and functional needs.

The Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Exposition Park showcases a significant collection of traditional ancient residences. These structures are arranged in a dispersed pattern, featuring both standalone buildings and integrated architectural complexes. Each historic dwelling preserves its original architectural style and features, from the roof tiles to the intricate brick carvings on the walls, as well as the courtyard layouts and interior decorations, all of which highlight the distinctive allure of ancient Chinese architecture. The park’s design thoughtfully combines aesthetic appeal with functionality, organizing the architectural clusters into distinct exhibition zones based on chronological and regional themes. For instance, the central island in the lake accommodates over 230 ancient structures representing various periods and regions, while the other five islands exhibit diverse thematic designs and architectural styles. As visitors explore the park, they can appreciate the unique architectural details and gain deeper insights into the folk cultures of different areas through exhibitions and interactive experiences.

Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park focuses on preserving and promoting traditional crafts. Within the park, numerous workshops dedicated to traditional skills, such as wood carving and brick carving, can be found. Here, artisans not only engage in restoring ancient structures but also impart the core techniques of these crafts to younger generations, ensuring their continuity across time. These workshops welcome visitors, who can witness firsthand the artisans’ demonstrations and hands-on processes. This experience allows guests to connect more deeply with the allure of traditional crafts, fostering greater appreciation and admiration for cultural heritage.

Bengbu Ancient Residence Expo Park collaborates with a variety of cultural and commercial organizations to continually bring in new content. Within the park, significant intellectual property projects have been established, including the Jackie Chan Environmental Art Exhibition Hall, Yang Liping Art Island, and the Beckham Football Museum. These initiatives achieve a seamless fusion of culture and commerce, which not only enriches the park’s cultural depth but also generates substantial commercial advantages.

3.2. Protection and restoration work

In the Bengbu Ancient Folk House Exposition Park, preserving and restoring the historical structures has consistently been the primary focus. To maintain the authentic appearance of these ancient houses, the park has implemented several strategies. These include engaging a specialized team for ancient building restoration,

utilizing traditional construction materials and methods, and conducting routine upkeep. Thanks to these initiatives, the ancient dwellings within the park have been successfully integrated into contemporary society. Hui-style residences are renowned for their distinctive architectural features and superior craftsmanship. Within the Expo Park, the restoration of Hui folk houses is executed with exceptional precision. Particular emphasis is placed on retaining the original construction materials and artisanal techniques. For instance, during the restoration of the Ma Tou walls, craftsmen employed traditional bricklaying methods to ensure consistency with the original design. Similarly, when repairing ornately carved beams and painted structures, skilled carvers replicated the damaged sections using the original patterns and methods, thereby restoring them to their former splendor.

3.3. Display of folk culture

Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park not only invests a lot of energy in architectural protection but also devotes itself to the display of folk culture. There are a number of folk culture exhibition halls in the expo park, which provide visitors with a comprehensive understanding of ancient people's lifestyles, traditional customs, and cultural inheritance through physical exhibitions, graphic introductions, and interactive experiences. These displays not only enrich the cultural connotation of the expo park but also provide visitors with a rare cultural experience.

The park has implemented a series of well-planned cultural promotion activities, including the launch of cultural and creative works, festival celebrations, and the release of solar term push. During traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, the park has specially launched limited-edition cultural creations closely related to the festival theme. The park often organizes various celebration activities, such as the Lantern Festival of the Spring Festival and the research activities of the Mid-Autumn Festival, so that visitors can have a deeper understanding of the cultural connotation and customs of traditional festivals. The park distributes free tickets widely in traditional festivals and major holidays, such as the Spring Festival and Dragon Boat Festival, so that more people have the opportunity to enter the park and feel the charm of folk culture. At the arrival of each solar term, the park will release the corresponding solar term culture promotion through the form of pictures to introduce the knowledge of solar terms to tourists, deepening their understanding of traditional culture.

The park not only attracts visitors through exhibitions and activities but also pays special attention to interactive experiences and educational activities. There are several interactive experience areas in the expo park, where visitors can take part in the restoration of ancient buildings by themselves or learn about the lifestyle of ancient people through simulated situations. In addition, the Expo Park also actively cooperates with local schools and cultural institutions, often holding cultural lectures and research activities, inviting famous masters to give on-site lectures, popularize knowledge of ancient folk culture, and enhance the public's awareness of cultural heritage protection.

4. Opportunities and challenges for the development of the Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park

4.1. Cultural tourism technology helps the leapfrog development of ancient folk houses

As cultural tourism continues to evolve rapidly, ancient dwellings, serving as a vital cultural resource, are expected to assume greater significance in the future ^[6]. On the one hand, by collaborating with travel agencies to create and promote unique tour itineraries, the Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park can draw in a larger number of visitors. Simultaneously, through the development of nearby tourist attractions, it can boost the local economy

and facilitate the convergence of cultural tourism and economic growth ^[7]. For example, the expo park can cooperate with local tourism companies to design a tour route themed on ancient folk house culture. The route not only includes visits within the expo park but can also be extended to the surrounding historical and cultural sites, allowing tourists to enjoy historical and cultural features during their trip. On the other hand, in the era of information, digital innovation has opened up novel avenues for safeguarding and promoting ancient folk houses ^[8]. The Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park can leverage digital tools to perform 3D scanning and modeling of these structures, create digital records, and ensure their enduring conservation ^[9]. Additionally, interactive experience programs can be designed using virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, enabling a broader audience to explore and appreciate the culture of ancient folk houses via the Internet ^[10]. For example, the Expo Park can actively cooperate with universities and scientific research institutions to conduct three-dimensional scanning and modeling of ancient residential buildings in the park and establish detailed digital archives to record the appearance, internal structure, and detailed restoration and maintenance process of ancient residential buildings. The park can also develop VR experience projects so that visitors can roam the park in the virtual world and see the details of each ancient residence more closely, breaking away from the space restrictions and stepping in person ^[11].

In the context of globalization, enhancing external exchanges and collaboration plays a crucial role in the preservation and development of ancient dwellings. First, the expo park can incorporate advanced conservation philosophies and technologies by partnering with international cultural heritage protection organizations and academic institutions, thereby elevating the standard of protection for ancient residences. Additionally, international academic conferences and exhibitions can be organized to display the cultural significance of traditional Chinese houses and foster cross-cultural interactions between China and other countries. Second, the Expo Park can collaborate with universities and research institutes to conduct studies and educational programs focused on ancient architecture and folk culture. This not only enhances the academic standing of the expo park but also nurtures more specialized talents, providing intellectual resources for the sustainable preservation and development of ancient folk dwellings. For example, the expo park can regularly hold academic seminars on ancient architecture and folk culture, invite experts and scholars from home and abroad to exchange and discuss, and provide valuable suggestions and guidance for the protection and development of ancient folk houses ^[12]. The park can also cooperate with colleges and universities to offer courses on the protection and restoration of ancient buildings, train professionals, and provide support for the protection and development of ancient houses.

4.2. Adopt a multi-pronged approach to ensure the sustainable development of ancient dwellings

In terms of policies, the protection and development of ancient dwellings need the government's policy support and capital investment. The government can facilitate the preservation and upkeep of ancient dwellings by establishing pertinent protective regulations and allocating dedicated funding. Additionally, businesses and individuals can be motivated to engage in the conservation and development of these historical homes through incentives like tax breaks and financial subsidies. Implementing such policies can help alleviate the financial strain on the expo park while also encouraging greater involvement from the public in safeguarding ancient residences.

In terms of society, the protection and development of ancient dwellings need the joint efforts of the whole society. The expo park can enhance collaboration with local communities and encourage greater social involvement in the preservation and development of historic houses through the organization of community events

and volunteer service initiatives. Additionally, public education programs can be conducted to raise awareness about cultural heritage conservation, thereby fostering a positive environment of widespread participation and collective protection^[13]. For example, the expo park can set up a publicity point for ancient folk houses in the community, and hold lectures and exhibitions regularly to introduce the history and cultural value of ancient folk houses to residents; Community residents can also be invited to participate in the management and maintenance of the expo park, so that they can personally experience the protection work of ancient dwellings. Through these activities, community residents can not only enhance their awareness of cultural heritage protection but also enhance their sense of identity and belonging to the expo park.

In terms of the park itself, in addition to improving its hard power in operation, management, and other aspects, it can also carry out publicity and promotion through various channels to improve its soft power and spread the unique cultural charm and connotation of ancient dwellings. The expo park can carry out various forms of publicity activities by means of modern media such as video platforms, WeChat public account, community forum, etc., to improve the visibility and influence of ancient residences. At the same time, the park can also establish cooperative relations with mainstream video platforms such as Bilibili, iQiyi, Tencent Video, etc., and use the algorithm recommendation mechanism of the video platform to accurately deliver the documentary to the target audience and improve the communication effect. In addition, the expo park can also make use of social media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo and Xiaohongshu to accurately locate the user characteristics of each platform, formulate differentiated publicity, and build an all-round and multi-level publicity matrix: Release creative short videos on Douyin to show the unique charm of ancient houses; Conduct topic discussions on Weibo to guide the public to pay attention to the protection and cultural inheritance of ancient residences; And sharing travel tips and time-clocking points on Xiaohongshu to stimulate tourists' desire to travel^[14]. All in all, the expo park should make full use of the power of modern media and social media platforms, innovate publicity methods, deepen cultural experience, and promote the inheritance and development of ancient folk house culture.

4.3. Problems and challenges

Although Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park has achieved remarkable results in the protection of ancient architectural cultural heritage and the dissemination of traditional folk culture, it also faces some problems and challenges.

First of all, there is the problem of funding. The preservation and upkeep of historic structures demand significant financial resources, particularly due to the expense of utilizing certain specialized materials and techniques. Consequently, finding ways to draw in more private investments and public contributions poses a major challenge for museums.

Then, there is the issue of technology. The preservation and restoration of historic structures demands a high level of expertise and experience. This is particularly true when dealing with valuable and intricate buildings, as they require meticulous and scientifically sound approaches. Ensuring the authenticity of the structure while conducting scientific preservation and restoration remains a crucial technical challenge.^[15] Consequently, enhancing collaboration with domestic and international institutions to advance conservation techniques represents an essential focus for future endeavors at the expo park.

Finally, there is the issue of social cognition. While the public's understanding of cultural heritage preservation is slowly improving, the overall awareness remains relatively low. Many individuals still lack a thorough comprehension of the significance and practical approaches to protecting cultural heritage. Enhancing

public awareness and engagement in cultural heritage protection remains an issue that requires resolution. Consequently, the expo park must continuously strive towards reinforcing public education and outreach through diverse methods to boost participation and backing from the community.

5. Conclusion

The Bengbu Ancient Folk House Expo Park serves as a crucial hub for showcasing and preserving Chinese traditional folk house culture. It offers a significant opportunity to delve deeper into the study of ancient folk house culture, thanks to its extensive architectural heritage and vibrant displays of folk traditions. By conducting both online research and on-site investigations of the Bengbu Ancient Folk House Expo Park, the researchers can gain insights into the historical evolution and current state of numerous ancient folk houses, as well as examine their potential future directions. With the backing of government policies, active involvement from the public, and the persistent endeavors of the expo park itself, the conservation and advancement of ancient folk houses are poised to embrace a brighter future.

The successful experience of the Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park shows that ancient folk houses are not only an important part of the material cultural heritage but also an important carrier of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Through in-depth exploration and continuous innovation, researchers can better protect and develop the ancient folk houses culture, let more people understand and love this valuable cultural heritage, and then promote the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

In short, exploring the source of folk culture in Bengbu Ancient Folk Houses Expo Park is not only to protect the ancient folk houses themselves, but also to inherit and promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Through continuous exploration and efforts, the authors have reason to believe that the ancient folk house culture will radiate new vitality in the modern society and become a cultural bridge connecting the past and the future.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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