

A study on the Overlay and Reconstruction of the Spatial Spirit of the Ancient Ruins of “Settlements, Post Stations, and Salt Warehouses” on Dongda Road

Cai Hui Mei¹, Wen Zhi Yuan*²

¹College of Fine Arts and Calligraphy, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

*²Corresponding Author: College of Fine Arts and Calligraphy, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

Abstract: As a pivotal node in the region's historical transportation network, Dongda Road has evolved over centuries into a layered structure comprising three spatial forms: settlements, relay stations, and salt warehouses. This configuration preserves the historical memory of regional economic and social activities while embodying a spatial spirit rich in cultural connotations. However, amid modern urban development and land renewal, these historical spaces have progressively faced issues such as functional decline and cultural context fragmentation. This study examines the ancient sites along Dongda Road. Through historical document analysis and spatial form dissection, it systematically traces the formation mechanisms and overlapping evolutionary processes of the three ancient site types—“settlement, post station, and salt warehouse.” It explores their functional interactions across historical time, the intrinsic connections in their spatial layout, and the composite cultural landscape they collectively form. Building on this foundation, the paper proposes a spatial revitalization strategy centered on cultural narrative reconstruction, spatial structure optimization, and public experience enhancement. This approach aims to sustain and regenerate the spiritual essence of historical sites within contemporary urban environments.

Keywords: Dongda road, Spatial Spirit, Linear Cultural Heritage, Settlement, Post Station, Salt Storage

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Questions

As a crucial transportation route and economic corridor throughout Chinese history, Dongda Road (the Ancient Post Road between Chengdu and Chongqing) is dotted with numerous historically significant sites, including ancient settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses. These sites not only bear witness to the social functions and economic activities of different historical periods but also embody a distinct spatial spirit. This spatial ethos encompasses the order of human habitation and productive life, reflecting the influence of transportation routes on human behavior and social organization, while also integrating the culture of salt-related trade, storage, transportation, and management. Research on these three types of ancient sites reveals phenomena of interweaving and layering in their spatial layout, functional configuration, and cultural expression. This layering not only demonstrates complementary relationships between different spatial functions but also mirrors shifts in socio-economic structures and cultural values across historical periods.

Current urbanization development poses significant challenges to the Dongda Road sites. The once interconnected relay stations, salt warehouses, and settlements have become fragmented under the impact of modern transportation and construction, with many ancient sites collapsing due to long-term neglect. In conservation and development efforts, we often focus solely on individual structures while overlooking their

original organic connections. Moreover, standardized restoration approaches applied to many ancient towns result in homogenized, identical-looking streets across different locations. This loss of spatial spirit robs historical heritage of its soul. Walking these ancient paths, one fails to sense the unique, centuries-spanning aura of the original sites.

The core issue this study seeks to address is how to reclaim this lost spatial spirit. By deeply analyzing how settlements, relay stations, and salt warehouses spatially interpenetrated, we distilled the logic of this layered interdependence. As Norbert Schütz noted in *The Spirit of Place*, a place is not merely a physical location but an entity with a distinct character. For Dongda Road, its character lies precisely within these complex spatial relationships.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

Many linear cultural heritage sites face two challenges during conservation efforts. One challenge stems from changes in spatial use; when a space loses its practical value, conservation work often becomes unsustainable. The other challenge arises from the absence of cultural expression; without clear means of cultural expression, the public struggles to comprehend the site's value. Dongda Road connects diverse functional spaces, and its historical spatial structure exhibits distinctive characteristics. Settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses developed interactive relationships throughout history. This structure reflects the connection between transportation and economic activities while mirroring social organization. Studying these spatial relationships aids in understanding the history of areas along Dongda Road. The concept of spatial spirit is crucial for comprehending historical environments. It stems from authentic spatial experiences: architectural forms, road structures, and public activities all contribute to this experience. People's actions within the space continually reinforce this feeling, giving spatial spirit historical continuity.

Current research predominantly focuses on the Eastern Highway itself, with less comprehensive discussion of the surrounding spatial context. While many conservation projects emphasize architectural restoration, spatial relationships are often overlooked. However, historical spaces are not static relics; through thoughtful design, ancient sites can be reintegrated into public life, and spatial spirit can be re-expressed through landscape, exhibition, and public activities.

This study aims to analyze the spatial characteristics and cultural significance of ancient settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouse sites along the East Avenue from the perspective of spatial spirit. It explores the mechanisms of their layered coexistence and proposes revitalization strategies grounded in the integration of historical context and contemporary realities. Through literature review, field surveys, and spatial analysis, this study will map the historical functions and spatial distribution patterns of these three site categories, revealing how spatial spirit manifests in functional layering, cultural integration, and morphological transformation. Concurrently, it will propose principles and methodologies for spatial spirit revitalization, offering actionable approaches for ancient site preservation and activation.

1.3 Research Content and Scope

This study centers on the historical spaces along Dongda Road, focusing on three types of sites: first, settlements along the route; second, historical post stations; and third, salt warehouse sites. Each of these spaces possesses distinct spatial spirits that have formed connections throughout historical development.

The study first reviews relevant theoretical frameworks. Linear cultural heritage theory provides a crucial framework for spatial analysis, while spatial spirit theory aids in understanding environmental experiences. The concepts of superimposition and reshaping are employed to explain spatial transformation processes. These theories will be organized through literature analysis.

Subsequently, the study analyzes the historical environment of Dongda Road. It will examine the road's formation context through its geographical location and historical evolution, while also analyzing the spatial distribution and spatial spirits of settlements, post stations, and salt warehouses. Historical materials will inform these interpretations.

The study then discusses the mechanisms of spatial spirit superposition. Different historical periods leave distinct traces in space; functional changes alter spatial usage patterns; temporal accumulation creates multi-layered structures; and cultural activities influence spatial experiences. The discussion will unfold from three perspectives: function, time, and culture.

Finally, the study proposes spatial reformation strategies. Historical spaces must adapt to contemporary life, and spatial renewal must respect historical information. Design concepts will be developed based on spatial analysis. Strategies will focus on spatial transformation, public space integration, and cultural presentation methods.

The research scope centers on the site areas along the East Avenue, with particular emphasis on its representative node spaces. The study primarily employs documentary research and spatial analysis methods.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Linear Cultural Heritage

Early heritage conservation efforts primarily focused on individual buildings or standalone sites. For an extended period, researchers placed greater emphasis on monumental structures, religious buildings, and archaeological sites. With the evolution of cultural heritage theory, scholars gradually recognized that historical spaces often possess holistic structures, with roads, waterways, and trade routes playing enduring roles in regional historical development. These linear spaces not only served transportation functions but also connected diverse social and cultural nodes. The concept of "Cultural Routes" emerged in international heritage conservation circles at the end of the 20th century. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) noted in relevant documents that cultural routes reflect the exchange processes among diverse populations through long-term historical interactions. These routes typically exhibit dynamic characteristics, with cultures from different regions continuously interacting and integrating through transportation and trade activities. Cultural routes are thus not merely transportation facilities but also comprehensive cultural landscapes.

Academic circles have progressively applied this holistic perspective to historical road studies. Researchers contend that roads themselves represent only a segment of a linear structure. Settlements, transportation service facilities, and commercial spaces along these routes collectively form a complete cultural system. Roads connect these spatial nodes, which in turn form networked relationships. Historical space thus manifests as a continuous structure. Chinese scholars have similarly adopted this perspective in studying ancient transportation networks. Research on ancient postal roads and trade routes demonstrates that stable settlements and commercial nodes frequently developed along these routes. Transportation activities facilitated population movement and material exchange, driving the gradual evolution of settlement spaces.

The theory of linear cultural heritage provides a new research framework for understanding historical roads. This perspective clarifies the relationships between spatial nodes, emphasizing spatial continuity and systemic integration. The historical significance of individual sites is often difficult to fully grasp when detached from their broader context. Only by examining sites within the framework of transportation routes and regional spatial structures can researchers comprehend their formation and historical functions. Settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses did not exist in isolation. They all emerged in dependence on transportation networks. Roads connected distinct functional spaces, and transportation activities forged historical connections between these

spaces.

2.2 Theory of Spatial Spirituality

The theory of spatial spirit serves as a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding historical environments. This theory is often associated with the concepts of “spirit of place” or “sense of place.” Researchers utilize this concept to explain the relationship between humans and their environment. Space is not merely a physical environment; it also encompasses cultural memory and social experience. Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz systematically developed this theory in his work *The Spirit of Place: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. He argued that human life requires meaningful environments. The task of architecture and landscape is not merely to provide functional spaces. Architecture must also endow places with recognizable characteristics. Norberg-Schulz emphasized that architecture's fundamental mission is to “embody the spirit of place,” thereby helping people develop a sense of belonging within their surroundings.

Nørberg-Schulz's theory draws from phenomenological philosophy, incorporating Heidegger's concept of “dwelling.” Heidegger posited that humans connect with the world through dwelling. Architectural environments must therefore aid people in understanding their relationship with their surroundings. Spaces lacking distinct characteristics induce alienation. A space's structure and form help establish a sense of direction and identity.

The spirit of a place does not originate solely from the physical environment. Researchers contend that it is composed of multiple elements. Architecture, landscape, historical memory, and social activities all participate in this process. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) states in the Quebec Declaration that the spirit of a place encompasses both tangible and intangible elements. Architecture, landscape, and pathways constitute the tangible components. Memory, traditional activities, and cultural narratives form the intangible aspects. Together, they imbue space with meaning.

Contemporary research increasingly applies this theory to historical heritage conservation. Site preservation no longer focuses solely on structural restoration. Researchers now emphasize spatial experience and cultural expression. Spatial relationships within heritage environments influence how the public understands history. Presentation methods, landscape design, and public events can all alter perceptions of a site. By analyzing spatial structures and cultural activities, researchers can uncover the historical significance embedded within an environment. For the Dongda Road site, settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses are not merely historical facilities. Together, they form a distinctive spatial atmosphere. Road traffic, commercial activities, and residents' daily lives have all left traces within this space. These elements collectively shape the historical character of the regional environment.

2.3 Theoretical Research on Spatial “Overlay” and “Reshaping”

Space undergoes continuous transformation over long-term development. Different historical periods leave distinct structural imprints within the same spatial context. Buildings, roads, and public spaces undergo ongoing adjustments through time. Researchers often employ concepts like “superimposition” or “stratification” to explain this phenomenon. Spatial superimposition emphasizes the cumulative process of historical information within space.

Simultaneously, contemporary urban renewal demands new organization of historical spaces. Adapting to modern life often necessitates spatial transformation. Researchers thus propose concepts like “spatial reshaping” or “repurposing.” These concepts emphasize creating new spatial designs while preserving historical information.

2.3.1 Stratification Theory

Historical cities often exhibit distinct stratigraphic characteristics. Different historical periods leave behind architectural and road structures within the same spatial context. Researchers frequently liken cities to “sediments of time.” This perspective is termed ‘stratigraphy’ or “superposition” in urban studies. Architectural theorist André Colboz proposed the concept of “land as a palimpsest.” He posited that urban spaces resemble texts rewritten repeatedly. New spatial structures overlay older ones, yet traces of the past often persist. Urban spaces thus carry multilayered historical information, with distinct imprints from different eras preserved within the same location.

Urban historical research frequently adopts a similar perspective. Historical maps and archaeological surveys reveal spatial structural transformations. Road realignments, building reconstructions, and shifts in land use all alter spatial forms. While some structures are replaced, earlier configurations often continue to influence the city's form. Stratification theory holds significant importance in heritage studies. Researchers contend that historical spaces should not be preserved solely in a single-period state. The multi-layered history of a space itself constitutes cultural value. Traces from different historical phases aid in understanding the city's developmental process.

This layered phenomenon is equally evident in studies of the East Grand Road. Settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses emerged during distinct historical phases. Changes in transportation systems affected postal station functions, while shifts in commercial activities influenced salt warehouse usage. Meanwhile, residents' daily lives persisted within the settlement spaces. These transformations gradually accumulated within the spatial fabric, resulting in the formation of multi-layered historical structures along the road corridor.

2.3.2 Spatial Reimagining

The theory of spatial reconfiguration primarily emerges in research on urban renewal and heritage preservation. As cities develop, many historic spaces must adapt to new functional demands. Preserving original structures entirely often fails to meet modern living requirements. Researchers therefore propose spatial renewal grounded in the preservation of historical information. The concept of “adaptive reuse” is frequently employed in architectural conservation. Scholars contend that when historic buildings continue participating in contemporary life, their cultural value becomes more readily understood by the public. Buildings gain opportunities for sustained use through new functions. This approach enables the long-term preservation of historical structures.

Spatial renewal requires striking a balance between preservation and transformation. Designers must comprehend the historical spatial fabric. New spatial organization should respect the original environmental characteristics. Excessive alteration risks erasing historical information, while excessive preservation may drain spaces of vitality. Spatial reshaping also intersects with public space design. Landscape architecture, exhibition facilities, and cultural events can all become vehicles for expressing history. History is conveyed not only through architectural form but also through spatial experience.

In the study of Dongda Road, spatial reimagining holds practical significance. Settlements, relay stations, and salt warehouse ruins require new expressions within the modern urban context. Road traffic conditions have changed. Without new uses, historical spaces risk gradual neglect. Through thoughtful design, new public spaces can be created while preserving historical information.

3. Overview and Spatial Characteristics Analysis of the Dongda Road Ancient Site

3.1 Historical and Geographical Overview of Dongda Road

Dongda Road, also known as the Chengdu-Chongqing Ancient Post Road, originated in the Han Dynasty and flourished during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Spanning approximately 1,080 li (about 545 kilometers), this route historically served dual functions as a political transportation corridor and a commercial transport artery, ranking among the most vital overland passages in the Ba-Shu region. The Eastern Highway commenced at Chengdu's Jinguan Post Station, traversing Longquanyi, Jianzhou, Ziyang, Zizhong, Neijiang, Longchang, Rongchang, Dazu, Yongchuan, and Bishan before culminating at Chongqing's Tongyuan Gate. Geographically, the Chengdu Plain and Chongqing were distinctly separated by mountainous terrain. The Longquan Mountains and hilly terrain made transportation conditions complex. Early travel relied on fixed mountain trails. The Eastern Highway emerged precisely under these natural constraints. Its route predominantly followed mountain passes, river valleys, and relatively gentle intermontane corridors. These topographical features ensured passability while also defining the road's spatial form.

During the Han Dynasty, the Eastern Highway took its initial form, serving basic functions of goods transportation and passenger travel. With socioeconomic development, it expanded further during the Tang and Song Dynasties, featuring more comprehensive postal stations and gradually improved transportation infrastructure. In this era, the Eastern Highway functioned not only as a vital official postal route but also as a primary corridor for private commercial travel. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the rise of the salt economy transformed the Eastern Highway into a vital corridor for salt transportation. Post stations and salt warehouses along the route became denser, with the Wanli edition of the Great Ming Code recording over 140 post stations in Sichuan at the time. Beyond serving as a lifeline for goods, the highway functioned as a cultural conduit, facilitating the dissemination and evolution of Ba-Shu culture.

The Eastern Highway held a pivotal position within the ancient transportation network. As the primary post road connecting Chengdu and Chongqing, it served multiple functions: official postal relay, goods transportation, and personnel movement. For official communications, it functioned as a vital link between the central government and local authorities, facilitating the delivery of documents and the reception of traveling officials. For goods transportation, it served as a vital corridor for salt, tea, silk, and other commodities, driving regional economic growth. Regarding personnel movement, it was the primary route for merchants, scholars, and officials, fostering cultural exchange and social interaction. Different spatial types interlinked through transportation activities, forming a stable spatial pattern over the long historical process.

3.2 Settlement Spaces

Settlements along Dongda Road often developed around transportation hubs. Roads facilitated human movement and commercial exchange, leading to the formation of many market towns along ancient routes. A prime example is Zouma Ancient Town in Jiulongpo District, Chongqing. Located in the western part of Chongqing's main urban area, Zouma historically occupied a crucial position on the Chengdu-Chongqing Ancient Road, serving as one of the key postal relay stations where the ancient route entered Chongqing. The area gradually developed into a market town during the Ming and Qing dynasties, its growth closely tied to the transportation activities along Dongda Road.



Figure 1: Settlements and Ancient Trails of Zouma Ancient Town (From the internet)

The spatial form of Zouma Ancient Town reflects a typical ancient trail settlement structure. The main street essentially follows the direction of the ancient trail, with continuous rows of commercial buildings lining both sides. This “street-market settlement” structure was common along ancient transportation and trade routes in China. The road served both as a thoroughfare and a commercial space. Shops, teahouses, and inns were distributed along the street, providing services to passing travelers. As commercial activity increased, residents gradually settled along both sides of the road, forming a stable settlement. From a spatial structure perspective, Zouma Ancient Town exhibits a distinct linear block pattern. Most ancient town buildings face the street, making the street the center of public activity. This layout reflects the fundamental characteristic of transportation settlements: the high integration of roads and settlement space. Transportation activity drives commercial activity, and commercial activity further reinforces the scale of the settlement.

The spatial ethos of settlements along Dongda Road is primarily manifested in the realm of social relations. These settlements are predominantly clan-based communities, where clan consciousness holds a central position in social life. Public spaces within the settlements, such as ancestral halls and temples, serve as vital venues for clan activities, embodying the organizational structure of rural society.

3.3 Station Space

The ancient Chengdu-Chongqing postal route featured multiple relay stations for delivering official documents and accommodating officials. For instance, the Longquanyi Ancient Relay Station in Longquanyi District, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, was situated near Longquan Mountain east of Chengdu. As the first relay station eastbound from Chengdu, it held significant transportation importance. Longquan Mountain formed a key geographical boundary between the Chengdu Plain and the eastern Sichuan hills, making it a vital node on the Chengdu-Chongqing route. Travelers departing from Chengdu and crossing Longquan Mountain needed to stop here for rest and supplies. The station provided services such as horse changes, lodging for personnel, and material resupply. Given its role in official communications, the station's architectural structure was typically substantial and included administrative offices. Spatially organized, the station featured relatively complete functional zones, including stables, lodging areas, and administrative spaces. Small settlements often formed around the station. Travelers' stays generated consumer demand, prompting merchants to operate inns and teahouses nearby. Over time, these commercial facilities gradually evolved into stable market streets.



Figure 2: Longquanyi Ancient Post Station in Longquanyi District, Chengdu City, Sichuan Province (From the internet)

Beyond Longquanyi, Dongda Road featured multiple historical relay stations such as Baishi Station (Jiulongpo District, Chongqing) and Laifeng Station (Bishan District, Chongqing). These stations formed a comprehensive transportation network during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The spatial design of these stations embodied the order and efficiency requirements of the ancient official relay system. Historical records indicate that roads during this period formed a spatial structure of “five post stations, four garrison towns, and three commercial streets.” Among these, Longquanyi, Nanjin Post Station, Shuangfeng Post Station, Laifeng Post Station, and Baishi Post Station were the primary stations. These stations not only served transportation functions but also contributed to the development of surrounding areas. Many market towns emerged precisely from the foundations of these post stations.

3.4 Salt Storage Space

The salt trade was a vital component of China's traditional economic system. Salt served not only as a daily necessity but also as a significant source of state revenue. Consequently, its transportation and storage developed into a well-established logistics network. Constructing salt warehouses along transportation routes enhanced efficiency and ensured secure storage.

Along the Eastern Highway corridor, salt trade activities were closely intertwined with the transportation network. Take Shiqiao Ancient Town in Jianyang City as an example. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, commodities like sugar, salt, liquor, and tea from the Sichuan Basin were transported via land or water routes, transshipped, and traded at Shiqiao. Large numbers of merchants from other regions entered the area to conduct business, forming a cross-regional commercial network. Merchants from Fujian, Guangdong, Shaanxi, Hubei, and other provinces established guilds in the ancient town for trade exchanges and organizational activities.

From a spatial perspective, salt warehouses were typically situated in areas with convenient transportation access. Storage buildings required proximity to major roads or docks to minimize cargo handling distances and enhance transport efficiency. These warehouses were often large-scale structures with thick walls to ensure stable storage conditions. Within the Dongda Road transportation system, salt warehouses did not exist as isolated facilities but formed integrated spaces alongside commercial districts and transportation hubs. For instance, in the Rongchang area, commercial districts were adjacent to storage facilities. Goods entering the town could swiftly enter storage spaces before being distributed through commercial networks. Additionally, significant trade hubs emerged in places like Neijiang and Zizhong. Situated midway between Chengdu and Chongqing, these areas often served as transshipment points for goods. The spatial significance of salt warehouses primarily manifested

in social relations. Managed by government officials or salt merchants, their operations involved multiple stakeholders, reflecting the intricate social dynamics of the ancient salt economy.

3.5 Localized Expressions of Three Types of Spatial Spirit: From Functional Independence to Spatial Symbiosis

Settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses along Dongda Road initially served distinct functions. Settlements primarily provided residential living spaces. Postal stations functioned as official transportation facilities. Salt warehouses facilitated commercial trade. These three spatial types remained relatively independent during their formative stages. As transportation activities intensified, connections gradually emerged between them. This interplay fostered a composite spatial structure along the highway. Transportation, commerce, and daily life operated within the same spatial system. Post stations provided transportation services, settlements offered living environments, while salt warehouses connected trade networks. Over the long historical process, these distinct spatial functions gradually merged. This integration shaped the spatial spirit along the road. The road ceased to be merely a passageway and became a public space for social activities. Travelers, merchants, and residents all operated within the same space. The flow of traffic intertwined with local life.

In the contemporary context, this historical structure retains significant research value. Even as some functions have faded, the relationship between roads and spatial nodes remains identifiable through archaeological sites and spatial patterns. Settlement street layouts, relay station ruins, and storage buildings all bear witness to historical activities. Thus, the historical spaces along Dongda Road can be understood as a composite cultural landscape. Settlements, relay stations, and salt warehouses are not isolated sites but integral components collectively forming a road cultural system. This spatial relationship provides a crucial foundation for subsequent research into the layering and reshaping of spatial spirit.

4. The Overlay Mechanism of Spatial Spirit at the Dongda Road Ancient Site

4.1 Functional Dimension Overlay

Historically, Dongda Road served not only as a route connecting Chengdu and Chongqing but also as a multifunctional transportation corridor. Historical records indicate that this highway stretched approximately 800 li from Chengdu through Longquan Mountain, Jianyang, Ziyang, Neijiang, and other locations before reaching Chongqing, making it one of the most vital transportation arteries within the Sichuan Basin during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In its early stages, the road primarily functioned for official communications. Government authorities established a communication network through the postal station system, responsible for delivering official documents and decrees. Postal stations were set up at regular intervals, typically “one relay station every ten li, one postal station every sixty li,” ensuring swift information transmission.

With the growth of commercial activities, Dongda Road gradually transformed from a single official postal route into a trade corridor. Numerous merchants transported goods along this road, particularly vital commodities like salt, sugar, and tea. Archaeological remains and historical records indicate that the ruts visible on the ancient stone slabs were formed by the prolonged transport of goods by merchants. This demonstrates the road's transformation from an official communication route into a commercial transportation corridor.

During this process, three distinct spatial functions emerged along the road. The first was the relay station space, primarily serving transportation needs. The second was settlement space, where residents established towns at transportation nodes. The third type comprised commercial and warehousing spaces where goods were stored and traded at transportation hubs. The ancient town of Shiqiao in Jianyang serves as a prime example. Located

along the Tuo River, this area functioned as a crucial junction where water and land routes converged. Historical records indicate that during the Ming and Qing dynasties through the Republican era, Shiqiao evolved into a major regional commercial center, with over a thousand vessels moored along its riverbanks at peak times.

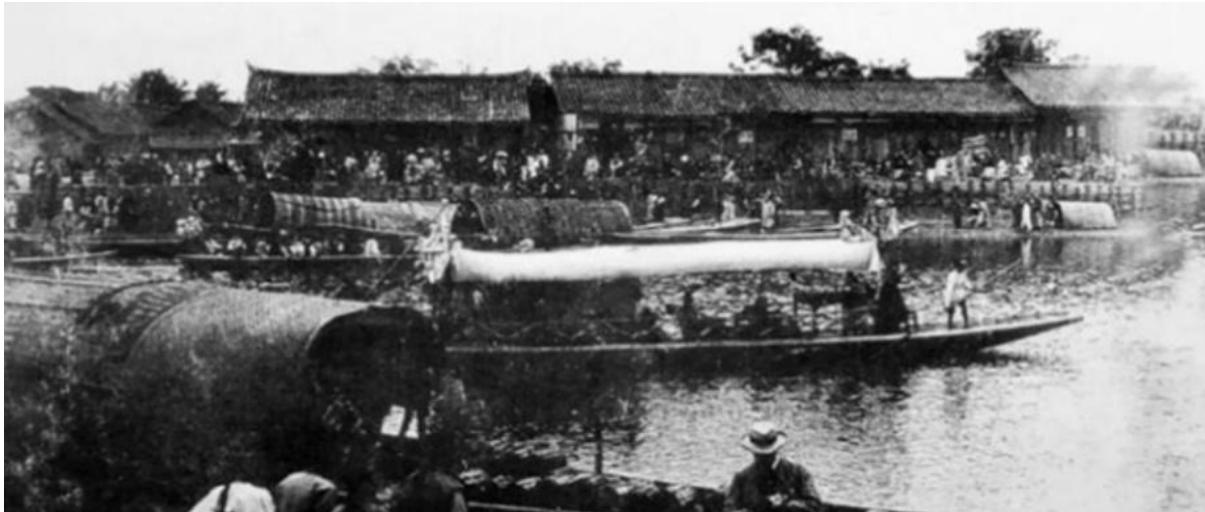


Figure 3: Waterfront Wharf at Shiqiao Ancient Town, Jianyang City, Sichuan Province (Image source: Internet)

Therefore, in terms of spatial structure, Dongda Road formed a composite system comprising “transportation nodes—commercial nodes—residential nodes.” The post stations ensured transportation services, the commercial nodes handled goods transshipment, while the settlements provided living and service spaces. These three types of spaces continuously interacted within the road system, thereby forming a composite spatial structure.

4.2 Superposition of the Time Dimension

The spatial structure of Dongda Road was not formed in a single step but gradually evolved through long-term historical development. From a temporal perspective, its origins can be traced back to earlier historical periods. As far back as the ancient Ba-Shu era, transportation links existed between Chengdu and Chongqing. Initially, these relied primarily on waterborne transport via the Min River and Yangtze River. With population growth and intensified regional exchanges, overland transportation gradually developed.

By the Ming and Qing dynasties, the overland transportation system became increasingly sophisticated. Dongda Road emerged as a vital component of the official postal road network. The government established relay stations and postal delivery points along the route, creating a stable transportation network. During this period, the road primarily served administrative management and official communication functions.

By the late Qing Dynasty, commercial activity began to surge significantly. Goods such as salt, sugar, liquor, and tea from Sichuan were transported via both land and water routes. As transportation demands expanded, road usage intensified, gradually fostering the emergence of commercial settlements along the routes.

The developmental trajectory of Shiqiao Ancient Town clearly reflects this layered historical progression. Initially, the area served merely as a transportation hub. With the growth of water transport on the Tuo River, numerous vessels began docking here, rapidly increasing commercial activity. By the Republican era, the ancient town had evolved into a regional commercial hub, even hosting financial institutions like banks. This historical trajectory demonstrates how the spatial structure of Dongda Road transformed from a transportation facility into a commercial settlement. The postal road system provided foundational transportation infrastructure, while

commercial activities drove settlement development. Spatial functions from different historical periods gradually layered upon one another, ultimately forming the multi-layered historical landscape observable today.

4.3 Overlay of Cultural Dimensions

The Chengdu-Chongqing Ancient Post Road served not only as a transportation route but also as a conduit for cultural exchange. Scholars, merchants, and ordinary travelers traversed this path, and the sustained flow of people along its length fostered the layering of diverse cultural elements, thereby driving cultural interaction within the Ba-Shu region.

First is the culture of the post road system. The ancient post road network constituted a vital component of the state's administrative framework. The station system embodied the ancient transportation management and governance structures. Post station architecture, ancient stone pavements, and related inscriptions all bear witness to this history. Next came commercial culture. As trade expanded, numerous merchants traveled along the ancient route. Commercial activities fostered diverse social gatherings, such as guild halls, shops, and markets. These commercial facilities gradually gave rise to street market culture, becoming integral components of settlements. Then there was local living culture. Residents settled along the route, gradually forming stable communities. Festivals, market fairs, and local customs flourished within these settlements. Transportation and commerce provided platforms for cultural exchange.

Spatially, this cultural layering manifests as the coexistence of multiple elements. Post station ruins embody official systems, commercial districts reflect trade activities, while residential spaces document local culture. The interweaving of diverse cultural elements within the same spatial context has forged a unique cultural landscape along Dongda Road.

4.4 Establishing the Triadic Spatial Spirit of “Salt-Post Station-Resting Place”

Through the above analysis, it becomes evident that the spatial structure along Dongda Road is not a single-function system, but rather a composite system formed by the layering of multiple historical elements.

First is the transportation system. The relay station network formed the basic framework of the road, enabling the rapid flow of information and people between regions.

Second is the commercial system. Commodities such as salt, sugar, and tea were transported along the road and traded and stored at transportation nodes. Commercial activities spurred the rapid development of some settlements into regional commercial centers.

Third is the living system. Residents settled at transportation nodes, forming stable communities. Commercial and transportation activities jointly shaped the local living environment.

These three systems did not exist in spatial isolation but overlapped at the same locations. For example, Shiquiao Ancient Town served as both a transportation node and a commercial center while also functioning as a residential living space.

Therefore, the spatial structure along Dongda Road can be summarized as a composite system of “salt-post station-settlement.” Here, “post station” represents the transportation system, ‘salt’ symbolizes commercial trade, and “settlement” denotes residential communities. These three elements interacted continuously throughout historical development, ultimately forming a distinctive local spatial spirit.

This spatial spirit cannot be captured by a single site but requires understanding through the holistic spatial structure. Roads, post stations, ancient towns, and storage facilities collectively constitute the historical and cultural landscape, forming the crucial foundation for studying the historical space of Dongda Road.

5. Strategies for Reimagining the Spatial Spirit of the Dongda Road Ancient Site

5.1 Current Status of the Dongda Road Ancient Site

In the course of modern urban development, the historical spatial structure along Dongda Road has undergone significant changes. The original transportation system has gradually been replaced by a modern highway network, rendering many ancient road sections obsolete. Consequently, the spatial connections between postal stations, settlements, and commercial facilities have weakened. Some sites are now surrounded by new urban developments, causing the historical spatial environment to gradually disappear.

Regarding relay station sites, many historical stations no longer retain complete structures. Some stations are preserved only through place names or scattered ruins. For instance, locations like Longquanyi and Baishiya still bear their historical names, yet their original relay station functions have long vanished. The areas where these stations once stood have mostly been replaced by urban roads and residential zones. The historical significance of relay stations as transportation facilities has gradually faded. Changes in settlement spaces are even more pronounced. Numerous ancient road settlements have undergone continuous reconstruction amid urban expansion. Some historic districts have been demolished and rebuilt, with traditional structures replaced by new architecture. Even in relatively well-preserved ancient towns, excessive commercialization poses challenges. During renovations, certain neighborhoods adopt uniform pseudo-antique styles, altering original street scales and architectural details. This has led to homogenization within the historical environment. Traditional storage facilities like salt warehouses were often situated near transportation hubs, areas typically redeveloped during urban growth. Many storage buildings have vanished, making their historical function difficult for the public to recognize. Even where some warehouse structures remain, they often lack interpretive displays.

Along the route spanning Longquanyi, Jianzhou, Ziyang, Zizhong, Neijiang, Longchang, Rongchang, Dazu, Yongchuan, and Bishan, the preservation status of ancient sites varies significantly. Some areas have achieved a degree of protection through local government efforts, while others face risks of neglect and destruction. Some significant sites have been designated as cultural heritage protection units, such as the Longquanyi Post Station Ruins and the Zizhong Salt Warehouse Ruins, which receive some level of protection and management. However, due to insufficient funding, limited conservation techniques, and weak preservation awareness, the protection of many ancient sites remains reactive. Natural factors like wind and rain erosion, vegetation overgrowth, and geological shifts persistently damage these sites, while human activities such as urban development, agricultural expansion, and tourism projects also pose threats to their preservation.

Amidst modernization, the ancient sites along Dongda Road face multiple dilemmas and challenges. First, a tension exists between preservation and development. While preserving historical authenticity is essential, these sites must also adapt to contemporary societal needs. Second, the spatial spirit of these sites grapples with the conflict between heritage preservation and innovation. It must uphold historical significance while evolving to align with modern society.

Overall, the sites along the Dongda Road still retain some historical information, but their overall spatial structure has been weakened. The connections between roads, settlements, and commercial nodes are no longer clear. When visiting these sites, the public often sees only scattered buildings and struggles to understand their historical context. Therefore, in future conservation and renewal efforts, it is necessary to re-examine the relationships between these spaces.

5.2 Theoretical Foundations for Spatial Spiritual Rejuvenation

The spatial rejuvenation of Dongda Road must be grounded in heritage conservation theory while integrating urban renewal practices. Historical and cultural heritage conservation theory emphasizes that

protected entities encompass not only the structures themselves but also their environmental and spatial relationships. The Venice Charter asserts that the value of historical heritage lies not only in individual buildings but also in their historical context. Site preservation necessitates maintaining original spatial relationships. This principle offers crucial guidance for preserving the Dongda Road site, as the ancient road space itself constitutes an integrated system composed of multiple nodes.

Cultural route theory holds equal significance. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) notes in its cultural route studies that transportation routes connect diverse cultural spaces, collectively forming cultural landscapes. Roads, settlements, and commercial facilities all form part of cultural routes. Therefore, Dongda Road should be studied as an integrated spatial system rather than an isolated collection of sites.

The theory of spatial spirit also offers methodologies for site renewal. Norberg-Schulz posits that architecture and environments should aid people in understanding a place's character. When spatial design conveys the features of the historical environment, people can sense the historical atmosphere while moving through the space. Thus, in site renewal, landscape design and spatial organization can both become important means of expressing history.

Urban renewal studies also propose the concept of “adaptive reuse.” Researchers contend that historical spaces retain greater cultural value when integrated into contemporary life, as this facilitates public understanding. Buildings gain sustained utility through new functions, enabling the long-term preservation of historical structures.

These theories collectively demonstrate that historical space conservation must extend beyond mere architectural restoration. Spatial relationships, environmental experiences, and social usage are equally vital. The revitalization of Dongda Road's spatial spirit must therefore encompass these dimensions.

5.3 Principles for Reimagining Spatial Identity

During the renewal of Dongda Road's historical spaces, clear design principles must be established to ensure historical information is respected while meeting contemporary spatial needs. First is respecting historical context. Historical roads, block patterns, and building layouts document the space's developmental journey. Spatial transformations should preserve these structural characteristics wherever possible. For instance, the alignment of ancient paths, street dimensions, and the locations of historical buildings should be protected. New construction activities should avoid disrupting these spatial relationships. Second is adapting functions to modern needs. Preservation efforts often falter when historical spaces lack practical utility. Spatial renewal must consider contemporary living requirements, such as public activity areas, cultural exhibition spaces, and community service facilities. Through thoughtful functional planning, historical spaces can reintegrate into urban life. Third is the synergy between space and culture. Historical environments comprise not only buildings but also cultural memory and social activities. Spatial design should enhance historical expression through displays, signage, and public activities. For instance, historical information systems, cultural event spaces, and themed walking trails can help the public understand the ancient road's history.

These principles strike a balance between preservation and renewal. Historical information is retained while spaces gain new vitality.

5.4 Strategies for Spatial Spiritual Transformation

At the level of concrete spatial design, efforts can be made in three areas: spatial renovation, public space integration, and cultural display.

Spatial renovation must respect historical structures. Ancient road remnants can be expressed through landscape design. For instance, pedestrian paths or landscape paving along original road alignments help visitors understand historical routes. Building renovations along these roads should maintain original scales, avoiding excessive expansion. Historic structures can be restored for continued use, preserving neighborhood vitality.

Public space integration is another key strategy. Settlements, relay stations, and trade hubs originally shared spatial connections. Renovation designs can reestablish these connections through a public space system. For instance, pedestrian routes linking different heritage sites allow visitors to grasp the ancient road's structure while walking. Post station sites can become public cultural spaces, while historic town districts can serve as commercial and leisure activity areas.

Cultural display strategies focus on conveying historical narratives. Without interpretation, the public struggles to understand the significance of historical sites. Display systems can explain historical contexts through text, imagery, and digital technology. Historical maps illustrating ancient routes, the postal station system, and commercial activities can be displayed. Cultural events also serve as vital expressions. Traditional markets, cultural festivals, and historical-themed activities help the public experience ancient road culture.

Through these three strategies, the historical spaces along Dongda Road can evolve from scattered ruins into an integrated cultural landscape system. These spaces not only preserve historical information but also become integral components of contemporary urban public life.

6. Conclusion

Through literature review and spatial analysis, this paper systematically examines the historical spatial framework of Dongda Road. Findings reveal that the historical environment along Dongda Road can be understood as a composite spatial system. Settlements, postal stations, and salt warehouses emerged during different historical periods and gradually established connections through transportation activities. The road served as the foundational infrastructure linking these spatial nodes.

The study further analyzes the formation process of spatial spirit. Transportation systems, commercial activities, and residential life overlapped within the same space, thereby creating a spatial atmosphere with distinct local characteristics. Post stations represented the transportation system, salt warehouses symbolized commercial trade, while settlements embodied daily life. These three spatial elements continuously interacted throughout historical development, ultimately forming the “salt-post station-settlement” composite spatial system.

Against the backdrop of modern urban development, this historical spatial system faces significant changes. Some sites have vanished, and spatial connections have weakened. Traditional conservation approaches often focus solely on individual buildings while neglecting the integrity of the spatial structure.

Therefore, this paper proposes a renewal strategy grounded in the holistic spatial system. By integrating historical environmental conservation theory, spatial spirit theory, and urban renewal research, spatial reshaping strategies can be established. Design practices should respect historical context while incorporating modern public space requirements. Through landscape design, public space integration, and cultural display, the history of the ancient road can be re-articulated.

The Dongda Road site is not merely a historical relic but an integral part of regional culture. Through appropriate conservation and renewal, these spaces can be reintegrated into contemporary social life. The historic road thus transforms into a culturally valuable public space, continuing to play a role in urban development.

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Author Profile

Cai Hui Mei, female, is a 2024 Master's candidate in the School of Fine Arts and Calligraphy at Sichuan Normal University, majoring in Art Design (Environmental Design). Her primary research focuses on landscape planning and design, rural landscape renewal, and ecological landscape design.