

Hongcun

A World Heritage village where living heritage and tourism occupy the same space

SITE

Yi County, Huangshan City Anhui Province, China

Inscribed with Xidi on the World Heritage List in 2000.



World Heritage Convention

Criteria (iii) : The villages of Xidi and Hongcun are graphic illustrations of a type of human settlement created during a feudal period and based on a prosperous trading economy.

Criteria (iv) : In their buildings and their street patterns, the two villages of southern Anhui reflect the socio-economic structure of a long-lived settled period of Chinese history.

Criteria (v) : The traditional non-urban settlements of China, which have to a very large extent disappeared during the past century, are exceptionally well preserved in the villages of Xidi and Hongcun.

Analytical scope

The settlement, water system, surrounding landscape and the institutions that shape everyday use.

HUL frame



Image source: author

Hongcun's value as a living relationship



01 A working water-village system

Canals, Moon Pond and South Lake connect water use, fire protection, microclimate, spatial order and collective memory.

02 Domestic space as living heritage

Courtyards, main halls, side rooms and lanes express family and community relations as well as Huizhou craft.

03 A place-specific economy

Huizhou mercantile traditions, carving, cuisine, painting and study travel convert cultural knowledge into livelihoods.

The value lies in the CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP among People, Water, Homes and Livelihoods

One sustainability challenge

Tourism-oriented businesses are replacing everyday village life.

visitor uses progressively replace resident life, community services and local cultural production, while redistributing space, benefits, environmental costs and decision-making power.

PLANET

Pressure on water and fabric

Crowding, waste, painting materials and extreme rainfall increase stress on channels, lanes and historic buildings.

PEOPLE

Residential continuity at risk

Commercial conversion reduces living space, privacy and everyday services. As tourism replaces domestic functions, residents have fewer opportunities to pass on local knowledge.

PROSPERITY

Local prosperity becomes less resilient

Tourism can raise income while high rent, similar visitor businesses and rapid turnover reduce local resilience. Heritage provides the attraction, but local knowledge and producers capture too little of the return.



Image source: author

SDG+ revitalization pathway

A HUL system links evidence, local capability, visitor demand and shared decisions

01 PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION BASE



- Create one-courtyard-one-archive file, covering original fabric, spatial layout, domestic use, repairs and permits.
- Combine water-quality, humidity and deformation sensors with visitor and group-booking data.

Alerts trigger inspection, maintenance funding or booking limits.

02 COMMUNITY CAPABILITY TOOLS



- Create a resident-controlled library of oral history, rituals, craft methods, recipes and images.
- Set up reward system and simple booking tools to reward water care, teaching and local production.

Heritage stewardship becomes paid local work.

03 VISITOR DEMAND GUIDANCE



- Use AR to explain the water system, clan life and everyday practices rather than add photo filters.
- Rank verified local shops, craft experiences and family dining above generic chains, without excluding outside operators.

Visitor choice shifts away from standardized retail.

04 SHARED DATA AND GOVERNANCE



- Build an HUL map linking buildings, uses, leases, businesses, waterways and visitor hotspots.
- Authorities and the village access full data; the public sees resident presence, business mix, water quality and local sourcing.

Decisions become traceable and revisable.

How the pathway retains Hongcun's character

ATTRIBUTE	EVIDENCE	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		
Working Water-village System	Water quality and flow Wastewater connection Visitor and group load	When a threshold is exceeded, management reduces group bookings, inspects discharges and directs maintenance funding.		
Domestic Space As Living Heritage	Domestic-use area Room-level alterations Repair and permit history	Whole-courtyard conversion requires review. Repair support prioritizes retained residential use and compatible work.		
Place-specific Economy	Resident-controlled content Verified local providers Booking and reward records	Platform visibility and rewards go to traceable local knowledge, paid teaching and resident-linked production.		
Community Control	Public indicators Permit and funding records Responsible body and review date	Every permit, booking limit and funding decision records a public reason and a review date.		