International Conservation Training Course
UNESCO World Heritage Site, Pingyao Ancient City, Shanxi Province, PRC
Oct 26th – 31st 2008

Group photo of participants.
Front row left to right: Ms. Kuanghan Li, GHF China Program Manager; Mr. Lei Xinping, Deputy Magistrate of Pingyao County; Mr. John Hurd, Director of GHF International Conservation; Mr. Li Jinsheng, Chief Planner of Shanxi Province Ministry of Construction; Mr. Ji Taiping, Director of Pingyao County Planning Bureau
BACKGROUND

Pingyao Ancient City in Shanxi, China (UNESCO inscribed 1997) is considered to be the first banking capital of China. Pingyao was the central bank for much of the Silk Road trade during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The city of Pingyao is one of only two Chinese ancient cities with UNESCO World Heritage status. With over 40,000 low-income residents living within its ancient walls, Pingyao is facing unprecedented pressures and deterioration of its core historic Qing Dynasty district and last remaining historic religious, administrative, commercial and residential buildings.

Global Heritage Fund (GHF), in partnership with the Pingyao County Government, is working to create a multi-year program to better preserve the priceless cultural heritage of Pingyao Ancient City in more comprehensive and systematic approaches. Promoting economic opportunities for the surrounding poor communities is also being pursued through the development of sustainable tourism. By providing critically needed planning, funding, and expertise, GHF has supported the master planning and authentic restorations of selective traditional courtyard houses with local families. In addition, GHF is aiming to establish new artisan and community complexes in the ancient city.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the conservation training course supported and co-organized by GHF and the Pingyao County Urban and Rural Planning Bureau (PYPB) as part of the GHF Pingyao Cultural Heritage Development Program. The aim of the training course is to raise awareness in conservation concepts, principles and techniques amongst local officials and ground staffs who are directly responsible for the conservation of Pingyao Ancient City.

Participants for the course included personnel from the Shanxi Province Urban and Rural Planning Society (SXPS), Pingyao County Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, Cultural Heritage Bureau (PYCHB), Tourism Bureau (PYTB), private tourism industry operators and craftsmen specializing in ancient architecture construction and restoration (see Appendix 1 for...
After visiting Pingyao and its famed earthen city wall in August 2008, John Hurd, one of the world’s leading specialists in the conservation of earthen construction, believed that a training course in basic conservation theories and techniques can greatly help the local staffs responsible in the care and maintenance of this invaluable world heritage city.

The program for the training course was then designed with feedback from the Pingyao government. The course commenced with a pre-course meeting on Oct 26th. John Hurd, accompanied by GHF staff, Kuanghan Li and Suliang Zhou, met with Mr. Li Jinsheng, Chief Planner of the Shanxi Province Ministry of Construction, together with planners from both the Provincial and Pingyao county levels. Exchanges on international and Chinese conservation practices were made; John Hurd was also given more detailed introduction to the conditions of cultural heritage conservation of Pingyao Ancient City and Shanxi Province in general. The meeting ended in a friendly mood with Li Jinsheng inviting John Hurd to be a senior advisor for the Shanxi Province Urban and Rural Planning Institute.

Beginning on Oct 27th to Oct 30th, teachings by both international and local instructors were presented to a group of 40-50 students in Pingyao Ancient City, covering a range of topics relating to the care and maintenance of cultural heritage sites, and on traditional architecture and building crafts. On Oct 31st, a shortened lecture on the history and evolution of UNESCO World Heritage Site, documentation principles and techniques, and interpretation was presented to a group of 40 conservation professionals at the Shanxi Research Institute of Ancient Architecture Conservation in Taiyuan.

Demonstrating the design concept of traditional door opening proportions.
**Day 1: Understanding UNESCO World Heritage Site**

The first lecture of the training course was an introduction to understanding UNESCO World Heritage Site, presented by GHF International Conservation Director John Hurd. He began with the history and evolution of the concept of International Culturalism and how it led to our current understanding of World Heritage Sites. John presented the UNESCO World Heritage Site selection criteria, and how one define, assess and safeguard Pingyao Ancient City’s outstanding universal value and authenticity.

The afternoon lecture was conducted by Mr. Zhao Pengtu, an experienced craftsman and scholar on traditional Pingyao architecture. Mr. Zhao is also the chief curator of the Rishengchang draft bank museum and a special consultant to the Pingyao Cultural Heritage Bureau. The class was presented in-situ, using a few different classic courtyards in the historic Fanjia Street area as case studies. Characteristics of the traditional courtyard houses including its specific layout, details, materials and building techniques were explained by Mr. Zhao. It was a very valuable opportunity as many of the trainees, who are Pingyao natives and cultural heritage professionals, have never had the chance to learn about the traditional courtyard houses, whose significance as cultural heritage are often understated.

**Day 2: Materials Science, Building Pathology and Traditional Building Crafts**

John Hurd presented a lecture on basic material science and building pathology relating to the building typology and materials commonly found in Pingyao. With drawn diagrams and images of deterioration taken in Pingyao, John Hurd clearly explained the working principles of traditional constructions and how the failure to understand traditional building wisdom, and introducing inappropriate modern materials and design can lead to damaging results. The lecture was a great success as the trainees, even those without construction or conservation background, can relate to the consequence of inappropriate interventions as they have seen the deterioration in their own home and work place. Experienced craftsmen who understood the phenomena and causes of deterioration also found the lecture to be engaging and informative as it was explained from a scientific point of view. In addition, recommendations from an international expert such as John Hurd helped to reinforce ideas that the craftsmen have been propagating before, but were ignored by the masses due to lack of understanding respect for traditional materials and building crafts.

Armed with the knowledge from the morning lecture, the afternoon class was conducted at a ongoing work site within the ancient city, where two craftsmen specializing in traditional construction methods made a demonstration of traditional brick carving.
building crafts spoke about traditional masonry work and carpentry. The afternoon class was concluded by Mr. Sun Xiangwu, who is a special design advisor for the Pingyao Ancient City Review Committee at the Pingyao Planning Bureau. Mr. Sun, who is from an artisan family, spoke about the characteristics, techniques and artistic content of architectural stone, wood and brick carvings.

**Day 3: Documentation Methods, Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites and Cultural Tourism**

GHF China Program Manager Kuanghan Li gave a lecture on basic documentation methods and techniques for cultural heritage sites. The lecture gave an overview of international charters on documentation, various documentation tools and techniques, and how to select the most appropriate tools that best fit the purpose and limitations of the project. Case studies of documentation projects that are comparable to the Pingyao context were also presented. The trainees learned to achieve good documentation that properly serves the conservation goals with basic tools and skills. It was inspiring for them to see how other conservation projects solve documentation issues with limited budget, time and skills.

In the afternoon, John Hurd and Kuanghan Li co-presented a lecture on interpretation of cultural heritage sites and cultural tourism. It was a meaningful lecture as the directors and party secretary of the Pingyao Tourism Bureau all attended the event. Examples of interpretation as political and propaganda tools, educational tool and especially as management and control tools in other World Heritage Sites offered worthwhile lessons for Pingyao Ancient City as it seeks to improve its existing interpretation plan. The Enames Charter on interpretation of cultural heritage sites by ICOMOS was also introduced to the participants. The main guiding principles in the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Tourism were also discussed with reference to the Pingyao context. The important differences between “cultural tourism” and “mass tourism” were defined and explained, and suggestions on how Pingyao should develop and manage cultural tourism were raised.
Day 4: History of Jin Merchants and Influence on Pingyao’s Architecture

The last day of the training course in Pingyao was concluded by Mr. Hao Xinxi, a local historian specializing in Pingyao history, who spoke about the history of the Jin Merchants and their influence on the architecture of Pingyao. The lecture was very well received. Most of the tour guides have received very general training with questionable historical accuracy and depth. Their past training mainly focused on the few ticketed sites, and they have little knowledge of the numerous historic courtyard buildings and their famed occupants within the ancient city. Mr. Hao also spoke about the history and significance of some of the courtyard buildings that have being converted into hotels. For some of the owners, knowledge of their property’s history will encourage them to carry out more sensitive use and rehabilitation; as well as help them realize the value of these historic buildings.

CONCLUSION

After the four-day training course in Pingyao, John Hurd and Kuanghan Li gave a half day lecture at the Shanxi Research Institute of Ancient Architecture Conservation, at the invitation of Director Ning Jianying and Deputy Director Ren Yimin. The entire course was filmed and was reported by the Pingyao TV station on their weekly news program. The recording will be organized by the Pingyao Planning Bureau staff and distributed to all interested participants. Shanxi Urban and Rural Planning Society also plans to publish extracts from the course in their newsletter. In general, the course was very well-received. Both the participants and Pingyao government officials expressed strong wishes for the continuation of such training course. For most participants, this was the first such training course ever held in Pingyao.

Appendix 1: List of Attendees

- Pingyao County Urban and Rural Planning Bureau - 7 persons, including Director and Chief Planner
- Shanxi Province Urban and Rural Planning Society - 6 persons, including Chairman and Chief Secretary
- Pingyao County Cultural Heritage Bureau - 15 persons
- Pingyao County Tourism Bureau -10 persons, including Director, Deputy Director and Party Secretary
- Taigu County Cultural Heritage Management Bureau - 2 persons
- Tour Guides - 12 persons
- Ancient Architecture technicians/craftsmen - 4 persons
- Private Hotel Operator - 1 person
- Shanxi Research Institute of Ancient Architecture Conservation - all employees