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## Heritage Research

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**Abstract**

The Ancient City of Pingyao, established in 1368 during the Ming Dynasty, is a prototype of ancient Han Chinese cities, and is an excellent example with which to explore the social system and physical planning in late imperial China. A successful financial city in the Qing Dynasty and a living city during the communist era, Pingyao was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. The city's new role as a domestic and international tourism destination has yielded unique social and cultural impacts. These are the subject of this dissertation.

The order of nature and the power of religion dominated the original layout of the 2.25 square kilometer city. The symmetrical arrangement of its traditional anchor elements, such as religious structures, municipal buildings, and commercial streets, represented the ritual canons, lifestyle and belief system of the people living within. Historically, the character of the traditional anchor elements created a unique morphology in the surrounding region. Functional changes to the traditional anchor elements in different political eras fostered morphological changes to the land utilization patterns surrounding these elements. Pingyao's place identity persists in the pattern and content of the extant traditional anchor elements, and these contextualize the lives of contemporary residents. Traditional anchor elements were places to cultivate local culture, a sense of place and residents identity, and today they serve as a repository of collective memory among local residents across the powerful social transformations experienced in China.

In recent years, tourism-driven development has been given priority in the historic city. Tourists encounter a city whose material authenticity is profoundly shaped by contemporary interventions. Authenticity is now staged for the edification of tourists. The spatial structure surrounding the traditional elements consequently has changed. In addition, the imposition of new functions upon traditional anchor elements has transformed their roles in local imagery and identity. The tourism-driven interpretation of local history today jeopardizes continuity in localized cultural meanings and practices.

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