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**Reinterpretation of History:  
Urban Regeneration in Historic Wenzhou, China**

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# Abstract

The regeneration of historic cities in China is currently in full swing. Many cities that previously experienced the loss of historical characteristics due to modern construction are now striving to restore their historical ambiance. Within this context, the concept of ‘organic renewal’ has long been embraced by Chinese academia as a guiding principle for urban regeneration. However, in practice, this concept manifests in diverse ways. In China, Wenzhou is a city that falls between the second-tier and third-tier categories. ‘Wenzhounese’ holds a particularly special meaning in contemporary China, which has cultivated unique characters for the city. This study examines the regeneration of historic Wenzhou, contributing to the urban heritage discourse by reassessing historicity and conservation practices within China’s social, cultural, political, and academic frameworks. As a historically significant city, most of the existing research regarding Wenzhou are purely historical studies and its contemporary conservation practices have received little attention in the global urban heritage sector. Thus, this study tries to in-depth explore the transformation model of historic Wenzhou, and the driving forces behind it.

An evidence-based, theoretically informed methodology guides this study, focusing on Wenzhou’s unique role in the practice of contemporary urban heritage conservation in China. First, through a review of conservation theories, the study establishes a foundational understanding of the broader context over the world and characteristics of urban heritage regeneration in contemporary China. It then examines Wenzhou’s historical transformations and contemporary conservation strategies through an analysis of relevant

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designs and historical documents. Focusing on three key streets—Wuma Street, Chan Street, and Gongyuan Road—the study conducts site visits, architectural observations, and professional architectural analyses to assess urban and architectural features. Supported by various institutions, the research further incorporates design document analysis and interviews with planners, architects, government officials, and experts. Based on these investigations, the study ultimately synthesizes contemporary attitudes toward history and methods of historical reinterpretation in the regeneration of historic Wenzhou.

This study explores the mechanisms of historical reinterpretation shaping Wenzhou's historic core, revealing how concepts of 'authentic' versus 'pseudo-classic' and 'integral' versus 'fragmentary' are negotiated in conservation practices. It demonstrates that a narrow sense of authenticity based on pure historical objects is not practical in contemporary China's urban conservation and regeneration. The study illustrates increasing public tolerance for diverse interpretations of historicity within conservation practices. By clarifying the concept of 'organic renewal' through the Wenzhou case, the study evaluates its application and the roles of various stakeholders in regeneration practices. From a broader perspective, it identifies common challenges and underlying mechanisms in historic city renewal across China, offering recommendations for Wenzhou's future development and insights for other cities facing similar circumstances.

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## Acronyms

<b>CIAM:</b>	<b>Congrès International d'Architecture Modern</b>
<b>HCDCSC:</b>	<b>Historical and Cultural District Construction Service Center</b>
<b>ICOMOS:</b>	<b>International Council on Monuments and Sites</b>
<b>MHURD:</b>	<b>Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development</b>
<b>NHCFC:</b>	<b>National Historical-Cultural Famous City</b>
<b>ZPHCFC:</b>	<b>Zhejiang Provincial Historical-Cultural Famous City</b>
<b>PC:</b>	<b>Republic of China</b>
<b>PGLD:</b>	<b>People's Government of Lucheng District</b>
<b>PRC:</b>	<b>the People's Republic of China</b>
<b>WDG:</b>	<b>Wenzhou Design Group</b>
<b>WUPDI:</b>	<b>Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute</b>
<b>WMBNRP:</b>	<b>Wenzhou Municipal Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning</b>
<b>WMPG:</b>	<b>Wenzhou Municipal People's Government</b>
<b>ZPPG:</b>	<b>Zhejiang Provincial People's Government</b>

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Over the past century, profound modernization has significantly transformed the appearance of many historic cities worldwide. Meanwhile, the rethinking regarding the values of heritage and the relationship between today and the past drives the development of theories and practices in urban regeneration. As claimed by Jeremy Whitehand et al.: “a historical urban landscape can engender a rapport and sense of continuity with the efforts and achievements of a succession of previous societies”.<sup>1</sup> A review of heritage theory reveals a trend toward an increasingly broad understanding of heritage. The shift from building-scale to urban-scale conservation reflects a response to rapid modernization and growing awareness of the value of place-based heritage.<sup>2</sup> Until now, historic quarter has huge potential in economic and cultural significance has become the consensus in many nations. Therefore, many regeneration projects prioritize tourism development as their core goal. To attract tourists from outside, the government often comprehensively reintegrates the structure of historic urban areas and old buildings. In the process, a large number of pseudo-classic buildings were created. However, this phenomenon has been seriously criticized from the perspective of authenticity. Diane Barthel notes that many tourist-driven,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy WR Whitehand et al., "Urban Morphology and Conservation in China," *Cities* 28, no. 2 (2011): 171-85.

<sup>2</sup> Yisan 阮仪三 Ruan, *The Analects of Urban Heritage Conservation 城市遗产保护论* (Shanghai: Science and Technology Press, 2005), 31-37.

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pseudo-classical projects are designed to “serve the fickle demands of the market”.<sup>3</sup> The 2005 World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture international conference critically pointed out that all forms of pseudo-historical design should be avoided as “...they constitute a denial of both the historical and the contemporary alike”.<sup>4</sup> As for the phenomenon of pseudo-classic design, it still exists in a large number of urban heritage practice, which forms a sharp contrast to the academia criticism.

In China, scholar Wu Liangyong proposed the ‘organic renewal’ (有机更新, youji gengxin) theory for urban regeneration since the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup> This concept emphasizes an attitude of sustainable development to the traditional neighborhood system.<sup>6</sup> He advocated:

The use of appropriate scale and the proper handling of the relationship between the present and the future... To make the development of each piece achieve relative integrity, so that the sum of countless relative integralities can promote the improvement of the overall historical city of Beijing. Thus, it can achieve the purpose of organic renewal.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 117.

<sup>4</sup> Vienna Memorandum, "Managing the Historic Urban Landscape," in *World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture* (Vienna2005), 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> See more detailed clarification of this concept in section 2.2.4.

<sup>6</sup> Liangyong Wu, *The Old City of Beijing and Ju'er Hutong 北京旧城与菊儿胡同* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 1994), 68.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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However, the modernization practices of numerous Chinese cities almost completely contradict this theory. Since the mid-1980s, the ‘Reform and Opening-up’ (改革开放, gaige kaifang) policy in China has resulted in a nationwide campaign of ‘old city renewal’ (旧城改造, jiucheng gaizao).<sup>8</sup> In historic districts, many traditional architectures have been demolished, and numerous ‘generic architectures’ and ‘generic districts’ have emerged.<sup>9</sup> This approach is often referred to as ‘constructive destruction’ (建设性破坏, jianshexing pohuai) in China.<sup>10</sup> This has not only caused severe damage to historical and cultural environments, but it has also led to urban congestion, poor environment, and numerous other pathologies as resources and population factors continue to shift toward historic districts. Along with this, Chinese cities have continuously lost their historical memories, and their historical areas are in grave danger due to their dilapidated historic architectures, poor living conditions, and inadequate public services and sanitation facilities. This widespread destruction has led to national reflection on the need for urban heritage conservation.<sup>11</sup>

Since the 21st century, an increasing number of local governments, planners, architects, and citizens are now dedicated to conserving historical sites, memories and

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<sup>8</sup> Jixiang Shan, "From "Demolition and Construction of Old City Reconstruction" to "Integrated Protection of Historical Urban Areas"—Discussion on the Scientific Approach and Organic Order of Historical Urban Protection 从“大拆大建式旧城改造”到“历史城区整体保护”——探讨历史城区保护的科学途径与有机秩序 (中)," *Cultural Relics*, no. 6 (2006): 36-48.

<sup>9</sup> Liangyong 吴良镛 Wu, *Academic and Cultural Essays by Wu Liangyong 吴良镛学术文化随笔* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 2001), 169.

<sup>10</sup> Xiaohua Zhong and Xiangming Chen, "Demolition, Rehabilitation, and Conservation: Heritage in Shanghai's Urban Regeneration, 1990–2015," *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 41, no. 2 (2017): 82-91.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



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identities. Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China have issued a series of decrees prohibiting the ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ (大拆大建, dachai dajian).<sup>12</sup> A great deal of practical opportunities have resulted in a variety of understandings and strategies regarding conservation.<sup>13</sup> In this process, numerous pseudo-classic buildings in the historic cities are regarded as erroneous practices that have resulted in irreparable harm to the city and its memories. The Chinese architect and recipient of the Pritzker Prize, Wang Shu, states that “attitude [toward history] is more important than method”.<sup>14</sup> However, attitude often depends on the understanding and cognition level of people, it will vary from person to person, environment deviation, and time change. There is hardly a one-size-fits-all attitude to history. Therefore, to study historical urban regeneration, it is necessary to deeply analyze the characteristics of a specific city in order to reach a conclusion suitable for it.

In this study, the author uses Wenzhou, a unique Chinese 3<sup>rd</sup>-tier city,<sup>15</sup> located in Zhejiang Province in southeast China, as a case study, exploring its historical and cultural significance from the author’s firsthand experience as a resident and worker, to illustrate the conservation attitudes and methods of its historic urban area in the context of its strong

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<sup>12</sup> This term is a widely used term in China to describe the prevalent practice of demolishing a large number of traditional buildings, while making way for the construction of numerous modern buildings. See Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China 住房和城乡建设部, “*Notice on Preventing Big Demolition, Big Construction in the Implementation of Urban Renewal*” 关于在实施城市更新行动中防止大拆大建问题的通知. 30.08.2021.

<sup>13</sup> Shuyi Xie, Kai Gu, and Xiaoling Zhang, "Urban Conservation in China in an International Context: Retrospect and Prospects," *Habitat International* 95 (2020): 102098.

<sup>14</sup> Piironen Esa, Hai Fang, and Fagntan Dong, *Thoughts on Architecture* (Beijing: China Electric Power Press, 2018), 115.

<sup>15</sup> Generally, China's first-tier cities include Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen; Second-tier cities are mostly provincial capitals, third-tier cities are the rest of the larger cities, and fourth-tier cities are the rest of the smaller cities.

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localities. Except the character of historically significant, the city of Wenzhou is also well-known as the birthplace of the Wenzhou Model (温州模式, *Wenzhou moshi*) - one of the typical economic models from China's Reform and Opening-up policy.<sup>16</sup> As the real estate industry was once the most significant economic driver in China, its growth in Wenzhou had been especially rapid. Once, a reputation as the Wenzhounese Real-Estate Speculator Group (温州炒房团, *Wenzhou chaofang tuan*) swept the country.<sup>17</sup> Wenzhou's average real estate price once surpassed Shanghai's - the highest on the Chinese mainland. This phenomenon had indeed boosted the city's economic vitality. However, after Wenzhou's real estate bubble burst in 2012, the city experienced one of China's sharpest property declines.<sup>18</sup> Today, this city is still ambitious about its future – to be 'open,' that is, to attract more tourists and to allow more visitors to influence and contribute to the city's development. In the past, natural landscapes such as Yandang Mountain and Nanxi River have historically been the city's primary draw for tourists. While the historical city of Wenzhou never had enough appeal. In recent years, the government's efforts to beautify Wenzhou's central city have altered this flaw.<sup>19</sup> Together with the excavation of important archaeological sites along the river harbor, the overall night-tour projects along the Oujiang

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<sup>16</sup> Kristen Parris, "Local Initiative and National Reform: The Wenzhou Model of Development," in *Chinese Economic History since 1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1479-502.

<sup>17</sup> Guoshu Zhan, "Mystery of Wenzhou Real Estate Speculation Group 温州炒房团的奥秘," *China Economic Weekly*, no. 42 (2010): 71-73.

<sup>18</sup> Genqian Yu, "The Revelation of Falling Housing Prices in Wenzhou 温州房价下跌的启示," *Statistics of China*, no. 9 (2014): 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> Yaojian Li and Huaqian Zhu, "Wenzhou Lucheng Government Work Report Mentioned 173 "New", How to Rejuvenate the Old City? 温州鹿城政府工作报告提及 173 处“新”，老城区如何焕新活力?," *Trendy News 潮新闻*, [http://news.sohu.com/a/756492362\\_121777418](http://news.sohu.com/a/756492362_121777418).(accessed on July 19th, 2024)

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River in the city's north, and the revitalization of several important historic streets, the number of museums in the city has increased significantly – making the city becoming more alluring. As the central scenic location, the spirit and memory of historic Wenzhou will be reborn along with the reintegration of its spaces and buildings. And its revival will offer valuable insights for urban heritage studies.



Figure 1 The location of Wenzhou City and Zhejiang Province in China.

Author's drawing, 2022.

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## 1.2 Research Intentions and Questions

Urban regeneration creates opportunities to meet diverse needs, encouraging people to re-engage with the prosperity of historic urban cores.<sup>20</sup> Regenerating historic city cores involves balancing two opposing processes: conservation and development. Dennis Rodwell articulates that the latter strives to adapt to change in urban economic development, but the former tries to limit change.<sup>21</sup> Balancing change and constancy is a universal challenge faced by urban regeneration practitioners worldwide. In contemporary Chinese cities, after experiencing a period of ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’, abundant histories are no longer existed and need to be reinterpreted. When we think about conservation, it is more challenging to think about how to restore historical value in the act of urban renewal, and make this process sustainable, inheritable, and developable. Today, more and more decision-makers of urban regeneration take ‘organic renewal’ as an important slogan, a guiding theory, and even an ideal vision especially for the Chinese historical cities. Therefore, it is very necessary for us to analyze and evaluate the practice of urban regeneration in China, in combination with the key concepts and related urban heritage theories. Examining the challenges within the Chinese model offers valuable insights for global academic discussions on urban regeneration.

Building on this intention, the core research question is: “How can a city’s history be organically reinterpreted?” This question combines two key concepts – ‘history

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<sup>20</sup> Mehrdad Chahardowli et al., "Survey of Sustainable Regeneration of Historic and Cultural Cores of Cities," *Energies* 13, no. 11 (2020): 2708.

<sup>21</sup> Rodwell, Dennis. "Sustainability and the holistic approach to the conservation of historic cities." *Journal of architectural conservation* 9, no 1 (2003): 58-73.

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reinterpretation' and 'organic renewal', which will be explored and reflected throughout the project. In addition, Wu Jiang emphasizes that urban organic renewal is a comprehensive process, encompassing policy-making, plan implementation, and management operations.<sup>22</sup> This process inevitably involves diverse demands from multiple stakeholders, which shape the objectives of urban renewal plans. Thus, this study also pays attention to different stakeholders in urban regeneration. Therefore, this research pursues three secondary goals: (1) to understand diverse views on history and authenticity; (2) to critically interpret 'organic renewal' practices in Chinese historic city regeneration; and (3) to explore the varying interests and perspectives of stakeholders within China's current political and social landscape. Likewise, more specific secondary research intentions and questions will be raised and discussed following the three aspects:

## **1. History Reinterpretation**

Historical buildings and areas are irreplaceable economic and cultural resources.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, careful discovery, preservation, and reuse of historical information are essential to avoid compromising significant historical and social values. The research of history focuses on the diachronic time dimension, that is, the process of evolution and its reference to the present. While Chang Qing states that the research on architectural heritage is more concerned with the spatial dimension of synchronicity, that is, the value of ontology and its

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<sup>22</sup> Jiang Wu, "The Three Dimensions in Urban Organic Renewal 城市有机更新的三个维度," *Science China Press* 53, no. 5 (2023): 713-20.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis Rodwell, *Conservation and Sustainability in Historic Cities*, trans. Chen Jiangning 陈江宁 (Beijing: Publishing House of Electronics Industry, 2015), 211.

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existence.<sup>24</sup> Muoz-Vias stated that as heritage must be continuously updated, consequently, reintegration is more crucial than preservation.<sup>25</sup> In each period of history, people reintegrate historicity in accordance with their own requirements. David Lowenthal held that "heritages are never just preserved, they are always strengthened or weakened by future generations".<sup>26</sup> Following this scenario, reinterpreting historical buildings, sites, and monuments is one of the most common and indispensable approaches in the regeneration of urban historical areas. Proper reinterpretation is not only a form of respect for the past but also enhances the spatial quality, enabling historical area to achieve sustainable development. However, an improper interpretation of history can mislead the public's understanding of historical truths, and could even develop an aversion to the historic site. Thus, a research question can be raised as: How to determine the correctness or rationality of history interpretation?

For a long time, Liang Sicheng's principle of "repairing the old to appear old (修旧如旧, xiujiu rujiu)" has long been a foundational concept in modern and contemporary Chinese heritage restoration, incorporating European views on authenticity.<sup>27, 28</sup> As early as 1935, he pointed out: "If a building is damaged, we should know the causes and remedies.

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<sup>24</sup> Qing Chang, *Envisioning Historic Place 历史建筑保护工程学* (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, trans. Peng Zhang (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>26</sup> David Lowenthal, "Stewarding the Past in a Perplexing Present," *Values and heritage conservation* (2000): 18.

<sup>27</sup> The translation is referred from Nancy Berliner, "Sheltering the Past: The Preservation of China's Old Dwellings," in Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo, *House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 214.

<sup>28</sup> Jing Xie and Tim Heath, *Heritage-Led Urban Regeneration in China* (London: Routledge, 2017), 188.

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Apply our rational thinking to the building, so as to prolong the life of its existence as much as possible, rather than demolish the old and build a new one like the people did in old times.”<sup>29</sup> At that time, the main factor is the damages caused by war, so the limit of his thought was that he did not realize that restoration should distinguish between the new and the original parts. Deliberate pseudo-classic designs became popular in China, but scholars like Ruan Yisan argue that such designs make it difficult for the public to distinguish authentic from fictitious heritage.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, there is a significant divide between heritage practical and theoretical circles in modern China. One constantly creates fake antiques, while one holds the historical remains in high regard. Such conflicts stem from the dualism in understanding the concepts between authenticity and pseudo-classic. As both of them are unavoidable issues in discussing the approach and standard of reinterpreting history, it raises another question: Does the pseudo-classic method really contrary to the principle of authenticity? One hypothesis proposed in this study is: The above two can be not contradictory under certain conditions. It is necessary to expand the understanding of authenticity, and at the same time to expand the approaches of pseudo-classic design, in order to narrow down the wide gap between them.

From the perspective of architectural design, replying history is not only about strictly restore or rebuild it. As Zhang Yonghe notes “No one knows what contemporary Chinese culture is. Under this opportunity, there are many experimental examples, some of

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<sup>29</sup> Jia Lin and Qiheng Wang, "The Preservation and Renovation Plan of Qufu Confucius Temple and the Restoration of Chinese Architectural Heritage 《曲阜孔庙之建筑及其修葺计划》与中国建筑遗产修缮事业," *Journal of Architecture History*, no. 02 (2021): 46-55.

<sup>30</sup> Yisan Ruan and Jianli Xiao, "Retain Nostalgic Feelings and Say "No" to Fake Antiques 留住乡愁, 不要假古董," *Urban Planning Forum* 6 (2017).

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which can be said to be real contemporary Chinese architecture... I think the diversity of this experimental design is something that China can export to the world to learn from”.<sup>31</sup> Today, many ‘experimental architects’ are using innovative ways to interpret Chinese traditional cultures. For example, the use of modern materials and techniques in accordance with historical forms, or the use of traditional materials and techniques to produce brand new architectural forms. China's numerous innovative practices in this area are contributing to the global heritage community with new cognitions and application methods.

However, in fact, the proportion of these innovative designs in China's urban regeneration practice is not high. In ordinary cities, local decision-makers' awareness and attitude towards history rarely match that of those avant-garde ‘experimental architects’. In the practice of historic Wenzhou – as the case study of this research, what are the specific design methods used in different projects and their impacts? To what extent could pseudo-classic method and innovative design respectively be applied and accepted by local decision-makers? The responses to these questions could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the values of architectural design in the practice of historic Wenzhou, as well as the cognitions of stakeholders. And it is obvious that the architects are the most key figures to address this part of research concern.

## **2. Organic Renewal**

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<sup>31</sup> Pier Rizzardi and Hankun Zhang, *The Condition of Chinese Architecture 中国建筑现状* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2018), 72.



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Eliel Saarinen, who is the first to regard cities from an organic perspective, pointed out that there are two characteristics of architecture in the city. The first is the inner power of the individual and the second is the conditions of coordination between individuals.<sup>32</sup> In contemporary China, the highlighted idea of ‘organic renewal’, firstly raised by Wu Liangyong in late 1970s, has been advocated throughout the nation for decades. In order to achieve a sustainable development, the initial proposal of this concept arose when Wu was involved in the urban regeneration of Beijing - a city abundant in historical heritage.<sup>33</sup> It was put forward as a means to balance conservation and development, especially for the historical residential area of Beijing.

However, just like the idea of ‘repairing the old to appear old’ has been constantly evolved, Tong Ming et al. articulate that the definition of ‘organic renewal’ also has become more and more broad and diversified with the development of the times and practices.<sup>34</sup> China today is experiencing the transition from ‘*zengliang guihua*’ (增量规划, means new development) to ‘*cunliang guihua*’ (存量规划, means regeneration) in many major

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<sup>32</sup> Eliel Saarinen, *The City: Its Growth. Its Decay. Its Future*, trans. Qiyuan Gu (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Liangyong Wu, "From "Organic Renewal" to a New "Organic Order": Approaches to the Renovation of Residential Areas in the Old City of Beijing (Ii) 从“有机更新”走向新的“有机秩序”: 北京旧城居住区整治途径 (二)," *Architectural Journal* 2 (1991).

<sup>34</sup> Ming Tong, Xueyan Bai, and Jiawei Jiang, "Organic Ideas, Organic Cities and Organic Regeneration 有机思想有机城市与有机更新," *Time + Architecture* 4 (2021): 50-58.

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cities.<sup>35,36</sup> The ‘*zengliang guihua*’ means that the previous planning model adopted by Chinese cities was to add a lot of land for new urban construction. While the ‘*cunliang guihua*’ heralds more meticulous regenerations for the cities’ historical areas, and it contributes to the revival of numerous traditions in jeopardy. Based on a large number of urban regeneration practical opportunities in China, the following questions can be raised: What kind of urban regeneration can be considered as ‘organic renewal’? Are the criteria of ‘organic renewal’ still practical in the practice of contemporary Chinese cities? How to determine the degree of organicness in a particular case? How to achieve a status of ‘organic integrity’? In order to answer the above questions, it is necessary to both reflect about the general mode of urban regeneration in China, and interpret the unique ‘organicness’ from individual practices. We should not only critically analyze the bottleneck and difficulty of implementing the ideal ‘organic renewal’ in Chinese cities, but also broaden its interpretations and recognitions. So, this part is about how urban regeneration should be organized and operated. Usually, the one with most discourse power in urban regeneration should address this problem. For instance, the government officials who in charge of the project. Besides, project planners and architects also need to have a deep understanding of this issue.

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<sup>35</sup> Hongsheng Chen, Xingping Wang, and Zijian Guo, "Transformation of Urban Planning: Thoughts on Incremental Planning, Stock-Based Planning, and Reduction Planning," *China City Planning Review* 25, no. 02 (2016): 26-31.

<sup>36</sup> Bing Zou, "Increment Planning, Inventory Planning and Policy Planning 增量规划, 存量规划与政策规划," *Urban Planning* 2 (2013): 35-37.

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### 3. Stakeholders

In 1999, at the ICOMOS Mexico conference, the important questions, “Why protect? For whom?” were posed.<sup>37</sup> It became the question that heritage theorists and practitioners of the 21st century must pay attention to when they encounter each different object. Follow these questions, ICOMOS conferences have been focused on the discuss about the cultural characteristics of heritage sites in a differentiated manner, accompanied by a large number of regional heritage practices around the world, since the 21st century. Due to China's current social transition phase, the urban regeneration practices taking place in the country have the potential to make unique theoretical contributions to the global context.<sup>38</sup> The attitudes toward urban heritage from the state, local governments, and individuals are continuously evolving, and the deep-level relationships between them are undergoing subtle changes. It is important to think further about how these changes impact urban regeneration, which could contribute to better people-oriented practices in the future. This study's stakeholder analysis aims to bridge sociological and architectural perspectives, examining the evolving attitudes of contemporary Chinese society toward history and exploring solutions to architectural challenges.

Therefore, in specific urban regeneration projects, questions need to be asked as: What types of stakeholders exist? Then, what are their different cognitions of history? What are their different pursuits of interest? How to balance these different interests? At the same

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<sup>37</sup> ICOMOS, "Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage," (1999).

<sup>38</sup> J. Li and J. Zhang, "A Comparative Study of the Evolution of Urban Regeneration in China and the West 中西方城市更新演化比较研究," *Urban Issues* 05 (2003): 68-71.

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time, these questions prompt further reflections on the two previous research concerns, as the different attitudes toward history greatly influence the methods of ‘history reinterpretation’, and the different interest pursuits greatly affect the mechanism and effectiveness of ‘organic renewal’. It also necessary to know whose voice is strong, and whose voice is weak during the decision-making process? What is the further impact of these inequalities of discourse power on urban design and architectural design? The inequalities of discourse power can reflect deeper social problems and help to find out the cause of the problem. By analyzing these problems, we will have a deeper understanding of the fundamental human will in China’s urban regeneration, and thus better understand the operating mechanism behind different regeneration models. Thus, this part should be mostly concerned by the organizers, coordinators and integrators of urban regeneration, which can be a department of local government, or a coordinator / urban development company.

The following figure (Figure 2) summarizes the core research question/intention, and many secondary research concerns generated from three themes mentioned in this section.

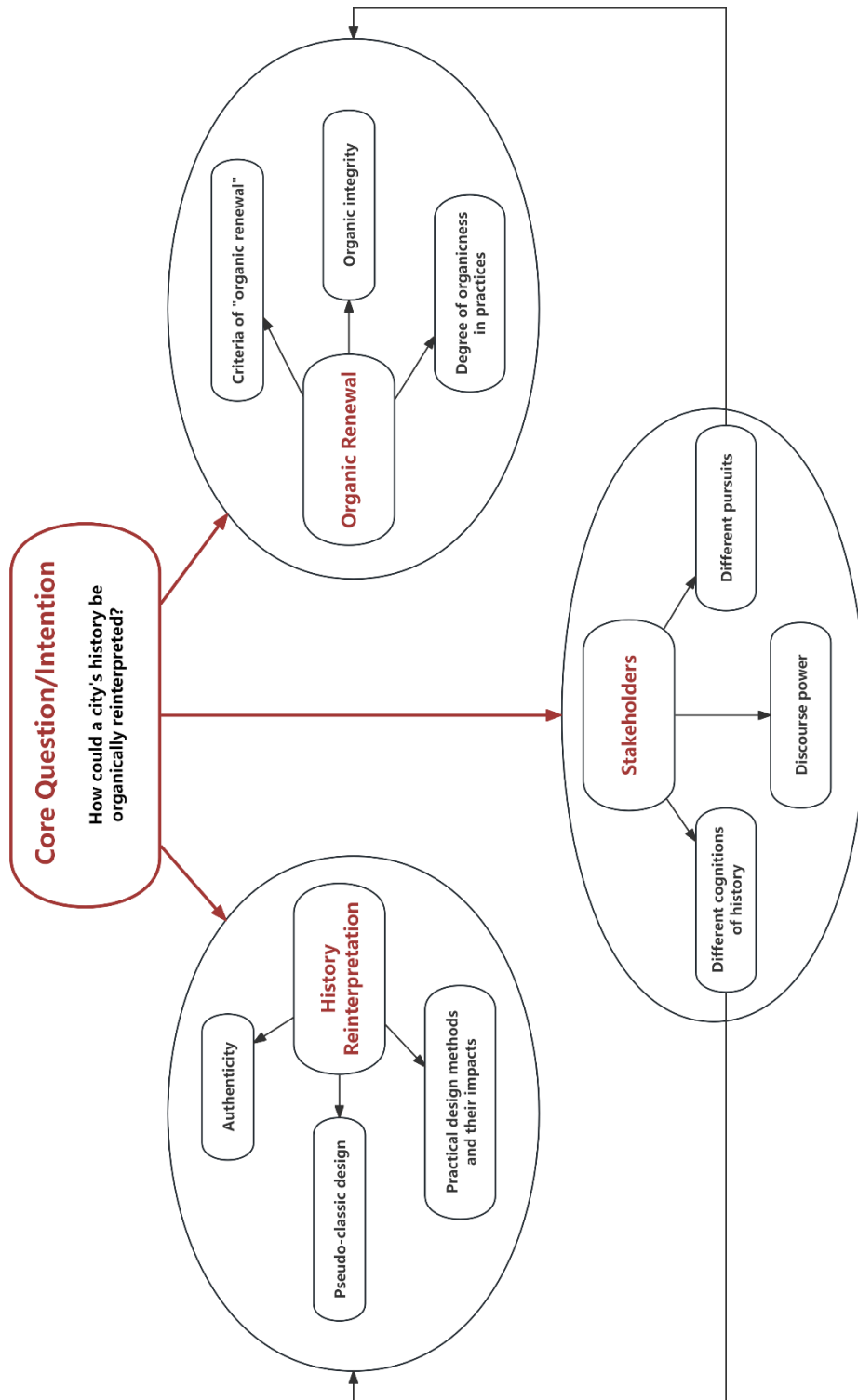


Figure 2 Core research question/intention and secondary research concerns.

Made by the author, 2024.

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## 1.3 Research Gap

From the research intentions and questions, three main research gaps emerge: a literature gap, a disagreement gap, and a contextual gap.

### Literature Gap

Although ‘organic renewal’ is widely advocated in contemporary Chinese regeneration practices, its interpretation and application vary significantly (section 2.2.4 details specific cases). Tong Ming et al. note that the ‘ideological foundations’ and ‘contexts of application’ for ‘organic renewal’ are increasingly diverse.<sup>39</sup> Many regeneration projects claim to follow the idea of ‘organic renewal’, but there are significant differences in the understanding and interpretation of this idea among different practical projects, government officials, designers, and developers. De Magalhães argues that urban regeneration objectives vary due to differing perceptions of urban decline, the ideological perspectives of successive governments, and the balance of power among regeneration stakeholders.<sup>40</sup> Due to the existence of these differences, the past definition of ‘organic renewal’ can no longer be fully applied to the complex situations today, thus giving rise to a literature gap. Therefore, it is essential to re-examine the applicability and practicability of this idea in the

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<sup>39</sup> Tong, Bai, and Jiang. 50-58.

<sup>40</sup> Claudio De Magalhães, "Urban Regeneration," *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (2015): 919-25.

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contemporary Chinese context, and develop ‘organic’ strategies that address specific urban problems for distinct contexts.

### **Disagreement Gap**

Definitions of authenticity and values surrounding heritage and conservation and renewal strategies remain in a stage of uncertain exploration and development.<sup>41</sup> This study’s disagreement gap centers on two main issues: (1) the meanings and values associated with historical reinterpretation, especially the pseudo-classic approach, and (2) the conservation model focused on historic quarters.

Many scholars critique the pseudo-classic approach to rebuilding historic architecture and urban landscapes; however, this approach remains common in historic urban renewal projects.<sup>42,43</sup> However, this approach practically persists in many historic urban renewal projects. Notably, some scholars' attitudes towards Chinese heritage conservation are not strictly limited to historical facts and sometimes a certain degree of alteration to the original structures is accepted (will be discussed in section 2.2.3). More and more values in different heritage practices have been globally recognized especially through the second-half of 20th century (will be discussed in section 2.1.2). Consistent with the recent-years’ people-oriented viewpoint on heritage (section 2.1.3), Miles Glendinning

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<sup>41</sup> Xueying Chen and Jie Duan, "What They Talk About When They Talk About Urban Regeneration: Understanding the Concept ‘Urban Regeneration’ in Prd, China," *Cities* 130 (2022): 103880.

<sup>42</sup> Xinghan Hong, "Spatial Criticism of Xi 'an Urban Strategy under Modernization Development 現代化發展下西安都市策略的空間批判," *Geographical Research* 49 (2008): 1-26.

<sup>43</sup> Qiuda Lin, "Fractal of Architectural Life - on the Death and Life of Architecture 建筑生命的分形——论建筑的死与生," *Urban Architecture* 10 (2018): 118-20.

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emphasizes that “conservation has always been integral to modern society”, noting that built environments are often remade or destroyed multiple times.<sup>44</sup>

This research assumes that effective planning and implementing well-executed pseudo-classic designs with a solid historical basis can effectively reconstruct a damaged historic city and enhance the sense of place. Thus, it is indeed important to delve deeper into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the current pseudo-classic approaches in expressing the ‘history’ of historic Wenzhou. Moreover, it is necessary to delve into the underlying motivation driving this phenomenon. Also, it needs to question whether the newly created ‘fake antiques’ can be considered as heritage? If so, it can push the boundaries of what is considered legitimate and acceptable in regenerating historic sites.

In addition, ‘historic quarter’ is usually regarded as the key realm for urban conservation in Chinese cities (will be discussed in section 2.2.2). However, the formation process of historic quarters is fundamentally fragmented. Thus, it is essential to query the current wide-spread urban heritage conservation model based on historic quarters. Through the practice of historic Wenzhou, this research tries to evaluate on how to make the broken and chaotic historical urban area to become a whole again.

## **Contextual Gap**

The contextual gap highlights the lack of research on historic Wenzhou, as this city has received limited scholarly attention regarding its urban and architectural conservation. Historic Wenzhou’s recent regeneration practices offer valuable insights that could

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<sup>44</sup> Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation: Antiquity to Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.



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contribute to theoretical discussions in urban heritage conservation (see Chapter 2). Various models of ‘history reinterpretation’ and ‘organic renewal’ projects need to be analyzed in-depth and thoroughly summarized. And we need to reflect on whether they can bring enlightenment to the similar situations in China today. Besides, it is also essential to evaluate the different stakeholders and related roles they play in the regeneration process of historic Wenzhou. Occasionally, contradictions may arise between the preferences of governmental authorities, professionals and the general public. Based on Chinese land policy, it is still unclear whether a populace-based bottom-up communication model can have a positive effect in the regenerations in historic Wenzhou. It is crucial to identify the interests of both vulnerable and powerful stakeholders and to examine how these conflicts have been addressed, resolved, or left unresolved.

## **1.4 Research Aim and Objectives**

Based on the identified research questions and gaps, this study aims to analyze the phenomenon of ‘history reinterpretation’ in Chinese historic city cores and explore the application of the ‘organic renewal’ concept.

The objectives are divided into three main areas aligned with the secondary research questions, each comprising broad and specific levels:

### **1. History Reinterpretation:**

- To analyze approaches to history reinterpretation in urban and architectural design and evaluate these methods concerning authenticity.

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- To examine the history of transformation and conservation plans for historic Wenzhou and critically assess the design strategies employed in its regeneration.

## **2. Organic Renewal:**

- To evaluate the significance and challenges of implementing ‘organic renewal’ in contemporary China.
- To analyze the degree of ‘organicness’ demonstrated in practical projects within historic Wenzhou.
- To reflect the historic quarter-oriented conservation model from the perspective of ‘organic integrity’.

## **3. Stakeholders:**

- To identify and examine the differing interests and objectives of stakeholders, including state entities, local governments, professionals, and the general public, within China’s urban regeneration movement.
- To assess the interests and influence of various stakeholders involved in specific regeneration projects in historic Wenzhou.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure**

Combining with the three aspects of research focus, namely ‘history reinterpretation’, ‘organic renewal’ and ‘stakeholders’, the overall procedure of this study

(Figure 3) can be roughly described as: ‘general settings’ – ‘theoretical framework’ – ‘research methods’ – ‘case study of historic Wenzhou’ – ‘reflection’.

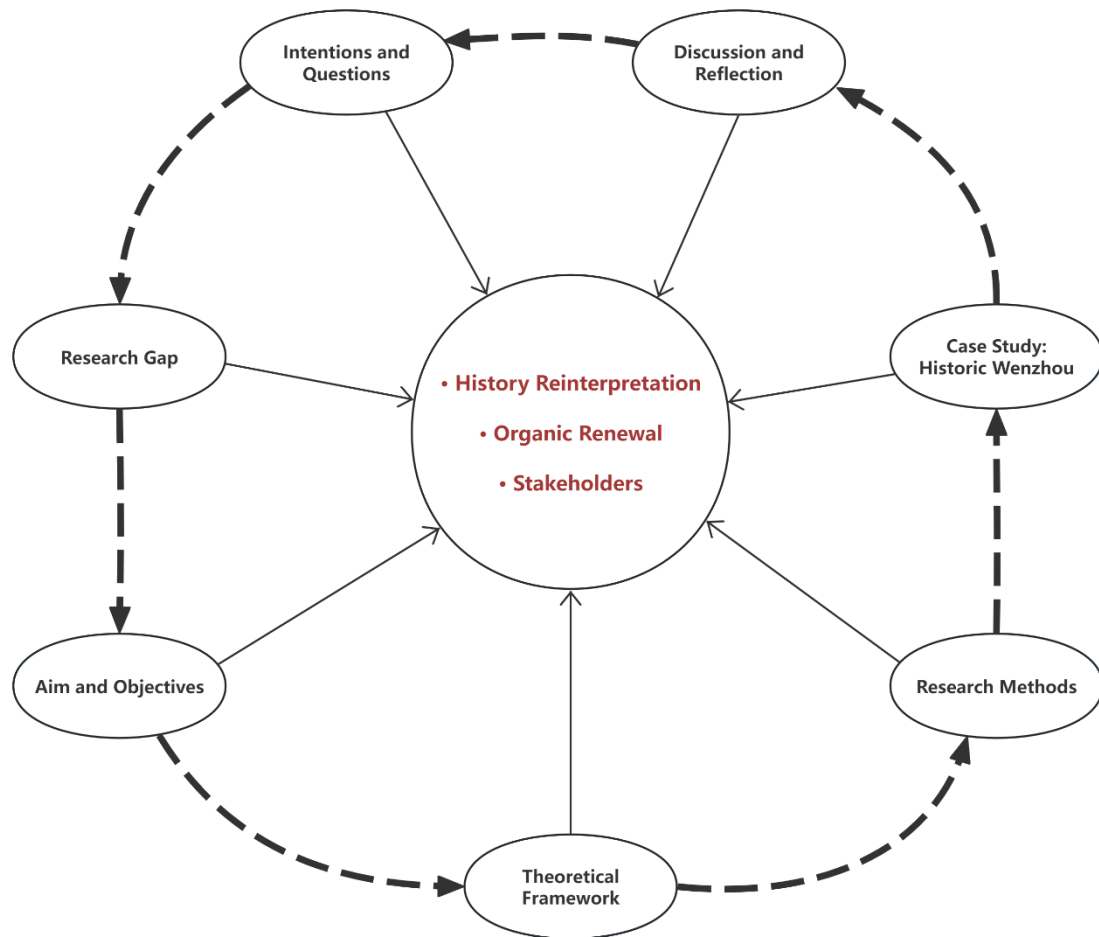


Figure 3 The overall procedure of this study.

Made by the author, 2024.

The following explains the outline of each chapter:

- 1. Chapter 1** introduces the research background, covering both broad and case-specific aspects, followed by the research intentions and questions. Following up the questions,

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it sets three aspects of research gaps. In order to fill in gaps, the research aim, and objectives are set.

2. **Chapter 2** provides a theoretical framework. It begins with a literature review of key theories on conservation, restoration, and regeneration. Then, it gives an overview of urban conservation and regeneration in China, including the development process from demolishing to protecting to regeneration, main terms and policies, the Chinese flexible attitude toward authenticity, and the idea of ‘organic renewal’.
3. **Chapter 3** develops detailed and systematic research methods. It firstly explains the methodology for this study. Then, it elaborates the rationale for selecting historic Wenzhou as a case study at the city level and the three street regeneration cases at the street level. After that, it plans the ways of data collection and data analysis. Additionally, this chapter addresses ethical considerations relevant to the research.
4. The transformation of historic Wenzhou is described in **Chapter 4** to provide a comprehensive and fundamental understanding of the case. This transformation involves changes in both urban form and architectural style, as well as shifts in public perceptions of the city. Two stages of the transformation process are described: first, the ancient plan that embodies the traditional Chinese concept of Feng Shui; second, the modern time transformations that embody the drastic changes brought to the city by cultural and technological revolutions.
5. **Chapter 5** examines a series of conservation plans for historic Wenzhou since the beginning of the 21st century. This includes two overall conservation plans for the entire historical city in 2005 and 2018, as well as some secondary plans for historic quarters within this period. The iterative process of conservation plans with constantly

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revising and improving, signifies the evolving and advancing understanding of heritage conservation. Furthermore, these conservation plans provide a crucial foundation for subsequent goals and contents of the following street regeneration projects.

6. The cases of contemporary street regeneration practices, including Chan Street, Wuma Street and Gongyuan Road in historic Wenzhou, are examined in detail in **Chapter 6**. It is presented in-depth by describing each one's historical background and design specific strategies. In addition, it also analyses the subsequent use and influence of these projects.
7. In **Chapter 7**, reflects on the phenomenon of history reinterpretation, the application of the Organic Renewal theory, and the roles of different stakeholders in regenerating the historic city core.
8. Finally, **Chapter 8** concludes the research, addressing key questions and summarizing major findings. Then, it provides some recommendations and general lessons learned from this research. Moreover, it acknowledges the limitations of this study and provides prospects for future research in some related fields.

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## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

The development of heritage conservation theories is full of contradictions and integrations. As Roberto Pane claimed, “conservation must be a philosophy before it can be a technology”.<sup>45</sup> This chapter explores Western heritage conservation theories, examining how attitudes toward the past and practices for reinterpreting it have developed since the mid-19th century. Key topics include the ongoing debates around authenticity, the recognition of diverse values, and people-centered approaches in heritage studies. Additionally, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of urban heritage regeneration in contemporary China, reviewing influential Chinese perspectives and theories on regeneration. Core terms such as ‘conservation’, ‘regeneration’, and ‘historic-cultural street districts’ are defined. In addition, in the Chinese context, the concepts of flexible authenticity and organic renewal are especially and deeply discussed.

### **2.1 Remaking the Past**

#### **2.1.1 Debate on Material-based Authenticity**

Authenticity is generally understood as the most primitive and essential condition of the heritage, its artistic, historical and cultural dimensions and the aesthetic, structural and functional form of the object or site, its material and technology, and its physical and

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<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Carbonara, *Avvicinamento Al Restauro: Teoria, Storia, Monumenti* (Naples: Liguori Napoli, 1997), 557.

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socio-cultural context.<sup>46</sup> However, two opposing schools of thought regarding architectural conservation appeared in the mid-19th century, sparking heated debate about authenticity. One is called 'stylistic restoration', which advocates interventional restoration, represented by Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (1814~1879) from France.<sup>47</sup> The other is the called 'anti-restoration movement' or 'conservation movement' led by John Ruskin (1819~1900) from Britain.<sup>48</sup>

As an archaeologist-historian, conservator-restorer and architect-creator, Viollet-le-Duc employed a systematic approach in his 'stylistic restoration', based on a thorough study of relevant historical style, material and technologies.<sup>49</sup> Viollet-le-Duc argued that a building should be restored to reflect its idealised form rather than its historical reality.<sup>50</sup> He posited that architectural styles evolve over time, with each style uniquely expressing a building's purpose and function.<sup>51</sup> Thus, a restored building should embody the ideal characteristics of its architectural style rather than being restricted by historical accuracy. One of the critical elements of Viollet-le-Duc's approach was his emphasis on the importance of function in architectural design.<sup>52</sup> He maintained that each element of a

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<sup>46</sup> Jukka Jokilehto, "Authenticity: A General Framework for the Concept," in *"Local and Global Heritage. Proceedings of the Heritage Seminars at Koli National Park and National Landscape in Finland, 8-9 August 2001"* (1995), 17-34.

<sup>47</sup> *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 137-73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-98.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-41.

<sup>50</sup> J. M. Fitch, "Viollet-Le-Duc and the Restoration of Medieval Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41, no. 4 (1982): 283-98.

<sup>51</sup> F. Loyer, *Viollet-Le-Duc: The French Gothic Revival and the Creation of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> John Summerson, "Viollet-Le-Duc and the Rational Point of View," *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (1963): 261-68.

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building should serve a specific function and that the building's style should align with this purpose.<sup>53</sup> For example, a Gothic cathedral should have soaring arches and pointed spires, which create a sense of upward movement and spiritual elevation. He incorporated these 'essential' elements into his most renowned restoration work, Notre Dame de Paris. He articulated:

The term 'restoration' and the thing itself are both modern. To restore a building is not to preserve it, repair it, or rebuild it; it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which may never have existed at any given time.<sup>54</sup>

We should notice that the word 'modern' in this sentence does not mean the modern style of architecture, but it means the contemporaneity of heritage. According to this theory, what is more critical to historic architecture is associating it with historical value, not historicity.<sup>55</sup> The discussion of 'historical value' in this context has certain limitations as it primarily centres on the specific style of the building.

One of Viollet-le-Duc's significant contributions lies in his meticulous study of architectural styles. To support his 'rational' practices on restoration, he even thoroughly compiled a ten-volume *architectural dictionary*, a historical compilation through long-term field research and mapping throughout France.<sup>56</sup> His unremitting efforts in architectural

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<sup>53</sup> R. Middleton, "Viollet-Le-Duc and the Idea of the Gothic," *Journal of Architecture History* 8, no. 1 (2003): 5-22.

<sup>54</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 79.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Bressani, *Architecture and the Historical Imagination: Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc, 1814-1879* (London: Routledge, 2016), 111.

<sup>56</sup> Jiawei Jiang, "What Is Rational: Viollet-Le-Duc and the Architectural Dictionary 何为理性: 维奥莱·勒·迪克与《建筑类典》," *Der Zug* 4 (2017): 11.



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style study is still a model for us to learn from today. A twisted story about his restoration case - Carcassonne failed in the application of World Heritage reputation at the first time because the existing body of the castle was largely the result of restoration in the 19th century. Later, the French government adjusted the application strategy - highlighting the value of Viollet-le-Duc's restoration itself that Carcassonne should be regarded as a typical representative of 'stylistic restoration' that had a profound impact on the heritage practice for the later generations. Consequently, the castle was successfully added to the World Heritage List in 1997.<sup>57</sup> This case indirectly demonstrates that, despite criticisms, his ideas were forward-looking and continue to significantly influence contemporary practices.

In contrast to Viollet-le-Duc's approach, John Ruskin adopted an 'anti-restoration' viewpoint. He put 'truth' together with 'memory' to describe the character of heritage. In his book *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he believed that any works that attempt to replace the previous from posterity were not authentic to historic architecture, thus alienating to original works.<sup>58</sup> Ruskin used the word 'conservation' rather than 'restoration', as restoration was regarded as negative and destructive to authenticity.<sup>59</sup> He advocated 'conservative repairing' to historic building rather than 'restoring' them. He, along with his student William Morris, led a 'Conservation Movement' that spread internationally, advocating applying maintenance to historic architecture to restore the material,

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<sup>57</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 147-49.

<sup>58</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, trans. Yi Gu (Jinan: Shandong Pictorial Publishing House 山东画报出版社, 2012), 97-115.

<sup>59</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 174.

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construction, usage, and actual vicissitudinary condition to its previous state.<sup>60</sup> John Pendlebury realizes that some of the ideas from this movement, such as ‘minimum intervention’, are still current.<sup>61</sup> This movement contributes to preserving cultural heritage through careful management and stewardship. But, it is the narrowest understanding of authenticity, and narrowest understanding of conservation. The meaning of the term ‘conservation’ has recently gained broader meaning (see section 2.2.2). It can only be applied to a limited portion of the valuable existing heritage. Consistent with this attitude, the item 70 of Athens Charter (1933) states that

On aesthetic pretexts, the practice of new buildings with historical forms in historical areas only has harmful consequences, is not beneficial and should be stopped.<sup>62</sup>

It strongly opposes creating architectural replicas, arguing that blending ‘false’ and ‘genuine’ elements disrupts the unity and purity of style.

Italian architect Camillo Boito (1835~1914) synthesized the Viollet-le-Duc’s and John Ruskin’s attitudes - summed up the so-called ‘philological restoration’ theory. Unlike Viollet-le-Duc’s contribution, especially in style study, Camillo Boito looked at heritage as historical archives, a superposition of all achievements of different historical periods, and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> John Pendlebury, "Conservation of the Historic Environment," in *Town and Country Planning in the UK*, ed. Vincent Nadin Barry Cullingworth, Trevor Hart, Simin Davoudi, John Pendlebury, Geoff Vigar, David Webb & Tim Townshend (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2015), 318.

<sup>62</sup> CIAM, "Charter of Athens," (1933).Charter of Athens. 1933.

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all contributions should be respected.<sup>63</sup> He agreed with the need for interventional restoration. However, he believed that it could only be established if all protective measures were of no avail. This leads to a complex concept of restoration. His most important contribution is establishing a hierarchical vision for the restoration principle when faced with the complex state of conservation practice. It also enables the discussion of authenticity to open it up to a broader academic realm, thus treating authenticity issues differentially.

Under the influence of the above thoughts, the Venice Charter of 1964 cements the importance of material authenticity among international conservation organizations and communities. The Charter emphasizes the importance of respecting a building or site's historical and cultural significance and stresses the need to balance conservation with necessary adaptations to ensure continued use and enjoyment. From the perspective of authenticity, it encourages using traditional materials and techniques in restoration work and emphasizes the importance of documentation and research in guiding restoration decisions.<sup>64</sup> Much of the Charter is consistent with the 'philological restoration' theory. In addition, it points out that "the legitimate contributions of all ages to a monument must be respected. The purpose of restoration is not to seek uniformity of style."<sup>65</sup> To some extent, the establishment of such consensus can be regarded as a negation of the 'stylistic restoration' theory. While the idea of 'philological restoration' laid an important foundation

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<sup>63</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 309.

<sup>64</sup> ICOMOS, "The Venice Charter," (1964).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

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for much of the international consensus of the second half of the 20th century in the Western world.

Today, the understanding of authenticity has diversified significantly. Barry Rowney pointed out, “authenticity is only considered to be a remnant of the original structure.”<sup>66</sup> The mind of overemphasis on protecting the original state is not to be advocated. D. E. Cosgrove believes that if authenticity is over-emphasized, it will become a kind of shackle that inhibits the vitality of the building.<sup>67</sup> From the perspective of Stovel H., the only possible natural state is the present. Other states are based on research, choice or taste.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the criterion of authenticity becomes fictional and idealized. For example, John Ashurst mentions ‘the truth of information’, which includes the creation process, documentary evidence and social culture.<sup>69</sup> This indicates that in the practice of contemporary conservation projects should tolerate the situation: even if all buildings are newly constructed, but they compose the historical environment based on ‘the truth of information’. While Cesare Brandi clarified three categories of heritage authenticity: authenticity during original construction, authenticity from natural aging, and authenticity following intervention actions.<sup>70</sup> In particular, the consideration of intervention actions has allowed future generations to create more possibilities on historical buildings. The trend is

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<sup>66</sup> Barry Rowney, "Charters and the Ethics of Conservation: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" (2004).

<sup>67</sup> Denis E Cosgrove, "Should We Take It All So Seriously? Culture, Conservation, and Meaning in the Contemporary World," *Durability and Change. The Science, Responsibility, and Cost of Sustaining cultural Heritage* (1994): 76.

<sup>68</sup> Herb Stovel, "Effective Use of Authenticity and Integrity as World Heritage Qualifying Conditions," *City & time* 2, no. 3 (2007): 21-36.

<sup>69</sup> John Ashurst, *Conservation of Ruins* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.

<sup>70</sup> C. Brandi, *The Theories of Restoration*, trans. Lu Di 陆地 (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2016), 26.

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obvious that more and more definitions of ‘authentic status’ have been clarified as the time progresses. While these are steps forward in the perception of authenticity, they can also make it difficult to decide which ‘authenticity’ should be prioritized in actual conservation projects.

In summary, this section has reviewed many different viewpoints on material-based authenticity (see Figure 8). As a vital aspect in heritage conservation, it refers to the degree to which a building or site is considered original or genuine, and guides decisions about approaching restoration, renovation, and other interventions in historic buildings and areas. But, the criteria and definitions of authenticity have long been debated. Chris Caple noted that the ‘authentic nature’ [or true nature] of an object was not a static concept rooted in time.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, there may be multiple representations of authenticity on the same object, and authenticity can be achieved in different ways. Striking a balance between preserving the authenticity and allowing for necessary changes and adaptations is a crucial challenge in heritage conservation.

### **2.1.2 Cognition of Values and Integrity**

Since the latter half of the 20th century, the focus of heritage conservation has shifted from material-based authenticity to discussions of heritage values.<sup>72</sup> Here, value encompasses people's recognition of heritage importance and its role in society.

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<sup>71</sup> Chris Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgment, Method and Decision Making* (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.

<sup>72</sup> Carol Ludwig, Linda Walton, and Yi-Wen Wang, *The Heritage Turn in China: The Reinvention, Dissemination and Consumption of Heritage* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 163.

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Austrian art historian Alois Riegl established the axiological foundation for heritage conservation. As early as 1903, he submitted a draft law on the preservation of cultural heritage to the authorities, of which the foreword later became a famous article as *Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin*.<sup>73</sup> He proposed a comprehensive value system, laying a theoretical foundation for protecting modern historical buildings and establishing standards for various value judgments in practice. He believed that the value of historical monuments can be classified into two opposite categories: ‘commemorative values’ and ‘present-day values’. Within ‘commemorative values’, he identified three components: ‘age value,’ ‘historical value,’ and ‘intentional memorial value’. The ‘present-day values’ contain ‘use value’ and ‘art value’. Art value’ includes ‘newness value’ and ‘relative art value’.<sup>74</sup> Of particular relevance today is the debate surrounding ‘newness’ in historic areas. Norberg Schulz is of the view that historic areas should have ‘new tradition’ architecture inserted into them. The purpose of this ‘new tradition’ is to provide a foundation to resolve the contradiction between ‘innovation’ and ‘eternity’.<sup>75</sup> This ‘new tradition’ relates to ‘relative-art value,’ where artistic value is judged by contemporary aesthetic preferences, allowing modifications to heritage forms based on the concept of ‘Kunstwollen’.<sup>76</sup> However, this ‘relative-art value,’ introduced through architectural innovation, inevitably compromises ‘age value,’ reflecting a natural tension between these

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<sup>73</sup> Hong Wu and Weiqi Guo, *Sites and Images. Appendix: The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin*. (Beijing: China National Photography Art Publishing House, 2017), 246-73.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Xiaofeng Li, "New Tradition Theory and Contemporary Architectural Movement - Interpretation of the New Tradition by Norberg Schulz 新传统论与当代建筑运动——诺伯格·舒尔兹《新传统》解读," *New Architecture 新建筑* 4 (1995): 20-22.

<sup>76</sup> Henri Zerner, "Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism," *Daedalus* (1976): 177-88.

two values.<sup>77</sup> This approach can only be considered successful and acceptable when the newly added artistic value far exceeds the sacrificed ‘age value’. Table 1 provides a more detailed overview of each value’s meaning and associated conservation approach. Riegl’s outstanding contribution is his deep analysis of these values’ respective connotations and interrelationships. He addresses the inherent conflicts between various values, uncovering both the dialectical relationship among them and the potential for compromise. In line with his thinking, value judgments are seen as inherently subjective, yet informed by rational analysis.

Types		Value Connotations	Conservation Approaches
Commemorative values	Age value	It is precipitated by the time-passing of the monument and presented by the material imprint of time.	"Anti-intervention" or "minimal intervention" principles to delay its decline.
	Historical value	As the monument is presented as a testimony of human activities in a certain period and under certain conditions, its value goal is to preserve a document as authentic as possible for future historical research.	Maintain the original state of the monument and the corresponding historical information that can be used as a document.
	Intentional memorial value	Immortality is directly pursued from the very beginning of monuments.	Because of its "immortality", it must be restored to its integrity.

<sup>77</sup> Otto Pächt, "Art Historians and Art Critics-Vi: Alois Riegl," *The Burlington Magazine* 105, no. 722 (1963): 188-93.

Present-day values	use value	Meet the contemporary demands for its use.		It needs to be maintained and patched according to the function of use.
	art value	newness value	A monument is a self-contained piece of art with its shape and color intact.	Restoration of shape and color is necessary to present a complete artistic image.
		relative art value	People judge its artistic value according to the current aesthetic taste.	The original work is modified and adjusted according to the current aesthetic taste using new materials and forms.

Table 1 The “value” system from Riegl.

Compiled by the author based on “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin”.

In his 1963 book, *Theory of Restoration*, Cesare Brandi advanced the ‘value discussion’ in heritage conservation.<sup>78</sup> His viewpoint was derived from the understanding of the ‘creative process’ of an artwork.<sup>79</sup> He argued that restoration should be guided by understanding the building or site's original design, use, and context. Any intervention should be based on a thorough knowledge of the materials, techniques, and traditions used in the original construction. From this, he redefined restoration as balancing two aspects—‘aesthetic’ and ‘historical’, which, he argued, “swing back and forth like two ends of a scale.”<sup>80</sup> He criticized early scientific restoration approaches for often overlooking

<sup>78</sup> Brandi.

<sup>79</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 228-31.

<sup>80</sup> Q. Du and Yongkang Cao, "The Theory and Practice of Restoration of Italian Architects in the Post-Brandi Era 后布兰迪时代意大利建筑师的修复理论与实践," *Journal of architecture 建筑学报* 7 (2019): 88-93.



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‘aesthetic value’ [similar to Riegl’s ‘art value’].<sup>81</sup> As the ‘newness value’ requires ‘a complete artistic image’, the integrity of heritage was then widely valued.

Subsequently, drawn up by Brandi as one of the important drafters, The 1964 Venice Charter, with Brandi as a key drafter, established ‘authenticity’ and ‘integrity’ as fundamental principles.<sup>82</sup> It emphasizes that “the protection of monuments involves the protection of the environment on a certain scale... Monuments cannot be separated from the history they bear witness to and their surrounding environment.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, a vital contribution of the Venice Charter is to expand the scope of heritage protection – not only for single historic buildings but also for historic streets, cities and their surroundings. With an expanded perception of value, conservation has evolved from focusing on individual buildings to encompassing broader architectural environments and intangible heritage aspects. Meanwhile, it suggests that conservation and restoration work should involve architects, planners, engineers, historians, archaeologists, and other specialists.<sup>84</sup> Murzyn-Kupisz and Dąbrowski praise such awareness of integrity for interdisciplinary collaboration in conservation, which still has a long-term impact today.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the activity of architectural conservation has been extended over a much more significant quantity of

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<sup>81</sup> Brandi, 56-58.

<sup>82</sup>Di Lu and Yan Zhong, "An Interpretation of Some Keywords in and Beyond Cesare Brandi's Teoria Del Restauro 解读切萨雷·布兰迪《修复理论》内外的若干关键词," *Architect 建筑师* 4 (2019): 76-85.

<sup>83</sup> ICOMOS, "The Venice Charter."

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> M. Murzyn-Kupisz and M. Dąbrowski, "The Venice Charter 50 Years Later: The Heritage Protection System and Its Challenges," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 6, no. 3 (2016): 282-95.

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buildings, places, and related professionals, and has been increasingly linked with the planning system.

Building on the ideals of the Venice Charter, later charters and consensus documents further expanded the concept of integrity. For instance, the Washington Charter in 1987 is a step forward, as it marks the maturity of issuing the expanding scope of conservation to “historic urban areas, large and small, including cities, towns and historic centers or quarters, together with their natural and man-made environments”.<sup>86</sup> The Operational Guidelines (2005) sorts out and distinguishes the concepts and terms such as ‘cross-border heritage’, ‘serial nomination’ and ‘heritage extension’.<sup>87</sup> It realizes that heritage is not only a key element for the self-knowledge and self-development of a region or a nation. A broad sense of heritage belonging to different regions or nations with the same natural or cultural background can be used as a favorable entry point to eliminate disputes between them.

In summary, awarenesses of multiple values, particularly integrity, has transformed heritage conservation into a more complex and comprehensive practice. Not only the ‘historical value’, but also the ‘art value’ and the ‘use value’ should be considered by the practitioners of heritage. Under the planning thinking mode, large historical areas not only contain historical buildings, but also contain many new modern buildings; not just a single cultural background, but a diverse cultural coexistence; not just a single heritage vision, but diversified heritage goal statements. Consequently, balancing diverse values, harmonizing

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<sup>86</sup> ICOMOS, "Washington Charter," (1987).

<sup>87</sup> UNESCO, "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention," (2005).

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modern and traditional structures, and integrating varied cultures across large areas have become central challenges in heritage practice.

### **2.1.3 People-oriented**

Post-modernism introduced a focus on various issues, including humanity's relationship with nature, anthropological diversity, shifts in conservation subjects, and sustainable development. Over time, heritage conservation paradigms have broadened, increasingly emphasizing the social significance of historical sites. This shift has fostered dynamic developments in interpreting authenticity.<sup>88</sup> As a result, intangible, people-oriented values in urban heritage conservation have gained increasing attention. This means that the protection of heritage should not only focus on the material level, but also on the protection of those who use it and could create it.

As early as the 1940s, Gustavo Giovannoni recognized that conserving historic areas required active involvement from local communities and stakeholders, who contribute valuable insights into the urban environment's social and cultural significance.<sup>89</sup> As a planner, Giovannoni adopted a broader social perspective compared to that of an architect. Australia's Burra Charter, first enacted in 1979, uses the word 'place' instead of 'monument' and 'site' as previously used.<sup>90</sup> 'Place' encompasses a variety of meanings, including site, area, land, landscape, building, and associated environments, as well as the

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<sup>88</sup> Zheng, X. "The Authenticity in the Planning and Design of Historic Quarters." *Chinese Cultural Heritage* 3 (2015): 22-28.

<sup>89</sup> Berbard M Feilden and Jukka Jokilehto, "Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites," (1998): 7.

<sup>90</sup> ICOMOS, "The Burra Charter," (1979).

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components, contents, and spatial context of these elements. This broader term represents not only tangible entities but also captures their cultural significance more effectively. Then, more and more scholars began to study the value of historical place conservation at the sociological level. For example, Donovan Rypkema observed that one of the strongest arguments for preservation is the multiple layers of value that a historic building or townscape holds for its community.<sup>91</sup> Burthenshaw, Bateman & Ashworth note that conservation goals extend beyond visual, architectural, and historic quality to include economic functions that support regional character and sustainable building conservation.”<sup>92</sup> Ashworth & Tunbridge argue that conservation efforts should account for current and future land use, traffic systems, regional populations, and social structures.<sup>93</sup>

The ICOMOS has clearly realized that the disposal of cultural heritage has begun to undergo profound and fundamental changes. This shift marks a move from focusing on material entities to considering social attributes. The ICOMOS conference in Mexico in 1999 was a significant event, as it highlighted the need to consider the subjective reasons for heritage conservation and the various stakeholders involved.<sup>94</sup> It called for a more participatory and collaborative approach to heritage conservation, considering different groups' diverse perspectives and interests. It raised a critical question: 'Why protect, and by whom?' This question appealed to heritage practitioners to recognize and embrace the

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<sup>91</sup> Donovan D. Rypkema, "Rethinking Economic Values," in *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments* (Lafayette: The Preservation Press, 1992), 206.

<sup>92</sup> D Burtenshaw, M Bateman, and GJ Ashworth, "The European City-a Western Perspective, London: David Fulton," (1991).

<sup>93</sup> Gregory John Ashworth and John E Tunbridge, *The Tourist-Historic City* (London: Routledge, 2000), 56.

<sup>94</sup> ICOMOS, "Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage."

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distinctions, rather than enforcing a universal criterion upon all communities. Other conferences have echoed these themes, including ICOMOS in Zimbabwe, which emphasized the importance of place, memory, and spirit.<sup>95</sup> The 18th ICOMOS in Florence focuses on the highest expression of heritage and landscape as ‘Human Values’.<sup>96</sup> The Declaration of San Antonio, addressed numerous intangible heritage values, including cultural identity, historical and social value, dynamic and static heritage, administrative rights, and economic importance.<sup>97</sup> The ICOMOS 2023 takes the theme “Heritage Changes”, which especially notes that: “Feature innovative infrastructure development to showcase how traditional knowledge, practices and cultural heritage can be part of the solutions [to solve contemporary urban diseases]”.<sup>98</sup> There has been more and more consensus on the fact that many urban diseases are caused by the overlooking of tradition. Thus, contemporary actions towards historical sites must respect their past, present, and future. Thus, areas that have experienced the loss of heritage have been an increasing awareness about the necessity of remaking and reinterpreting heritage for the near decades. It includes not only the reconstruction of tangible aspects, but also the reconstruction of traditional customs and humanistic spirit.

David Lowenthal, a key figure in heritage studies, pioneered the concept of ‘critical heritage studies’ in contemporary academia. In the book *The Past Is a Foreign*

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<sup>95</sup> "Heritage at Risk," (Zimbabwe2003), 222.

<sup>96</sup> "The Florence Declaration on Heritage and Landscape as Human Values," (ICOMOS Paris, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> "The Declaration of San Antonio: Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage," ed. ICOMOS National Committees of Americas (1996).

<sup>98</sup> "Heritage Changes," <https://www.icomos.org/en/focus/18-april-international-day-for-monuments-and-sites/121522-18-april-2023-heritage-changes>.

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*Country-Revisited*, he further explores the connection between the past and the present by incorporating the definitions of ‘history’ and ‘relics’. He noted that "history is the diachronic sorting out of the past, while relics is the construction of the synchronicity of the past in the present".<sup>99</sup> History is based on memory, but at the same time, it results from selection, interference, or deliberate manipulation by later generations. Relics are never just preserved; they are continually strengthened or weakened by future generations – they dynamically evolve.<sup>100</sup> Contemporary society's historical concepts reshape the relationship between the present and past, influenced by social forces, politics, traditions, and economics. A ‘usable past’ is constructed from various relics, stories and fragments.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, his core idea is to accept and tolerate the need to change and reshape the historical heritage today. In *Our Past Before Us: Why Do We Save It?*, Lowenthal expresses his view on heritage, stating “we have to treat the past with reservation - learn from it, draw inspiration from it, live with it, but come out of it.”<sup>102</sup> He advocated that people should translate the past in their own way and accept the diversity and subjective recognition of heritage. It interprets the essence of origin as a cultural production process, of which the purpose and significance concern the personal construction of the sense of place and identity.<sup>103</sup> He categorizes ‘Remaking the Past’ as follows:

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<sup>99</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 383.

<sup>100</sup> "Stewarding the Past in a Perplexing Present," 18.

<sup>101</sup> *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 386-404.

<sup>102</sup> David Lowenthal and Marcus Binney, *Our Past before Us: Why Do We Save It?* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1981), 254.

<sup>103</sup> Xi Chen, "The Imagined History and Invented Heritage: Introduction of David Lowenthal's "Heritage Trilogy" 历史的想象与遗产的建构评大卫·罗温索的遗产保护三部曲," *Time Architecture*, no. 1 (2016): 136-37.

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1. Save the past through preservation and replication.
  2. Replacing the past with restoration and re-enactment.
  3. Improving the past by Fabricating and Embellishing.<sup>104</sup>

He affirmed that the replication of history is positive in certain circumstances. At the same time, he also proposed that the past can be improved by making intentional changes to the history of land use and activities based on the contemporary demands and technologies.<sup>105</sup> Thus, history can be reinterpreted by recreating the past or by establishing a new tradition. It is obvious that his theory is full of positive reinterpretations of the past. From a broader perspective, it represents a subjective understanding of authenticity.

Laurajane Smith, a follower of Lowenthal, argues that Lowenthal's theory challenged the prevailing 'authorized heritage discourse' in late 20th-century. Because what is rooted in this discourse is such a concept - the moral requirement to put the heritage to the descendants- contemporary people have almost no right to use heritage as it is fragile and must be protected by experts.<sup>106</sup> She looks at the essence of heritage as a 'cultural process' or 'embodied performance', which could contain many different levels and backgrounds.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, she advocates that contemporary research on heritage should focus more on individual aspects, that is, the attitude of searching for heritage from diverse

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<sup>104</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 413-576.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 411-576.

<sup>106</sup> Laurajane Smith, *All Heritage Is Intangible: Critical Heritage Studies and Museums* (Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academy, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

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ordinary people.<sup>108</sup> Experts and officials must listen to the feedback from the ordinary, and issuing a formal document from the institutions should be based on the public. Indeed, in reality, there could be a huge gap of cognition between experts and public. For example, Daniel Boorstin argued that the value of authenticity, which is highly cherished by experts and scholars studying history, holds little significance from the perspective of tourists. As tourists may be more interested in the visual appeal and aesthetic qualities of historical sites, rather than strict historical accuracy or preservation of original features; and “they expect quirky things such as non-authentic, commercial products and imitation and staged attractions”.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, it is particularly necessary for decision-maker [e.g. government, urban development company] to act as an intermediary to bridge or reduce this gap.

In summary, the philosophical and cultural values underlying conservation are as important as its technical aspects. Especially, Lowenthal's perspective on heritage has indeed challenged traditional views on authenticity and universality, leading to a new era of thinking about heritage conservation - from a focus on protecting the physical fabric of buildings and sites, conservation has evolved to include a broader understanding of heritage's cultural and social significance.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Daniel Joseph Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (Visalia: Vintage, 1992), 165.



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## 2.2 Conservation and Regeneration in China

### 2.2.1 From Demolition to Protection to Regeneration

Modernist pioneer Le Corbusier stated, “We need to banish from our hearts and minds the old dead ideas about housing.”<sup>110</sup> In his ‘Radiant City’ plan, an envisioned utopian cityscape of high-rise buildings, vast open spaces, and efficient transportation systems totally replaced the Paris’s old city center.<sup>111,112</sup> Because it replaces all the complex traditional urban fabric with a single standard of modernization construction, Philippe Panerai et al. described it as the ‘domination of the standard’.<sup>113</sup> Although Paris was not reconstructed according to this plan, Le Corbusier’s concept had a profound global impact on perceptions of traditional urban forms.. It led to the widespread destruction and reconstruction of many historic urban centers as well as the loss of valuable historical resources.

Since the 1960s, Western scholars have increasingly criticized the modern urban planning model. For example, Heidegger equates functionality with ‘loss of soul’, and argues that “people must understand ‘how to live’ in order to find the essence of living again”.<sup>114</sup> Function-oriented housing design, in turn, eroded the spiritual value of living. Christian Norberg-Schulz noted that: “the new urban settlements do not anymore possess

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<sup>110</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (Hawthorne: BN Publishing, 2008), 263, 27.

<sup>111</sup> *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization* (London: Orion Press, 1967), 34.

<sup>112</sup> William JR Curtis, *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* (London: Phaidon, 1986).

<sup>113</sup> Philippe Panerai et al., *Urban Forms: The Death and Life of the Urban Block* (London: Routledge, 2004), 116.

<sup>114</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Kress (London: Routledge, 1993), 363.

enclosure and density... Streets and squares in the traditional sense are no longer found, and the general result is a scattered assembly of units... it usually does not bring about any sense of place.”<sup>115</sup> The demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe community in St. Louis became, for many, a symbol of the modernist movement’s failure in the Western world (Figure 4).<sup>116</sup>



Figure 4 The Pruitt-Igoe.<sup>117</sup>

China’s rapid urbanization and modernization can be linked to early modernist ideals, which often disregarded traditional urban forms. Because a rapid pace of urbanization has the potential to significantly boost a country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and provide substantial impetus for economic growth, the adoption of modernist principles in China was part of a broader effort to catch up with the developed world and modernize the country.<sup>118</sup> The growth of urbanization rate had witnessed from 18% in early

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<sup>115</sup> Norberg-Schulz Christian, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 189.

<sup>116</sup> Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design since 1880* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 264.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "The China Model: Can It Replace the Western Model of Modernization?," *Journal of contemporary China* 19, no. 65 (2010): 419-36.

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1980s to about 66% in 2023.<sup>119</sup> Throughout this transformation, the ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ (大拆大建, dachai dajian) approach has been the mainstream for most local governments to modernize the city and relocate citizens.<sup>120</sup> ‘Big Demolition’ involved the irreversible destruction of many old buildings, while ‘Big Construction’ aimed at building new, large-scale modern structures.

Since the dominant form of land tenure in Chinese cities is public ownership, governments have a monopoly on land supply.<sup>121</sup> The so-called ‘Chinese residential community’ has gradually become the main residential model for today.<sup>122</sup> The land for this type of development is typically sourced either from farmland or from the demolition of old urban and rural settlements. The widespread acceptance of this model amongst local citizens can be attributed to the poor living conditions in the old settlements and so they are generally content to see the old buildings demolished and provided with a larger living area in the new high-rise buildings in exchange for their properties.<sup>123</sup> However, the

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<sup>119</sup> State Statistics Bureau 国家统计局, "Statistical Bulletin of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development for 2023 中华人民共和国 2023 年国民经济和社会发展统计公报," [https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202402/content\\_6934935.htm](https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202402/content_6934935.htm). (accessed on August 8th, 2024)

<sup>120</sup> Weisheng Lu et al., "Estimating and Calibrating the Amount of Building-Related Construction and Demolition Waste in Urban China," *International Journal of Construction Management* 17, no. 1 (2017): 13-24.

<sup>121</sup> Shouying Liu and Ulich Schmitt, "China's Urbanization and Land: A Framework for Reform," *World Bank and Development Research Center for the State Council of the PRC, Urban China: Towards Efficient, Inclusive, and Sustainable Urbanization. Washington, DC: World Bank Group* (2014): 163-96.

<sup>122</sup> Chuanyu Peng et al., "Expanding Social, Psychological, and Physical Indicators of Urbanites' Life Satisfaction toward Residential Community: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2021): 4.

<sup>123</sup> Yabing Sun and Zhongyue Cao, "Financing Mode Analysis of Chinese Real Estate Enterprises—a Case Study of Evergrande Group" (paper presented at the 2021 2nd Asia-Pacific Conference on Image Processing, Electronics and Computers, 2021), 524-30.

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implementation of this model has resulted in the irreversible disappearance of the historical and cultural elements associated with traditional low-rise houses. Moreover, mainly motivated by economic interests, such a model often prioritizes the size and functionality of the buildings over the preservation of local culture. Pier Rizzardi and Hankun Zhang criticize the condition of contemporary design works of ‘Chinese Residential Community’ as ‘repeated building facades’ (Figure 5).<sup>124</sup> Thus, it has led to a phenomenon in China which is well-known as the ‘Similar Image of Thousand Cities’ (千城一面, qiancheng yimian) - the simplification of design has resulted in a lack of unique character and individuality across many Chinese cities.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Rizzardi and Zhang, 58-59, 226-27.

<sup>125</sup> Shaojie Shen, "Introspection and Discrimination of Criticism: Recognizing Qiancheng from One Side 批评的反省和辨析——千城一面再认识," *Architecture Journal 建筑学报*, no. 6 (2013): 96-98.



Figure 5 The repeated building facades of 'Chinese Residential Community' in different cities.

Despite widespread scholarly criticism, modernization has profoundly transformed Chinese cityscapes. Chinese local governments, as primary agents of urban construction, wield more decision-making power than their counterparts in Western countries. China's long history and decades of ideological influence during the planned economy era have fostered a mindset where individuals tend to lack agency, internalizing

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and obeying state authority without question.<sup>126</sup> With the Reform and Opening-up, the central government strategically unlocked economic potential. The implementation of compensated land use has established a continuing land finance model. This model has transformed local governments into primary drivers of regional economic growth, moving beyond their traditional role as state representatives. However, the societal transformation at the psychological level lags, as individuals continue to exhibit a comprehensive obedience to the state's authority. As a result, local governments possess substantial execution power, which ensure the implementation of 'Big Demolition, Big Construction'.<sup>127</sup> This massive housing expansion increased urban density and brought economic benefits, raising living standards and improving quality of life in some respects despite the gated neighborhoods being criticized for reducing social interaction and weakening relationships between neighbors.<sup>128</sup> Si-Ming Li et al. point out that the residents of gated communities in China are generally more satisfied with their living environment than those in non-gated communities.<sup>129</sup> Tingting Lu et al. find that residents in such areas have considerably high attachment to place, and this is enhanced by private governance that prioritizes market-based services in line with a demand for private governance based

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<sup>126</sup> Yunqin Shi, *Reinventing the City People: The State and the Individual in the Old City Transformation and the Urban Movement* 再造城民: 旧城改造与都市运动中的国家与个人 (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2015), 268-69.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-77.

<sup>128</sup> Choon-Piew Pow, "Urban Dystopia and Epistemologies of Hope," *Progress in Human Geography* 39, no. 4 (2015): 464-85.

<sup>129</sup> Si-ming Li, Yushu Zhu, and Limei Li, "Neighborhood Type, Gatedness, and Residential Experiences in Chinese Cities: A Study of Guangzhou," *Urban geography* 33, no. 2 (2012): 237-55.

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on consumption.<sup>130</sup> This increased satisfaction may be attributed to other factors such as better maintenance, security, and access to amenities, rather than the physical gating of the community itself.

As Jing Xie and Tim Heath note that it is a global phenomenon that the preservation of historic cities and cultural heritage occurs at a time when they are under grave threat.<sup>131</sup> For historic quarters, Steven Tiesdell et al. identified seven values as aesthetic, architectural diversity, environmental diversity, functional diversity, resource, cultural memory and heritage continuity and finally, economics and business.<sup>132</sup> Since the 21st century, various cities in China have gradually and widely realized the serious problem of the loss of their urban heritage, and started to strictly protect urban historic areas. China president Xi Jinping once stated that “The happiness of a place is very important. We must remember nostalgia”,<sup>133</sup> “Let the city retain memories, let people remember nostalgia”, “The historical sites and cultural heritages of a city are parts of the life of a city. And if the cultural heritage is destroyed there is a lack of vitality no matter how the new city is built”.<sup>134</sup> Nostalgia evokes a longing for the past, connecting individuals with personal

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<sup>130</sup> Tingting Lu, Fangzhu Zhang, and Fulong Wu, "Place Attachment in Gated Neighbourhoods in China: Evidence from Wenzhou," *Geoforum* 92 (2018): 144-51.

<sup>131</sup> Xie and Heath, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Steven Tiesdell, Taner Oc, and Tim Heath, *Revitalizing Historic Urban Quarters* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1996), 11-18.

<sup>133</sup> CCTV News. *During the Mid-Autumn Festival, listen to Xi Jinping talk about nostalgia*. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1612447119968148225&wfr=spider&for=pc> (Sep. 24.2018)

<sup>134</sup> Xinhua News Agency 新华社, “Let the city retain memory, let people remember the nostalgia” “让城市留住记忆，让人们记住乡愁”。 Accessed on December 25, 2019. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1653877732115174033&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

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history and identity while offering a sense of continuity. It can be a powerful force for personal and cultural connection, and provide a sense of continuity, identity, and inspiration.<sup>135</sup>

Today, most historic quarters are under strict preservation policies set by local governments, any unauthorized alterations to the appearance of traditional residential buildings is prohibited.<sup>136</sup> As many cities halted demolition and construction in historical urban areas, local governments failed to renew them in a timely manner. This had once led to the deterioration of many historical buildings and communities.

Urban heritage is different from pure artworks, as the former is not an exhibition in a museum. It is an organic component of the urban structure, embodying national identity and serving as a vibrant backdrop for community life. Therefore, designers had to rehabilitate its contemporary function and meaning. However, in this process, the practical problems to be solved are often complicated, thus the practice often has to compromise with interests, concepts and technologies. Over the past two decades, numerous local governments, as the primary agents, have engaged in extensive practices of revitalizing historic quarters or streets, which has been in full swing across China. One reason for this is the growing social appetite for history, while another is that heritage is also increasingly seen as a marketable commodity.<sup>137</sup> Local governments are, therefore increasingly active

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<sup>135</sup> Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History," (SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2010), 181-86.

<sup>136</sup> Nan Guo, Edwin Hon Wan Chan, and Esther Hiu Kwan Yung, "Alternative Governance Model for Historical Building Conservation in China: From Property Rights Perspective," *Sustainability* 13, no. 1 (2020): 203.

<sup>137</sup> Xie and Heath, 32.



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in implementing historic conservation projects driven by economic and political gains. Moreover, the process has been enabled by state ownership of land and the provision of compensation to displaced residents who have to vacate houses.<sup>138</sup> Jing Xie & Tim Heath are of the opinion that, thanks to the state ownership of the land, local governments (in partnership with private developers) can transform decaying urban fabric into commercial places with ‘historic flavor’.<sup>139</sup> This development approach, which involves large amounts of pseudo-classical architecture, is common in China. The broad sense of pseudo-classic architecture refers to the use of modern or traditional building materials to recreate traditional architectural forms in line with specific traditional cultural characteristics. In the narrow sense, it refers to the use of traditional materials to remake traditional buildings.<sup>140</sup> Sometime, those pseudo-classical reproductions are regarded as ‘fake antiques’ (假古董) by many Chinese scholars, who take a severely critical attitude towards this as they see it as a departure from the original intent of preservation, showing insufficient regard for authenticity.<sup>141, 142, 143</sup> However, in many situations, investors (whether they are private developers or local governments) find it’s cheaper to demolish the old building and rebuild a new pseudo-classic one, rather than careful restore a real old one. Therefore, due to

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 3, 188.

<sup>140</sup> Yongfu Tian, *Chinese Pseudo-Classic Architecture Design 中国仿古建筑设计* (Beijing: Chemical Industry Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>141</sup> Ruan and Xiao, 13-18.

<sup>142</sup> Guan Zhaoye. *From "Fake Antiques" to "Innovation"*. *Architecture Journal*, no.3 (1987): 16-19. Zhaoye Guan, "From 'Fake Antiques' to 'Innovation' 从'假古董'谈到'创新'," *Architecture Journal 建筑学报*, no. 3 (1987): 14-17.

<sup>143</sup> Shu Wang, "Zhongshan Road: Renovation of a Road and a City, Hangzhou, China 中山路：一条路的复兴与一座城的复兴，杭州，中国," *Journal of World Architecture* 5 (2012): 14-21.

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economic reasons, limited awareness among local government officials, and strong powers of land displacement, the practice of constructing pseudo-classical buildings as heritage conservation has become widespread.

Fortunately, in recent years, the central government of China is leading local governments across the country to re-understand and develop a more sustainable model for urban heritage preservation. For instance, president Xi Jinping pointed out in 2018:

“Urban planning and construction should attach great importance to historical and cultural protection, should not strive for quick success, and should not pursue ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’. It is necessary to highlight the local characteristics, pay attention to the improvement of the living environment, employ the ‘stitching’ effect of micro-renovation more, and to pay attention to the legacy of civilization and the continuation of culture so the city will leave memories and people will remember the past with fondness”.<sup>144</sup>

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China issued a notice on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, titled “*Preventing ‘Big Demolition and Big Construction’ in the implementation of urban renewal operations*”.<sup>145</sup> The notice emphasizes preservation and progressive renewal, and is intended to promote the retention of the traditional culture and urban character rather than completely replacing it with something new. From the perspective of

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<sup>144</sup> See: [https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao\\_14012853](https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_14012853). (accessed on Sep. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

<sup>145</sup> “Notice of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development on the Prevention of Big Demolition Big Construction Issues in Urban Regeneration Implementations 住房和城乡建设部关于在实施城市更新行动中防止大拆大建问题的通知,” (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, 30. 08. 2021).[http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/wjfb/202108/t20210831\\_251375.html](http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/wjfb/202108/t20210831_251375.html). (accessed on Nov. 5, 2023)

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building a friendly community, care for the quality of life of the local people was proposed and, for the first time, the amount of demolition was to be strictly controlled stipulating that demolition should not exceed 20% of the existing total building area. It also encouraged the shift from development to operation, and the exploration of sustainable renewal models for government guidance, market operation, and public participation. In June 2023, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China issued the national standard as “*Specification for the Protection and Utilization of Urban and Rural Historic and Cultural Projects*”.<sup>146</sup> It particularly emphasizes the mandatory and authoritative role of these specifications, stating that any provisions in the existing construction standards that are inconsistent with the specifications should be superseded by the latter. The specifications explicitly state the “prohibition of extensive demolition and forced relocation of residents” and emphasize the need to “maintain long-established neighborhood relationships and social structures within historic districts.” It advocates for a form of governance that is “government-led, with resident participation”. From these national guidelines, it is evident that the country has been increasingly attempting to rigorously prevent local governments from continuing their previous mistakes in construction activities within historical areas. For instance, the shift in wording from ‘preventing’(防止) [with a 20% tolerance] to ‘prohibition’(禁止) [without any percentage allowance] indicates the tightening control.

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<sup>146</sup> Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, "Specification for the Protection and Utilization of Urban and Rural Historic and Cultural Projects 《城乡历史文化保护利用项目规范》," (2023).[https://www.mohurd.gov.cn/gongkai/zhengce/zhengcefilelib/202306/20230605\\_772515.html](https://www.mohurd.gov.cn/gongkai/zhengce/zhengcefilelib/202306/20230605_772515.html). (accessed on June 14th, 2023)

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From the perspective of citizens, the middle-class and upper-class populations in Chinese cities continue to grow, and these groups increasingly appreciate traditional culture and historic buildings. However, China still has a large number of economically vulnerable groups living in dilapidated and old buildings in historic quarters, and who are eager to relocate to a modern gated urban community.<sup>147</sup> Paul Cheshire notes that “the spatial concentration of socially disadvantaged groups might compound their problems by weakening their interactions with the rest of society, and reinforcing patterns of social exclusion”.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, Fengbao Liu et al. worry that China's gentrification process involves uneven development in the social sphere, which could lead to inequitable outcomes.<sup>149</sup>

However, Broady M. recognized the advantage of mutual help in the old city areas and slums. “People living in the same street have usually lived there for several generations, so they have established long-term social connections with their neighbors and relatives. so that those who are struggling financially are more inclined to unite for mutual help and protection.”<sup>150</sup> Gentrification efforts should balance between welcoming new residents and preserving the existing community. The sudden influx of new people from outside should be avoided and a portion of the local population should be encouraged to stay. Additionally, urban renewal initiatives should be community-based, engaging and empower local

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<sup>147</sup> Xie and Heath, 172.

<sup>148</sup> Paul C Cheshire, "Resurgent Cities, Urban Myths and Policy Hubris: What We Need to Know," *Urban studies* 43, no. 8 (2006): 1231–46.

<sup>149</sup> Fengbao Liu et al., "Progress of Gentrification Research in China: A Bibliometric Review," *Sustainability* 11, no. 2 (2019): 367.

<sup>150</sup> Broady, M. *Planning For People*. (London: Bedford Square Press, 1968), 15.

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residents to have a say in the changes taking place in their neighborhoods. However, Li Fan claims that most conservation projects fail to achieve a local community-based process because consultation with local residents rarely occurs prior to the implementation of conservation projects.<sup>151</sup> Responding, in the “*Notice on the Solid and Orderly Promotion of Urban Regeneration Work*” issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development on July 5, 2023, ‘small-scale’, gradual ‘organic renewal’, and ‘public participation’ are encouraged.<sup>152</sup> This has gradually become the mainstream focus of Chinese scholars in theory and designers in practice and relates to the idea of ‘organic renewal’ to be discussed in section 2.2.4. In fact, during the 2000s, there were few important experimental cases about the ‘organic renewal’ of historic districts over China. At that time, most historical cities in China were transitioning from ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ to ‘strict protection’, while the mode of ‘organic renewal’ was not widely adopted in most cities. However, more than a decade later, we can find these cases have had significant impacts in recent years’ urban regeneration (their influences can be found in the street regenerations of historic Wenzhou, which are reflected in Chapter 6 and 7).

### **2.2.2 Main Terms and Policies**

At the broadest level, the term ‘urban regeneration’ refers broadly to interventions aimed at addressing urban decay in cities and is roughly synonymous with terms such as

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<sup>151</sup> Li Fan, "International Influence and Local Response: Understanding Community Involvement in Urban Heritage Conservation in China," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 651-62.

<sup>152</sup> "Notice on the Solid and Orderly Promotion of Urban Regeneration Work 扎实有序推进城市更新工作的通知," ed. Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China (2023).[https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/202307/content\\_6891045.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/202307/content_6891045.htm). (accessed on October 12th, 2023).

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‘urban renewal’, ‘urban revitalization’ or ‘urban renaissance’.<sup>153</sup> While there are subtle nuances of meaning between these terms, they are largely interchangeable. Steven Tiesdell et al. point out that ‘regeneration’ is a term that includes the methods of restoration, renovation, transformation, etc.<sup>154</sup> It is agreed that ‘urban regeneration’ has evolved into a global phenomenon and strategy addressing to long-standing urban problems.<sup>155,156,157</sup> Claudio Magalhães states: “rather than a discipline firmly anchored in a solid body of theory, urban regeneration is an empirical field of policy”.<sup>158</sup>

The regeneration of historical sites is undoubtedly one of the most important components of ‘urban regeneration’. Chang Qing notes that ‘urban heritage’ or ‘historic cities’ extend the concept of ‘architectural heritage’ or ‘historic building’.<sup>159</sup> So, although this study takes the urban areas and streets as the research objects, the core system for the conceptual framework draws from architectural heritage. As for methods for managing urban and architectural heritage, Jokilehto J. describes ‘preservation’ as a narrow approach while ‘conservation’ encompasses broader actions [However, the term ‘conservation’ used by John Ruskin was a narrow sense, which is mentioned in section 2.1.1.]. ‘Conservation’

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<sup>153</sup> De Magalhães, 919-25.

<sup>154</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 171-72.

<sup>155</sup> Sue Brownill, "Just Add Water: Waterfront Regeneration as a Global Phenomenon," in *The Routledge Companion to Urban Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2013), 65-75.

<sup>156</sup> Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, and Ernesto López Morales, *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 60.

<sup>157</sup> John Pendlebury and Heleni Porfyriou, *Heritage, Urban Regeneration and Place-Making*, vol. 22 (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 429-32.

<sup>158</sup> De Magalhães.

<sup>159</sup> Chang, 13.

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includes:

1. Preservation research and determining the value of historic buildings;
2. Periodic maintenance and minor restoration with little intervention;
3. Regeneration, renovation and restoration with a high level of intervention;
4. Addition and reconstruction under specific circumstances.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, with reference to the Chinese national *Code of Conservation Plan for Historic-Cultural Famous Cities* in 2005, it notes that “conservation has generic and broad meanings” while “preservation is a relatively strict protection method for cultural relics and historical sites, and does not allow any original state to be changed”.<sup>161</sup> Further, there is a special term in academia called ‘constructive conservation’, which allows for the re-creation of brand-new historical appearance in accordance with old/traditional patterns.<sup>162</sup> The organization of English Heritage asserts that in the activity of constructive conservation, “substantial changes to the internal layout and the infill panels within the frame could therefore be introduced without damaging its historic significance”.<sup>163</sup> The characteristics of this kind of building after the renewal are close to the ‘Chinese Stylistic Restoration’ to be mentioned in the next section. In short, the term ‘preservation’ is not widely used in this study because of its narrow meaning in protection. At the same time, we need to recognize that the meaning of ‘conservation’ has expanded from its original narrow sense to include

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<sup>160</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 15.

<sup>161</sup> Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, “Code of Conservation Plan for Historic Cultural Famous Cities 历史文化名城保护规划规范,” (Beijing 2005).

<sup>162</sup> Pendlebury, 346.

<sup>163</sup> English Heritage, “Constructive Conservation in Practice,” (London: English Heritage, 2008), 14.

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diverse modes of protection and regeneration. Therefore, in this research, the use of ‘conservation’, ‘renewal’ and ‘regeneration’ are all accepted as core terms in order to precisely describe approaches to urban heritage as they differ for distinct situations.

The *Law of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics* clearly defines three levels in the conservation system hierarchy as ‘single cultural relic (单体文物)’, ‘historic and cultural quarter / village / town (历史文化街区/村镇)’ and ‘historic and cultural city (历史文化名城)’.<sup>164</sup> They correspond to the conservation efforts at the building, quarter, and city scales, respectively. In the *Code of Conservation Plan for Historic Cultural Famous Cities*, many terms are expanded upon, such as:

- ‘Historic urban area’ (历史城区) designates areas within historical cities with defined historical boundaries, complete pattern and unique architectural style, which need to be protected and controlled.
- ‘Historic area’ (历史地段) refers to areas rich in historical relics and with substantial scale.
- Within the ‘Development control area’ (建设控制地带) and outside the scope of strict protection, the construction activities should be controlled with regard to volume, brightness, color, and form.

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<sup>164</sup> Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, "Law of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics 中华人民共和国文物保护法," (2015). (1st edition in 1982)



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- ‘Coordination area’ (环境协调区) refers to areas outside the Development Control Area, focusing on natural landscape preservation.<sup>165</sup>

It is interesting to note that even though ‘historic streets’ may not be listed in most of the important legal documents. While in practice, governments often select a particular street as a primary focus for certain conservation initiatives creating an intermediary level between ‘historic and cultural quarter / village / town’ and ‘singular cultural relic’.

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<sup>165</sup> China, "Code of Conservation Plan for Historic Cultural Famous Cities 历史文化名城保护规划规范."

Main terms and policies about conservation in China		
Term	Code / Policy / Scholar	Main Statement / Conclusion
<div>Urban Regeneration</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban renewal</li> <li>Urban revitalization</li> <li>Urban renaissance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Steven Tiesdell et al.</li> <li>· Sue Brownill</li> <li>· Loretta Lees et al.</li> <li>· John Pendlebury &amp; Heleni Porfyriou</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regeneration is a term that includes the methods of restoration, renovation, transformation, etc.</li> <li>· It has become a global phenomenon and a global urban strategy in response to long-standing urban problems.</li> </ul>
<div>Conservation</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preservation</li> <li>Value determination</li> <li>Periodic maintenance and minor restoration</li> <li>Regeneration, renovation</li> <li>Addition, reconstruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Jokilehto J.</li> <li>· <i>Code of Conservation Plan for Historic-Cultural Famous Cities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conservation has generic and broad meanings.</li> </ul>
<div>Cultural Relics</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single cultural relic</li> <li>Historic and cultural quarter / village / town</li> <li>Historic and cultural city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>Law of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conservation include three levels as: building scale, quarter scale and city scale.</li> </ul>
<div>Other terms</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historic urban area</li> <li>Historic area</li> <li>Development control area</li> <li>Coordination area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>Code of Conservation Plan for Historic-Cultural Famous Cities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Even though 'historic street' is not listed in the code, governments often make street level projects in practice.</li> </ul>

Table 2 Main terms and policies about conservation.

Made by the author, 2024.

The term ‘historic and cultural quarter (历史文化街区)’ is commonly used in China.

A similar term, ‘historic urban quarter’, often simplified to ‘historic quarter’ in this paper,

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emerged in Western countries in the 1980s. Taner Oc et al. defined the ‘historic quarter’ as “encompassing those areas that retain their historic integrity and cohesion in the city”.<sup>166</sup> They also point out that “these important areas of cities...have usually lost any economic viability and new activities and sense of place needs to be created”.<sup>167</sup> They believed the key to this was finding an appropriate level of replacement and gentrification, and proposed adopting moderate demolition and functional updating, to improve the utility of residential architecture and other land and so realize the material regeneration of historic quarters.<sup>168</sup> Whitehand & Gukai that historic quarter conservation represents an intermediate link between relic conservation and overall urban conservation. In urban conservation, defining and managing a historic quarter is the priority. and social, economic and cultural factors related to urban conservation are mainly reflected on the level of the historic quarter.<sup>169</sup> However, in practical conservation planning, many measures and procedures for defining conservation areas are formulated according to experience, are vaguely defined and lack solid and rational foundations. This undermines the authority to protect and plan historic quarters and diminishes the practicality of guiding future street and building projects.

In China, practically irreversible modernization has occurred in most cities and only fragmented traces of the city's historical character remain. Because of this, these fragmented historic quarters are the focus of conservation and regeneration in most cities.

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<sup>166</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 9.

<sup>167</sup> Taner Oc, Tim Heath, and Steve Tiesdell, "Design in Historic Urban Quarters," *Rivista di Scienze del Turismo-Ambiente Cultura Diritto Economia* 1, no. 2 (2010): 51.

<sup>168</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 168-200.

<sup>169</sup> Jeremy Whitehand and Kai Gu, "Urban Conservation in China: Historical Development, Current Practice and Morphological Approach," *Town Planning Review* 78, no. 5 (2007): 643-70.

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In Chinese academia, combined with the reality of historical cities in China, the term is defined as follows: Wang Jinghui believes that historic urban quarters should possess characters such as 1. perfect historic scene, 2. authentic historic relics, and 3. have a historical vision consistency within a certain scale.<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile, Gu Xiaowei gives a more detailed description of the characteristics of the historic quarters as 1. a certain scale of area which has well-kept historic buildings and traditional building groups as a major component; 2. traditional physical area or district in which the original pattern of the quarter, the river system and the architectural scene are well preserved, and 3. has an historic, scientific and cultural value.<sup>171</sup> In addition, Yang Xinhai adds the ‘functionality of space’ to his description of the characteristics of historic quarter, which means that historic quarters still need to have contemporary uses.<sup>172</sup> Therefore, the historical quarter is a complex research object, it needs to have the authentic historical characters, but also should meet the contemporary use; It is a part of the historical remnants of after the modernization construction, but also should contain a certain scale and a relatively complete historical pattern of its own.

In practice, do historic quarters consistently exhibit these characteristics? In the Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, the meaning of using ‘historic quarter’ in the case of historic Wenzhou will be specifically discussed and reflected.

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<sup>170</sup> Jinghui Wang, "How to Protect Historical Quarters in Foreign Countries," *Architectural Creation* (2003).

<sup>171</sup> Yisan Ruan and Xiaowei Gu, "Analysis on Protection and Practice Mode of Historic Quarters in China," *Journal of Tongji University* (2004): 1-6.

<sup>172</sup> Xinhai Yang, "Connotation and Evaluation Elements of the Authenticity of the History of Street Life," *Journal of Suzhou University of Science and Technology*, no. 04 (2011): 5-9.

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### 2.2.3 Flexible Authenticity

Flexible authenticity in architectural preservation acknowledges the unique challenges and practices in different cultural contexts. In China, traditional architecture, predominantly constructed with wood, exemplifies this concept. This characteristic has led to notable differences in preservation practices and philosophies compared to the Western approach. The 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity expanded the definition of authenticity from the perspective of wooden frame architecture in the Eastern world, which clarified that the criteria of authenticity are not fixed.<sup>173</sup> As the document notes: “All cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitutes their heritage, and these should be respected”.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the regularity of the metabolism of wooden construction started to be recognized worldwide. Similarly, the 2007 Beijing Document clarified that “Taking into account each region's cultural and historical characteristics is essential, rather than based on a fixed, standard method”.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, the choice of restoration technology for current Chinese architectural heritage should pay more attention to the pathological causes of materials and traditional crafts on the premise of Chinese cultural background.

The idea of ‘repairing the old to appear old’ (修旧如旧, jiuxiu rujiu) from Liang Sicheng has left a long-term impact on heritage conservation in modern and contemporary China.<sup>176</sup> He believed that any modern-look of a historic building could seriously damage

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<sup>173</sup> ICOMOS, "The Nara Document on Authenticity," (1994). <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> "Beijing Document," (2007). <https://www.wochmoc.org.cn/home/upload/file/201811/1542967174026008910>.

<sup>176</sup> Mentioned in section 1.2.

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its historical and artistic values.<sup>177</sup> This concept has gradually become a slogan, which reminds decision-makers to carry out building restoration work with rigorous approaches. However, the reality is that there is considerable arbitrariness in practice.

Many scholars try to find the cultural root of this ‘arbitrariness’. Chang Qing combines with the ancient Chinese Taoist thought, noting that “the physical objects will eventually disappear, while Tao exists forever in everything”.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, the Chinese have been paying more attention to studying and inheriting metaphysical laws since ancient times. While the ‘eternal preservation’ of solid objects is slighted. From the perspective of architecture, ‘Tao’ can refer to the method of spatial layout from a macro perspective, such as various setting methods embodied in gardening. On a micro level, it can refer to construction technology, such as wood processing and splicing technologies.<sup>179</sup> Chen Fei and Kevin Thwaites pointed out that “Chinese eternity was believed to lie in the virtue of replicable symbolism, which was a ‘memory without location’”.<sup>180</sup> This means the advantages of reproducibility of modular wooden building components are recognized, and the significance of retaining buildings in fixed situations is diminished. Therefore, it can be said that the phenomenon of many replica buildings or pseudo-classic buildings appearing in China has its cultural foundation. Thus, Chen Xi describes the current pseudo-classic design in Chinese cities as the ‘Chinese Stylistic Restoration’ [as referred to the Viollet-le-

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<sup>177</sup> Sicheng Liang, "The Gossip of Restoration and Maintenance of Heritage Buildings 閑話文物建筑的重修与维护," *Cultural Relic*, no. 7 (1963): 6.

<sup>178</sup> Chang, 21.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Fei Chen and Kevin Thwaites, *Chinese Urban Design: The Typomorphological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2018), 22.

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Duc's idea of Stylistic Restoration], which has two main characters: "emphasis on style over authenticity" and "flexible attitude of authenticity toward reconstruction".<sup>181</sup> It is interesting to find that Viollet-le-Duc's thought has long been criticized, corrected, and even outdated in the Western world due to its own shortcomings. But its approaches are widely used in contemporary practices in China.

Zeynep A. believes that the Western authenticity principle regarding the permanency of materials does not strictly correspond with the Asian tradition of replacing old material with new after a specific period using the same technique.<sup>182</sup> The reconstruction process of erasing old materials is still widely debated in academia. It is believed by Salman Yousaf and Xiucheng Fan that making replicas is becoming a Chinese style of architecture, which seems to be marketable to Chinese tourists.<sup>183</sup> Carol Ludwig and Yi-Wen Wang point out that there is a demand for the middle class of China to get entertained in the 'disneyfication' of history.<sup>184</sup> So it is necessary to make a reconceptualization of authenticity in the Chinese context. In many cases, imitation and reproduction are not considered wrong. Instead, reconstruction or creating high-quality replicas is deemed an expression of the technical level in the Chinese aesthetic tradition.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Xi Chen, "Academic Origins and Characteristics of the Chinese Stylistic Restoration," *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 353-59.

<sup>182</sup> Zeynep Aygen, *International Heritage and Historic Building Conservation: Saving the World's Past* (London: Routledge, 2013), 27.

<sup>183</sup> Salman Yousaf and Xiucheng Fan, "Copysites/Duplicate Structures as Tourist Attractions: An Exploratory Study on Experiences of Chinese Tourists at Replicas of Foreign Architectural Landmarks in China," *Tourism Management* 81 (2020): 104-79.

<sup>184</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 163.

<sup>185</sup> Bianca Bosker, "Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China," (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 6.

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This recognition promotes the close connection between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible heritage.

Jing Xie and Tim Heath point out that “heritage is a selective process of identifying which value is more authentic in representing an identity or ideology”.<sup>186</sup> This highlights the complexity and subjectivity involved in the evaluation of the value and authenticity of a particular region. In their study, they found that in many situations, the Chinese pay more attention to how to make an appreciation of ‘historical flavor’ to achieve a harmonious appearance for the historic area. Therefore, the repaired ‘honest’ historic buildings, fake historic buildings, relocated historic buildings, creative interpretations and adaptations of historical scenes are all accepted in historical streets, as the repaired or rebuilt building ultimately achieves an old look if it utilizes new materials.<sup>187</sup>

A famous example of that creation of complex scene is the Southern Song Imperial Street in the city of Hangzhou, which is designed in 2008 by Wang Shu who won the Pritzker Prize. He described the design philosophy of the project as ‘xin jiu bao rong, he er bu tong’(新旧包容，和而不同), meaning an inclusiveness of both new and old appearances, achieving harmony in diversity.<sup>188</sup> He pointed out that the origin belonging to the past or to tradition can be explained as a universal form of perceptual experience.<sup>189</sup> One of the key design strategies is a significant intervention for the original buildings with

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<sup>186</sup> Xie and Heath, 187.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 3, 188.

<sup>188</sup> See the interview of “Wang Shu: How Did Hangzhou Zhongshan Road become the Southern Song Imperial Street” in 2021. (<http://www.lu-xu.com/shehui/1739319.html>) Accessed on June 4th, 2024.

<sup>189</sup> Shu Wang, *Building Houses 造房子* (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2016), 79.



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the creation of a ‘colonnade system’ (骑楼系统), containing many diversified shading panels, pavilions and canopies (Figure 6, Figure 7).<sup>190</sup> This newly added arcade divides the existing old modern buildings into two parts: the lower parts on the first and second floors represent traditionality; while the upper parts represent modernity. He also attempted to represent domestic culture in diverse ways that included inviting totally 28 architects (mainly are scholars from different universities) to independently design some individual buildings in this project.<sup>191</sup> As Michael Ball and Paul J Maginn realize: because of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the problems that urban regeneration has to deal with, no single actor is likely to have all the necessary knowledge or capacity to solve those problems individually.<sup>192</sup> The collage of different architects’ visions, materials, tectonic ways, forms and styles makes people aware of an unfamiliar tradition. However, Jing Xie notes that while the creative designs may satisfy visitors' curiosity, the project scarcely reflects the true characteristics of the Southern Song Dynasty.<sup>193</sup> Even so, this project has gained considerable attention since Wang Shu became famous, with its design strategy widely imitated across China (e.g. the case study of Chan Street in section 6.1).

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<sup>190</sup> "Zhongshan Road: Renovation of a Road and a City, Hangzhou, China 中山路：一条路的复兴与一座城的复兴，杭州，中国," 14-21.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Michael Ball and Paul J Maginn, "Urban Change and Conflict: Evaluating the Role of Partnerships in Urban Regeneration in the Uk," *Housing Studies* 20, no. 1 (2005): 9-28.

<sup>193</sup> Jing Xie, "Disembodied Historicity: Southern Song Imperial Street in Hangzhou," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75, no. 2 (2016): 182-200.



Figure 6. A part of the newly built 'colonnade system' in front of the original façade.

Author's photo, 2015.

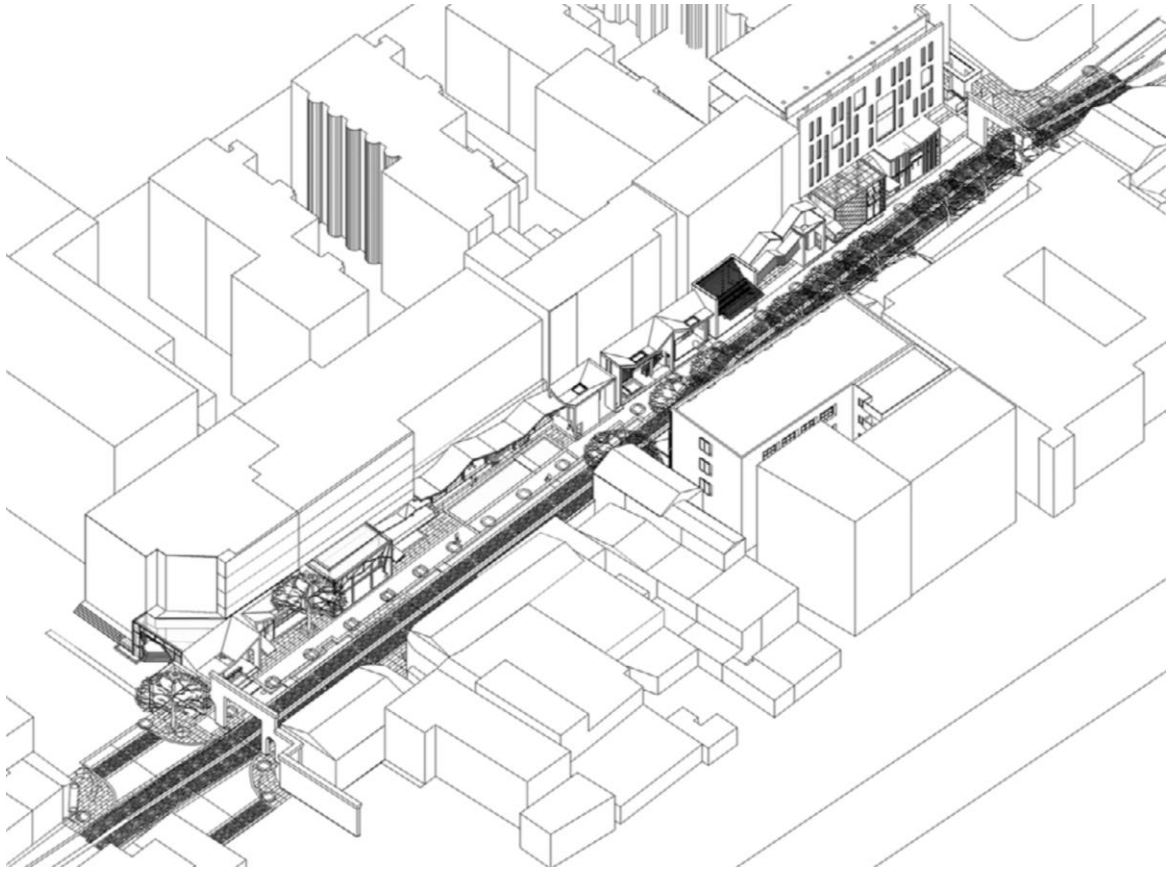


Figure 7 The axonometric sketch of 'colonnade system'.

Source from: Wang, "Zhongshan Road: Renovation of a Road and a City, Hangzhou, China."

The content of this section has a high correlation with Section 2.1.1. Figure 8 summarizes and contrasts the development and differing attitudes towards authenticity discussed in these sections. A long-standing contradiction emerges: on one hand, Chinese culture demonstrates greater flexibility in understanding authenticity and a higher tolerance for practical applications; on the other hand, many scholars criticize pseudo-classical design. Thus, evaluating the authenticity of regeneration in historic areas remains an unavoidable topic.

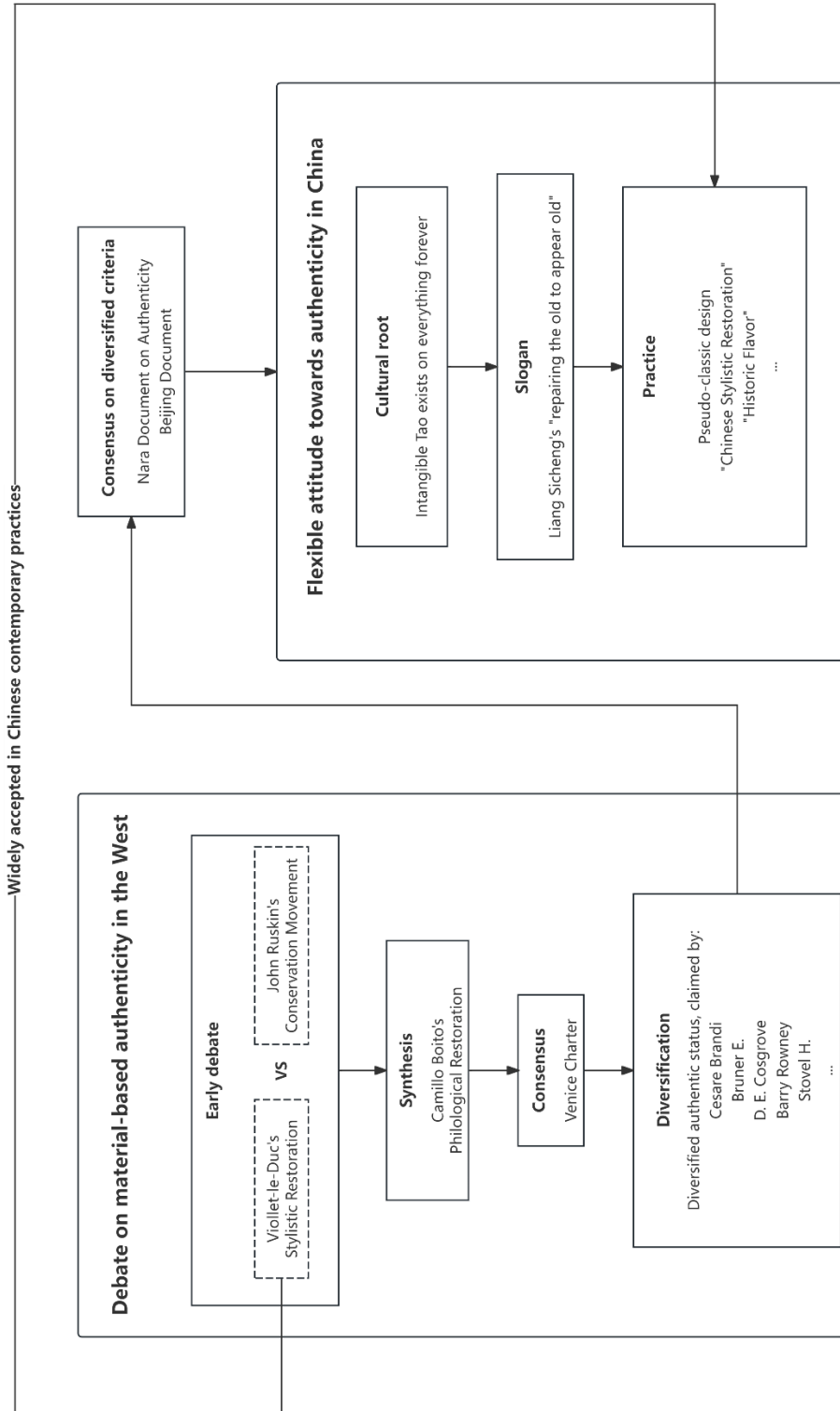


Figure 8 Theoretical framework on authenticity – a contrast between the West and China.

Made by the author, in 2024.

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#### 2.2.4 Organic Renewal

If the ‘truth-seeking’ mode of thought is the root of Western heritage conservation, then, in contrast, the archetype of Chinese culture is an organic system of multiple coexistence. Qian Mu, a philosopher of contemporary China, states: “Westerners value the part, while the Chinese value the whole”.<sup>194</sup> Consistent with this idea, Wu Liangyong made significant contributions to the contemporary urban renewal in China through the development of his ‘organic renewal’ theory since the late 1970s. Thanks to Liang's recommendation, Wu studied under Eliel Saarinen in the United States from 1948 to 1950.<sup>195</sup> The latter's major contribution to urban research lies in theory of ‘organic decentralization’. In proposing this theory, Saarinen claimed: “Only through making the decentralized processes ‘organically’, can sustainable results be achieved.”<sup>196</sup>

However, this theory does not explain the key word ‘organic’ very much - only a comparison between urban transportation to the human circulatory system is mentioned.<sup>197</sup> Influenced by his tutor, Wu's theory emphasizes more on the analogy of city as an organism.<sup>198</sup> It can be considered as a supplement to Saarinen's theory. Zhang Hongyan

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<sup>194</sup> Mu Qian, *Late Learning Blind Words 晚学盲言* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>195</sup> Liangyong Wu, "The Teachings of Saarinen 沙里宁的教诲," *Shui Mu Qing Hua 水木清华*, no. 6 (2002): 56-59.

<sup>196</sup> Saarinen, 169.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>198</sup> Wu, "From 'Organic Renewal' to a New 'Organic Order': Approaches to the Renovation of Residential Areas in the Old City of Beijing (Ii) 从“有机更新”走向新的“有机秩序”: 北京旧城居住区整治途径 (二)," 7-13.

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categorizes the theories of Wu and Saarinen as part of the ‘Organic Order Cities Theory System’ and advocates the formation of a well-functioning ‘urban self-repair mechanism’ as the ‘ultimate value’ of urbanization in China.<sup>199</sup> This concept of an ‘organic urban order’ emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balanced and sustainable urban environment. Wu believes that a city should maintain ‘organic integrity’ from the whole to its parts, with urban conservation and development being a dynamic, gradual process that carefully considers proper scale. In this way, with the development of each urban area to achieve a relative degree of integrity, the collection of many such areas can achieve the ultimate goal of organic renewal.<sup>200</sup> In contrast with the ‘integrity’ mentioned in section 2.1.2, the similarity lies in the fact that they all consider the relevance and consistency from a small building to a large city area; while the difference is that one is conservation oriented and another is renewal oriented.

Wu also actively advocates creative ways in response to tradition: “when designing new residential areas, architects should not only stay with the old hutong-style neighborhood system but also explore the ‘new courtyard’ model”. He demonstrated this idea in his early famous practical project named Juer Hutong in Beijing.<sup>201</sup> He articulates, “The overall protection of the historic city must adhere to the premise of reducing the burden, relieving, transforming, revitalizing and making it livable.”<sup>202</sup> Followed by his

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<sup>199</sup> Hongyan Zhang, "Construction of a New Model of Chinese Urbanization Theory 中国城市化理论新模式的建构," *Academic Monthly 学术月刊*, no. 8 (2012): 14-22.

<sup>200</sup> Wu, *The Old City of Beijing and Ju'er Hutong 北京旧城与菊儿胡同*, 68.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>202</sup> National Library, *Ministerial-Level Leading Cadres History and Culture Lecture · 2004 部级领导干部历史文化讲座 · 2004* (Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 2005), 336-38.

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supervision, his student Fang Ke categorized the organicity in the ‘organic renewal’ into three aspects: first, the organicity of the city as a whole; Second, the organicness of the ‘cells’ in the city and their organizational relations; Third, the organicness of the renewal process.<sup>203</sup> Thus, Wu Liangyong and his students jointly established and formed the original theory of ‘organic renewal’ in the 1990s.

However, Tong Ming et al point out that due to the limitations of the proposed era is relatively early, in the subsequent nearly 30 years after Wu Liangyong proposed it, Chinese cities were in a stage of rapid development, with most urban construction focusing on the expansion of new districts, while the topic of ‘organic renewal’ for historical areas has not been fully carried out.<sup>204</sup> Only in recent years has ‘organic renewal’ become a hot topic again. Tong Ming et al realize that the ‘ideological clues’ and ‘application context’ of ‘organic renewal’ are becoming more and more diversified. Different cognition and understanding of this idea result in the differentiated strategies adopted by various action subjects for urban issues.<sup>205</sup> Although many projects claim to adopt this idea, there are many variations in their specific strategies and methods. Wu Shifang especially pays attention to the theory’s dynamic nature: “Cities can constantly renew, eliminate and repair themselves, that is, cities can grow, improve, innovate and make self-evolution”.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, strict preservation is not valued, the longevity of the original building is

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<sup>203</sup> Ke Fang, "Exploring the Appropriate Way of Organic Renewal of Residential Areas in Beijing Historical City 探索北京旧城居住区有机更新的适宜途径" (Qinghua University, 2000).PhD thesis.

<sup>204</sup> Tong, Bai, and Jiang, 50-58.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Shifang Wu, *City of Life: Based on Whitehead's Organic Cosmology 生命之城市：基于怀特海有机宇宙论* (Wuhan: Wuhan Univesity Press, 2020), 30.

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downplayed, and it is considered insignificant compared to eternal time and space. Wu Jiang has made a classification for the modes and characteristics of ‘organic renewal’ in contemporary China. It is worth mentioning that he believes that the relationship between old and new is the most prominent and important in the context of ‘organic renewal’. More specifically, there are three types of relationship between old and new: ‘making the old active’ (Jiuer Xinsheng, 旧而新生), ‘symbiosis of old and new structures’ (Xinjiu Gongsheng, 新旧共生) and ‘constantly renewing new structures’ (Xiner Zaisheng, 新而再生).<sup>207</sup> It corresponds to one of the important themes discussed in this research – ‘history reinterpretation’. In addition, Wu Jiang also classified the level/scale of organic renewal, namely, ‘district level’, the ‘street/block level’ and ‘micro level’.<sup>208</sup> While this paper will mostly focus on the research of the ‘street/block level’.

For example, the famous Kuanzhai Alley (宽窄巷子) Historic District Renewal Project in 2006 in the city of Chengdu is a ‘courtyard-based organic renewal’ model. It reflects the organic renewal of both the ‘street/block level’ and the ‘micro level’. The policymakers initially intended to proceed quickly by following the property development model, but relocating the local people exposed contradictions and delayed the project, forcing the decision-makers to shift to “relocating a yard’s residents one by one, and renewing one yard at a time”. All elevations and sections of each courtyard are the result of the revisions after consultations between designers and the residents. Therefore, it is

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<sup>207</sup> Wu, 713-20.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.



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described as ‘microcirculation model based on courtyard’.<sup>209</sup> Following on from ‘courtyard relocation’ and ‘courtyard renewal’, the planners and operators proposed a specific ‘courtyard business’ model that was later brought into commercial operation.<sup>210</sup> Although this model is small-scale and dynamic, it is still top-down. Its success requires a huge investment of time and effort by the local government and designers.

While another famous example named Tianzifang (田子坊) Historic Quarter has experienced a more bottom-up and self-organized organic renewal process. Originally (in early 2000s), the affordable rent drawn in many young artists who have purchased abandoned alley factories in Tianzifang to establish their studios, making this place a ‘hub of non-stop cultural activities’<sup>211</sup>. Culture acts as a catalyst, fostering a self-improving system that drives prosperity and preserves history, transforming this place into an organic living entity capable of continual renewal.<sup>212</sup> Sun Shiwen and Zhou Yu pointed out that the decentralization of administrative power implemented by the local government has given the subdistrict office a unique status and role that enable it to mobilize various social resources in the process of renewal of the Tianzifang community.<sup>213</sup> Its spontaneous

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<sup>209</sup> Boying Liu et al., *Beautiful China, Kuanzhai Dream 美丽中国·宽窄梦* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2014), 307-08.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>211</sup> Yanning Li, "Tianzifang "Bottom-up" Sample of Shanghai Historic District Renewal 田子坊上海历史街区更新的“自下而上”样本," *Chinese Cultural Heritage* 3 (2011): 38-47.

<sup>212</sup> Zhang Q. and Su Y., "The Cultural Regeneration of Historical District: Research and Discussion of the Theory of Urban Rehabilitation in the Perspective of Urban Catalyst," in *The 5th International Conference of the International Forum on Urbanism* (2011).

<sup>213</sup> Shiwen Sun and Yu Zhou, "Research on the Renewal Mechanism of Shanghai Tianzifang District 上海田子坊地区更新机制研究," *Urban Planning Journal 城市规划学刊* 1 (2015): 39-45.

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transformations, providing valuable insights for China's exploration in a system of community-led organic renewal with self-organized public participations.

Consequently, a set of criteria can be roughly drawn from the above theoretical development and practical cases to assess whether an urban regeneration project qualifies as 'organic renewal':

- Gradual Transformation – Changes should be incremental rather than disruptive, allowing the city's historical fabric to evolve naturally.
- Contextual Sensitivity – Interventions must respect the historical, cultural, and social characteristics of the site.
- Stakeholder Participation – Local communities, residents, and businesses should be actively involved in decision-making processes.
- Integration of Old and New – Architectural and urban design solutions should harmonize historical elements with contemporary needs.
- Sustainability and Inheritability – The renewal process should ensure long-term viability by maintaining historical memory while enabling future development.

However, in the current political context of China, it is quite difficult to promote and popularize the organic renewal models of the above two examples. In fact, local governments generally adopt the urban heritage renewal behavior oriented by tourism and economic development.

In contrast, although Western countries do not explicitly use the word 'organic' in urban regeneration, many of their operational mechanisms and methods have corresponded

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to the ‘organic renewal’ concept. For example, in the UK, the ‘Urban Development Corporation’ has been established as a statutory body to operate urban regeneration since 1980. They encourage the so called ‘place-marketing’ by creating new consumption spaces in the old city centre through legislative mandates and public input.<sup>214</sup> Its operating cycle [10 years required by law] is not measured by the construction period [usually take only a year or two]. In order to further strengthen coordination, organization and integration of all forces to release the development potential of old city centre, and better match the uncertainty and complexity of urban regeneration goals in the long cycle, since 1999, ‘Urban Regeneration Companies’ [similar to consulting firms] has been introduced to help creating favorable investment environment for the local private sectors.<sup>215</sup> For example, the ‘Liverpool Vision’ is such a company that played a role of integration, supervision and coordination in the development of ‘Liverpool One’ [Liverpool’s old city centre].<sup>216</sup> However, the current urban regenerations in China are mostly measured by short construction period, and lack of well coordination mechanism of multiple sectors from public to private. Thus, there is concern in Chinese practice, ‘organic renewal’ may be dismissed as a visionary but impractical slogan, making its implementation into clear and effective actions challenging.

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<sup>214</sup> Imrie R. and Thomas H., *British Urban Policy: An Evaluation of the Urban Development Corporations* (London: Sage, 1999), 9, 76, 93.

<sup>215</sup> Greenhalgh P. and Gudgeon C., "Mechanisms of Urban Change: Regeneration Companies or Development Corporations," *Northern Economic Review*, no. 35 (2004): 53-72.

<sup>216</sup> David Taylor and Terry Davenport, *Liverpool: Regeneration of a City Centre*, trans. Biao Wei (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2016), 42.

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## 2.3 Summary

Figure 9 summarizes and integrates connections between key concepts discussed in this chapter, such as ‘values and integrity’ (section 2.1.2), ‘people-oriented’ (section 2.1.3), and ‘organic renewal’ (section 2.2.4). Together with Figure 8, which addresses authenticity (section 2.1.1 and 2.2.3), these figures form the complete theoretical framework for this research.

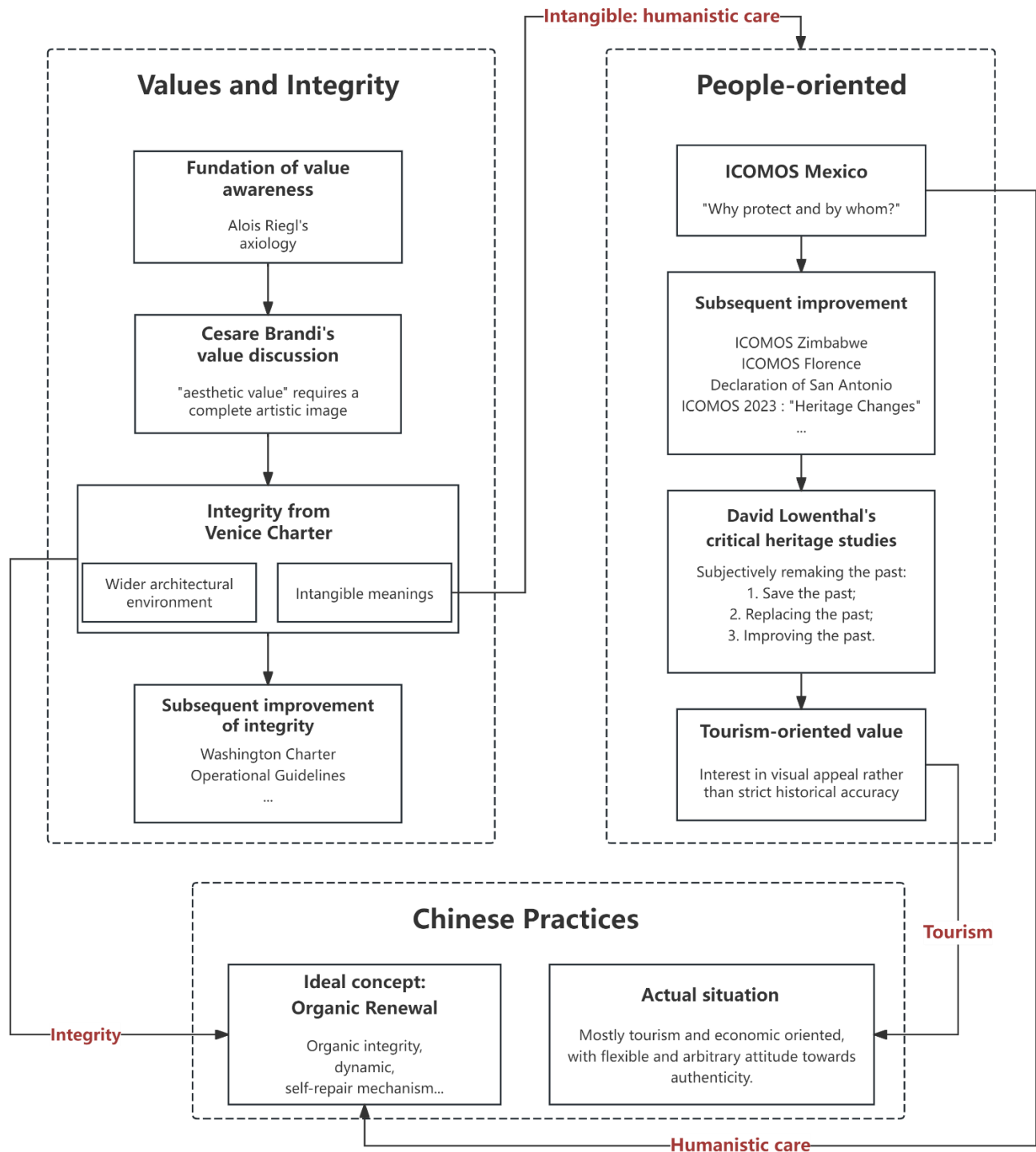


Figure 9 The theoretical development of 'values and integrity' to 'people oriented' concepts, and their connections to the Chinese practices.

Made by the author, in 2024.

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Conservation involves a history of seeking rationality amid numerous contradictions: the rationality of viewing history, aesthetics, values, and methods.<sup>217</sup> The changing attitudes and approaches toward heritage conservation from material-based to values-based, and then to people-centred living heritage, raising new questions about the principles of selection, reinterpretation and dissemination of the past.<sup>218</sup> The history of conservation is a reminder that our relationship with the past is not static but constantly evolving and that our efforts to manage heritage must reflect the needs and aspirations of the present.

In contemporary China, the attitude towards urban heritage has undergone a transition process from demolition, to protection, and then to regeneration. The current situation in China differs significantly from that in Western countries. There are different construction modes toward historical cities and different attitudes towards authenticity. In a large number of practices, it has gradually developed Chinese characteristic heritage conservation methods, policies and thoughts. In particular, the concept of ‘organic renewal’ and its specific implementation methods are widely promoted in contemporary China. However, this ideal is rarely achieved in practice. Therefore, it is essential to reflect deeply on the gap between the ideal and reality.

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<sup>217</sup> Xi Chen, *The Evolution of Architectural Heritage Conservation Theory* (Shanghai: Tongji University 2016), 1-2.

<sup>218</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 162-63.

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## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter aims to establish an appropriate research methodology. It attempts to address the research questions in a theory-informed and evidence-based manner. Creswell defines research methodology as “plans and procedures that cover the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation”.<sup>219</sup> Although urban studies are comprehensive and interdisciplinary, this study adopts sociology as its primary discipline. According to Auguste Comte, a positivist methodology “values the internal laws and mechanism of society by learning through observation or sensory experience”.<sup>220</sup> ‘Progress’ and ‘order’ are the two aspects that constitute sociological research.<sup>221</sup> Consequently, this research will also attempt to utilise interdisciplinary knowledge and comparative study methods to review the chronological ‘progress’ and identify the ‘orders’ of urban regeneration. As “case studies do not stop at the level of study individual cases, but also need to find deep causal relationships among study variables.”<sup>222</sup> Therefore, it is important to use a method of comparative research for the multiple cases, in order to find out the distinguishing features and trends of their

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<sup>219</sup> John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage publications, 2017), 3.

<sup>220</sup> Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J.H. Bridges (London: Routledge, 2015), 8.

<sup>221</sup> William Whewell, "Comte and Positivism," *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science* 54, no. 4 (2017): 209-24.

<sup>222</sup> Robert K Yin, "How to Do Better Case Studies," *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods* 2, no. 254-282 (2009): 260.

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evolution. To analyse these features, this study will use both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The former will serve as the primary approach, with the latter as auxiliary.

Firstly, it is necessary to elucidate the value and significance of the case-choosing and propose rational research hypotheses. The case study should then be divided into several parts or procedures, formulating a series of research questions for each part. Subsequently, specific methods, such as documentation, interview and fieldwork, need to be defined. Finally, analytical approaches should be developed for the collected data and information.

### **3.1 Case Selection and Research Focus**

Charles and Mertler identify three purposes of case studies: (1) to describe a specific individual phenomenon, (2) to provide explanation, and (3) to offer evaluation.<sup>223</sup> Robert K. Yin claims that case study is an empirical inquiry, in which the focus is on contemporary complex social phenomena within a real-life context.<sup>224</sup> Urban regeneration in a given context is often a result of the interplay between global policy transfer and local policy adaptation.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, we need to constantly switch between macro- and micro-level perspectives to identify correlations between them. Yin also points out that in selecting

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<sup>223</sup> C. M. Charles and C. A. Mertler, *Introduction to Educational Research* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon Incorporated, 2002), 32.

<sup>224</sup> Yin, 12.

<sup>225</sup> Chen and Duan, 103880.



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cases, the researcher “needs sufficient access to the data for your potential case – whether to interview people, review documents or records, or make field observations”.<sup>226</sup>

In light of these considerations, this research identifies two pivotal factors to which the case study must respond. Firstly, the case study needs to respond to and represent the theories from the established theoretical framework. Secondly, the case study needs to be distinctive, thereby serving not only to elucidate but also to augment and enrich the theoretical stance. The researcher spent a period studying and visiting many famous urban historical regeneration sites across China. Besides historic Wenzhou, the initial investigations included visiting Southern Song Imperial Street (南宋御街) in Hangzhou, Tianzifang (田子坊) in Shanghai, Kuanzhai Alley (宽窄巷子) in Chengdu, Nanluo Old Alley (南锣鼓巷) in Beijing, Five Old Streets (五大道) in Tianjin, Pingjiang Road (平江路) in Suzhou and so on. As a result of this, historic Wenzhou was chosen as the research case study to explain how empirical strategies of regeneration are applied in a contemporary real-life context. This selection was based on the following factors:

- **The distinctiveness of the city:** In recent years, there has been a significant amount of research focused on the revitalization of historical cities in China, particularly those with significant historical importance such as Beijing, Xi'an, and Suzhou. Wenzhou, on the other hand, may not have received the same level of scholarly attention in terms

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<sup>226</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2018), 26.

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of its urban and architectural conservation. Its uniqueness and character have not been comprehensively analyzed in academia.

- **The representation of the theories and complexity of the issues:** The ongoing regeneration of historic Wenzhou continue to face major challenges and controversies. It provides an ideal opportunity to explore and evaluate the application of urban heritage conservation theories in practice. The complexity of the issues can be found in its recent dynamic and diverse street regeneration projects. Various strategies have been implemented to reinterpret the city's histories, which are worth studying and reflected. At the same time, 'organic renewal' is also proclaimed as the regeneration mode in many city's official media,<sup>227,228</sup> so it is meaningful to test whether different projects can meet the criteria and provide suggestions for its further development. Thus, the case of historic Wenzhou could be both typical and unique that could further enrich and enhance the theoretical stance for this research.
- **Subjective factors of the researcher:** The author's extensive experience living and working in Wenzhou has provided him with sufficient access to observe the transformation of the city core, communicate with key figures, and collect necessary research documents about conservation plans and regeneration projects.

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<sup>227</sup> CPC Wenzhou Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department. December 29th, 2023. <http://www.wzxc.gov.cn/system/2023/12/29/014941681.shtml>. (accessed on Feb. 15th, 2025)

<sup>228</sup> Wenzhou News Network. March 7th, 2024. <https://news.66wz.com/system/2024/03/07/105625480.shtml> (accessed on Feb. 15th, 2025)

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Responding to the overall research question “How could a city’s history be organically reinterpreted?”, this paper will focus on the case of historic Wenzhou and deeply analyse the process of its on-going historical urban space regenerations. Thus, the aim of the case study can be explained as: review the chronological ‘progress’ and identify the ‘orders’ from the regenerations in historic Wenzhou. Following that, the research will elaborate on historic Wenzhou from three perspectives— ‘historical transformations’, ‘conservation plans’, and ‘street regenerations’—in three independent chapters. In addition, Figure 10 can help to better understand such framing of the case study. In fact, this study contains two tiers of case studies – the whole historic Wenzhou is the first tier, while the conservation plans for historic quarters and street regeneration projects are the second tier. For the second tier, the research covers multiple-case studies. As Robert K. Yin indicates that comparison is the most important factor in establishing multiple-case studies, and the selection of subsequent cases should address any obvious shortcomings or criticisms of previous cases.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, the correlation and comparison between these multiple cases are essential in later discussions and reflections. For example, the selection of the third street case—Gongyuan Road—incorporates a variety of renewal strategies, serving as a response and adjustment to the shortcomings of previous cases that focused too heavily on a single strategy (see Chapters 6 and 7).

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 62.

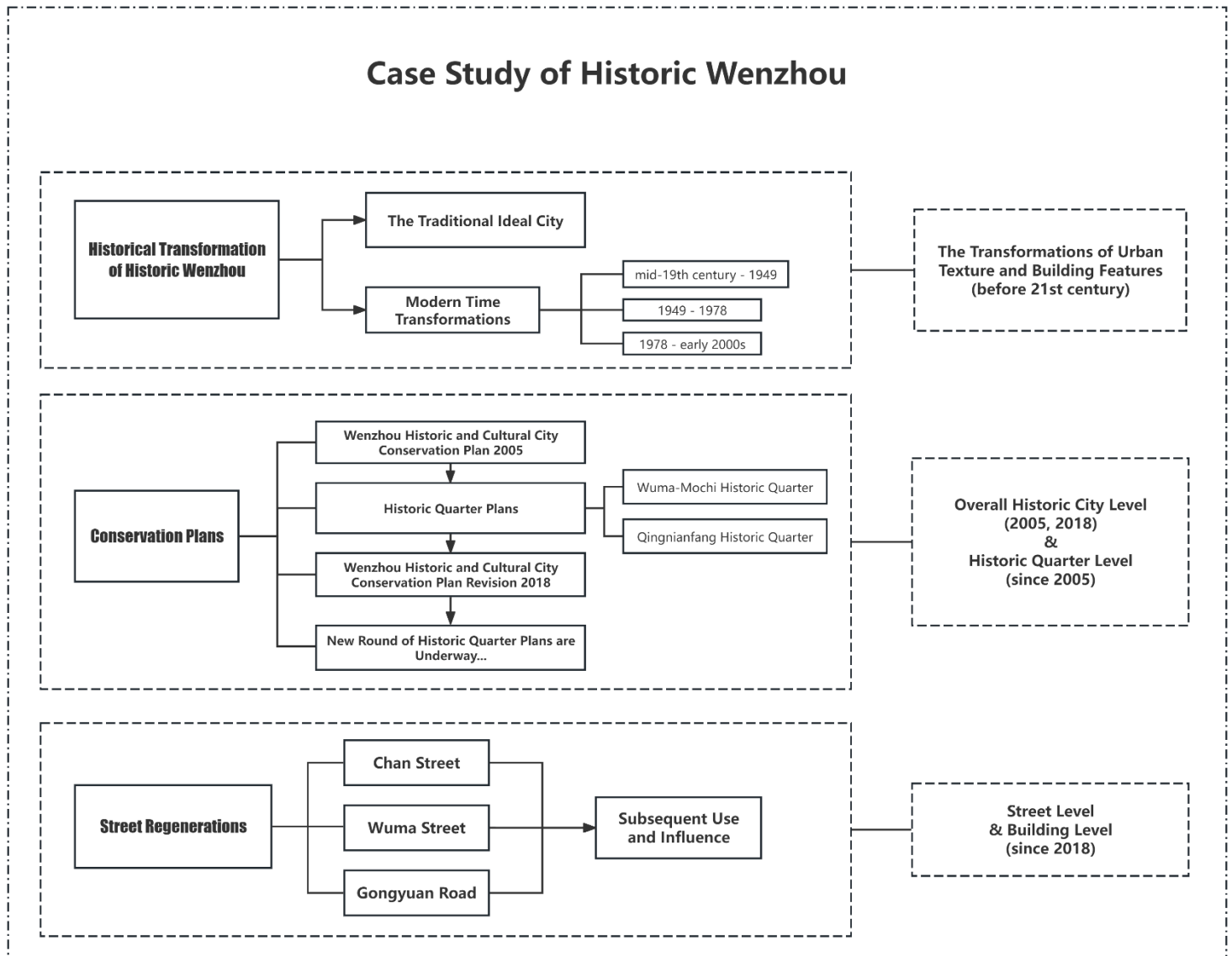


Figure 10 Framing of the case study.

Made by the author, 2024.

Robert K. Yin clarified that the purpose of case study research design is to generalize to theoretical propositions.<sup>230</sup> Thus, after selecting cases, study questions should

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 40.

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be established, and areas of focus clarified. He also explains that there are five levels of questions in case study research:

1. Questions verbalised to specific interviewees (discussed in section 3.2).
2. Questions about each case, which represent your line of inquiry.
3. Questions asked of the pattern of findings across multiple cases.
4. Questions asked of an entire study – calling on information beyond the case study evidence and including other literature that have been reviewed.
5. Normative questions about policy recommendations and conclusions, going beyond the narrow scope of study.<sup>231</sup>

Using the above framework and the five levels of questions, the following paragraphs will outline the case-level research questions and the purpose of each section.

First, from a chronological perspective, a question can be raised: how has historic Wenzhou transformed over time, and what historical features are associated with each era? Understanding how this city transformed in history, and what historical characteristics these transformations left for it, lays a foundation for the subsequent analysis of the ‘history reinterpretation’. The planning and architectural style of historic Wenzhou, rooted in traditional Chinese culture, persisted for over a thousand years before undergoing radical changes in the modern period of the last century. Therefore, the ‘historical transformations’ of the city can be divided into a ‘traditional stage’ and ‘modern stage’. The transformations experienced by the latter can be divided into three stages, they are the ‘early modern’, ‘early

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 100.

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People's Republic of China', 'early Reform and Opening-up'. After so many periods of changes, today historic Wenzhou not only contains a large number of low-rise buildings mixed with traditional Chinese style, Western classical style and simple modern style - forming the historic quarters with traditional urban texture; but also, it contains a large number of multi-storey and high-rise modern buildings, forming modern urban fabrics and modern communities. Those historic quarters are still the carrier of authentic traditional residential life. It is necessary to make a comprehensive analysis of its historical transformation process and the reasons behind, to understand what typical traditional patterns it contains and their related values. They deserve to be re-studied and inherited in the process of history reinterpretation.

Second, the understanding of conservation plans of historic Wenzhou is not only helpful to understand the future vision of the entire historical city, but also the basis for analyzing the subsequent street regeneration projects. Historic quarters, as important factors defined in the conservation plans, exist scattered in the historical city as the areas that still retain the traditional urban textures and traditional architectures. Each historic quarter also has its secondary conservation plan. So, a hypothesis of this study is that the above-mentioned overall conservation plans and quarter-level conservation plans could interact in remaking a better historic Wenzhou. As historic quarter usually has a scattered nature in the historical city, it is needed to reflect on the widespread model of 'historic quarter conservation' as: does the 'historic quarter conservation' model contributes to or hinders the historical integrity of historic Wenzhou? Moreover, both 'organic renewal' theory and 'Wenzhou Model' are often associated with the character of 'bottom-up'. The former advocates consideration and respect for public opinion in urban renewal. While the

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latter embodies the success of private entrepreneurs by their own efforts.<sup>232</sup> Thus, it needs to answer: how do different stakeholders' opinions work in the current renewal mechanism of historic Wenzhou? Has it taken into account the historical marks of urban architecture formed by the numerous individual businesses under the impact of 'Wenzhou model'? Has it fully respected the opinions from local residents? In the process of exploring these issues, we can not only have a better understanding of the case itself, but also further think about relevant theories and policies, which will help to form subsequent policy recommendations.

Third, why taking the street scale as renewal projects for analysis, rather than single building scale or historic quarter scale? This is not only related to the focus of this study, but also in line with the actual situation of historic Wenzhou. Since this study focuses on analyzing different methods of reinterpreting history, the methods that can be adopted by a single building are limited and cannot form enough diversity. In addition, if an entire historic quarter is regenerated at one time, it may do harm to the 'organicness' of city (e.g. the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter mentioned in section 5.2.2). In the actual renewal process of historic Wenzhou, it is true that most of the projects are progressively carried out by street scale. Then, questions of street-level cases can be raised, such as: Will these street projects align with the visions from the conservation plans in historic Wenzhou? What kinds of Wenzhou's local cultural characteristics does it imply? What roles did the various stakeholders or key figures play in the process of these street projects? What are the driving factors that make them different? Do they reflect the specific wills of national and local governments? By correlating the implementation patterns of each case to the

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<sup>232</sup> Alan PL Liu, "The" Wenzhou Model" of Development and China's Modernization," *Asian Survey* (1992): 696-711.

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relevant policies in China over the past few years, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and mechanisms. Then, it can serve as a foundation for future discussions regarding the possibility of optimizing the existing mechanism in regeneration projects in China. In summary, the reasons for selecting street projects are as follows:

1. They should be able to clearly reflect the characteristics of different design strategies, that is, they adopt different ways to express the authenticity of history and the organicness of renewal.

2. They should be able to cater to specific policies, which reflects some specific wills of national and local governments.

3. From a broader perspective of urban space, they need to conform to the visions proposed in the conservation plans, and promote the formation of the entire historical environment in historic Wenzhou.

4. In order to show the different regeneration strategies for streets in different identity situations, it's better to choose different identities of streets in the conservation plans [e.g. choose a case in the 'key protection zone' of historic quarter; choose a case in the 'construction control zone' of historic quarter; choose a case does not belong to any historic quarter].<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> The "key protection zone" and "construction control zone" will be clarified in section 5.2.1.



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5. Even though they have shortcomings, they can provide positive reference value for the future regeneration of historic Wenzhou and for a lot of China's historical cities with similar situations.

Therefore, combined with the above reasons, among the many streets in historic Wenzhou that have been regenerated, the author selects Chan Street, Wuma Street, Gongyuan Road for in-depth analysis and comparative study. Each of the three streets not only has its unique background and design methods, but also cater to the policies of central and local governments in a particular era. For example, Chan Street, which does not belong to any historic quarter, was remade historically based on totally modern high-rise buildings. Wuma Street, which always has been in the 'key protection zone', underwent two very different regeneration patterns. Gongyuan Road, which was used not to be in historic quarter in the first conservation plan, but was included in the scope of protection [as 'construction control zone'] in the second conservation plan, includes comprehensive use of many kinds of renewal method (see section 5.2.1). More particularly, the three streets together form a historical spatial axis across the entire historical city, laying the foundation for future renewals, and contributing to the reshaping of the overall historical structure of historic Wenzhou. The comparative analysis of these three streets [the findings across the multiple cases] will help this study to further reflect on the method of 'history reinterpretation', the implementation of 'organic renewal', and the specific roles of stakeholders in the regenerations of Chinese cities today.

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## 3.2 Data Collection

Multiple sources of evidence are required for the case studies. Diane Vaughan reminds us that “the paradox of theory is that at the same time it tells us where to look, it can keep us from seeing”; and Robert K. Yin claims that “theoretical propositions will provide surprisingly explicit ideas for determining the data to collect and the strategies for data analysis”.<sup>234,235</sup> Therefore, the concerns mentioned in Chapter One, such as ‘history reinterpretation’, ‘organic renewal’ and ‘stakeholders’, and the theories mentioned in Chapter Two, such as ‘authenticity’, ‘values’ and ‘people-oriented’ all need to be considered as ‘directions’ for data collection and analysis. As the regeneration of historic Wenzhou is ongoing, data collection for the case study needs to be an alternating process involving documentation, interviews, and direct observations to continuously investigate newly initiated regenerations and verify the effects of completed regenerations. Table 3 shows the classification of data in this study, while the detailed elaborations can be seen in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>234</sup> D. Vaughan, "Theory Elaboration: The Heuristics of Case Analysis.," in *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, ed. C. C. Ragin & H. D. Becker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 195.

<sup>235</sup> Yin, 35.

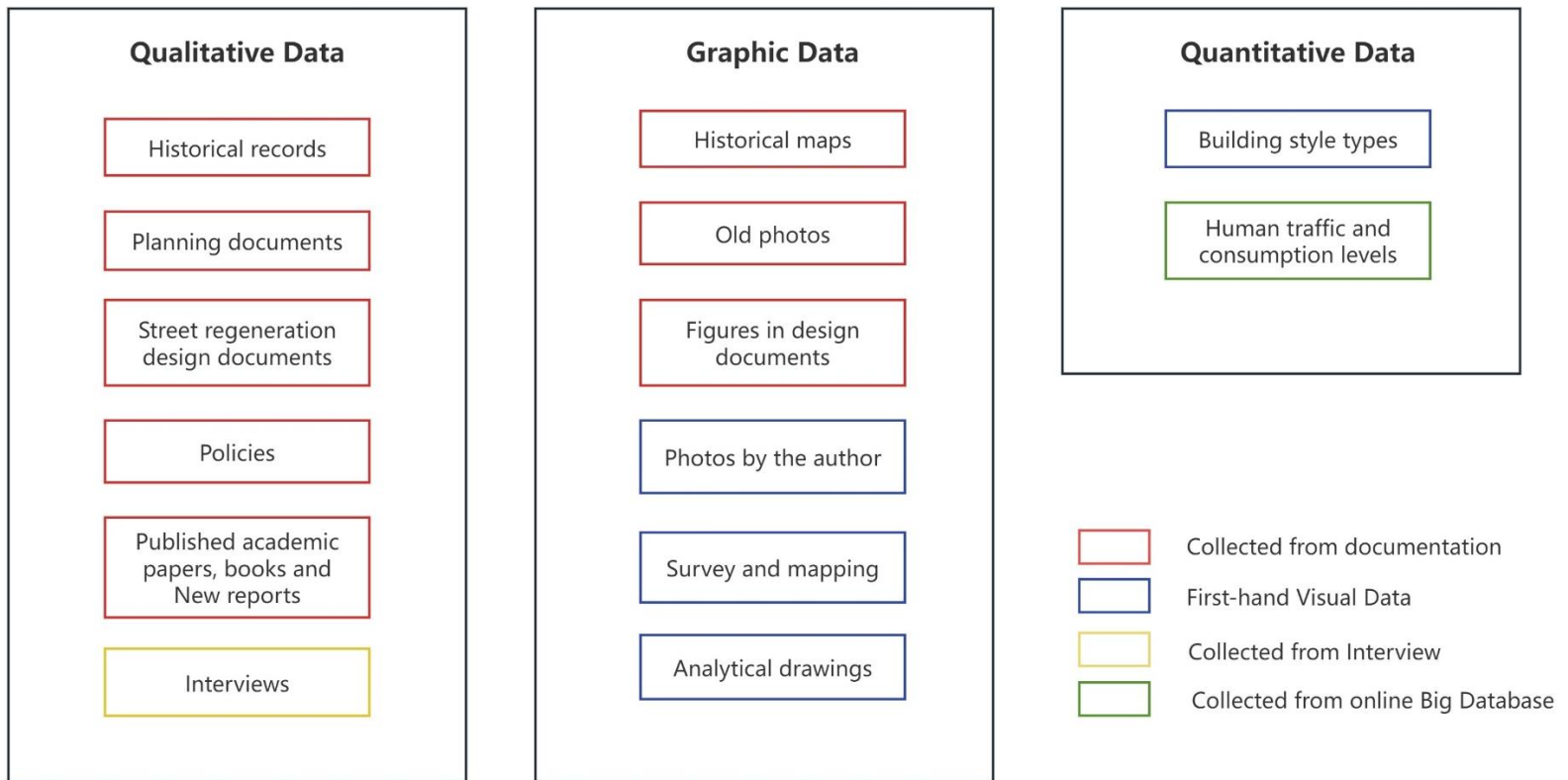


Table 3 Data classification.

Made by the author, 2025.

## Documentation

Documentary information plays a crucial role in substantiating and enhancing the evidence obtained from various other sources. According to Robert K. Yin, this way of data collection has the following strengths:

1. Stable – can be reviewed repeatedly.
2. Unobtrusive – not created as a result of the case study.
3. Specific – can contain the exact names, references and details of events.

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4. Broad – can cover a long span of time, many events and settings.<sup>236</sup>

On the other hand, Yin also reminds us that documentary information may not always be accurate and lacking in bias. So, the most important use of documentation is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.<sup>237</sup> Consequently, the documentation workload for research is often substantial and varied. From 2016 to 2024, the author has invested considerable effort into collecting a wide range of documents related to historic Wenzhou and other cities, including design proposals, policies, announcements, event reports, historical records, maps, photos, books, and journal articles from previous research.

At the outset of the research, documents proved highly valuable, providing a consistent and verifiable source of information that could be repeatedly examined. Additionally, these documents played a crucial role in shaping the collection of evidence from various sources and identifying key figures involved in the conservation and regeneration of historic Wenzhou. Design proposals, historical records, both national and local political documents were extensively employed to gain insights into the city's historical status and its aspirations. They were also instrumental in comparing the city's vision at specific points in time with the actual accomplishments. In addition, prior research findings and maps have greatly enriched this research and the subsequent discussion. However, a challenge arose from the vast array of materials available online, which could potentially be time-consuming. This challenge was addressed by giving priority to the most pertinent information while setting aside less crucial materials.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 115.

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## Interviews

According to John Gerring, one advantage of conducting an in-depth interview is the ability to capture a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals form their opinions. Although we cannot directly observe the hidden cognitive processes that lead to their responses, we can observe their outward manifestations.<sup>238</sup> To continuously understand the evolving dynamics of the overall conservation plan of historic Wenzhou and its street regeneration projects, the author has maintained long-time communications with relevant professionals such as architects, planners, and government officials. However, the formal interviews were all conducted in 2024. The interview questions are designed to be as directly or potentially related to the theoretical propositions of the study as possible. They are organized as four sections related to the case study, with each section focused on specific types of interviewees (see appendix 3). They are:

Section 1: Role and Planning [for Interviewee A, C, D, E, F, G]<sup>239</sup>

Section 2: Design and Architecture [for Interviewee B, C, D, G]

Section 3: Community Engagement and Sustainability [for Interviewee A, E, F]

Section 4: Impacts, Reflections and Recommendations [for all interviewees]

This approach refers to the qualitative research method in social science, mentioned by Magaldi and Berler, which combines a preset of open-ended questions, helping interviewers explore specific themes and respond with further in-depth discussions –

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<sup>238</sup> John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>239</sup> The person to whom the interviewee code corresponds is described in detail in appendix 4.

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something that the author might have never predicted before.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, these semi-structured interviews provide the author with unexpected insights and understandings about historic Wenzhou that were not previously foreseen. Many of the reasons behind the regeneration actions are influenced by the personal inclinations of a decision-maker at the time or are derived from a consensus reached by a group of decision-makers after deliberation. These factors are often not comprehensible from design or policy documents. Doreen Massey notes that the exploration of how the specificity of a place has been ‘articulated’ through the interactions of specific networks of individuals.<sup>241</sup> Particularly significant are those individuals who held positions of authority or had the capacity to influence decision-making processes, as they played a pivotal role in shaping the form of regeneration in historic Wenzhou.

In total, the author interviewed seven professionals, each with their unique relationship to the conservation and regeneration of historic Wenzhou (see appendix 4). The following reasons explain the recruitment of each interviewee:

1. Interviewing a government official (Interviewee A) from the local planning bureau can help understanding the evolution process of local government policies related to the conservation of historic Wenzhou, as well as the reasons behind these changes.
2. Interviewing a seasoned local architectural expert (Interviewee B) can contribute to the understanding of each specific architectural design mode adopted at different stages of

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<sup>240</sup> Danielle Magaldi and Matthew Berler, "Semi-Structured Interviews," *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (2020): 4825-30.

<sup>241</sup> Doreen Massey, *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. , Double Articulation: A Place in the World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 117.

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the Wenzhou City. This includes examining the impact these design modes have had on the overall urban form and the reasons behind their adoptions.

3. Interviewing a chief architect (Interviewee C) who is in charge of the relevant street regeneration projects in historic Wenzhou can help understanding the challenges and difficulties faced by different regeneration projects, the use of specific design strategies and methods, as well as the comparison between the achieved results and the expected outcomes.

4. Interviewing a chief architect or planner (Interviewee D) who is in charge of a relevant historic quarter regeneration project in historic Wenzhou can help understanding the difficulties in quarter-scale regeneration.

5. Interviewing a government official (Interviewee E) who has the leadership to the development and operation of regeneration projects in historic Wenzhou can help understanding the respective goals, site selections, development models, and challenges encountered from various regeneration projects in recent years.

6. Interviewing a government official (Interviewee F) who is in charge of the data statistics in historic Wenzhou can contribute to the collection and analysis on how these regenerated sites have been managed and operated subsequently, including specific data on visitors and the number of public events held.

7. Interviewing a planner (Interviewee G) who involved in the formulating of conservation plans of historic Wenzhou can contribute to the understanding of the specific strategies used in the two overall conservation plans and each historic quarter-level plan,

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and even their interrelations. It's worth to learn from the planner about how expected goals had been achieved in practical actions.

Furthermore, as the regeneration of historic Wenzhou is an on-going state, the strong relationships that the author has established with these key figures have provided opportunities to participate in discussions and meetings related to the regeneration projects. This provides him with the opportunity to share his suggestions and insights from this study. However, care must be taken, as Yin indicates that interviews are prone to common issues such as bias, imperfect recall, and challenges in articulating thoughts accurately.<sup>242</sup> A common practice is to validate interview data by cross-referencing it with information from other sources. Therefore, the author will combine the data or opinions obtained from interviews with field visits and literature collection for comparison and verification.

### **First-hand Visual Data**

The real-world setting of the case creates the opportunity for direct observations, which offer immediacy and context. As the phenomena of interest have not been purely historical, some relevant social or environmental conditions should be learnt from observation.<sup>243</sup> Such a method can range from formal to casual data collection activities. As the author has been working and living in the city of Wenzhou for a long time, this has provided the opportunity to collect observational data informally during numerous field visits. These numerous visits allowed the author to experience and record the changes of

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<sup>242</sup> Yin, 254-82.

<sup>243</sup> Yin, 121-23.



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different sites during different periods in historic Wenzhou. Thus, the author can have a comprehensive understanding of where the history of historic Wenzhou has been destroyed by modern construction, and whether the conservation plan of each historic quarter has played an effective role. All first-hand visual data collected through the author's own research investigation was recorded from 2017 to 2024. In particular, while conducting the case study on street regenerations (Chapter Six), the author maintained communication with government departments and design institutes, which enabled advance notice of upcoming street regeneration projects. For these projects, the author conducted comprehensive observations and visual recordings at three stages: 'before regeneration', 'during regeneration', and 'after regeneration'. For example, the project of Chan Street was first started in 2018, and the author began to conduct field visits and photo records of its 'before regeneration' status in 2017; The author entered Gongyuan Road during its regeneration construction phase from 2019 to 2020 for many times to record its construction process. As for Wuma Street - the most influential commercial street in historic Wenzhou, the author has made photo recording since 2017.

They enable the author to conduct a comparative analysis with design proposals and political documents to see how they are actually being implemented. Additionally, continuous observations play a crucial role in evaluating the subsequent operation and management of each regeneration project. The primary way of recording these observations was through photographs of the case study site. These photographs serve a crucial purpose in conveying specific attributes of the case study to the reader that cannot be effectively conveyed through other means. Furthermore, the author will conduct surveying and mapping of some traditional courtyards within historic Wenzhou. Using plans, elevations,

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and section drawings, combined with photographs, to collect their layout and elevation changes. Compared with photographic records, the maps and drawings are more characteristic of architectural research.

### **3.3 Use of Data**

Case studies should handle data systematically, rather than reporting simply reporting all evidence. Thus, analysing case study data should rely on the theoretical propositions.<sup>244</sup> The purpose of this section is to provide a description and rationale for the process through which data is organised and analysed. The methods of using data in this research include chronological, thematic, graphic and quantitative.

First, chronological descriptions of the case study is going to be developed, which aiding in organising the case study in a narrative format. This approach streamlined the research process by emphasizing the case study's key strengths and enabling the tracking of events over time. According to Lune and Berg, the chronological analysis technique serves a significant analytical purpose in the investigation of presumed causal events. They also highlighted that the chronological technique is more likely to cover various types of variables, resulting in outcomes that are more comprehensive and insightful compared to other similar approaches.<sup>245</sup> Thus, literal historical data assisted by graphics help to gain an overall understanding of each transformation stage of historic Wenzhou. In addition, each

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>245</sup> Howard Lune and Bruce L Berg, "Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences," (Indianapolis: Pearson, 2017), 5-8.

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street regeneration case in historic Wenzhou is analysed chronologically, providing insight into how street regeneration methods, along with people's attitudes toward urban heritage, have evolved over time.

Secondly, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and documenting patterns or themes within the data.<sup>246</sup> It also seeks to construct explanations for the case study, addressing the 'how' and 'why' behind events. The interviews to the relevant planners, architects and government officials can greatly help the author to think about the reasons behind the phenomena of cases. The theoretical framework will play a pivotal role in guiding the thematic analysis of the case study and further defining the units of analysis. Robert K. Yin reminds us that case studies provide an opportunity to shed empirical light on theoretical concepts or principles.<sup>247</sup> In this research, the themes of 'authenticity', 'heritage values', 'people-oriented', and 'organic renewal' discussed in the theoretical framework will all contribute to the 'discussion and reflection' in Chapter Seven and will closely interact with the cases.

Third, as design requires a lot of visual materials, this research needs to adopt a variety of graphic methods. For the conservation plans, the key is to compare the conservation scope of different periods based on different planning maps. In the field survey, it is important to conduct a comprehensive and comparable visualized outcomes for the cases from 'before', 'during' and 'after' street regenerations. First, extensive observations and photographs contribute to establishing fundamental images. Then,

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<sup>246</sup> Catherine Pope, Sue Ziebland, and Nicholas Mays, "Analysing Qualitative Data," *Bmj* 320, no. 7227 (2000): 114-16.

<sup>247</sup> Yin, 38.

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multiple recordings at various stages aid in clarifying the relationships between the old and new architectural components, as some are pseudo-classical design works that may cloud the judgment of what is authentic. Thus, secondary graphical analysis of the collected image resources is important. In this research, visual materials have four categories according to their nature of function: ethnographic [e.g., ancient maps], narrative [e.g., photos and plans], analytical and diagrammatic [e.g., mind maps]. Some of these diagrams can represent a few quantitative studies of the cases, such as the proportion of architectural styles based on street facade panoramas. The visual material works along with the text to show the history, status quo, social investigation, and public events as seen in historic Wenzhou. They tell stories and expose the relationships for re-thinking the concepts in the research.

Fourth, quantitative analysis plays a relatively limited role in the research. In the case study, this primarily includes statistical data on the proportions of architectural styles [derived from photographic records], as well as data on human traffic and consumption levels, assisted by “Wuma Smart Business Circle Big Database” (五马智慧商圈大数据库) from the organization named as Construction Service Centre of Historical and Cultural District, Lucheng District, Wenzhou City (温州市鹿城区历史文化街区建设服务中心). This database was allowed to be used during the interview to the government official who is in charge with it. However, this big database has been started to use since 2021. It cannot help to make a comprehensive comparison between the pre-regeneration and post-regeneration conditions. The primary objective of quantitative analysis is to enhance the qualitative analysis by identifying major patterns and issues within the dataset.

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In the final discussion and reflection chapter, and referring to Robert K. Yin's point of view,<sup>248</sup> the evidence analysis will demonstrate that:

1. "The study involves all the relevant evidence in the research process." For this study, comparative discussions should include all of the conservation plans of the city level and the regeneration projects of street level.
2. "The most significant issues of this study are addressed." In this study, three topics— 'history reinterpretation', 'organic renewal', and 'stakeholder concerns'—will be discussed alongside the two levels of cases.
3. "The study draws on prior expert knowledge." In this study, the theoretical framework and research gap established in previous chapters will be revisited in the final discussion. Practical experiences gathered during the study will also be used to assess whether a theoretical contribution or breakthrough has been achieved.

In summary, this section describes the systematic data analysis methods used in the research, integrating theoretical propositions with empirical evidence. The study employs four approaches: **chronological analysis** to track events over time and identify causal relationships; **thematic analysis** to identify patterns and explain phenomena using theoretical concepts like authenticity and organic renewal; **graphic methods** to visualize conservation plans, architectural changes, and social dynamics; and **quantitative analysis** to support qualitative findings by identifying patterns in architectural styles and human

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<sup>248</sup> *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage, 2009), 113.

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traffic data. These methods collectively ensure comprehensive evidence integration, address key research issues, and contribute to theoretical discussions.

### **3.4 Ethical Consideration**

The consideration of research ethics is a crucial aspect of this research and forms the foundation of the case study. Bryman reminds us that four ethical issues that must be avoided: (1) harm to participants, (2) lack of informed consent, (3) invasion of privacy, and (4) deception.<sup>249</sup> This study places strong emphasis on these ethical aspects and applies these principles during research design, data collection, and report writing.

The research ethics were guided by the University of Nottingham's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics.<sup>250</sup> Before the author started to collect data, a Research Ethics Checklist (appendix 1) was approved by the university, covering site access permissions, data storage security, avoidance of unnecessary risks, and protection of participants' consent and privacy. A Participant Consent Form available both in English and Chinese (appendix 2) outlines the academic purpose of this study and provides instructions on privacy and safety. Each interviewee received the form and signed it in person prior to the interview. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw, stop recording, or decline participation at any time, and this option was well-received. To further ensure privacy, interviewees remain anonymous in this thesis, with no identifying

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<sup>249</sup> A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 509.

<sup>250</sup> University of Nottingham, "Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics," (2023).  
<https://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research-and-business/documents/ethics/code-of-research-conduct-and-research-ethics.pdf>

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information. All participants agreed to take part, signed the consent form, and records have been securely stored.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has provided a description and rationale for the research methodology and the design of the case study. It begins by explaining the rationale for selecting historic Wenzhou as the primary case study for this research. In addition to the city level, it defines lower hierarchy of cases – the ‘quarter level’ and the ‘street level’. With case-level research questions, this study will employ chronological analysis to gain a broad view, identifying general features. These features will provide the final discussion (Chapter 7) of correlation and comparison among multiple second-tier cases.

Regarding research data, this chapter explains the three main data sources—documentation, interviews, and first-hand visual data—each comprising various data types. The study will employ four types of data analysis—chronological description, thematic analysis, graphic analysis, and quantitative analysis—which will significantly enrich the research by offering valuable insights into events and characteristics.

Based on the delineation of each chapter's content in section 1.5 - Thesis Structure, the author creates a flowchart (Figure 11) to illustrate the overall research design of this study. First, various historical materials, including old maps, photographs, and city records, are collected, alongside an interview with a senior architectural expert. This step aims to establish a systematic understanding of the chronological development of historic Wenzhou, thereby providing a solid foundation for comprehending the necessity of conservation and

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regeneration. Second, to examine the vision, relationships, and evolution of different conservation plans, relevant planning documents and conservation policies are gathered. Additionally, interviews are conducted with a government official from the local planning bureau and a planner involved in conservation planning. This step enables a broader perspective on the significance of selecting the three street cases. The third step involves a detailed analysis of each street case. This requires collecting relevant design documents, conducting multiple field visits and observations, and interviewing the architects responsible for the designs as well as government officials managing the overall projects. Finally, the study compares the different regeneration models and evaluates the cases in relation to theoretical frameworks and conservation visions. Thereby, it ultimately helps to understand the contributions of this research.



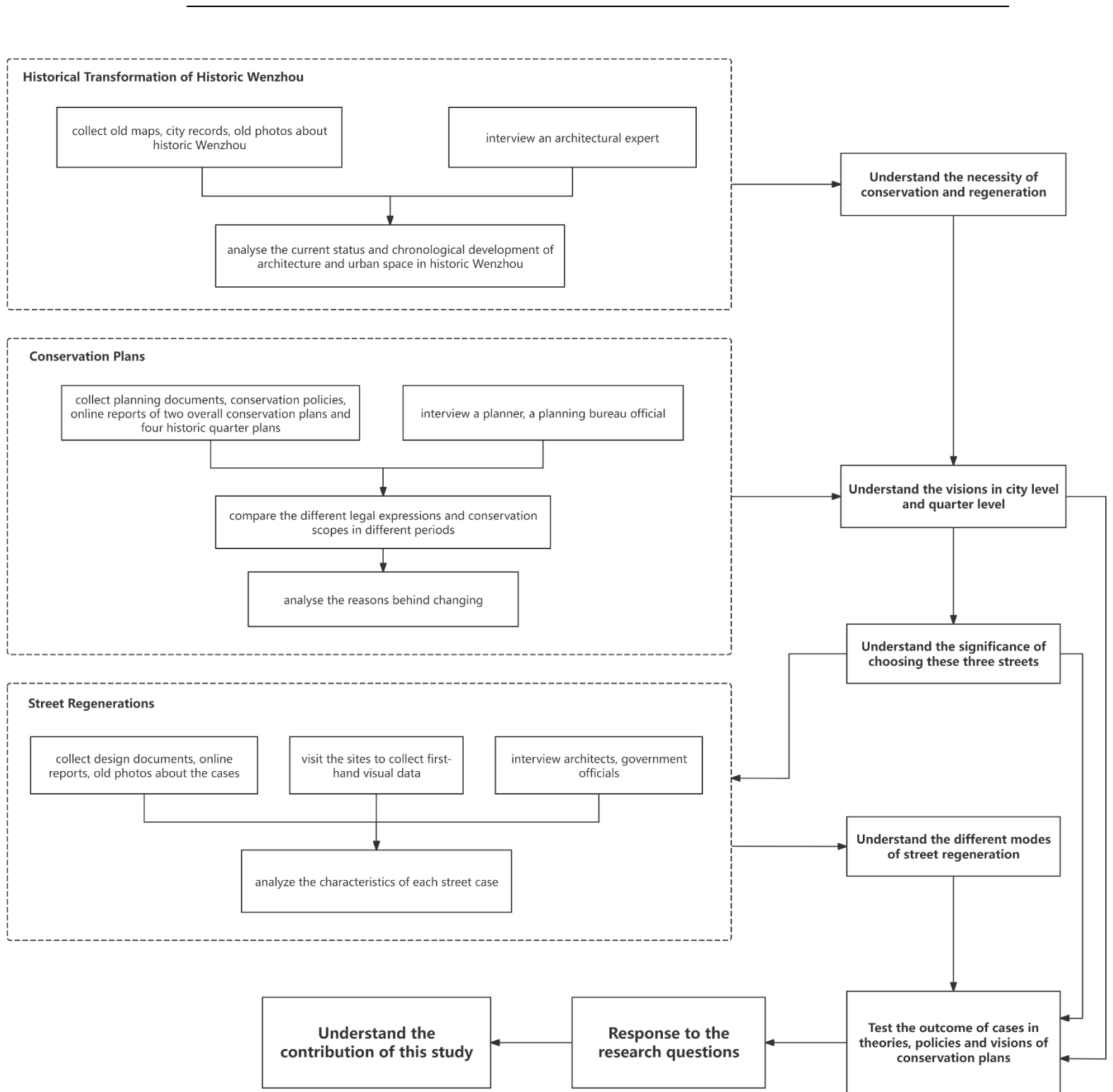


Figure 11 The research design.

Made by the author in 2025.

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## **Chapter 4: The Historical Transformation of Historic**

### **Wenzhou**

This chapter chronologically provides a comprehensive understanding of the transformation settings of historic Wenzhou before 21<sup>st</sup> century - prior to the contemporary conservation mainstream. To fully understand the topic, it is essential to first explore what constituted an ideal city in ancient China and how the initial planning and layout of Wenzhou city were influenced by traditional Chinese thought. It then delves into the significant changes in what can broadly be called the modern era which the author divides into three periods, and then explains in detail how the urban spaces and buildings of Historic Wenzhou have been changed correspond to each period. The three periods are the early modern era which was a period of learning from Western architectural styles, the early People's Republic of China era characterized by the combining courtyard residences due to the land revolution, and the era of Reform and Opening-up characterized by urban architectural modernization and the 'Wenzhou Model' of economic development. Understanding the character of the different eras can form a foundation for the further conservation plans and street regenerations in the following chapters.

#### **4.1 The Traditional Ideal City**

##### **4.1.1 The Idea of Traditional Chinese City**

Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan claims that “a great city began its life as a cosmic

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ceremonial center”,<sup>251</sup> and that the “city began as an attempt to bring the order and majesty of heaven down to earth”.<sup>252</sup> Thus, the most basic requirement for ancient planners is to understand the field of astronomy.<sup>253</sup> The ‘*tianren heyi*’ (天人合一, unity of heaven and man) is a traditional Chinese philosophical concept that emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and the natural world. Chinese philosopher Dongmei Fang pointed out that ancient Chinese looked at the entire universe as an ‘organic whole’ and believed the essence of the universe, the essence of nature, and the essence of the city are all unified with the essence of life.<sup>254</sup> To reach an ideal and eternal status, the ancient Chinese believed that the city was a spatial concept that embodied the harmonious relation between heaven and earth and so the city and its architecture became the medium for the ancients to express their understanding of the universe.<sup>255</sup> Carl Fingerhuth describes invisible magical lines that connect the Chinese cities with the heaven and the earth. The line tends to start from a point that is typically a mountain, and extend to the city (Figure 12). Chinese ancestors usually associated the city lines with the geographical features of mountains and streams, referring to them as ‘*long mai*’ (龙脉, dragon veins). This concept holds that these natural formations possess a special energy that flows through them,

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<sup>251</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Romantic Geography: In Search of the Sublime Landscape*, trans. Xiaoxuan Lu (Nanjing: Yilin Pres, 2021), 15.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>253</sup> *Humanist Geography: An Individual's Search for Meaning*, trans. Xiukui Song, Jinfeng Chen, and Panpan Zhang (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2020). Chapter Six.

<sup>254</sup> Dongmei Fang, *Virtue in Life: A Collection of Philosophical Essays* 生生之德: 哲学论文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 2013), 236.

<sup>255</sup> Tian Yinsheng, Gu Kai, and Wei Tao, "Urban Morphology, Architectural Typology and Cities in Transition," (Beijing: Science Press, 2014), 126.

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resembling the mythical dragon.<sup>256</sup> In ancient China, the concept of ‘*shan-shui*’ (山水, mountain and water) can refer to all tangible natural elements as well as intangible natural forces.<sup>257</sup> Thus, the site selection and planning of ancient Chinese cities need to be in harmony with ‘*shan-shui*’. Qian Xuesen, a famous scientist, proposed a discussion on the concept of modern ‘*shan-shui city*’ in the early 1990s.<sup>258</sup> In addition, the current China President Xi Jinping called upon the ‘*xianshan lushui*’ (显山露水, revealing mountains and exposing waters) slogan in urban and rural construction, when he was the party secretary of Zhejiang Province in 2005. After he became the national president, this slogan has arisen another round of nationwide discussion and practice on the harmonious relationship between ‘*shan-shui*’ and city in the 2010s.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, the concept of ‘*shan-shui*’ has not disappeared but is highly valued in today's China.

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<sup>256</sup> Carl Fingerhuth, *Learning from China: The Tao of the City*, trans. Lufeng Zhang and Zhiyu Bao (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2007), 108.

<sup>257</sup> Feng Han, "Case Study: The Traditional Chinese View of Nature and Challenges of Urban Development," *Reconnecting the City: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Future of Urban Heritage* (2014): 148-60.

<sup>258</sup> Bao S., *On Shan-Shui City by Qian Xuesen* (Beijing: China Construction Industry Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>259</sup> <http://cpc.people.com.cn/gb/n1/2017/0815/c412690-29472589.html>. Accessed on March 10th, 2021.



Figure 12 City in the 'Dragon vein'.

From: Carl Fingerhuth, *Learning from China: The Tao of the City*, 108.

Christian Norberg-Schulz pointed out, the ancient Eastern city/architecture was based on a circular route in order to form a quiet and harmony place. Such encircling space could capture or form subtle energies, which reinforce the wishes of the dominator.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, trans. Peitong 尹培桐 Yin (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 1990), 76.

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Marko Pogacnik explained that the term *fengshui* (风水, wind and water) is a technology in ancient China that attempted to find the subtle energy contained in the earth.<sup>261</sup> This energy is named as *qi* (气, literal means air), which pervades all of existence. It is believed that every living creature, the natural world, the man-made world of buildings and cities, and even the entire universe, possess *qi*.<sup>262</sup> Ancient fengshui master Guo Pu defined the relationship among *qi*, wind and water: “*Qi* is dispersed by the wind and stopped by the water”.<sup>263</sup> The purpose of using *fengshui* approach is focused on finding the most auspicious locations and orientations for buildings and city structures to harmonize with the natural environment and ensure the flow of positive energy, which had been forming the bedrock for urban planning and architectural design in ancient Chinese civilization.<sup>264</sup> Ernest John Eitel pointed out that ancient Chinese believe a vital chain of spiritual life ran through every existence, be it animate or inanimate. To this end, *fengshui* emerged as a way of forging a deep bond between all things in heaven and on earth, unifying them into an integrated and harmonious whole.<sup>265</sup> Thus, it can be said that the ancient Chinese recognition of the city as an organism formed the technology of *fengshui*, which in turn helped to make the built environment become more organic.

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<sup>261</sup> Marko Pogacnik, "Schule Der Geomantie," *München: Knaur* (1996): 9.

<sup>262</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, "Qi (Ch'i): Vital Force," *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Antonio S. Cua (2003): 615-17.

<sup>263</sup> Pu Guo, Zang Shu 葬书, [http://www.360doc.com/content/19/0308/20/32712951\\_820156549.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/19/0308/20/32712951_820156549.shtml). (access online, 6/22/2020).

<sup>264</sup> Yinsheng, Kai, and Tao, 126.

<sup>265</sup> Ernest J. Eitel, *Feng Shui: The Rudiments of Natural Science in China* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 6.

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In addition, just as the words ‘*Zhong Guo*’ (中国, China) literally means the country of the center, the construction of Chinese cities also placed great emphasis on the concept of ‘centering’. According to the ancient book *Wu Yue Chun Qiu* (吴越春秋), ‘*cheng*’ (城) were those walls built to protect the ruling class while ‘*guo*’ (郭) defined the boundaries of a city and guarded the common citizens.<sup>266</sup> The ancient book *Protocol of Zhou - Record of Artificers* (周礼·考工记) from around 476BC described an ideal capital city pattern as “When the builder constructs the capital city, it should be a square of nine *li* (里, Length unit) with three gates on each side. Within the city are nine longitudinal and nine latitudinal streets and each of them is nine carriages wide. The ancestral temple in the east and altar in the west. The hall of audience in the front and the market at the rear.”<sup>267</sup> Later, different interpretations of this passage led to different schematic diagrams. The most famous of these is from Nie Chongyi in Song Dynasty (Figure 14). Following that, Chen Xiao analyses three possible relationships among *cheng*, *guo* and streets (Figure 15).<sup>268</sup> These are regarded as the traditional city planning templates and commonly seen in the patterns of traditional Chinese cities.

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<sup>266</sup> Ye Zhao, *Wu Yue Chun Qiu* 吴越春秋 (*Han Dynasty*) (Changchun: Times Literature and Art Press, 2008), 53. The original Chinese text is “筑城以卫君，造郭以守民”.

<sup>267</sup> Lijuan Sun and Shuqian Li, "The Evolution of the State System of Kaogong Ji and the Layout Planning of Ancient Capital City in Central Plains 《考工记》营国制度与中原地区古代都城布局规划的演变," *Cultural Relics of Central China* 中原文物, no. 6 (2008): 55-60.

<sup>268</sup> Xiao Chen, *Ideal City in Ancient China* 中国古代的理想城市 (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2021), 33-39.

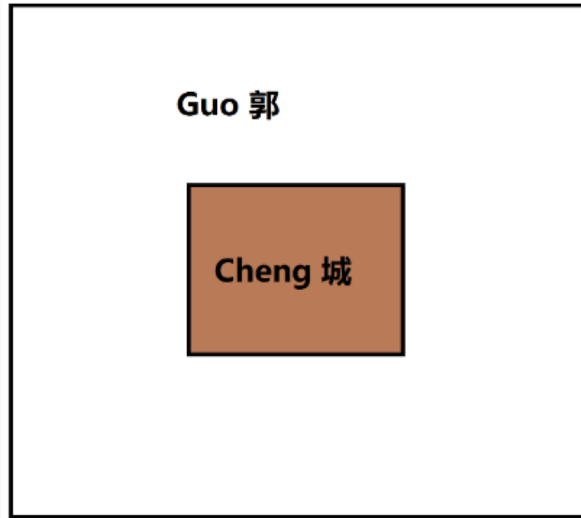


Figure 13 The common spatial relationship between *cheng* and *guo*.

Author's drawing, in 2022.

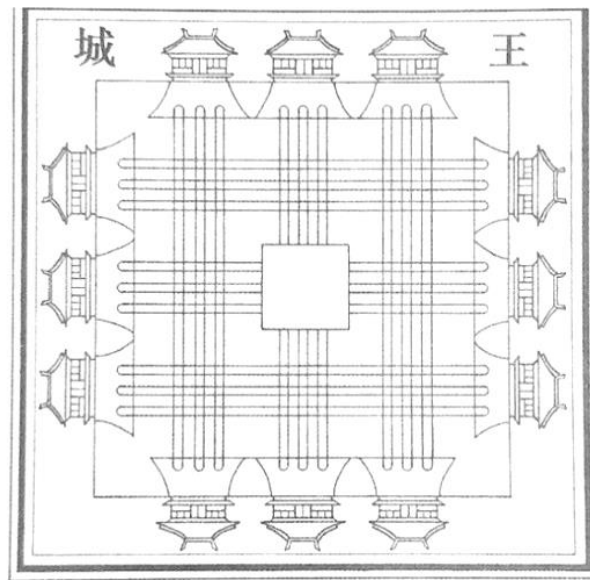


Figure 14 The diagram of ideal capital city.

By Chongyi Nie in Song Dynasty.<sup>269</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 32-33.



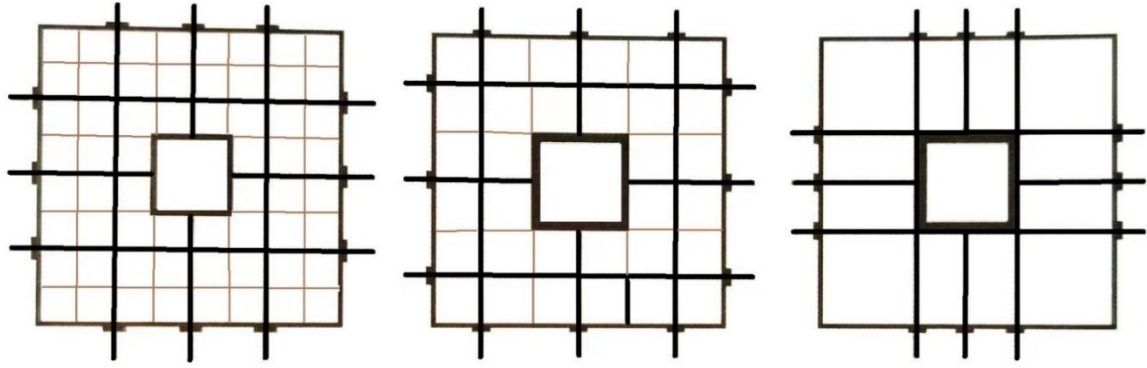


Figure 15 The three possible relationships among ‘cheng’, ‘guo’ and street hierarchies.

Following by Chen Xiao’s work, reproduced by the author, in 2022.

Ruan Xin points out that an individual courtyard contains the hidden meaning of ‘the house of heaven and earth’ and the pre-modern Chinese “also built the city into a grand courtyard – enabling a perfect heaven to descend to earth”.<sup>270</sup> It is obvious to find the similarities between the city and the courtyard, with both using square enclosures to emphasize the centering. Thus, the ideal lives in a city are connected to the ideal life in courtyards, and both embody the perception of the order of heaven and earth. Yi-Fu Tuan claims that the traditional Chinese built environment is “a whole world of thought and belief, habit and custom, skills and artefacts”, and they are used to “disguise, escape and transcend social realities by means of different strategies”.<sup>271</sup> In deed, traditional Chinese made their lifestyle and embodied physical spaces of allegorical meanings, which will also been demonstrated in the following section about the pre-modern Wenzhou city.

<sup>270</sup> Xin Ruan, *Fusheng · Architecture* 浮生·建筑 (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2020), 3-19.

<sup>271</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 5-6.

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#### 4.1.2 The Idea of Traditional Wenzhou City

The history of Wenzhou City dates back over 2,200 years ago to Dongou Capital City (东瓯王都城).<sup>272</sup> However, that earliest city no longer exists. Recorded in 1503, the remaining historical city Wenzhou was established during the Eastern Jin (东晋) Dynasty in 323AD and planned by none other than the *fengshui* master Guo Pu.<sup>273</sup> However, today, some scholars like Jiang Zhuqin have questioned this claim, arguing that it is unlikely Guo Pu planned and designed the city of Wenzhou.<sup>274</sup> This research, however, will not delve into this argument extensively. There is no doubt that the initial planning of historic Wenzhou contains a lot of *fengshui* ideas. The Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan articulates that it is a typical ‘*Shan-shui City*’ (山水城市).<sup>275</sup>

The map from 1882 (Figure 16) shows the city was surrounded by mountains linked with city walls, while the outside big river, city moats and the inside waterways composed it water system. In the middle of the square area is the ‘*zi cheng*’ (子城, inner-city) which used to be the administration district corresponding to the concept of *cheng* (城, city) mentioned above. The functional layout was “East Temple, the West Dwelling, the South

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<sup>272</sup> Y. Cai, *Ou Yue: A Brief Survey of Wenzhou Local Culture* (2014), 4.

<sup>273</sup> Zan Wang, *Hongzhi Wenzhou Fu Zhi 弘治温州府志 (1503 Wenzhou City Records)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2006), 8-9.

<sup>274</sup> Zhuqin Jiang, *Wenzhou Geography -- Human Geography Volume (Part 1) 温州地理—人文地理分册 (上)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 2015), 209.

<sup>275</sup> Xiaodong Zhen, "The Discussion of Wenzhou Shan-Shui City Space 温州山水城市空间初探," *Modern City Research*, no. 01 (2001): 30-33.

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Market, the North Port, and the Central Inner-city” (东庙、西居、南市、北埠、中子城).<sup>276</sup> It worth mentioning that the map emphasizes the waterways [indicated as double lines in maps] as the main traffic routes, while the streets [indicated as dot lines in maps] are marked incompletely. Relying on totally 54 waterways in the city, it formed a very specific water-based transportation system.<sup>277</sup> Since its founding, the city has always been a very important port for foreign trade and cultural exchange in the southeast coastal region of China.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute, National Historical and Cultural City Research Center, and Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute, "Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan 温州市历史文化名城保护规划," (2005).

<sup>277</sup> *Wenzhou in a Century (1876-1978) 温州百年风云(1876-1978)*, ed. Wenzhou CPPCC Literature and History Information Committee 温州市政协文史资料委员会 (Beijing: Chinese Literature and History Press 中国文史出版社, 2014), 22.

<sup>278</sup> *Selected Architectural and Environmental Elements in the Historical City of Wenzhou 温州历史城区建筑与环境要素选集*, ed. Wenzhou Mingcheng Construction Investment Group 温州市名城建设投资集团有限公司 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Peoples Fine Arts Publishing House, 2014), 5.

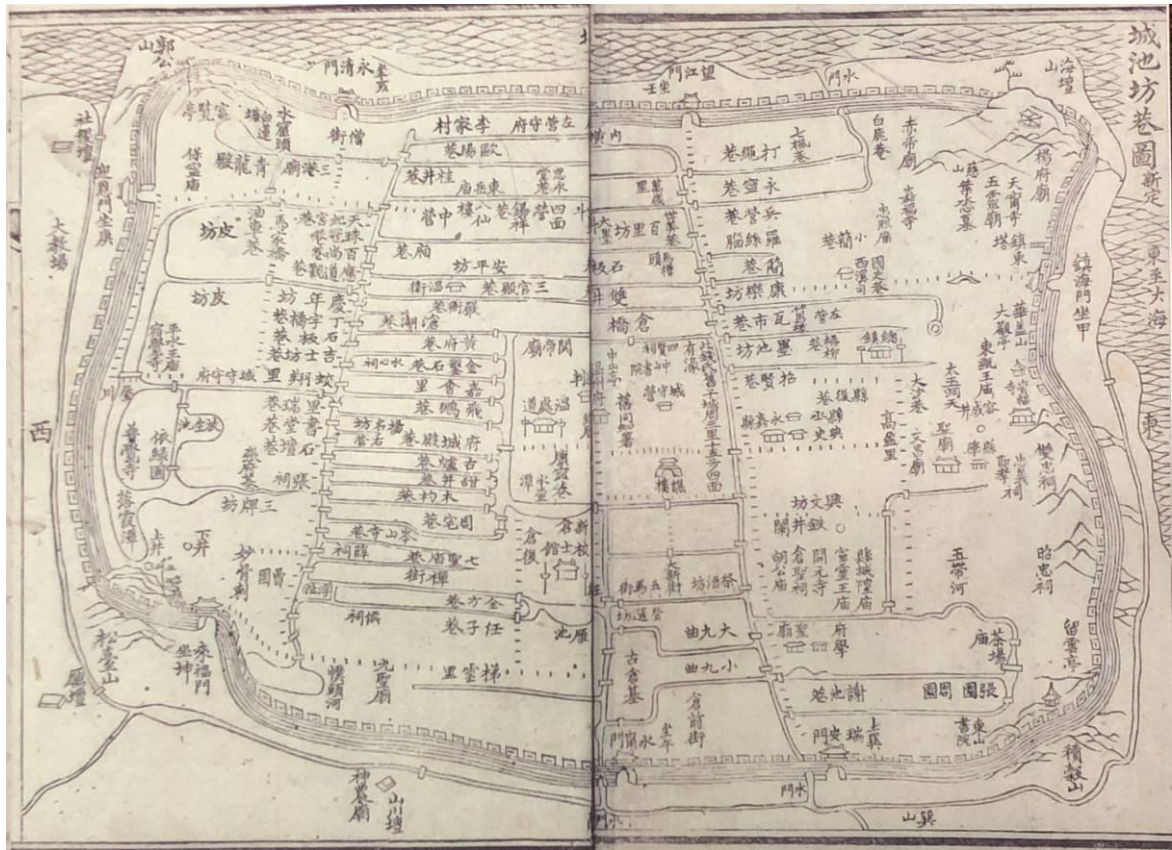


Figure 16 The map of Wenzhou in 1882.

Source: *Guangxu Yongjia Xian Zhi* 光緒永嘉縣志 (1882 Yongjia County Records), (Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2000), 15.

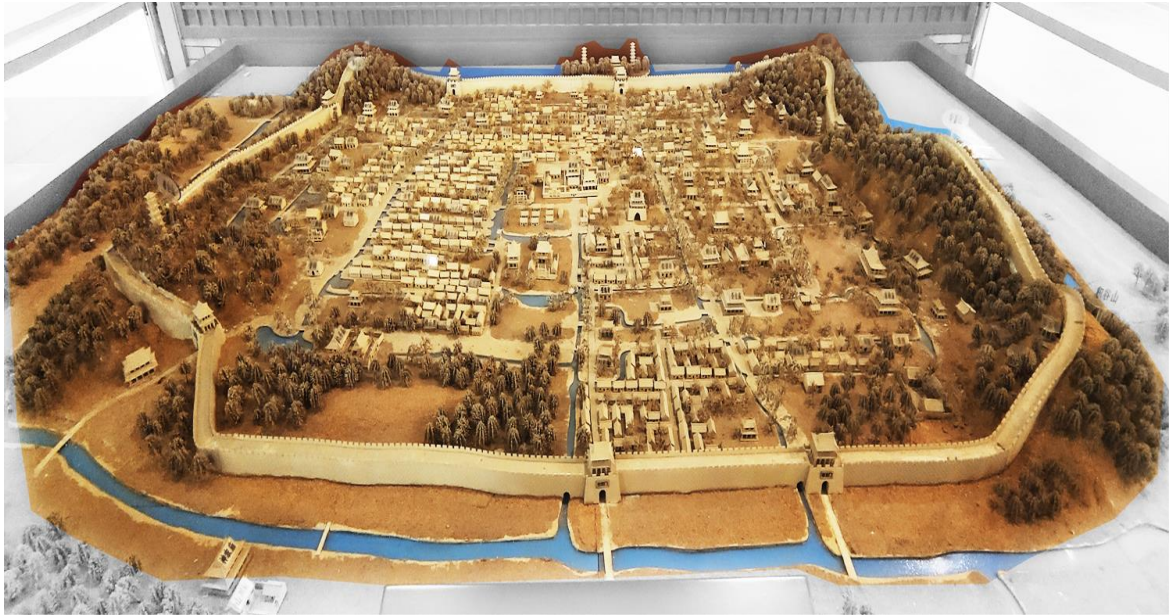


Figure 17 3D Model of Wenzhou based on the map in 1882.

Photographed by the author from the Wenzhou City Planning Exhibition Center, in 2018.

A map of Wenzhou drawn in 1877 using early modern Western cartography (Figure 18) for the first time clearly shows the locations of all the streets in the city. Of all the streets, the South-North Street (南北大街) on the east side of the inner-city is the only one that runs directly through the two city gates, and marked with eight *paifang* (牌坊, archways). Therefore, it can be concluded that it is the street of highest grade in the city.





Figure 18 The map of Wenzhou in 1877.

Original source from the National Archive, UK.

The author marks the South-North Street with a dotted line in red, and the archways on the street are circled in yellow.

Under the comprehensive consideration of the above ancient map forms, especially considering the location relationship between each important street and the city wall, gates and the inner-city, the author draws an abstract structure map of historic Wenzhou (Figure 19). Comparing this map with the common ideal Chinese city pattern (Figure 15) described in *Protocol of Zhou - Record of Artificers* (mentioned in the last section), the structure of historic Wenzhou reveals a great deal of flexibility regarding the impact of natural elements:

1. The ideal city pattern has a total of twelve city gates while historic Wenzhou only has seven. However, its surrounded five mountains also play a role of sentry like city gate.

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The total number of gates and mountains in Wenzhou is twelve, which is equal to the idea city's number.

2. The ideal city has market to the north of its center, while the market in historic Wenzhou is located in the south part of the city. Because the southern has a hinterland and most land trade came from this direction.

3. The northern part of the ideal city has a market while historic Wenzhou has the port because the river flows across the north of the city.

4. The ideal city has eighteen main streets crossing the city and linking to the city gates. In historic Wenzhou, only the South-North Street can be considered as directly run across two city gates, while several other streets do not link the city gates strictly.

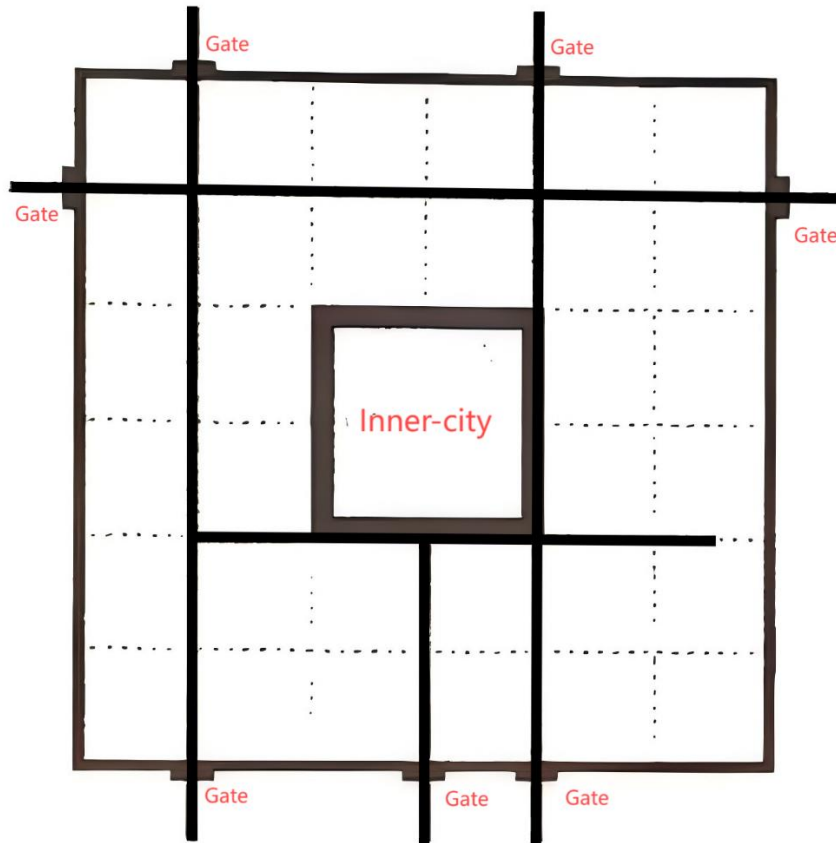


Figure 19 The structure of historic Wenzhou.

Author's drawing, in 2024.

The planning of Wenzhou city incorporated the existing mountains and a wider river, with the excavation of river channels and the construction of city walls so that the mountains, river channels, and city walls can be seen as locks to avoid the escaping of *Qi* (Figure 20). In general, it highlights the two concepts of 'center' and 'enclosure'. The enclosing enhances the concentration of *Qi* in the central area. In addition, linking the mountains and channels with the city walls was also important for defense. *Wenzhou City Records* in 1762 recorded that



“If the city is outside the mountains, the openness could make it rich, but it will inevitably face floods and invasions. The city can be more secured if the surrounding city walls are allowed to pass along the tops of the hills.”<sup>279</sup>

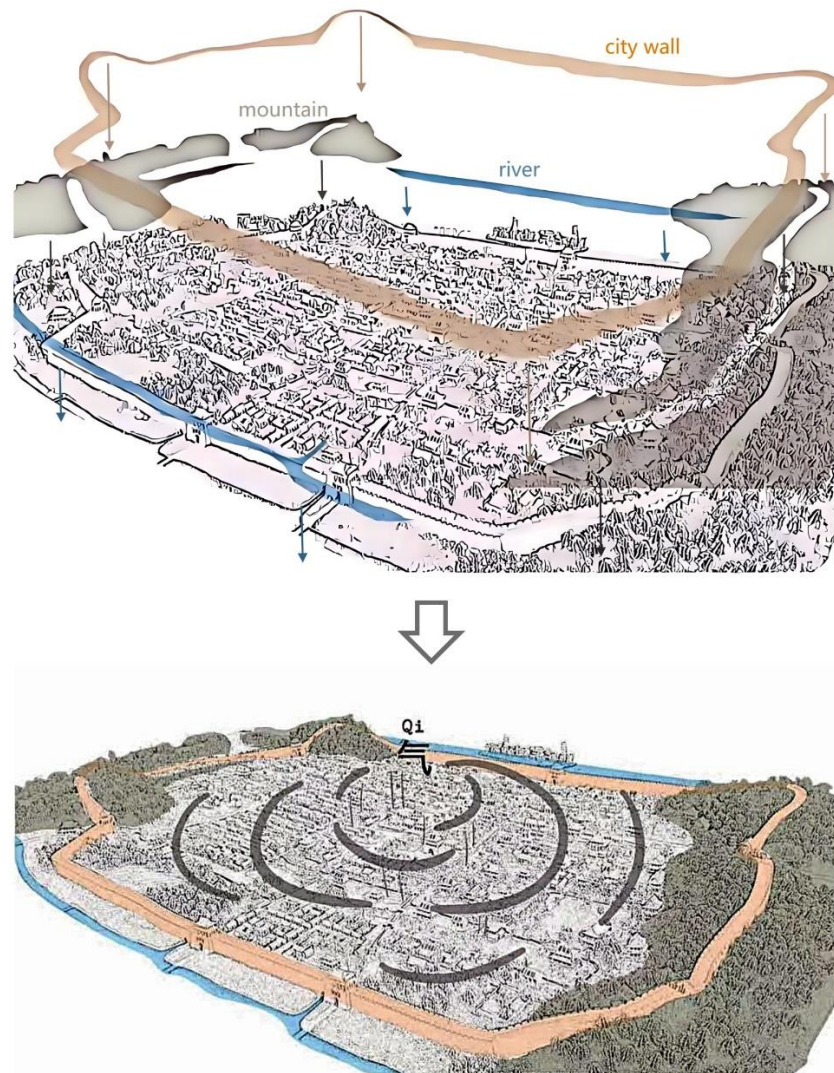


Figure 20 The gathering of *qi* by the surrounding mountains, rivers and city walls in historic Wenzhou.

Author's drawing in 2024, following the base model in the Wenzhou City Planning Exhibition Center, which is generated from the map of Wenzhou in 1882.

<sup>279</sup> Wan Li, *Wenzhou Fu Zhi* 温州府志 (1752 Wenzhou City Records) (Taipei: Chengwen Press, 1993), 26.

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Norberg-Schulz said “mankind has to symbolize his understanding of nature and himself. Symbolization implies that an experienced meaning is translated into another medium... Men gather the experienced meanings to create for themselves a microcosmos which concretizes their world.”<sup>280</sup>

Accordingly, the entire shape of Wenzhou city has two symbolizations (Figure 21). One is a tortoise, of which the shape consists of the enclosing factors as two towers on the Jiangxin Island, the mountains surrounding the city, the city gates and city walls. For this creature, it has the allegorical meaning of surviving long.<sup>281</sup> The other is the Big Dipper Constellation, as it embodies the notion of respecting the north in the celestial order. Thus, it gains a name as ‘*dou cheng*’ (斗城, dipper city). The Big Dipper had an important political meaning in ancient China - symbolizing the ‘emperor's chariot’, which ‘runs in the center’ and ‘controls the four sides of the land’.<sup>282</sup> In addition, Junqing Ding believes that its shape also predicts enclosure, which further predicts robust defense for the city.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Christian, 17.

<sup>281</sup> Fingerhuth, 109.

<sup>282</sup> Qian Sima, “Tianguan Shu 天官书,” in *Records of History 史记* (Wuhan: Chongwen Book Store 崇文书局, 2017), 478.

<sup>283</sup> Junqing Ding, “The Planning Thought and Academic Significance of Yongjia County 论永嘉郡城的规划思想及学术意义,” *China Famous City 中国名城*, no. 7 (2012): 48-53.

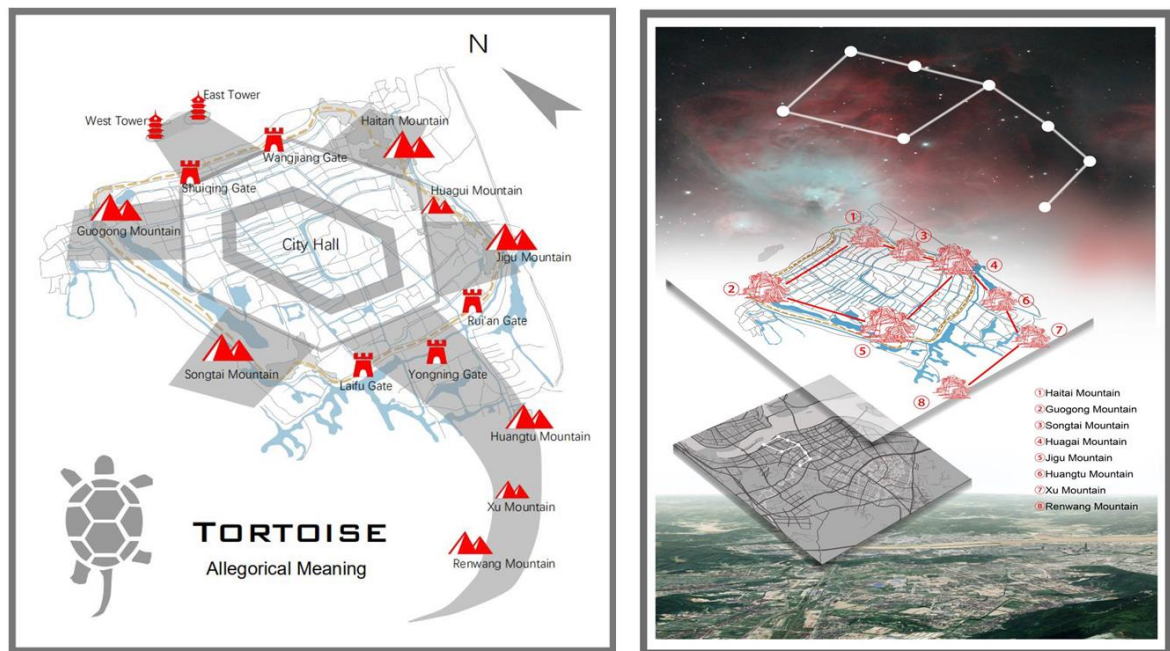


Figure 21 Representations of a tortoise (left) and the Big Dipper (right).

Drawn by the author, in 2022.

For residences, they were built along the water, interwoven with the waterways and streets. Houses along a river generally maximize their proximity to the water, with some even extending over the water's surface, allowing the doors to open onto the river to creating a multifunctional waterfront space. In 1938, Dorothea Hosie, a British amateur film maker and writer on China, described Wenzhou city with numerous river alleys as ‘China’s Venice’ (Figure 22).<sup>284</sup> Most of courtyard houses adhere to the three-bay design principle (often in the east-west direction), as this was a national unified limitation for

<sup>284</sup> Dorothea Hosie, *Brave New China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 193.

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ordinary people's residences.<sup>285</sup> Therefore, the construction of houses can only be extended in a depth direction (often south-north), and sometimes multiple courtyards were needed to organize larger housing areas (Figure 23). This characteristic also determines that the streets (including waterways) in the ancient city of Wenzhou were mostly showing east-west direction. Ding Junqing points out that the spatial layout of traditional residential buildings in Wenzhou follows a 'gate-courtyard-hall triad'.<sup>286</sup> Therefore, it is insufficient to discuss the house alone. The gate symbolizes the homeowner's social status, and the courtyard is the result of enclosure, representing the cultural psychology of 'concealment'. Some houses have a grand interior but a plain and unadorned exterior - hiding their powerful essence behind a simple, stable, and harmonious facade, creating a microcosm within the home.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Mei Hua, *Study on the Annals of Yufu in Chinese History* 中国历代《舆服志》研究 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2015), 142.

<sup>286</sup> Junqing Ding, *Study on Wenzhou Folk Architecture Culture* 温州民居建筑文化研究 (Beijing: China National Photography Art Publishing House 中国民族摄影艺术出版社, 2014), 30-36.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



Figure 22 The river alley in historic Wenzhou.

Dorothea Hosie's photo, in 1936.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Hosie, 193.

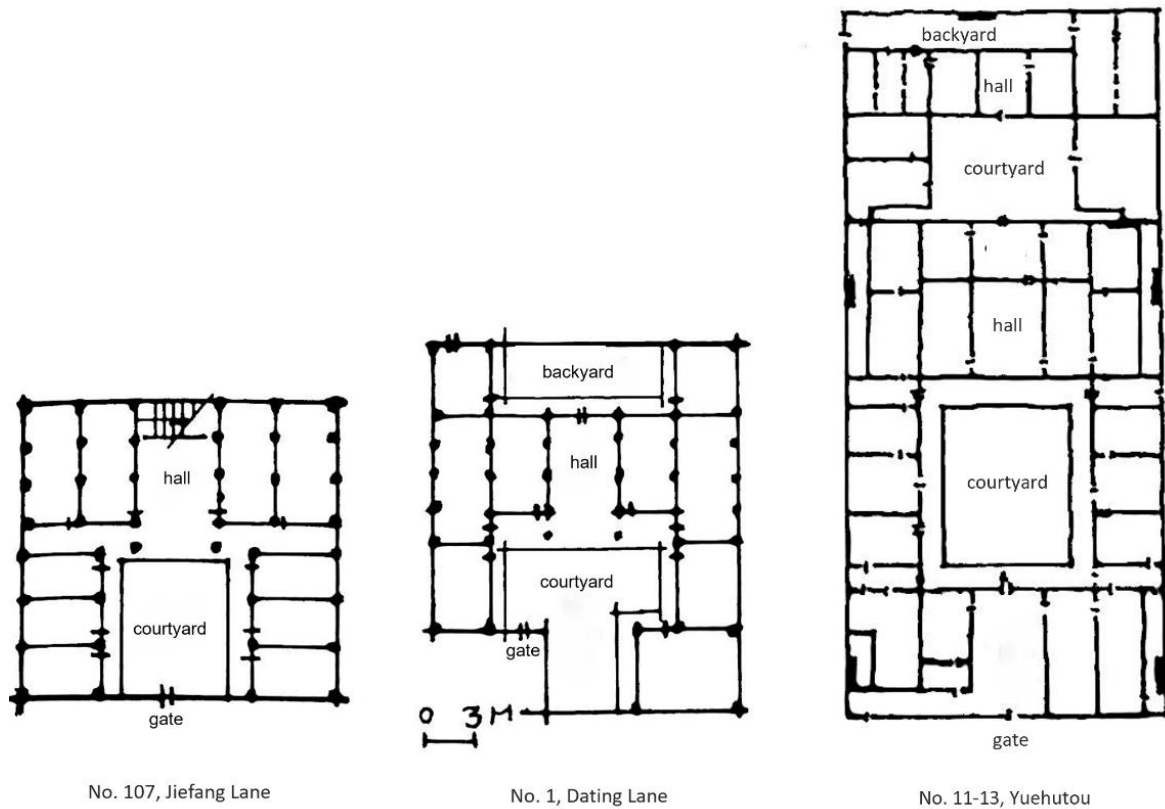


Figure 23 Typical traditional courtyard dwellings in historic Wenzhou. Their backyards directly face waterway.

Author's drawing after Junqing Ding, *Study on Wenzhou Folk Architecture Culture*, 107.

In summary, urban construction of historic Wenzhou once had a close relationship with nature, which reflects in the overall urban pattern, to the waterway system, and to the design of ordinary residences. Martin Heidegger said that all settings determine the nature of the space, and the spatial relationship is based on people's understanding and actions in the world.<sup>289</sup> Therefore, the people who lived in this city in old times had a great reverence for nature. It is the comprehensive and multi-level interpretations of the concept of *shan-*

<sup>289</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 153, 57-58.

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*shui* that creates the cultural charm of the city. Here, I would like to end this section with Jing Xie's reflective words:

Traditional Chinese architecture is not only a showcase of artisan craftsmanship, but also a symbolically important space to show the cosmological and political views of the elite. Cities and buildings are built for a noble purpose – referring the heaven to lead the people.<sup>290</sup>

## **4.2 Modern Time Transformations**

The city of Wenzhou had undergone tremendous transformations from the mid-19th century to the whole 20th century. They can be roughly broken down into three stages, namely the early modern period (from the mid-19th century to 1949), the early People's Republic of China period (from 1949 to 1978), and the Reform and Opening-up period (from 1978 to the early 2000s). Changes in the social system at each stage were accompanied by changes in its urban layout and architectural forms.

### **4.2.1 During Early Modern Time**

After the 1840s, China was invaded and colonized by the West, and one coastal city after another was forced to open as a trading port and Wenzhou was no exception and, in

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<sup>290</sup> Jing Xie, *Tracing the Source of Chinese Architectural Elements: Courtyard, Dougong and Zaojing* 中国建筑要素溯源: 庭院、斗拱和藻井 (Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 2022), 154.

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1876, the *Treaty of Yantai* (烟台条约) confirmed Wenzhou as a trading port allowing for more knowledge and cultural interaction between Westerners and Chinese.<sup>291</sup> Westerners recognized the economic potential of the city as a trading hub and invested in its development. Meanwhile, the local merchants expanded their horizons: they quickly absorbed Western ideas, learned Western technology, used Western products, imitated Western architectural styles, and began the transition towards an industrialized society. Therefore, Wenzhou was described as: “a place on the sea, with its market half foreign”.<sup>292</sup>

In terms of architecture, the mix of Western and Chinese architectural elements, giving the city a semi-colonial character.<sup>293</sup> The range of styles include mock Gothic, Romanesque and Baroque, to eclecticism and the later Art-deco style.<sup>294</sup> Among these, the Baroque and Art Deco styles are the most dominant. As the lavish decoration and intricate details of the Baroque style met the needs of affluent Chinese in the early modern time, and also, the use of decorative elements enables the integration of traditional Chinese motifs to not appear discordant.<sup>295</sup> As a result, some Baroque-style building facades feature elements such as dragons, phoenixes, and landscape paintings to create the fusion architecture known

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<sup>291</sup> Shen-tsu Wang, *The Margary Affair and the Chefoo Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 27.

<sup>292</sup> Cai, 5.

<sup>293</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 62.

<sup>294</sup> Lai, P. & Liu, B. "The Protect Implementation of Historical Block in Wenzhou: Wuma and Mochi, Wenzhou Case." *Planners*. 30 (2014) : 21-26.

<sup>295</sup> AP Ivanova and NP Kradin, "About Studying Architectural Heritage of the Harbin City:" Chinese Baroque", *Bulletin of PNU* 35, no. 4 (2014): 25-30.



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as ‘Chinese Baroque’ (Figure 24).<sup>296</sup> Meanwhile, as Art Deco represented a belief in social and technological progress, especially the strong vertical lines expressed on the facades were seen as representing innovation,<sup>297</sup> it aligned with that period of innovation in Wenzhou.



Figure 24 ‘Chinese Baroque’ architectures in Wenzhou.

Author’s photos, in 2022.

Interestingly, most of these European-style buildings were merely facades along the street while their interior spaces were still the traditional patterns, materials and styles of China. The North-South Street with many Art Deco style buildings was especially evident, as it can be found that many heights of facade are not matched with the other parts (Figure 25). While in the alleys of Wenzhou, there were many Baroque courtyard houses. But except for the gates were Baroque, other parts were all traditional Chinese. Such as The

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<sup>296</sup> Svetlana Levoshko and Igor Kirichkov, "Tourist Quarter “Chinese-Baroque” of Dao Way District in Harbin City: Experience, Problems and Perspectives of Renovation" (paper presented at the MATEC Web of Conferences, 2016).

<sup>297</sup> Rehab Mahmoud Kotb, "Art Deco Architectures as Inspiration Source in Fashion Design," *International journal of Science Commerce and Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2014): 2.

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building named Yikang Private Bank (益康钱庄) (Figure 26). Thus, during this time, the most basic unit of organization in the city buildings was still Chinese in nature, reflecting the continuity of the city's fundamental social relationships.



Figure 25 Jiefang Street with Western facades, mostly in Art Deco style.

Left: In 1950s, source from: *Selected Architectural and Environmental Elements in the Historical City of Wenzhou* 温州历史城区建筑与环境要素选集. Edited by Wenzhou Mingcheng Construction Investment Group 温州市名城建设投资集团有限公司, (2014): 494.

Right: author's photo, 2020.

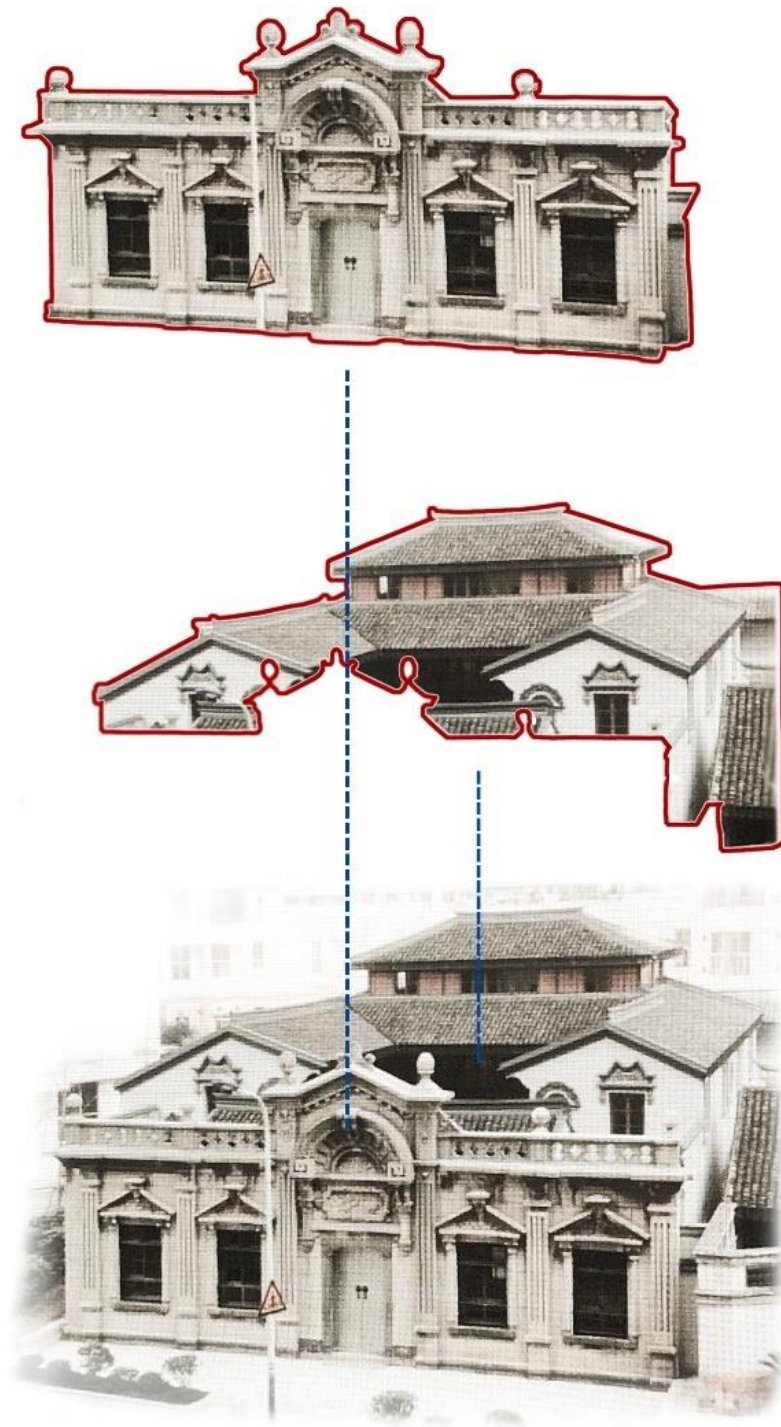


Figure 26 The composition of Yikang Private Bank.

Made by the author, in 2019.

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In the aspect of urban fabric, the construction of city began to break through the constraints of the city wall. Comparing the map of 1877 (Figure 18) with the map of 1944 (Figure 27), it can be seen that the city underwent significant expansion to the northeast, northwest and south directions, resulting that little of the city wall was remained. An old local newspaper recorded: “The city wall should be demolished so as not to hinder the expansion of the urban area” (Figure 28).<sup>298</sup> While Wang Changming, from the perspective of war, claims that another reason was to make it easier to safely evacuate the city in case of wars.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> It is reported by a Wenzhou local newspaper: Zheou Daily 3rd Edition, Dec. 7th, 1938.

<sup>299</sup> Changming Wang, *Research on the History of Wenzhou Lianhuaxin War of Resistance against Japan* 温州莲花心抗日战史研究 (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press, 2018), 25.



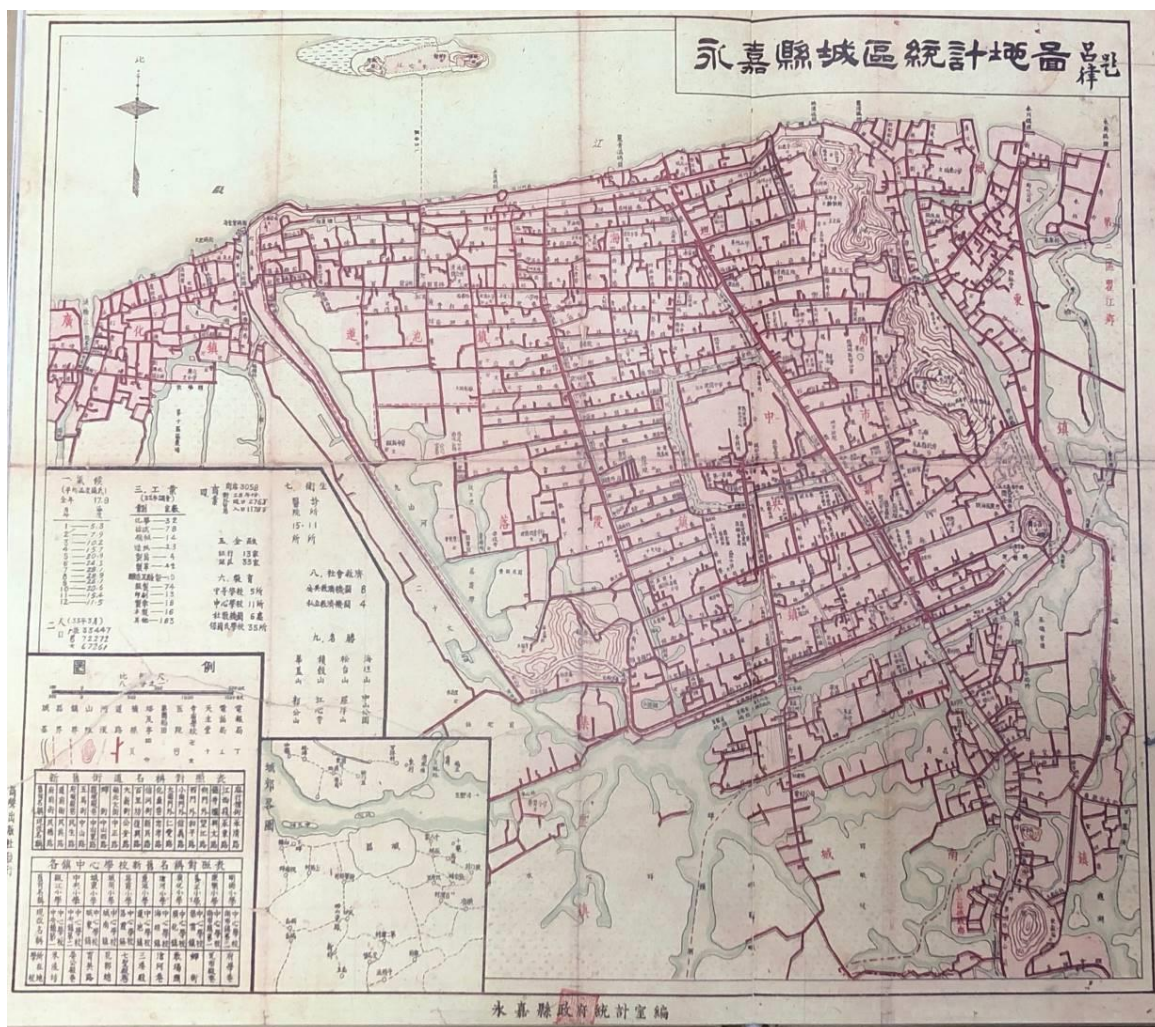


Figure 27 The "Statistical Map of Yongjia County Urban Area" in 1944.

Source from: Chong Zhong, *Wenzhou Old Maps* 温州古旧地图集, 80.

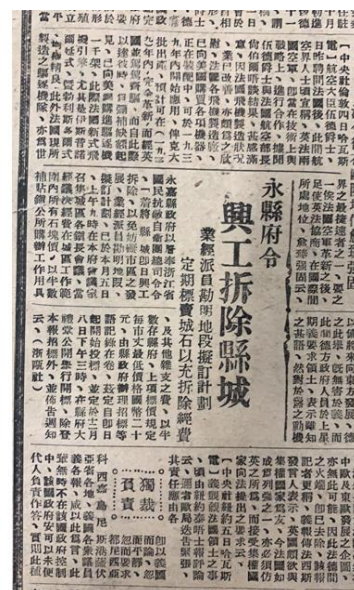


Figure 28 During the Republic of China, the demolition of city wall.

Left: Photographed by Shao Du. (<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1629594107395486511&wfr=spider&for=pc>, Sep. 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Right: Zheou Daily 3rd Edition (Dec. 7th, 1938) stated that the city wall should be demolished.

Throughout the 20th century, with the emergence of modern transportation, most of the waterways inside the city were filled in and transformed into roads.<sup>300</sup> Only a few parts of moat [on the southern and eastern sides] and Jiushan Lake [on the western side of the historical city] are preserved today. It's a pity that people today can no longer experience the unique urban space that dominated by waterways in historic Wenzhou.

<sup>300</sup> Guofang Shan, "Wenzhou Ancient City Water System and Water Control Probe 温州古城水系和治水探微," *China Water Resources*, no. 11 (2014): 62-64.

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#### 4.2.2 During the Early PRC

During the early phase of the People's Republic of China (PRC) from 1949 to 1978, the central government embarked on a mission to enhance the society through a process of *Chinesization* that aimed to foster a sense of national unity and create a cohesive national identity.<sup>301</sup> The collective effort to achieve this goal involved widespread social and political reforms and placed particular emphasis on public assemblies and parades. During this period, China's economic development model can be characterized as a centrally planned economy with a focus on state ownership and control. While foreign trade was limited, and the government focused on import substitution, aiming to produce goods domestically instead of relying on imports. There were strict controls on foreign investment and limited engagement with the global market.<sup>302</sup> Therefore, Wenzhou as a port of foreign trade, its economic development was severely restricted. At the same time, political engagement by street procession was a matter of great importance to the general populace. As a result, more streets were extended in width at the cost of filling waterways, and a public square was constructed instead of the old administrative center in the 'inner city'.

In 1957, the *Preliminary Plan of Wenzhou* (温州市初步规划图) was developed as the first plan for the city since its PRC foundations, and outlined a vision for a city with a population of 300,000 and a land area of 23 square kilometers.<sup>303</sup> This plan introduced

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<sup>301</sup> Rizzardi and Zhang, 30.

<sup>302</sup> Steven J Davis, Dingquian Liu, and Xuguang Simon Sheng, "Economic Policy Uncertainty in China since 1949: The View from Mainland Newspapers" (paper presented at the Fourth Annual IMF-Atlanta Fed Research Workshop on China's Economy Atlanta, 2019), 1-37.

<sup>303</sup> Baofu Hu, *Urban Construction History of Wenzhou City* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 1993), 16.

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several new concepts never before seen in Wenzhou, including a city center, boulevards, parks, sewers, and apartment residential areas, all of which led to significant changes in the urban landscape. Main roads were widened to 30 meters and secondary roads were widened to between 20 and 24 meters while streets such as Xinhe Street, Fuqian Street, and Xiaonan Road were designated as boulevards. From 1952 to 1957, 18 new and rebuilt roads were constructed.<sup>304</sup> These broader roads led to the filling in of more rivers and the dismantling of more bridges, resulting in further erasure of the traditional spatial patterns and features of the urban landscape.

In the 1950s, the ‘inner city’ of historic Wenzhou underwent a transformation with its administrative functions replaced by a new role as a bustling public gathering spot. Once it was a group of courtyards, had been reduced to ruins during the Anti-Japanese War. Its reconstruction involved local citizens volunteering their time and effort to clean up the debris and erect the People's Square (Figure 29).<sup>305</sup> In 1951, it was turned into a sports field complete with a circular track for the city's games and, despite this change in function, it remained a popular gathering spot for the public. Over time, the square evolved into a versatile and multi-functional space that hosted a wide range of activities, including public hearings, marches, sporting events, cultural exhibitions, goods trading, and cultural performances (Figure 30). Indeed, it was widely regarded as the most vibrant and dynamic

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>305</sup> *Wenzhou in a Century (1876-1978)* 温州百年风云(1876-1978), 457.



public space in Wenzhou.<sup>306</sup>



Figure 29 The location of People's Square in the Street map of Wenzhou city in 1951.

Drawn by the author, base map from *Wenzhou National Historical and Cultural City Application Series*.<sup>307</sup>

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>307</sup> Dong Wu, *Wenzhou National Historical and Cultural City Application Series* 温州市国家历史文化名城申报系列丛书 (Beijing: China Ethnic Photography Art Publishing House, 2014), 31.



Figure 30 People's Square.

Left: As “public hearing” space in 1978. Source: Wang D. *Lucheng Old Neighborhoods*. Hangzhou: Xi Leng Yin She Press, (2009), 73.

Middle: As sports field in 1950's. Photographed by Du Shao 邵度. Source: *Wenzhou in a Century (1876-1978)*, 458.

Right: As march space in 1968. Photographed by Jiaying Zhu. ([https://www.sohu.com/a/317654591\\_355935](https://www.sohu.com/a/317654591_355935), accessed on 06/Sep/2020.)

At the architectural level, influenced by the ideology of Utopian Socialism, China, as a newly founded socialist country, had undertaken a major experimental reform of its people's housing patterns. One of the important early socialist Charles Fourier (in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century) put forward a concept of ‘*phalanstère*’, which is not only a huge architecture, but also a microtown as a self-contained utopian community. In addition, the form of covered corridor is particularly prominent in its design, because it contains publicity and harmony.<sup>308</sup> Roger Luckhurst articulates that utopian socialist advocates the existing space

<sup>308</sup> François Marie Charles Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, trans. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 243-44.

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of social relations should be dismantled, especially the closed-door social relations of the bourgeois family. Then, by introducing the presence of corridors, it offers hope for complete social integration.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the socialist principles espoused by China during this period necessitated a more equitable distribution of wealth and consequently, many opulent courtyard-style mansions formerly owned by the wealthy were nationalized and subsequently divided into smaller, more modest accommodations for multiple occupants.<sup>310</sup> The traditional Chinese etiquette-oriented architecture was changed unprecedently – ‘confucian world’ was replaced by *da zayuan* (大杂院, big miscellaneous courtyard).<sup>311</sup> On the other hand, most of newly built large apartment buildings or office buildings have distinct corridors connecting individual rooms.

During the 1950s and 1960s, some apartment complexes were constructed in Wenzhou, along with numerous public buildings. The prevalent building type consisted of a multi-story reinforced concrete structure around a central courtyard, with a single-sided corridor facing inward. Each unit within the building could serve as either a residence or an office. This type of building was utilized for various purposes, including residential, cultural institutions, and offices.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), 89.

<sup>310</sup> Chris Bramall, "Inequality, Land Reform and Agricultural Growth in China, 1952–55: A Preliminary Treatment," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 3 (2000): 30-54.

<sup>311</sup> Xin Ruan, *Confucius' Courtyard: Architecture, Philosophy and the Good Life in China* (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 249-54.

<sup>312</sup> Hu, 32-33.

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Although most residents still live in traditional courtyards, there was a shift towards the collective ownership of these houses through a process of government expropriation and redistribution. These houses, which were previously owned by a single family, were subdivided and shared between several families that now lived together and shared a courtyard. This transformation resulted in the destruction of the original unity of the houses but it also led to the emergence of a closer neighborhood social relationships. Traditional social relations were reorganized and the spatial pattern significantly altered.<sup>313</sup> The original unity of the traditional large family courtyard houses ceased to exist after renovation and reconstruction as many households demolished the wooden structure of their own unit and replaced it with a concrete one.

The Zhu's Family House (朱式住宅) is a prime example of how the original unity of private housing was lost during this period. Although it still has a luxurious Baroque facade, its interior space is a completely different scene (Figure 31). The hall is now divided into seven living units, and additional compartments had been added later on [even encroach on the space of central courtyard], resulting in fragmentation of the original structure (Figure 32). Today, it serves as a dilapidated, overcrowded dormitory for disadvantaged groups with poor living conditions. The building of Baoda Shanghang (宝大商行) (Figure 33) is another example, which have baroque-style facades but have been divided into many small rooms, each functioning as independent household. In particular, the transformation of the inner traffic space of the latter formed a public corridor as the

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<sup>313</sup> Bramall, 30-54.

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core to organize the two sides of unit living space, which corresponds to the model of Fourier's Utopian Socialist architecture. The reorganization of traditional dwellings into collective ownership has thus had a significant impact on the spatial integrity of these buildings, creating problems for their preservation today.



Figure 31 Zhu's family house.

Left: The European style façade; right: The chaotic inner courtyard. Photographed by the author in 2017.

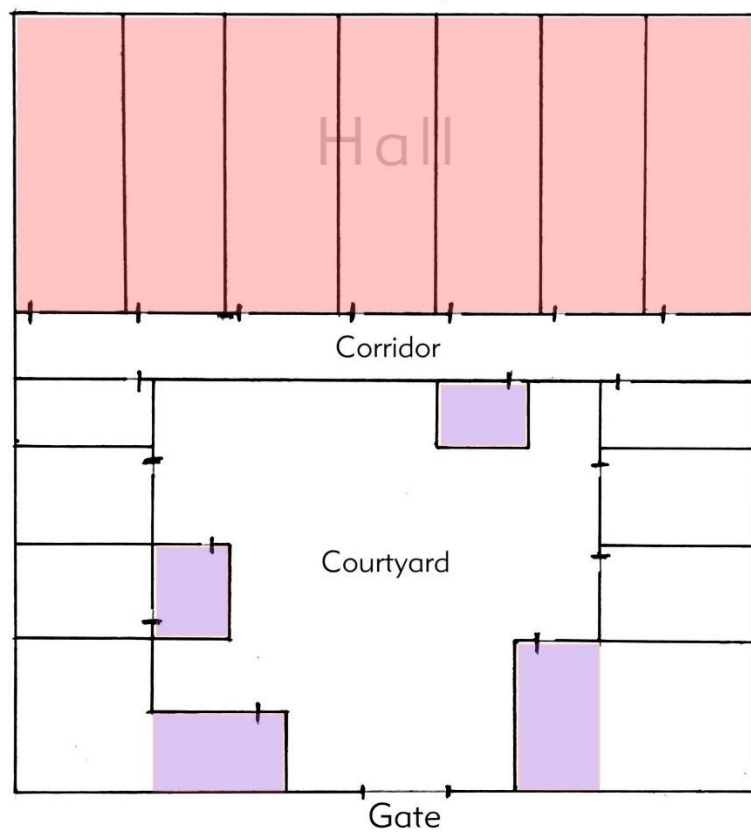


Figure 32 The layout draft of Zhu's family house today.

The red area was originally a hall, but divided into 7 units. The purple areas are additional compartments that encroach on the courtyard.

Drawn by the author, in 2024.



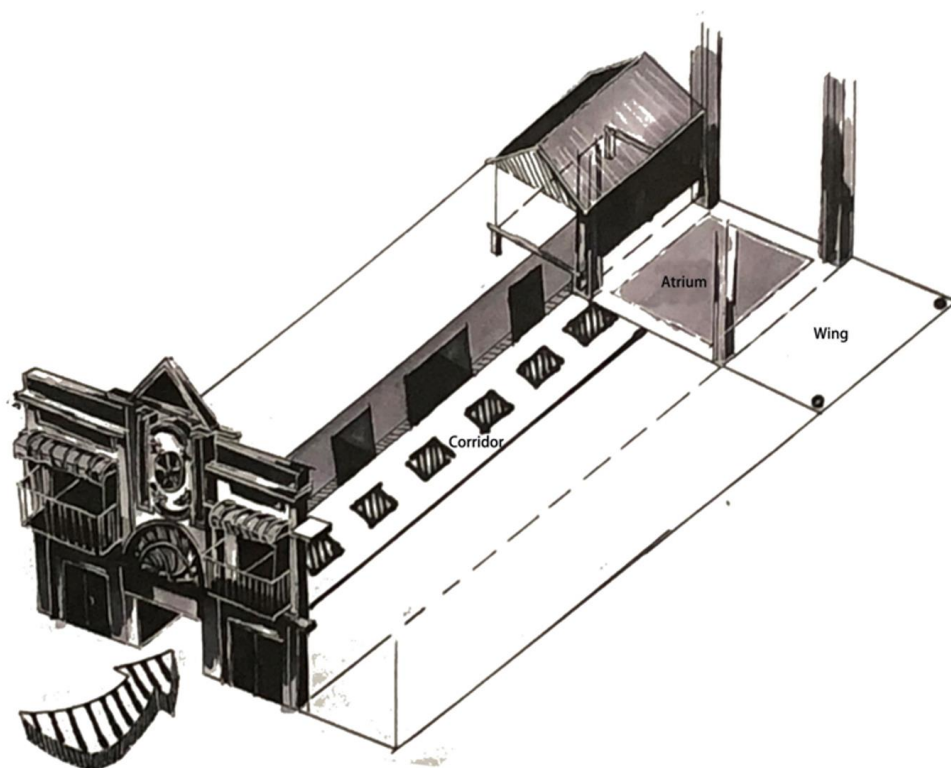


Figure 33 The building of Baoda Shanghang.

Top Left: The façade. Author's photo in 2018.

Top Right: The atrium used as a kitchen. Author's photo in 2018.

Bottom: Drawn by Bella Zheng and the author.

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### 4.2.3 Early Reform and Opening-up

Since the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, China has formed three representative development models of market economy:

1. ‘South Jiangsu Model’ (苏南模式), characterized by township enterprises with collective economy.
2. ‘Pearl River Model’ (珠江模式), characterized by co-operative economy [the cooperations especially with foreign or HongKong enterprises].
3. ‘Wenzhou Model’ (温州模式), characterized by Family-based enterprises with private economy.<sup>314</sup>

The ‘Wenzhou Model’ represents a pioneering, daring, and unorthodox approach.<sup>315</sup> It exemplifies the re-privatization of the economic development and it is this approach that caused entrepreneurs to drive the economy of the entire Wenzhou region, with the local government providing proper regulation and guidance rather than relying solely on funds from higher authorities for city construction.<sup>316</sup> The transfer of the right to use state-owned land to the public for a fee, and the market-oriented operation of urban construction, were both crucial for the success of this approach. Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong defined this model as coming about “because the poverty of rural areas in Wenzhou in the 1980s meant

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<sup>314</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, "Reflections on the Models of Southern Jiangsu, Wenzhou and Pearl River 苏南、温州、珠江模式之反思," [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjsj/tjcb/zggqgl/200210/t20021024\\_37378.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjsj/tjcb/zggqgl/200210/t20021024_37378.html). Accessed on March 01, 2023

<sup>315</sup> Liu, 696-711.

<sup>316</sup> Wei Cao, "Government-Enterprise Coupling in Economic Transformation ——a Historical Investigation and Dilemma Research Based on Wenzhou Model 经济转型中的政企耦合 ——基于温州模式的历史考察与困境研究" (PhD, Zhejiang University, 2013), 83-84.



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that people went out to work and brought back the money to develop family factories and workshops. Then they sold the products of those family workshops through a vast distribution network, forming a ‘Small Commodity, Big Market’(小商品，大市场)”.<sup>317</sup> Furthermore, the Wenzhou Model has earned recognition and praise for its underlying work ethic, resilience, and readiness to embrace innovative ideas in their pursuit of prosperity. This is commonly referred to as the ‘Wenzhounese Spirit’ (温州人精神) and its core character is often described as ‘Daring to be the first in the world’ or ‘Venturing ahead fearlessly’(敢为天下先).<sup>318,319</sup> Economist Zhong Pengrong describes the Wenzhounese Spirit as four phrases: the entrepreneurial spirit of starting from scratch and working hard; the spirit of self-reliance and of not waiting for or relying on others; the pioneering spirit of exploring the world and treating it as their home; and the spirit of daring to be innovative innovate and being skilled at it.<sup>320</sup> Consequently, ‘Wenzhou Towns’ or ‘Wenzhou Streets’ emerged in numerous Chinese cities, selling the goods from Wenzhou; and Wenzhounese play an important economic role in Chinatowns around the world.<sup>321</sup> This illustrates the aptitude of Wenzhou businessmen for embarking on entrepreneurial ventures and integrating in different local environments. Li Qiang, the current premier of China, once encouraged Wenzhou people to go out to start their own businesses. Because this benign

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<sup>317</sup> Xiaotong Fei, "Rural, Small Town, Regional Development: A Review of My Community Research History 农村、小城镇、区域发展——我的社区研究历程的再回顾," *Journal of Peking University* 2 (1995): 4-14.

<sup>318</sup> Baojiang Zhu, *Wenzhounese Spirit 温州人精神* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>319</sup> Liming Fang, Hengxin Xue, and Congqing Xi, "Wenzhou Spirit: Connotation, Characteristic and Value 温州精神: 内涵, 特征及其价值," *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2006): 122-25.

<sup>320</sup> Junxian Chen, "On the 'Spirit of Wenzhou People' 浅论“温州人精神”, " *People's Tribune*, no. 1 (2004): 54-55.

<sup>321</sup> Qiang Li, *The Commentary of Wenzhou* (Beijing: Red Flag Publishing House, 2012), 7.

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capital outflow can bring back information, technology and capital appreciation to Wenzhou in the future.<sup>322</sup> It played a significant role in propelling the rapid economic development of Wenzhou during the early stages of China's Reform and Opening-up and continues to serve as an inspiration for contemporary Chinese entrepreneurs. It is because of this that the city reclaimed its position as a hub of economic and trade activities on China's southeastern coast.<sup>323</sup>

With the rapid development of economy, the city began to expand. The natural land that once outside of the city began to be gradually encroached upon by urban expansion. From the map of 1980 (Figure 34), it can be seen that the buildings and street construction outside the area of historic Wenzhou had been connected, which ceased to be isolated constructed areas to the northeast, northwest and south parts of historic Wenzhou. In addition, some determinant residential areas, which are obviously different from the spontaneously formed urban fabric, began to be planned and constructed in the periphery areas. It is worth to be noticed that constructions were particularly intense in the southern part of the city. Even though many of the river channels disappeared within the historic Wenzhou, but in the south area of the city's expansion, the previously strong waterborne trade continued to play an important role in forming the 'big market'. For instance, in the 1990s, the wharf on the moat to the south of historic Wenzhou remained the transportation link between the city and the regions to the south, and was called Xiaonan Public Wharf (小南公共码头). As the Tang River (塘河) to the south of historical city was an important

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>323</sup> Zhu, 12-20.

trade route, the original river-city spatial relationship within historic Wenzhou gradually expanded to the outside, resulting in the formation of water-facing buildings on both sides of the riverbank and numerous bridges across the river (Figure 35).



Figure 34 Map of Wenzhou City in 1980.

Painted by Wenzhou Science and Technology Association, stored in Wenzhou library.



Figure 35 Left: The Xiaonan Public Wharf in 1990.

From *Lucheng Memories*.<sup>324</sup>

Right: Tang River in 1990s.

From *Wenzhou National Historical and Cultural City Declaration Series*.<sup>325</sup>

The commercialization within traditional neighborhoods has brought changes to the traditional buildings. Since 1980, Wenzhou's private entrepreneurs have been prominent in the light industry sector, establishing numerous factories on the outskirts of the city and producing a wide range of goods such as clothing, stationery, lighters and leather products. These products needed to be gathered and sold in the city center and this led to the spontaneous emergence of commercial trade districts within historic Wenzhou<sup>326</sup>, showcasing a diverse array of shops, markets, and trading activities, attracting both locals

<sup>324</sup> Zuoyong Yang and Shouzhuang Sun, *Lucheng Memories 鹿城记忆* (Hangzhou: Xileng Seal Society Publishing House, 2009), 72.

<sup>325</sup> Wu, 39.

<sup>326</sup> Tetsushi Sonobe, Dinghuan Hu, and Keijiro Otsuka, "From Inferior to Superior Products: An Inquiry into the Wenzhou Model of Industrial Development in China," *Journal of comparative Economics* 32, no. 3 (2004): 542-63.

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and visitors alike. In order to reduce operating costs and balance personal life and business, shop owners typically transformed these buildings to have a ‘shop downstairs and the residence upstairs’ (楼下经商，楼上居住), reflecting the practicality and adaptability of Wenzhou's business community to use available space for both purposes. For instance, the Chengxi Street Historical Quarter, which has been preserved, still has many privately-owned clothing stores (Figure 36), many of which were converted from private residences. In the early 1990s, the traditional style of architecture in historic Wenzhou began to be replaced by a more simplified modern style, accompanied by a proliferation of advertising along streets (Figure 37). Many traditional wooden structures with three-dimensional decoration had their facades transformed into flat cement walls to facilitate the placement of advertising signage. Some shop owners chose to demolish the original building and rebuild it as a modern concrete structure but these spontaneous efforts towards modernization did not have significant impact on the overall scale of the traditional streets and blocks but it did result in a disordered appearance, especially in Wuma Street which is known for its commercial atmosphere. (Wuma Street will be analyzed in more detail in the following chapter).<sup>327</sup> In summary, the creation of advertising space and the desire for a modern appearance led to the alteration and reconstruction of buildings, and disturbed the architectural fabric of the historic streetscape.

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<sup>327</sup> Jingwu Chen, "Land Utilization and Redevelopment of Wuma Street in Wenzhou City and the Revival of Old Commercial District," *China Conference* (2000): 134-40.





Figure 36 Chengxi Street.

Author's photo, 2022.



Figure 37 Street buildings in the early 1990s.

Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1672523317888994316&wfr=spider&for=pc>, accessed on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

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In addition, there was also the pioneering adoption of new mechanisms in modernizing the old city of Wenzhou. In 1986, the government decided to rebuild historic Wenzhou in order to facilitate economic development and the guiding ideology of “diversification of financing means, enterprise-oriented construction, commercialization of facilities, standardization of government regulation and control” and ‘self-digestion and self-balancing’ (自我消化自我平衡) was established.<sup>328</sup> This included the widening of roads, alleviating traffic congestion in the old city, improving infrastructure, and improving the city’s appearance and living conditions. The modernization that was promoted could be divided into two stages, with the first being development focusing on buildings along streets, and the second being the development of large blocks.

The reconstruction project of Renmin Road (人民路) in 1988 (Figure 38) is a typical example of the street development model. As the city grew and automobile traffic increased, Renmin Road was widened from 12 to 36 meters, deteriorated buildings were renovated and the infrastructure (such as sewerage and electricity) was modernized. Along the road were mainly private residences and shops and, while local residents initially expressed their concerns about the impact of the project, the government was able to address their concerns with a demolition policy that prioritized local resettlement and reasonably-priced housing. A total of 7 billion yuan was raised from social funds, 1.3 million square meters of old houses were demolished, and 3.83 million square meters of

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<sup>328</sup> *Contemporary Chinese Cities Development Series: Wenzhou* 当代中国城市发展丛书·温州, ed. Wenzhou Research Group 《温州》课题组 (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2015), 105.

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new buildings constructed, forming a bustling business district centered around Renmin Road. The initiative had great benefit for the economic development of Wenzhou in the 1980s and 1990s. The project blended road construction and real estate development that promoted the commercialization of this area. It did all this without relying solely on government investment, and instead utilized the right to use state-owned land to attract private and social funds for a market-oriented operation. With its ‘self-digestion and self-balance’ principle, this became the most successful renovation model for the old city of Wenzhou in the 1990s, and drove the city’s modernization.<sup>329</sup> At the time, this approach was unique throughout China because most other urban development funding and investment was top-down with governments in the primary role.<sup>330</sup> The modernization of Renmin Road was called a significant embodiment of the ‘Wenzhou Spirit’ as it showcased the industriousness and innovative mindset of the people of Wenzhou people, reflecting their determination to constantly improve and transform their urban landscape.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Jiebang Yang and Zhiping He, "Dilemmas and Countermeasures of Old City Reconstruction -- a Case Study of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province 旧城改建的困境与对策——以浙江温州为例," *Construction of Small Towns*, no. 3 (2004): 80-81.

<sup>330</sup> Y. Li and Y. Wang, "Financing Urban Heritage Conservation in China: Challenges and Opportunities," *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 8, no. 4 (2019): 549-58.

<sup>331</sup> Liushu Yang, "The Growth Story of a City -- the Life Behind the Transformation of the Village in the City 一座城市的成长故事——城中村改造背后的百态人生," *Wenzhounese*, no. 9 (2016): 12-17.





Figure 38 Renmin Road before and after regeneration.

Left: The Renmin Road before regeneration, in 1991.

Right: Renmin Road after regeneration, in the early 2000s. (Wenzhou Old City Reconstruction Headquarters, 2010, pp10-11).

In the early 21st century, the people of Wenzhou gradually accumulated capital in the free-market economy and the real estate market had an unprecedented boom. At one point, the average Wenzhou property prices were the highest in China and seemingly disproportionate to the city's economic standing. Furthermore, Wenzhou people capitalized on their wealth by engaging in real estate transactions throughout China and earned substantial profits. Their involvement in the real estate market played a significant role in the rapid increase in housing prices in many cities in China during this period. The so-called ‘Wenzhou Property Investment Groups’ (温州炒房团) was a major player and the rapid rise in housing prices led to a buying frenzy among the general population and

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stimulated the construction of numerous high-rise residential buildings in Wenzhou.<sup>332</sup> With such intense real estate development, there was a further need to modernize historic Wenzhou and this resulted in a shift from the development of streets to the development of blocks. This large-scale block development model has been China's most common housing pattern for the past 20 years, and is typically a gated residential complex (or community or neighborhood) with several high-rise apartment buildings, and typically enclosed by security railings or a podium of 2-storey retail units that envelop the entire superblock.<sup>333</sup> <sup>334</sup> In the statistical map of architectural features within the scope of historic Wenzhou in 2005, it can be seen that the area of modern buildings has exceeded that of traditional ones (Figure 39). As can be seen from the 2019 satellite map, there is a large area in the western part of historic Wenzhou with a large volume of high-rise buildings (Figure 40). In the short term, many residents have made huge profits from compensation for demolition. The sudden and unequal profiteering caused a growing wealth gap and social inequality.<sup>335</sup> Moreover, the new residential areas tend to lack the close-knit community relationships and spatial experiences characteristic of traditional neighborhoods. <sup>336</sup> The new developments offer more living space but tend to foster apathy and disengagement among residents and this hampers social interaction and community cohesion.

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<sup>332</sup> Anping Pan, Chongfu Huang, and Dehua Jiang, "Wenzhou Real Estate Bubble and Rupture Risk Warning," *Journal of Risk Analysis and Crisis Response* 7, no. 4 (2017): 262-67.

<sup>333</sup> Xie and Heath, 169.

<sup>334</sup> Feng Deng, "Gated Community and Residential Segregation in Urban China," *GeoJournal* 82 (2017): 231-46.

<sup>335</sup> Xu Huang et al., "Compensation, Housing Situation and Residents' Satisfaction with the Outcome of Forced Relocation: Evidence from Urban China," *Cities* 96 (2020): 102436.

<sup>336</sup> Deng, 231-46.



Figure 39 Map of urban fabric in historic Wenzhou.

Blue represents modern building, and brown represents traditional building. The author signed the three expanded roads of modern development.

Source from: Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan, 2005.





Figure 40 The urban texture of Historic Wenzhou in 2019.

The red zone is the scope of Historic Wenzhou and the yellow zone is the area with a concentration of tall buildings.

Drawn by the author. Base map from Google-map, accessed on Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

During this time, Xinhe Street (信合街) and Baili Road (百里路) are the two typical examples of modern development in the early 2000s in historic Wenzhou. Take Xinhe Street for instance, its original street houses were largely demolished in order to expanding it into an 8-lane urban trunk road (Figure 41), which highly reflects citizens'

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preference for new and modern structures.<sup>337</sup> Interestingly, the construction of modern high-rise buildings is only existed in the blocks along the main street, while the urban fabric of inner part of the quarter is still traditional. Together with Renmin Road, it can be seen that these three roads look particularly wide in the realm of historic Wenzhou (Figure 39).



Figure 41 The comparison of before and after modern construction for Xinhe Street.

Up: The street houses in the 1990s. Source from: Jin, Danxia & Zhou, Hongzhuan. *The Image of Historic Wenzhou 温州老城印象*, 45.

Down: Photographed by the author in 2018.

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<sup>337</sup> Baomin Yang, *Wenzhou Old City 温州老城* (Beijing: 中国民族摄影艺术出版社 China Race Photograph Art Press, 2010), 35.

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It is also worth noting that the emergence of gated communities in historic cities have led to the replacement of old, intimate neighborhoods with new, modern layouts featuring parallel lines of high-rise buildings. Edward J Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder claim that gated communities often use modern architectural materials and styles that clash with the surrounding traditional buildings.<sup>338</sup> Therefore, it further detracts from the appearance of historic Wenzhou, leading not only to the destruction of patterns of circulation and the connections of urban space, but also to the fragmentation and division of historic urban areas. In addition, each housing estate constitutes an enclosed space inaccessible to outsiders, and often has its own infrastructure, security, and services, creating small, independent communities that may weaken publicity of services and urban governance in historic urban areas.<sup>339</sup>

In contrast, the old houses in historic Wenzhou continue to deteriorate due to the lack of a legal basis to provide residents with the autonomy to renovate. The height difference between the high-rise and low-rise buildings significantly impacts the latter's sight lines and creates substantial shadowing, while the huge increase in population density overloads the surrounding road systems. Zhou Yunzhou astutely pointed out that the prevalent practice of "Big Demolition, Big Construction" of the gated community had led to the alarming erosion of Wenzhou's distinctive urban character and has caused a severe

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<sup>338</sup> Edward J Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>339</sup> Martin Coy and Martin Pöhler, "Gated Communities in Latin American Megacities: Case Studies in Brazil and Argentina," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and design* 29, no. 3 (2002): 355-70.



rupture in the city's cultural fabric.<sup>340</sup>

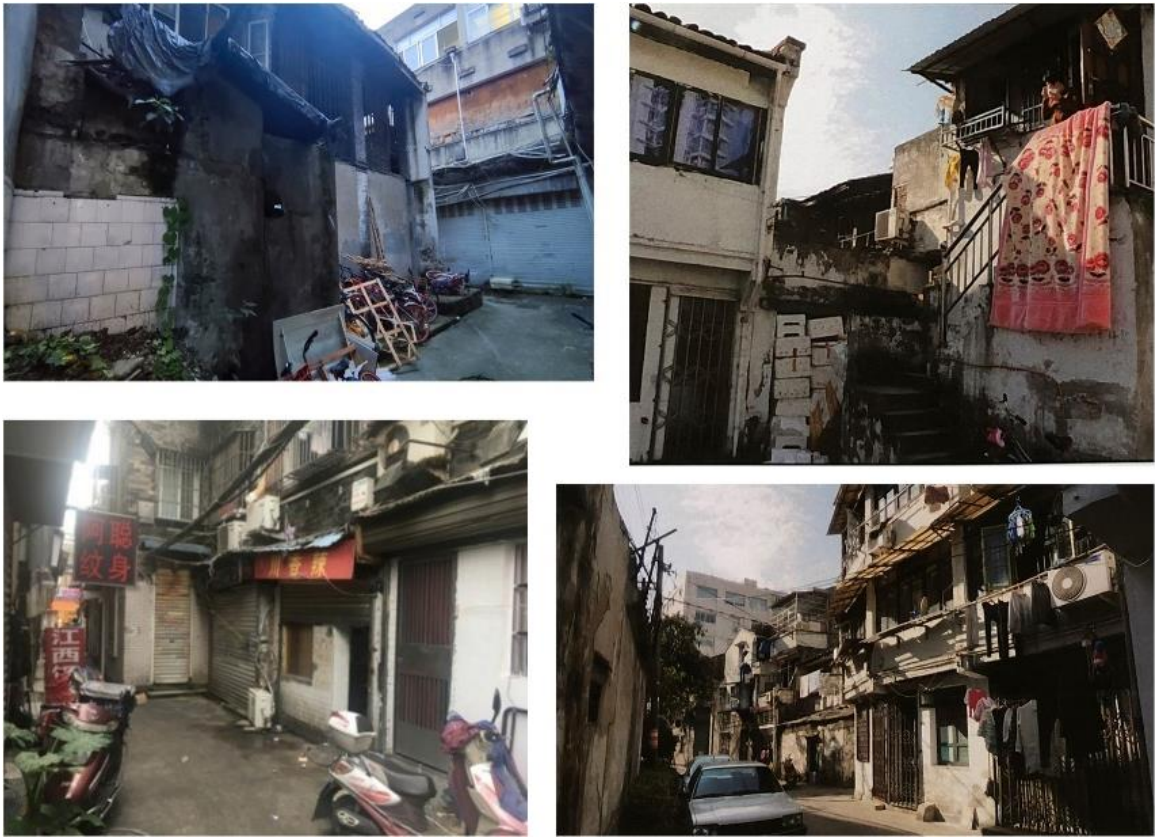


Figure 42 Timeworn status quo in the historic quarter in Wenzhou.

Author's photos, 2019

With respect to the overall development of Wenzhou City, it has largely expanded [especially eastward] in the past 20 years. When Li Qiang (Chinese current Premier) once in power in Wenzhou (2002-2004), he proposed that Wenzhou should further extend the

<sup>340</sup> Yunzhou Zhou, "The Loss of Cultural Context -- on the Fading and Protection of Wenzhou Urban Characteristics 文脉的失落——论温州城市特色消退与保护," *Journal of Wenzhou University: Social Science Edition*, no. 4 (2001): 79-82.

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urban framework, and move from the ‘Oujiang era’(瓯江时代) to the ‘East China Sea era’(东海时代).<sup>341</sup> That is, the original urban construction was carried out along the Oujiang River, and the construction of the 21st century should gradually transform into a situation of development along the East China Sea. He saw it as the city's greatest growth potential, as during the early 2000s, he regarded that the too small urban space was the main factor hindering Wenzhou's urbanization process.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, the city did develop largely along his proposals. Since 1978, the built area of Wenzhou has increased from 9.6 square kilometers to 275.9 square kilometers in 2020 – a 28.7-fold increase times.<sup>343</sup> The most notable feature of the present city is the presence of skyscrapers, making it difficult to locate historic Wenzhou in the overall view (Figure 43). With the relocation of the city’s administrative center of the emergence of commercial centers in different parts of the city, the political and economic status of historic Wenzhou has declined.

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<sup>341</sup> Li, 149-50.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>343</sup> Peopletch 人民资讯, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1702777048994124665&wfr=spider&for=pc>, last modified date April 17, 2021. (accessed on Nov. 14th, 2023)





Figure 43 The realm of Wenzhou city today.

Up: Base map from “Baidu Map” online, accessed on 16/09/2020.

Down: Photographed by the author in 2020.

In general, the term of Wenzhounese have been significant since the Reform and Opening-up. The entrepreneurs of Wenzhou played a nationwide and perhaps even a global role as far as the classic slogan of the early stage of Reform and Opening-up of “letting some people get rich first” (让一部分人先富起来) [as famously stated by Deng Xiaoping].<sup>344</sup> For their hometown of Wenzhou, the spirit of daring to create new mechanisms, and the being good at imitating had facilitated the modernization of certain

<sup>344</sup> Wei-Wei Zhang, *Ideology and Economic Reform under Deng Xiaoping 1978-1993* (London: Routledge, 2013), 6.

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areas within the historical city. Even in districts dominated by traditional architecture have a strong commercial atmosphere, with building facades obscured by advertising signs. Prior to the awareness to protect all of historic Wenzhou, all these phenomena were seen as signs of the city's prosperity. However, Ma Jinlong points out that the 'Wenzhounese Spirit', characterized by its commercial effectiveness within a particular historical context may not necessarily encompass a comprehensive value judgment of justice or ethics.<sup>345</sup> Guo Songmin believes that the true essence and driving force of the Wenzhounese Spirit is 'making money'.<sup>346</sup> As times continue to change, this Wenzhounese Spirit may come to represent negative aspects. The boldness that once drove their success could transform into overconfidence, and an excessive emphasis on pursuing economic gains may lead to the single-minded pursuit of profit. Therefore, today, it is crucial to learn from the positive aspects of the early 'Wenzhounese Spirit' but also to reflect upon and rectify its failings.

### 4.3 Summary

The content of this chapter has introduced the general historical background of Wenzhou's urban development. The initial planning of Wenzhou city was constructed under the guidance of traditional Chinese *fengshui* ideology. Its ideal city pattern, carrying

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<sup>345</sup> Jinlong Ma, "The Formation Condition and Innovation Process of Wenzhou Model 温州模式的形成条件与创新过程," 7 (1998): 3-5.

<sup>346</sup> Global Times, "Wenzhounese Spirit Need to Be Sublimated 温州人精神需要升华," ed. Songmin 郭松民 Guo (2013).<http://www.wzxc.gov.cn/system/2013/08/22/011366210.shtml> (accessed on Nov. 14th, 2023)

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rich traditional culture and local characteristics, had little changed over a thousand of years in pre-modern time. Throughout the 20th century, people's perception on built environment have changed along with drastic social and cultural evolutions. The city form had been changed especially on two aspects: the first is to replace rivers with roads, and the second is to replace small traditional buildings with large modern buildings. At the same time, the changes are closely related to economic activities. Because a large number of economic trading activities in Wenzhou are transported by water, the ancient urban spatial characteristics are closely related to it. Even after the filling of rivers within the historic Wenzhou in order to expanding roads, the newly constructed areas especially to the south part of city still spontaneously formed a dense water trade and rich waterfront architectures. However, with the change of transportation mode, these rivers and their unique water space have inevitably disappeared.

These changes unfortunately damaged the traditional Chinese historical characteristics of Wenzhou. However, when viewed from a different perspective, these changes have contributed to the city's historic richness and given it more historic meaning. Thus, historical characteristics are no longer limited to traditional Chinese characteristics but to those more complex, layered and multifaceted. Therefore, these changes also present challenges for present-day historic conservation and regeneration particularly regards: which specific period of history should be the reference, and how to reinterpret them? The following chapters will attempt to address these questions by analyzing specific conservation plans and street regenerations.

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## Chapter 5: Conservation Plans

As far back as 1991, historic Wenzhou was distinguished as the first batch of ‘Zhejiang Provincial Historic and Cultural Famous City’ (浙江省历史文化名城) due to its abundant historical assets.<sup>347</sup> However, this acknowledgement did not translate into protective action as the government neglected to formulate a proper conservation plan. Based on the author’s interview with a senior local planner in Wenzhou, it was observed during the 1990s that the prevailing sentiment was not of outrightly rejecting historical preservation but that people had a limited perception of what merited preservation.<sup>348</sup> In particular, ordinary traditional dwellings were not only deemed to have little value in terms of preservation but as impeding urban modernization. As a consequence, the process of ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ was able to be executed over large areas. A nationwide drive to preserve historic urban textures commenced only in the early 2000s and an increasing number of academicians and public officials began to recognize the historical significance of normal residential houses.<sup>349</sup> It wasn’t until the mid-2000s that a conservation movement finally took root in historic Wenzhou, characterized by a growing consensus on preserving its cultural heritage and historical authenticity.<sup>350</sup> The

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<sup>347</sup> [https://jst.zj.gov.cn/art/2022/9/20/art\\_1569972\\_58930566.html](https://jst.zj.gov.cn/art/2022/9/20/art_1569972_58930566.html). Accessed on October 20th, 2022.

<sup>348</sup> According to author’s interview to interviewee G (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>349</sup> Qinlun Weng, "Create a 'Famous City' to Highlight the City's Heritage 创“名城” 彰显城市底蕴," *Wenzhouness*, no. 11 (2015): 50-55.

<sup>350</sup> Pingping Lai and Peilei Liu, "The Protect Implementation of Historical Block in Wenzhou: Wuma and Mochi, Wenzhou Case 温州历史街区保护规划实践——以《温州市五马—墨池历史街区保护整治规划》为例," *Planners 规划师*, no. 30 (2014): 21-26.

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conservation movement focused on strict protection for important heritage assets and the adaptive renewal of historic areas. Accordingly, the Zhejiang Provincial Government approved two versions of the conservation plan. These were the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan* (approved in 2005) and the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*<sup>351</sup> (approved in 2018). In addition, after the former plan, there were some historic quarter-level conservation plans approved by the local municipal government, which presented more refined protection contents. And by the year 2023, a new round of historic quarter-level plans is under making, which show response to the 2018 conservation plan. This chapter will analyze the existing two overall conservation plans and two representative quarter-level plans. It is also crucial to think about evolvement of conservation paradigm or attitude shifts that reflected in these iterations of conservation plans.

## 5.1 Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan 2005

The formulation of the first *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan* (Figure 44) was a collaboration design between the Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute, the National Historical and Cultural City Research Center, and the Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute, and was instrumental in preventing the destruction of the remaining structures of historic Wenzhou. After completion, the plan received official

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<sup>351</sup> Wenzhou Municipal Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning, "Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision) 温州市历史文化名城保护规划（修编），" (2018).

endorsement from the Zhejiang Provincial People's Government in 2005.<sup>352</sup>

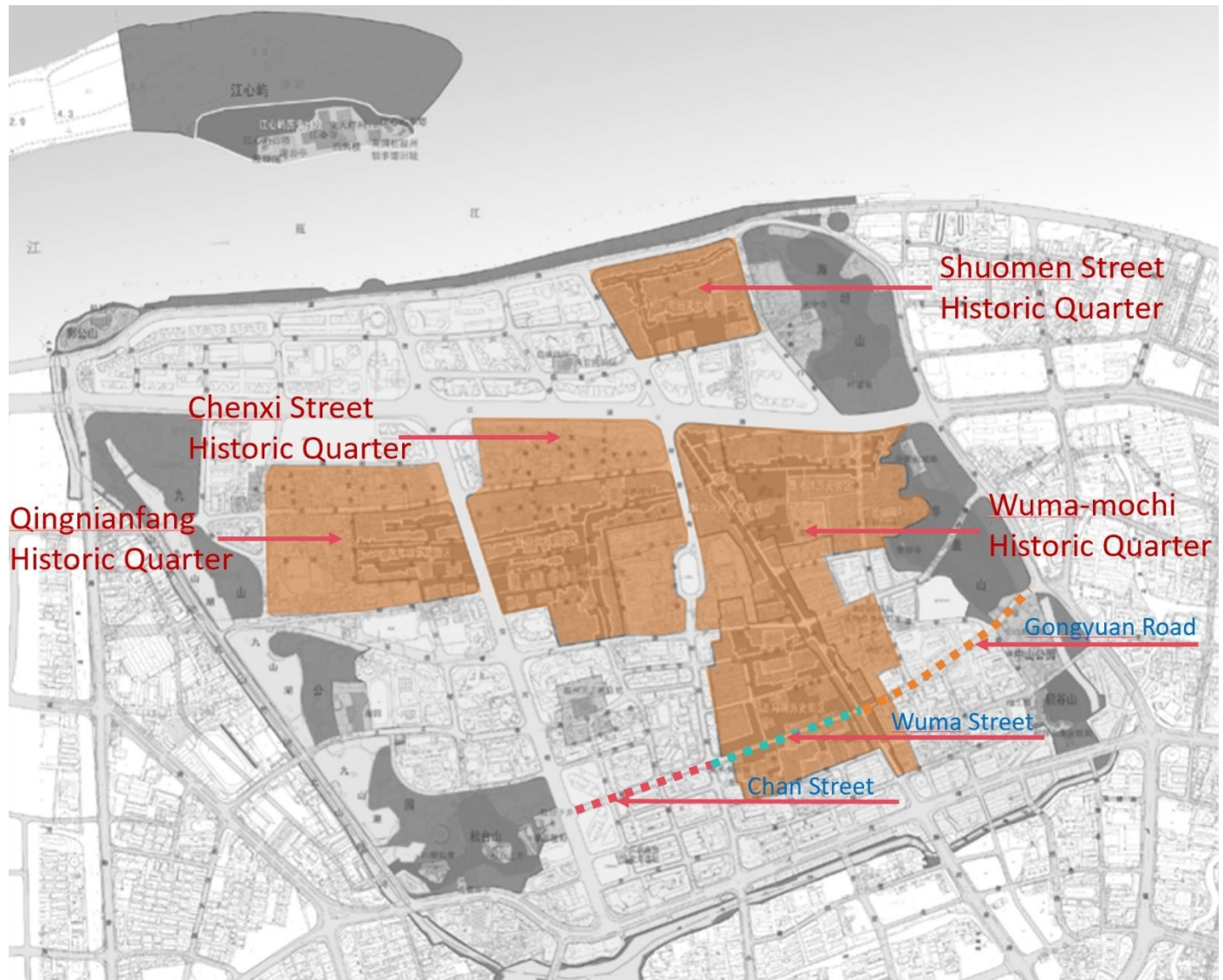


Figure 44 The four historic quarters and the three street cases in the overall master plan of historic Wenzhou, 2005.

Base map from: Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan, 2005. Notations drawn by the author.

<sup>352</sup> Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute, National Historical and Cultural City Research Center, and Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute.

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The plan was based on the exploration and examination of cultural relics, especially comprising 97 items (including buildings, wells and other immovable relics) as ‘Municipal Protected Historic Site’. This blueprint not only served as a first manifestation for the values of historic Wenzhou but also ratified a hierarchical framework of preservation measures. It attempts to make a distinction between cultural relics under stringent protection and areas characterized by generally controlled attributes. An array of preservation techniques encompassing buildings, structures, and the external environment within the historic quarters was proposed and encompassed protection, improvement, retention, renovation, demolition and reconstruction.<sup>353</sup>

Lin Guanzhong, a planner involved in the 2005 conservation plan clarified that

“Achieving comprehensive preservation of the entire historic Wenzhou was not practical. Rather, the emphasis should be on safeguarding the historical quarters through intensified preservation efforts and an expanded scope of protection. This approach sought to enhance the richness of historical and cultural heritage preservation and embrace a small-scale, organic renewal approach.”<sup>354</sup>

Indeed, his viewpoint resonates with the objectives and strategies outlined in the 2005

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Guanzhong Lin, "On the Protection of Wenzhou Ancient City Characteristics and Historical Blocks 温州古城特色和历史文化街区保护刍议," *Planner* 21, no. 7 (2005): 36-39.



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conservation plan. The plan uses the concept of ‘historic quarter’ to focus on the areas that still remain the traditional urban fabric. In the initial planning phase, remaining areas characterized by a high degree of historic ambience, resulted in six historic quarters.<sup>355</sup> However, after repeated negotiations and discussions, in order to make one quarter to have a prominent position, the decision-makers consolidated the previous three historic quarters into one, with the largest area and the most abundant historical resources. Because a very prominent one can gain a greater reputation throughout the country and win a higher degree of attention from the relevant departments at all levels [including municipal, provincial and even national levels].<sup>356</sup> Thus, in the final stage, there were totally four historic quarters. While prioritizing the conservation of important historic quarters, the plan fell short in providing guidance for the transformation of the modernized areas and displayed a limited understanding of the renovation and revitalization of historic Wenzhou as a whole.

The general characters and historic values of the four historic quarters can be described as follows.

1. The Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter (五马-墨池历史街区), is the largest in terms of area, has the highest number of protected historic sites and of all the historic quarters has the greatest historic value. This district comprises the vibrant commercial Wuma Street with its European-style buildings. In the subsequent chapter, two of the chosen street regeneration cases are from this

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee G (see appendix 4), in 2024.



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historic quarter.

2. Chengxi Street Historic Quarter (城西街历史街区) is characterized by a large number of retail stores selling affordable clothes. It was an important aspect of Wenzhou's early private economy during the Reform and Opening-up era, embodying the entrepreneurial Wenzhounese Spirit.
3. Qingnianfang Historic Quarter (庆年坊历史街区) mainly consists of ordinary residential buildings and lacks significant historical landmarks and attractions. Before 20<sup>th</sup> century, this area had the densest network of waterways, with almost every household situated along a river, which typified the "water" character of ancient Wenzhou city.
4. Shuomen Street Historic Quarter (朔门街历史街区) has been an important port and trading hub in the northern part of the city. However, as the river trade of Wenzhou completely collapsed since the 1990s, the importance of this area for the city has greatly diminished.

As analyzed in section 4.1.2, in order to achieve harmony with the natural environment, mountains and rivers serve as the boundaries for historic Wenzhou. Fortunately, these distinct landscape elements including five mountains and several rivers, have helped maintaining the clarity of the boundaries of this historic city to this day. As mentioned in section 4.1.1, president Xi Jinping called upon the slogan of ‘*xianshan lushui*’ (显山露水, Revealing Mountains and Exposing Waters) in 2005. The plan also made

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responding to this slogan a key objective.<sup>357</sup> Firstly, the plan advocates for the preservation of the overarching landscape patterns of the historic city and mandates strict control over construction in order to keep mountains in their natural state. Secondly, it attempts to establish a connection between the mountains and urban public space and limits excessive building around the mountains. Thirdly, it ensures the riverside becomes a spacious and accessible public area for the citizens. In addition to defining the historic quarters, the plan identifies several ‘historic conservation areas’ including the Jiangxin Island (江心屿) to the north of the city, as well as the mountainous regions surrounding historic Wenzhou and a portion of the city's moat that remains unburied.<sup>358</sup> The preservation of natural elements and their associated landscapes is highly emphasized on these ‘historic conservation areas’. The main natural elements surrounding the historic city include Haitan Mountain (海坦山), Huagai Mountain (华盖山), Jigu Mountain (鸡谷山), Songtai Mountain (松台山), Guogong Mountain (郭公山) and Jiushan River (九山河). The strategy for improve the quality of these mountain scenic spots involved demolishing some existing unattractive buildings and creating a public urban park. Following the implementation of this plan, some temples, pavilions, and pagodas using historic references were built to enhance the overall historical ambiance. As part of the efforts, the Dong Ou Wang Temple (东甌王庙) was built at the foot of Huagai Mountain, the Chishang Building (池上楼) was constructed at the foot of Jigu Mountain, the Buddhist temple and Jingguang Pagoda (净光塔) were

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<sup>357</sup> Yang and He, 80-81.

<sup>358</sup> Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute, National Historical and Cultural City Research Center, and Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute.

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rebuilt on Songtai Mountai, and the Fulan Pavilion (富览亭) was created on Guogong Mountain. These all recall the look of Wenzhou City at the time when Guo Pu chose its location, and aim to recreate and evoke the cultural and historical associations of these significant sites.

Before the implementation of this plan, preservation efforts in Wenzhou mainly concentrated on Individual Protected Historic Site (文保单位) as there was no cohesive and comprehensive protection system encompassing the integration of ‘points, lines and areas’.<sup>359</sup> The plan linked natural elements and trees along the major thoroughfares within the city to create a ‘Green System’ (Figure 45), highlighting the importance of preserving and integrating green areas throughout the city.<sup>360</sup> The preservation plan also introduced the concept of ‘Sight-Control Corridors’ (Figure 46) aimed at establishing connections between natural and cultural landscapes while highlighting important historical views. The corridors are shown as purple lines representing visual pathways in which the height and style of new buildings within the historic city are regulated. However, due to the fragmented nature of the remaining heritage sites upon which these corridors were based, it proved challenging to fully realize the original vision. Many valuable historical sites were not included into the corridors, which failed to achieve an overall sense of the structure of the historic city.

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<sup>359</sup> Lin, 36-39.

<sup>360</sup> Yang and He, 80-81.



Figure 45 The Green System plan.

Source from the Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan 2005.

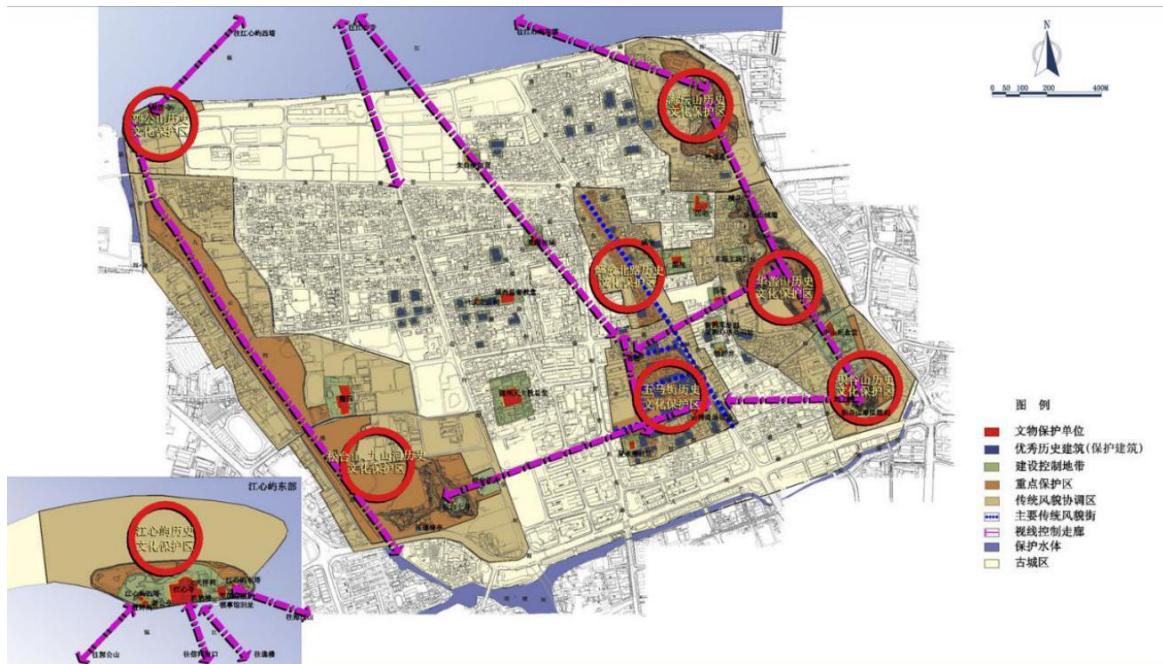


Figure 46 The plan of 'Sight-Control Corridors'.

Source from the Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan 2005.

It was a pity that the oversight of the inner-city area was a significant flaw in this conservation plan, as it failed to present the area's important historical value. As mentioned in section 4.1.2 and section 4.2.2, this area had served as the administrative center and People's Square for the city, which used to be the most important historic site. However, in the plan, the inner-city area was divided into three parts: a part belongs to the Wuma-Mochi Historical Quarter; a part belongs to the Chengxi Historical Quarter; the most inappropriate is the middle part, which served as a parking lot in the plan (Figure 47). Instead of serving as a core space with high historical significance, as a result, the historical value of the central area of the inner-city was marginalized and relegated to the periphery of historic quarter protection. This space should have been the most central and public area of the city but its status is now lost. Such a situation calls for deep reflection on the methods and mechanisms employed used to define historic district boundaries.





Figure 47 The core of the historic city as a parking lot in 2024.

Source: [https://www.sohu.com/a/337757232\\_355956](https://www.sohu.com/a/337757232_355956). (Accessed on October 20th, 2024)

In summary, the 2005 conservation plan halted the destruction of historical elements and since its implementation, the urban texture of historic Wenzhou has remained relatively unchanged. The plan laid the foundation for contemporary preservation efforts for historic Wenzhou. However, the plan does not address the modernized urban textures and, as such, is insufficient in terms of regeneration and revitalization. The plan attempted to establish linear axes in the form of green space and visual corridor planning, but the control requirements for these were ambiguously defined in the planning documentation. It is worth noting that the four historic quarters represent the parts of traditional urban textures that survived from the ‘Old City Reconstruction Movement’, and that they are

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essentially fragmented historic built environments. This was to become the main flaw of this version of the conservation plan. In addition, the plan of the inner-city area was another flaw in it.

## **5.2 Historic Quarter Plans**

In the years following the initial approval of the conservation plan, the relevant planning departments undertook independent initiatives to craft more comprehensive conservation plans for each historic quarter. These quarter-level plans were intended to deeper documenting the heritage and value of the respective quarters. Elements overlooked in the overall conservation plan of historic Wenzhou were encompassed by extending the historical quarter boundaries to encompass them. This process became a feedback loop that augmented the preceding overall conservation plan. The author selected two cases of historic quarter for analysis. In addition, a comparative method is mainly adopted, to find out the differences between the 2005 overall conservation plan with the quarter-level plans (related to the aspects of conservation scopes, measures, and regeneration visions). Then, analyze the reasons behind and find out the trend of development.

### **5.2.1 Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter**

As mention in section 5.1, the Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter is a combination of three previous historic quarters from the early phase of the *Wenzhou Historic and Coultural City Conservation Plan* (2005), it is the largest in size, richest in heritage, has the greatest

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historic value, and attracts most attention from the public and planning departments. Until the year 2023, much more historic street and architecture renewal projects have taken place in this historic quarter than in any other. Although the true center of historic Wenzhou should be the Inner-city, the above concept is not entirely correct. But this phenomenon shows from the side that Wuma Street and the surrounding blocks have successfully gained a prominent impression in people's minds.

In 2007, the specific conservation plan of this historic quarter was the first to be formulated after the overall conservation plan. It is named as *Protection and Renovation Planning of Wuma – Mochi Historic Quarter of Wenzhou City*.<sup>361</sup> The aim of the plan was “to safeguard the historic essence of the quarter while improving the quality of life of residents”. Areas of focus included traffic organization, the expansion of pedestrian spaces, the enhancement of public areas, the creation of captivating focal points, and the establishment of sustainable development goals that aligned with the overall planning requirements and the conservation plan for Wenzhou as a city of historical and cultural significance.

In the early stage of the plan, planners documented each building to identify structural risks, to determine the age and architectural styles of each part in order to designate their level of preservation and to specify requirements for future renovations. Moreover, the planning process included mechanisms for public participation to ensure that

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<sup>361</sup> "Protection and Renovation Planning of Wuma - Mochi Historic Quarter of Wenzhou City 温州市五马-墨池历史街区保护整治规划," ed. Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute (2007).



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decision-making was not confined to professionals and government officials but to all stakeholders. Based on questionnaire, a comprehensive ‘Social Survey Report’ that attached in the plan document, recorded the preferences of each household in the quarter, and covered crucial aspects such as public infrastructure, historical significance, and attitudes towards housing transformation.<sup>362</sup> According to a survey report in 2014, approximately 80% of the residents expressed their willingness to continue living in this community.<sup>363</sup> This indicates their strong emotional attachment to the community's environment, culture, and neighborhood relationships. Therefore, even though the commercial function of Wuma-mochi Historic Quarter is prominent, preserving its residential character is necessary. However, at that time, public participation was just beginning to be discussed in China, and there was no sound mechanism for further analysis of public opinions and truly effective integration into planning and design process.

Lai Pingping and Liu Beilei recognized the conservation for this historic quarter poses significant challenges.<sup>364</sup> The first issue is that the traditional brick-wood residential structures, which contribute to its historical character, have become excessively timeworn. However, some previous government-led street renewals appeared overly standardized, undermining the original diversity of architectural appearances. Another challenge lies in the disharmony between modern buildings and the traditional ones. Up until the 2000s, new modern constructions continued to replace traditional buildings, and the differences in scale

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<sup>362</sup> "Protection and Renovation Planning of Wuma - Mochi Historic Quarter of Wenzhou City" - Annex 3: Social Survey Report, 2007.

<sup>363</sup> Lai and Liu, 21-26.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

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and style between these structures significantly impacted the overall appearance of the historical area. In response to these challenges, its conservation plan in 2007 proposed a ‘micro-circulation’ (微循环) renewal model. This involves a strategy as ‘*yidian daimian*’ (以点带面, from point to area), to apply the gradual renewal of this historic quarter. Based on that, the plan not only categorized individual buildings into ‘preservation, improvement, and demolition’, but also adjusted the boundaries of the quarter. On a broader scale, the quarter was subdivided into ‘key protection zones’ and ‘construction control zones’.<sup>365</sup> Figure 48 shows a comparison between its range in the overall conservation plan and its range in the specific quarter-level plan. Judging from the urban fabric, it is evident that the former plan only selected traditional charactered buildings to formulate the historic quarter, while the later includes many larger and modern buildings within the boundaries of historic quarter - especially through the expansion of the ‘construction control zone’. Within such zone, not only the volume and style of newly built architectures are strictly limited, but also the renewal of old modern buildings is required to have historical characteristics. One of the important street regeneration cases – Gongyuan Road, which will be analyzed in detail in section 6.3, is included in the expended zone.

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.



Figure 48 Comparison of conservation scopes of Wuma - Mochi Historic Quarter.

Left: The realm of Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter in *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan* (2005);

Right: The realm of Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter in *Protection and Renovation Planning of Wuma - Mochi Historic Quarter of Wenzhou City* (2007).

The plan proposes several renewal initiatives to be undertaken over the coming years. These encompass the rejuvenation of historic street appearance, such as Gong'an Road (公安路) and Guangchang Road (广场路), and the reconstruction of significant historical sites that have been lost over time, such as the rebuilt of Mochi Park (墨池公园) and Dong'ou King's Temple (东甌王庙). Although these renewal projects proceeded smoothly for several years after the plan was completed, they received a lackluster response and did not significantly revitalize this quarter. Some architects commented that most of these projects were pseudo-classic designs based on unified traditional Chinese architectural styles, lacking authenticity and creative thinking. For example, from the effect of Guangchang Road after renewal (Figure 49), it reveals a monotonous design method.

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All units of the original building facades along the street were almost completely unified into a single pattern: wooden windows and wooden fences in the middle, white walls on both sides. In the years that followed, the road did not gain any more vitality or historical value than it was before. It is also important to acknowledge that these projects may require the demolition of some old residential buildings. A balance must be struck between preserving historical elements and creating space for the reconstruction and revitalization of significant landmarks. However, there also seems to be a lack of adequate textual research on what should remain and what can be demolished.<sup>366</sup>



Figure 49 Guangchang Road after renewal, in 2014.

From “Baidu Street Map”.

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<sup>366</sup> Pingping Lai and Beilei Liu, "Consideration on the Protection of Wenzhou Wuma - Mochi and Other Four Historic Districts 温州五马-墨池等四个历史街区的保护思考" (paper presented at the Academic Conference on Chinese Residence, 2012).

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### 5.2.2 Qingnianfang Historic Quarter

The Qingnianfang Historic Quarter is located on the western side of historic Wenzhou and was characterized by parallel-array network of waterways in the old time. The waterways have disappeared but the quarter still retains the layout of many pre-modern streets/alleys and has numerous courtyard-style residences. Additionally, it preserves some large-scale factories established during the early modern period, as well as many European-style doorways and facades. The area is also home to a community of local artisans and their associated intangible cultural heritage including ‘Ouxiu’ (瓯绣, Wenzhou embroidery), ‘Nanxi’ (南戏, Southern Opera), and ‘Longdeng’ (龙灯, Dragon Lantern). All these buildings and cultural elements, have been documented in the *Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic and Cultural Quarter Conservation Plan* in 2013.<sup>367</sup>

Compared to the delineation of the boundaries of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter from the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan* in 2005, this quarter-level conservation plan made some adjustments to the scope of its preservation boundaries (Figure 50). It includes the removing of the preservation area which related to the buildings along Xinhe Street (as the city's main road) on the east side of the quarter, as during the period (2005-2013) it had been transformed from traditional buildings into high-rise modern office buildings. Furthermore, expansion of the boundary has been enacted in the southern, southwestern, and northwestern directions of the pre-existing one. These expanded blocks were blank in the 2005 conservation plan, which reflects the fact that

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<sup>367</sup> Architecture Department of Zhejiang University and Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute, *Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic Cultural Quarter Conservation Plan* 温州庆年坊历史文化街区保护规划, 2013.

many details were unclear at the time. It is worth mentioning that the planners also analyzed and classified the different types of courtyards and some of the more distinctive decorative elements of each building. This information was used to create a ‘maintenance design guidelines’ (维修设计导则), which is attached in the plan document.<sup>368</sup>



Figure 50 Comparison of the conservation scope of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter.

Left: from the "Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan" in 2005.

Right: from the "Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic and Cultural Quarter Conservation Plan" in 2013.

Yang Keming and Lin Feng proposed in 2014 that this historic quarter should be revitalized based on the theory of ‘organic renewal’.<sup>369</sup> They realized that the biggest problem is the increasingly trends of bad population structure with ‘low physical fitness’

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Keming Yang and Feng Lin, "The Application of Organic Renewal Theory in Historical and Cultural Quarters: A Case Study of Qingnianfang in Wenzhou 有机更新理论在历史文化街区更新改造中的应用—以温州庆年坊历史文化街区为例," *Planners* 30 (2014): 217-26.



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[aged], ‘low income’ [a significant proportion of unemployment and migrant workers], and ‘low education’ [only 8.8% with higher education] in the area, which would significantly have bad influence to the public participation mechanisms in its organic renewal. There was a consensus that the current residents might not contribute to the future development of the area. It was a consensus that the current residents may not contribute to the future development of the area. To address this, it was suggested that the government should organize the relocation of some existing residents while introducing ‘beneficial populations’ (有益人口), particularly by renting out some courtyard houses at little or no rent to craftsmen to open workshops pertaining to intangible culture. Another issue raised was the lack of appropriate legal mechanisms enabling residents in the historic quarters to independently redesign their houses while ensuring control of historical protection. Therefore, they recommended government-led initiatives to renew some key public buildings; simultaneously, encouraging ‘beneficial populations’ to undertake high-quality renovations of courtyard houses, achieving a combination of bottom-up and top-down mechanisms for effective revitalization.<sup>370</sup>

However, conservation plans for historic quarters are approved at the municipal level rather than the provincial level and so their implementation often faces challenges and is sometimes subject to municipal government officers’ will of modification.<sup>371</sup> Despite the directive in the 2013 conservation plan for the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter “to curb constructive destruction” (遏制建设性破坏), subsequent government departments have

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> According to author’s interview to interviewee G (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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consistently proposed extensive demolition and reconstruction schemes for this quarter, contrary to the original conservation objectives. There is a need for significant displacement and gentrification measures, as a significant number of households were elderly residents and migrant workers who approved of large-scale demolition.<sup>372</sup> Although the ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ has long been unanimously characterized as a mistake by most academic experts, in 2016, an action with the slogan of ‘Big Demolition, Big Rectification’ (大拆大整)<sup>373</sup> was launched in the Wenzhou city region, and repeating the errors of the past. This action aimed to address issues such as inadequate facilities and structural risks in the old housing within the ‘urban villages’ (城中村, means the traditional old villages surrounded by modern construction after urban expansion).<sup>374</sup> Over several years, a significant number of urban villages in the city were demolished, and high-rise gated residential communities were constructed on the land. Such real estate development even received national funding subsidies. According to the author's interviews with relevant planning and architectural professionals, almost all of them clearly agree that this behavior is wrong, but they are the designers who implement this policy.

With this as the background, a new *Regeneration Plan of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter* was proposed in 2016.<sup>375</sup> Generally, it completely disregarded the conservation

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<sup>372</sup> According to the author's interview to Interviewee E (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>373</sup> "Big Demolition and Big Reorganization, Wenzhou Plan 大拆大整 温州方案," Wenzhou Daily 温州日报, [http://www.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2016/10/18/art\\_1241170\\_5818581.html](http://www.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2016/10/18/art_1241170_5818581.html). (Accessed on 30. 08. 2021).

<sup>374</sup> Siqi Zheng et al., "Urban Villages in China: A 2008 Survey of Migrant Settlements in Beijing," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no. 4 (2009): 425-46.

<sup>375</sup> From "Wenzhou Historical and Cultural City Rejuvenation Plan" designed by South Design in 2016. However, the plan was not implemented finally and the author was not authorized to publish its drawings.



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boundaries established for the Qingnianfang Quarter in 2013, while preserved only a small portion of early modern factory buildings and a concentrated section of residential structures to create a smaller core historical area. The remaining areas were to be developed into real estate projects with pseudo-historic elevations. If this plan were to be implemented, nearly all of the ordinary residential buildings in the historic quarter would be demolished and the residents relocated to more affordable housing on the outskirts of the city. In place of the demolished structures, a new batch of high-end low-rise residences would be developed in the style of the Republic of China era, with the expectation that these properties would be sold at high market prices to wealthy individuals. This approach was intended to achieve economic balance throughout the project's development process.

Another issue with this plan is that it overlooks the traditional urban structure of the area. Before the waterways were filled in, this region was organized around Xinhe Street as the main axis, with a dense network of rivers and alleyways on both sides forming a fishbone-like structure (Figure 51). This structure was totally based on linear axes and without a central area. However, the proposed plan revolves around a concentrated area of important historical buildings within the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter to form a new core for the quarter and creates new historical-style axes around it. The author thinks this stems from the overall conservation plan for historic Wenzhou in 2005, which focused on the historic quarter as its primary strategy. In that plan, Xinhe Street was treated as the boundary of the area rather than an important historic axis and, as a result, a new spatial core was formed in the *Regeneration Plan of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter* in 2016, without considering the historical significance of Xinhe Street.

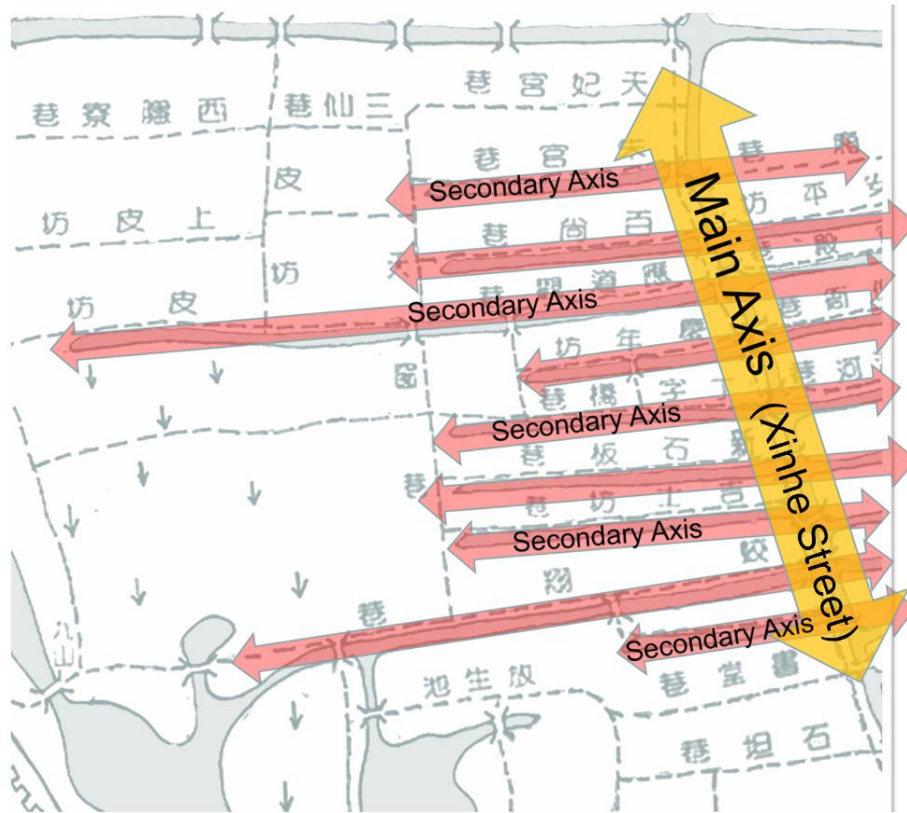


Figure 51 The traditional space structure of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter.

Drawn by the author, 2019.

Fortunately, in the same year, Wenzhou successfully obtained the title of ‘National Historic and Cultural Famous City’ (国家历史文化名城),<sup>376</sup> and this attracted experts from across the country to assist the conservation and revitalization measures for historic Wenzhou and its historic quarters. The plan which involved extensive demolition within the historic quarter was unanimously rejected by these experts, which avoided another complete destruction of the urban historical heritage.

<sup>376</sup> Announced by China State Council in 2016. ([http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-05/04/content\\_5070199.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-05/04/content_5070199.htm)) (accessed on 21.4.2021)

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However, with the continuous advancement of the ‘Big Demolition, Big Rectification’ movement in the whole Wenzhou region and its great contribution to the city's GDP growth, the local government still had not given up its efforts to completely rebuild the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter. A new *Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic Quarter Vision Plan* was approved in 2019 (Figure 52).<sup>377</sup> By incorporating additional lands [including some that did not belong to the historic quarter or even not within the boundaries of historic Wenzhou] into the overall planning scheme, the plan sought to realize the goal of expanding the preservation range for old buildings within the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter. The economic benefits generated from the development of these unprotected lands would be used to offset the financial investment required for the renovation of the preserved areas. Even so, if this plan was to be implemented, approximately half the old houses within the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter would still need to be demolished, and a significant number of residents would require relocation. The government posted its vision online and proposed to implement it in the future. Fortunately, the implementation has not been started until 2023, and it would never have a chance to be implemented. Because the national standard as *Specification for the Protection and Utilization of Urban and Rural Historic and Cultural Projects* (mentioned in section 2.2.4) has banned this mass demolition outright.

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<sup>377</sup> Some of the figures from the “Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic Quarter Vision Plan” (温州庆年坊历史街区愿景规划) designed by Shui On Land (瑞安地产) in 2019, was published online. <https://m.163.com/dy/article/GM4I73GL0535KUB5.html>. Accessed on Oct. 20th, 2024.



Figure 52 “Wenzhou Qingnianfang Historic Quarter Vision Plan” in 2019.

<https://m.163.com/dy/article/GM4I73GL0535KUB5.html>. Accessed on Oct. 20th, 2024.

The Wang Jinghui worries that regeneration activities carried out by private developers may sacrifice prescribed preservation targets for the sake of maximizing profit. He also reminds us that:

“Do not look at historical relics in isolation, we should put them in the cultural system to understand their internal relationship and judge their historical value.”<sup>378</sup>

Obviously, the process of formulating the regeneration plan for the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter was placed on balancing economic interests rather than ensuring the continuation of historical value. Besides, the incorporating of additional lands not within historic Wenzhou breaks its original realm of ‘cultural system’. Therefore, it is fortunate that the

<sup>378</sup> Jinghui wang, "The New Development of Cultural Relics 文化遗产保护的新发展," *China Ancient City* 008 (2010): 4-8.

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above-mentioned regeneration plans had been continuously denied. Thus, the revitalization of Qingnianfang still needs to wait for a more appropriate opportunity.

### **5.3 Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision) 2018**

With respect to the inadequacies of the previous 2005 conservation plan in terms of insufficiently concerning the historical values in historical quarters in particular, and with the ambition to apply for designation as a ‘National Historic and Culturally Famous City’ (国家级历史文化名城), the local government further refined the conservation plan and launched a new *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)* since 2011 and, after an extensive review, revision, and approval process, the revised conservation plan was officially sanctioned in 2018 by the Zhejiang Provincial People's Government.<sup>379</sup> In fact, when the conservation plan was first drawn up, neither the local government nor the planning staff expected that the approval process would take eight years. Some of the ‘near-term goals’ in the preliminary version of the plan were even set earlier than 2018. As Gao Qixin mentioned, the ‘near-term goal’ of the plan is to “completely improve the infrastructure and environment in the four historic quarters... From 2014 to 2015, works should be focused on the improvement of the historical image, environment and inner function of the historic quarters, in order to meet the requirements of applying

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<sup>379</sup> "The New Version of Wenzhou's Historical and Cultural City Protection Plan Was Approved 新版温州历史文化名城保护规划获批," The website of Wenzhou Municipal People's Government 温州市人民政府网, [http://www.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2018/8/27/art\\_1217829\\_20827442.html](http://www.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2018/8/27/art_1217829_20827442.html).(last modified on April. 27. 2018).

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the ‘National Historic and Cultural Famous City’ in 2015’.<sup>380</sup> However, due to the delay in its approval, the work of infrastructure improvement in historic quarters was not completely implemented, and only some key streets and alleys had been improved. Fortunately, Wenzhou successfully gained this honor in 2016. This honor served as a catalyst for the local government to redouble its efforts in improving the spatial quality of the historic urban area and to maintain high standards in creating an environment that showcases the rich historical and cultural heritage of Wenzhou. The new master plan (Figure 53) is significantly more complex in the shape of historic quarter's boundaries than that in the 2005 conservation plan (Figure 44), thanks to the meticulous investigation from the formulation process of each quarter-level plan.

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<sup>380</sup> Qixin Gao, "The Characteristics and Organic Renewal Path of Wenzhou Historical and Cultural District 温州历史文化街区的特性与有机更新路径," *China Ancient City*, no. 2 (2015): 73-78.



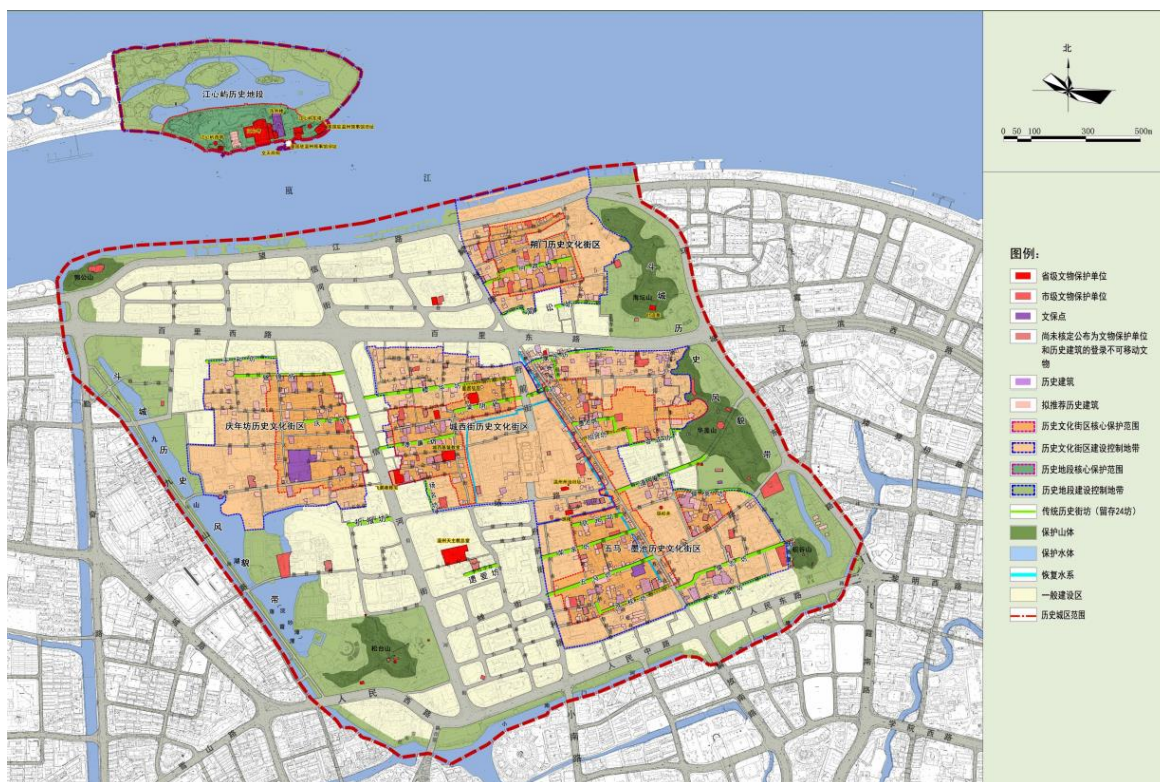


Figure 53 The overall master plan of historic Wenzhou, 2018.

Source from: Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision), 2018.

This plan identifies some key spaces in historic Wenzhou and plans to rebuild the historic city to improve its quality, rather than only preservation. The plan also expanded the descriptions of historical elements and their value to the entire Wenzhou region, encompassing not only the central historic Wenzhou but also many smaller towns, villages, quarters, streets, and buildings located outside the core area. Furthermore, the plan highlighted the significance of various intangible local cultural elements such as traditional handicraft techniques and skills. Within historic Wenzhou, the issue of ambiguous control requirements for spatial axes in the previous version of the plan, is addressed in the current

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version by the introduction of ‘eleven Axes’ as a crucial historical and natural landscape corridor for the future development of historic Wenzhou. Each axis is accompanied by a corresponding description of its expected characteristics. One of the most significant historical landscape axes includes three street cases that will be discussed in the next chapter. The intention of the ‘Overall Spatial Structure’ (Figure 54) of this plan is to reconstruct the historic spatial structure from ‘axial’ to ‘networked’. The light blue lines represent the planned urban historical visual corridors intended for future renewal. Unlike the 2005 conservation plan, the setting of these corridors is not solely based on the historic elements that remain as many parts of the corridors pass through areas where most buildings are new and the challenge is how to legitimately restore historical significance to these areas.



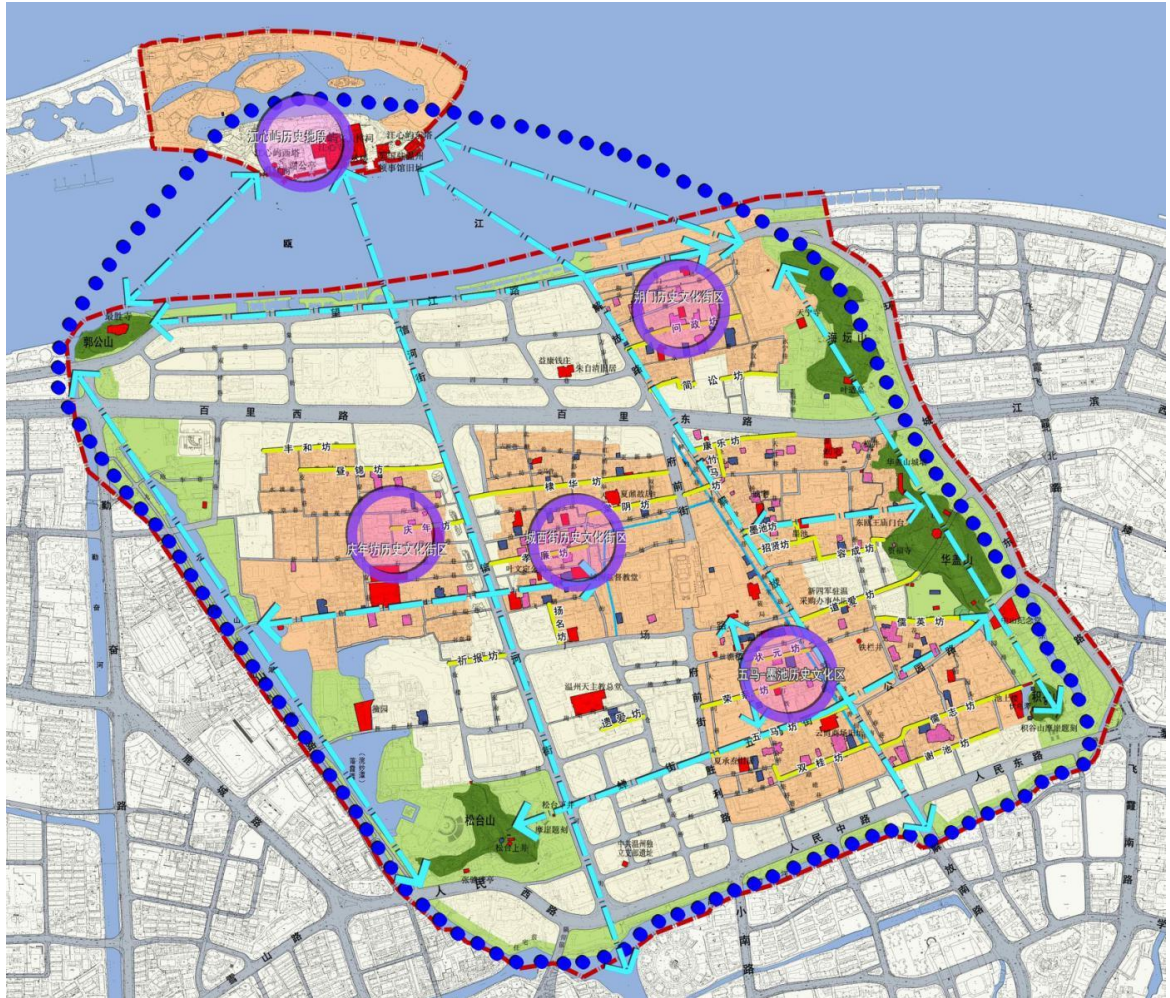


Figure 54 The “Overall Spatial Structure” in 2018 conservation plan.

Source from: *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, 2018.

The most important part of the plan is the modifications and enlargements made to the boundaries of each historic quarter. The four historic quarters have a total area of 132.86 hectares and notable adjustments include:

1. The Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter (Figure 55) had been expanded to include multi-story and high-rise modern apartments and office buildings (had been discussed in 4.2.1).



In particular, the areas on both sides of the Gongyuan Road were added to the historic quarter, laying the groundwork for its subsequent regeneration project in 2020 (will be discussed in detail in 5.3).



Figure 55 The Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter in 2018 conservation plan.

Source from: *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, 2018.

2. The extension of the preservation boundaries of the Shuomen Street Historic Quarter to the riverbank show the realization of this area used to be an important port in the past. The conservation plan is to demolish some scattered buildings along the river to form a complete riverside green space (Figure 56). Unexpectedly, as construction on the

project began in 2021, important relics were discovered - wharves and shipwrecks from Song (宋) Dynasty (about one thousand years ago) (Figure 57), which was later listed as one of China's top 10 archaeological discoveries in 2022.<sup>381</sup> As a result, the value and status of this historic quarter has been significantly lifted up. The new plan for this area needs to carefully and adequately display its archaeological findings, which left a challenge for the related decision-makers.<sup>382</sup> After nearly two years of consultation, until the end of 2023, the design scheme has not been fully confirmed.



Figure 56 Shuomen Street Historic Quarter in 2018 conservation plan.

Source from: *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, 2018.

<sup>381</sup> See [http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2023/3/28/art\\_1639077\\_59056410.html](http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2023/3/28/art_1639077_59056410.html). (accessed on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2023)

<sup>382</sup> The author got this information from the interview to Interviewee D (see appendix 4), who was responsible for the design of this area before the archaeological site was discovered, in 2024





Figure 57 The archaeological discovery in Shuomen Street Historic Quarter.

Author's photo, in 2023.

3. The expansion of the preservation boundaries of the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter (Figure 58) to the adjacent Jiushan Lake (九山湖) permits the possibility of reshaping the pattern of traditional riverside residences to recalling the ‘water-towns’ characters of the traditional southeast China. This deliberate extension aims to reconstruct ‘rive elements’ inside the area, while taking into account its historical significance and potential for future revitalization. However, it removes the area along the Xinhe Street (had been discussed in 4.2.2).



Figure 58 Qingnianfang Historic Quarter in 2018 conservation plan.

Source from: *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, 2018.

4. Previously, the Inner-city area was divided into two parts having different historic quarters. However, this plan combines them into the unified area designated the Chengxi Street Historic Quarter. Other scattered buildings in this historic quarter are a large number of spontaneous cloth stores, which represents the prosperity atmosphere created by the ‘Wenzhou Model’ of the early years of Reform and Opening-up (1980s-1990s). Considering that the underground of the Inner-city is also very likely to hide many precious relics, the relevant city decision-makers are very cautious about the renewal of this entire



historic area.<sup>383</sup> Although there were plans to turn it into a park, as of the year 2024, its center is still a parking lot (mentioned in section 5.1), and no renewal project has been initiated.

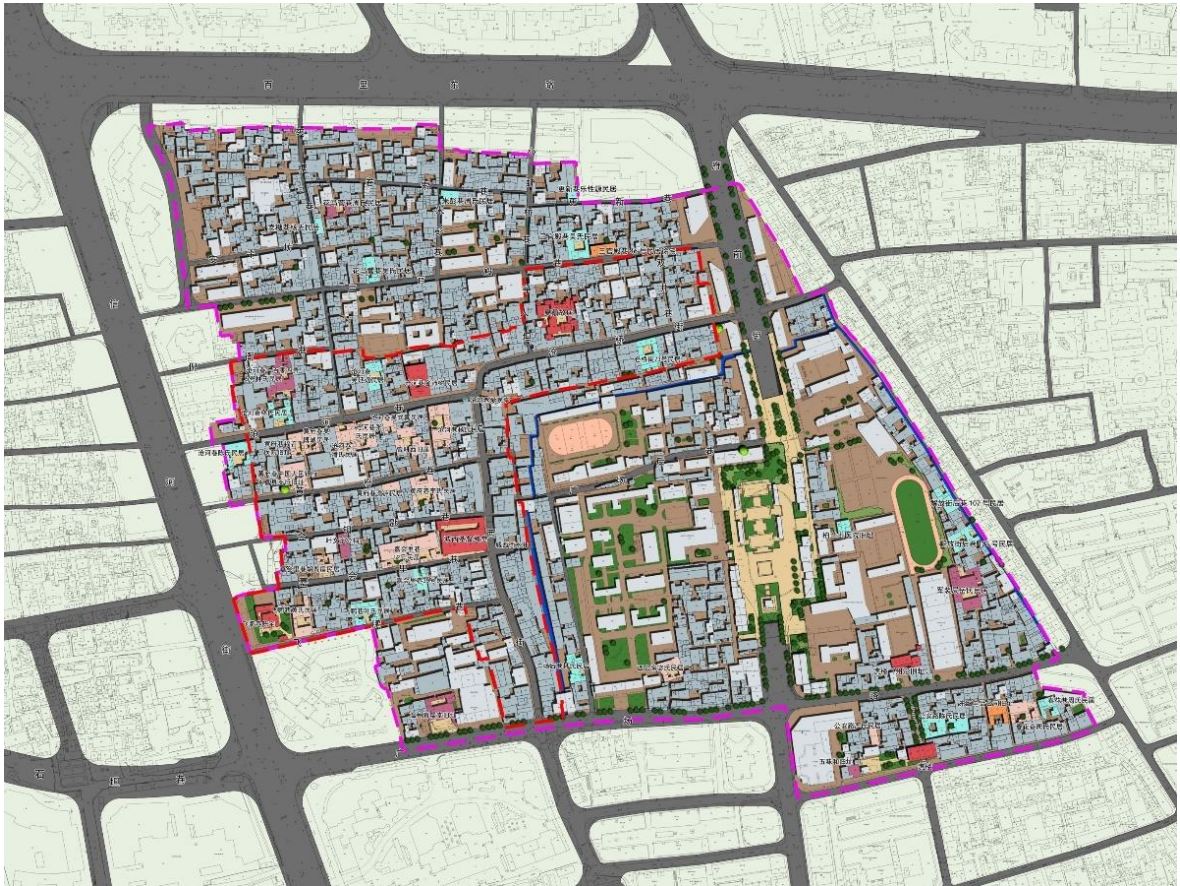


Figure 59 Chengxi Street Historic Quarter in 2018 conservation plan.

Source from: *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, 2018.

Just like the first round of historic quarter plans (section 5.2) had been developed after the 2005 conservation plan, the second round of historic quarter plans are being made

<sup>383</sup> According to author's interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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after the 2018 conservation plan. But, as of the end of 2024, the conservation plans at the historic quarter level have not been made public. The author learned from the relevant departments that these plans further enlarge the boundaries of each protected quarter, with some parcels featuring modern buildings now being included within the historic preservation zones. The intent of this inclusion is not to preserve these modern buildings but to allow the possibility of convert these modern buildings into traditional ones and so enhance the overall historical value.<sup>384</sup> For example, the modernized Xinhe Street has tall buildings but was included within the boundaries of the Qingnianfang Historical Quarter conservation plan.

Chen Sheng, scholar in real estate and urban regeneration, articulates that “Chinese cities are inclined to move towards organic and high-quality development through the conversion of ‘stock space’ (存量空间) into ‘incremental value’ (增量价值)”.<sup>385</sup> The most significant contribution of the 2005 conservation plan is its intent to consolidate historical spaces as a defense against ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ whereas the 2018 conservation plan optimized the historic value of the city in order to meet the standards for recognition as a National Historic-Cultural Famous City.

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<sup>384</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee G (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>385</sup> Sheng Chen, *Theory and Practice of Urban Renewal in China* 中国城市更新理论与实践 (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2020), 1.

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## 5.4 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the two overall conservation plans and two quarter-level plans of historic Wenzhou, showing how did decisions on conservation planning arise from the interactions of state and local government agencies. Meanwhile, it has critically reflected the crucial role that ‘historic quarter’ plays in the conservation planning system.

In the overall conservation of historic Wenzhou, the concept of ‘historic quarter’ emerged as a response to the remaining traditional areas after widespread modernization. These quarters are fragments of urban heritage within historical cities and so the conservation plan's exclusive focus on historic quarters was insufficient. The most glaring misstep was the disregard for the inner city which should be the true core of a historic city. When people think of the core area of historic Wenzhou, they think of Wuma Street and Jiefang Street which are areas known for their commerce and the large number of European-style buildings from the Republic of China era. The initial preservation efforts did not consider the overall pattern of historic Wenzhou.

However, subsequent plans at the quarter-level have attempted to rectify this situation and show how the designated preservation boundaries for these historic quarters had been too small. New items of potential historic significance had been discovered when specific conservation plans for each historic quarter were devised.<sup>386</sup> The planning departments endeavored to make the spatial axis control requirements more explicit and expand the preservation boundaries of each historic quarter. However, the conservation

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<sup>386</sup> Lai and Liu.



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planning at the historic quarter level was subject to approval by the municipal government and so was susceptible to modifications. Different terms of decision-makers may have different ideas toward historic Wenzhou, which makes the conservation policy of historic quarters will be modified accordingly. While the over conservation plan of the whole historic Wenzhou should be approved by the provincial government, which becomes firmer. Thus, it is crucial in raising awareness of the need for another overall revised conservation plan for historic Wenzhou in order to ensure adherence to spatial axis requirements and to adjust the boundaries of historic quarters in historic Wenzhou.

The proposed regeneration plans for the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter shows that the government should not integrate real estate development into the regeneration of historical quarters as the historic value would receive less attention than economic interests. The local government failed to implement the project because of oppositions from higher national level experts. The public's indifference to the history protection has led to the failure of the public participation mechanism to play a positive role. Since then, some regeneration projects in historic quarters that should have been started were abandoned or changed. For example, the archaeological discovery of the Shomen Street Historic Quarter has promoted the modification of the original planning and design scheme of this area; The plan to transform the inner-city from a parking lot into an urban public green space is reasonable, but the reason of on hold for this plan is fearing of damaging its underground relics. Therefore, it can be seen that the conservation plans of historical areas must require some flexible possibilities for adjustment. This adjustment should not be based on economic interests, but on respect for history. The good aspect is that it shows that the

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city's decision-makers have gradually become more cautious about historical heritage; while the bad aspect is that the development of four historic quarters are extremely unbalanced. Except for Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter, until the year 2023, none of the other three quarters had the opportunity to significantly boost their vitality.

Then, the 2018 conservation revision plan recognized the importance of acknowledging and embracing the historical significance of modernized urban areas. Integrating these areas with existing traditional architecture created a cohesive historical axis and spatial network spanning the city. This shift in perspective aims to foster a more holistic awareness of the historic urban environment and help the public form a correct understanding of the structure and value of historic Wenzhou.

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## Chapter 6: Street Regenerations

In contrast to the previous chapter, which focused on the overall-level and quarter-level conservation planning, this chapter will further focus on a lower level - street level urban regeneration. This level not only involves the design of overall space and form of street cases, but also involves the specific style and spatial functions of some individual buildings. Moreover, it will provide further thinkings about the crucial impacts of the selected streets on the subsequent regenerations.

Why is historical street regarded as the main carrier of urban regeneration in historic Wenzhou? Looking back at the city's expansion, primarily since the 1990s, the once-prosperous historic Wenzhou gradually declined, and many essential businesses were relocated.<sup>387</sup> The historical city residents gradually transformed into vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and low-income migrant workers. Citizens with better economic conditions mostly moved to newly built urban areas. However, the attainment of the 'National Famous Historic and Cultural City' honorary title in 2016 and the approval of the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)* in 2018 significantly motivated the local government to increase investment in revitalising historic Wenzhou. This initiative aimed to create a vision of a high-quality urban historical space in the near future. However, as evidenced in the case of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter in Chapter 5, regeneration projects that focus on the entire historic quarter often deviate from the intended goals of conservation plans and contradict the principles of 'organic renewal',

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<sup>387</sup> Yang and He, 80-81.

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which emphasize small-scale and incremental renewal steps.<sup>388</sup> As a result, such methods are susceptible to substantial criticism and frequently face implementation obstacles. Consequently, the local government began to explore city regeneration at the street level. This smaller-scale approach requires less funding, causes less disruption to the existing urban fabric, and is evidently easier to implement. In fact, street life has held significant importance for Chinese citizens throughout history. Since the Song Dynasty, streets in Chinese cities have evolved into multi-functional public spaces, serving as the best place for various forms of information exchange and communication within the urban context.<sup>389</sup> Governments also utilize the street space to organize socially and politically significant events. As Kisho Kurokawa pointed out, in the traditional eastern world people only have outdoor public lives on streets rather than squares.<sup>390</sup> Therefore, restoring the prosperity and general nature of the roads holds great historical significance for the historic city today.

Since 2017, the local government has initiated and organized a series of historical street regeneration projects. The street projects are selected primarily based on the ‘Eleven Axes’ outlined in the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*.<sup>391</sup> Among them, the first revitalised historical axis included the following sites from west to east: Songtai Mountain - Chan Street - Wuma Street - Gongyuan Road - Huagai Mountain. As located in the southern part, this axis geographically links two boundary mountains and

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<sup>388</sup> Wu, *The Old City of Beijing and Ju'er Hutong* 北京旧城与菊儿胡同, 20.

<sup>389</sup> Li Qin, *Planning and Design Aesthetics of Historical Cities* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2020), 178-80.

<sup>390</sup> Shiling Zheng and Mi Xue, *Kisho Kurokawa 黑川纪章* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 1997), 218.

<sup>391</sup> Although the plan was finally approved in 2018, it was started in 2011 and most design was completed in 2013. Only subtle adjustments were made over time.

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crosses the entire historical city (Figure 60). Before 20<sup>th</sup> century, this axis had great civic importance as it accommodated multiple users – not only used as a prosperous commercial route, but also with religious places and scholarly institutions. The planning document describes the axis as follows:

Protecting the spatial scale and traditional architectural features of Wuma Street and Gongyuan Road. Coordinating renovating the landscape environment and architectural features along Chan Street.<sup>392</sup>

The three streets involved, Chan Street, Wuma Street, and Gongyuan Road, underwent regeneration in 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively. In this chapter, each case will be thoroughly analyzed. It contributes to a more detailed understanding about the specific renewal strategies and methods used in the street-level and building-level in historic Wenzhou.

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<sup>392</sup> Wenzhou Municipal Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning.

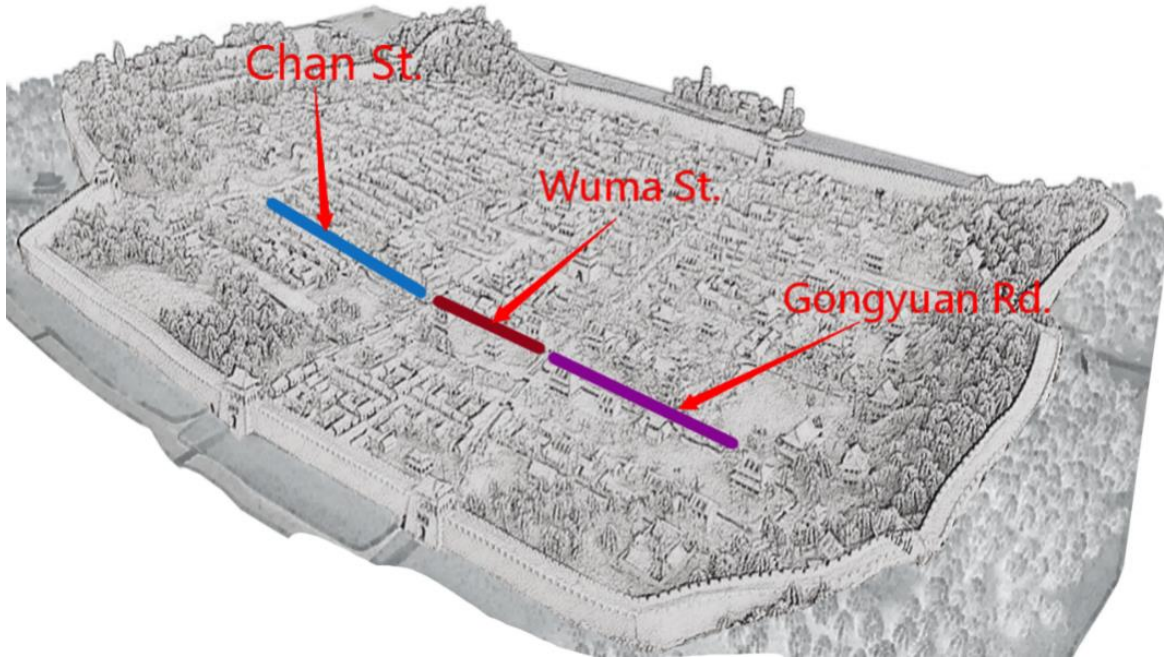


Figure 60 The location of the 3 streets in historic Wenzhou.

Made by the author, 2020.

## 6.1 Chan Street: Resurrection of Historical Flavor

### 6.1.1 Historical Setting

In the Tang Dynasty, a Buddhist building called Jingguang Temple (净光寺) was built on Songtai Mountain (one of the mountains surrounding historic Wenzhou). The street leading from the city to this temple was named as Chan (禅, Zen) Street, however, the street has had several other names as Chan (蝉, cicada) Street, Qian (前, means front) Street, Quan (泉, fountain) Street, and Ganquan Ward (甘泉坊), some of them sharing the similar

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pronunciations.<sup>393</sup> It is 437 meters long and located in the southwest part of historic Wenzhou, adjacent to the west of Wuma Street. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional courtyard houses and waterways composed the image of its streetscape. There also used to be ponds at each end of the street and a series of bridges spanning across the water, named Da Yan Pond (大雁池) and Xiao Que Pond (小雀池) (Figure 61). In addition, there were previously some educational buildings located on the street, such as the Wenzhou Demonstration Academy (温州示范学堂), Wenzhou Democratic Examination Institute (温州科举试院), and Floating College (浮沚书院). Therefore, the Zen and educational cultures are an important part of the historical memories of the street.

Chan Street is a typical area of historic Wenzhou that has experienced many modern transformations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, many Western-style facades appeared along the street in the early modern time, and secondly, the waterway was landfilled to widen the road, gaining more space for new construction. A streetscape photo (Figure 62) from the 1950s shows that the buildings along the street were up to three stories high and most had decorated façades. However, during the wave of rapid modernism construction in the 1990s, Chan Street was radically changed into arrays of modern buildings (Figure 63). Lvyin Zheng states that “all of these modern constructions made this street a ‘historical feature faultage’ (历史风貌断层带)”.<sup>394</sup> The streetscape is now dominated by high-rise

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<sup>393</sup> Yi Jie Shu Sheng, "Chan Street? Or Chan Street? Or Quan Street? 是蝉街? 禅街? 或是泉街? ,"  
[http://www.360doc.com/content/20/0209/23/30624544\\_890834287.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/20/0209/23/30624544_890834287.shtml). (Accessed on May 23th, 2023)

<sup>394</sup> Lvyin Zheng, "Renewal of Public Space in Wenzhou Historic Quarter -- a Case Study of Chan Street in Wenzhou 温州历史街区公共空间改造更新——以温州蝉街为例," *Zhejiang Garden* 3 (2021): 108-11.

apartments, with commerce in the lower podiums. In addition, those carriers full of Zen and educational cultural meanings no longer exist. In other words, Chan Street and its surrounding urban environment have become completely ‘modern’. Under this circumstance, how can the heritage site be reconstituted?

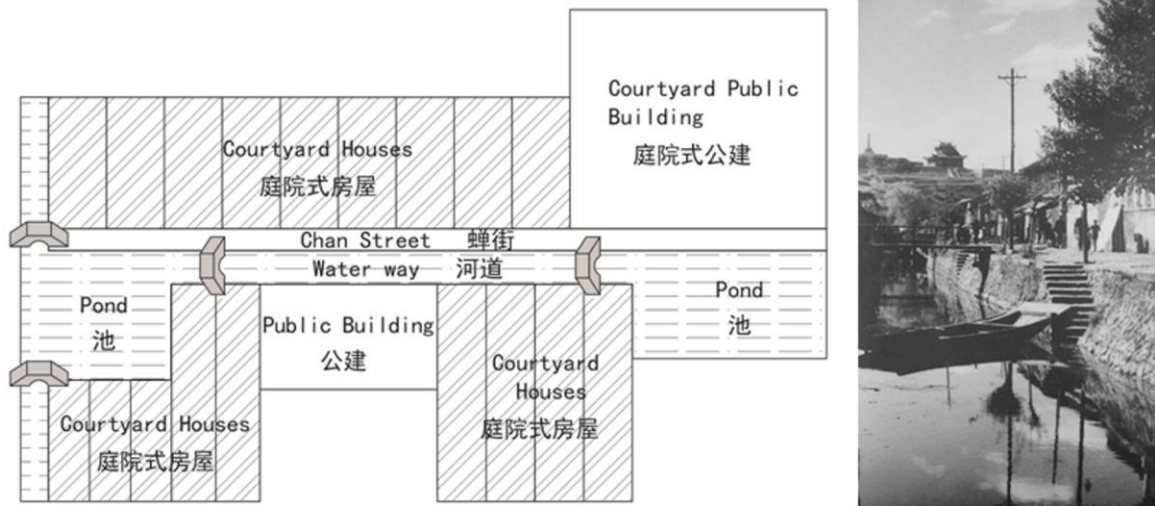


Figure 61 The traditional layout and looking of Chan Street.

Left: author's drawing, after the old map "Reports on Trade at the Treaty Ports for the Year 1877".

Right: Old photo of Chan Street during the Republic of China. (from "*Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*", 2018.)





Figure 62 Photo of Chan Street in the 1950s.

By Zhu Jiaying.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> *Wenzhou Old Photos 温州老照片 1877-1978*, ed. Wenzhou Lucheng District Party Committee Publicity Department 温州市鹿城区委宣传部 and television Wenzhou Lucheng District Culture radio, press and publication Bureau 温州市鹿城区文化广电新闻出版局 (Beijing: China National Photography Art Publishing House, 2017), 100.



Figure 63 The modern Chan Street.

Left: author's drawing, after the diagram from "*Renovation Proposal of Chan Street, 2018*".

Right: author's photo, 2017.

### 6.1.2 The driving force and orientation of the regeneration project

In 2017, the central government of China initiated a programme of 'Urban Dual Regeneration' (城市双修), namely 'Ecological Restoration' (生态修复) and 'Urban Repair' (城市修补). The idea of 'Urban Repair' mainly concerns the regeneration of historical areas. This is mentioned explicitly in the section 'Preservation of History and Culture' in the official document named *Promoting Transformation with Points and Areas - Comprehensively Deployed the Work of Double Repairs in Cities* by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.<sup>396</sup> The document also pointed out that importance

<sup>396</sup> "Promoting Transformation with Points and Areas - Comprehensively Deployed the Work of "Double Repairs in Cities" by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development 以点带面促转型——住房城乡建设部全面部署开展

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should be attached to urban design in the ‘Historical Features Coordinated Area’ (历史风貌协调区). Such an area is adjacent to the protected historic site and its landscape and architecture can easily affect the appearance of historical relics. ‘Historical Features Coordinated Area’ requires urban design to take specific control and guidance measures to ensure that new buildings are coordinated with historical relics regarding form and texture.<sup>397</sup> As the later version of overall conservation plan in 2018 (discussed in section 5.3) comprehensively reflected aspects of ‘rescuing’, ‘replacing’, and ‘reinforcing’ the past of historic Wenzhou. Specifically, it mentioned the need for a “coordinated rectification of the landscape environment and architectural style along Chan Street”.

Chan Street did not belong to any of the historic quarters in both conservation plans aforementioned (in chapter 5), however, due to its critical location in historic Wenzhou, its streetscape has a great impact on its surrounding historical areas. It is therefore necessary for Chan Street to play the role as ‘Historical Features Coordinated Area’. Interestingly, a regeneration project for Chan Street in 2018 was officially named as *The 1<sup>st</sup> Phase of Wuma Historic Cultural Street Quarter Renewal - Chan Street Renewal* (五马历史文化街区改造工程一期工程禅街改造更新项目).<sup>398</sup> Strictly speaking, as Chan Street had none historic structures left after the modern construction in the 1990s, it

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“城市双修”工作," The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China 住房和城乡建设部, [https://www.mohurd.gov.cn/xinwen/gzdt/201704/20170424\\_231585.html](https://www.mohurd.gov.cn/xinwen/gzdt/201704/20170424_231585.html). (accessed on June 27, 2023)

<sup>397</sup> Yuan Hao and Fang Liu, "Urban Design and Exploration of Coordinated Historical Features Area 历史风貌协调区的城市设计探索," in *Expert forum on Sustainable Development of Mountain Towns 山地城镇可持续发展专家论坛* (2012).

<sup>398</sup> Wenzhou Design Group, "Wuma Street Quarter Chan Street Renewal 五马历史街区禅街改造更新," (2018).

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does not belong to any of the historic streets or quarters. However, judging from the naming and overall arrangement of the regeneration project, this street has already been regarded as an important part of the historic quarter by the local government.

Under these circumstances, the regeneration of Chan Street project proposed four major objectives: (1) Historical and Cultural Tourism Street (历史人文的旅游街): fully exploring and displaying its history and culture; (2) Ecological Street for houses and marketplaces (市井生态家园街): becoming a part of the ecological landscape corridor connecting Songtai Mountain to Huagai Mountain; (3) High Quality of Urban Life Street (城市生活品质街): improving the street facilities and urban quality; and (4) Commerce and Branding Street (业态发展品牌街): promoting the commerce and business brands.<sup>399</sup>

### 6.1.3 Transplant and Collage

Historic structures no longer exist and the lack of detailed photographic materials, means that the authentic reconstruction of Chan Street's historical appearance is impossible. Therefore, new fabrication and embellishment are necessary if there is a desire to remake the past. In terms of urban and architectural form design, the main concept named "transplant and collage" was embodied in the design proposal of Chan Street.<sup>400</sup> The idea of "transplant" shows the rationality of the originations of the design of historical

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

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architectural elements, which refers to Viollet-Le-Duc's idea of 'stylistic restoration' (discussed in section 2.1.1). While the idea of 'collage' is derived from the book *Collage City*, which reveals the confrontation of different urban architectures and advocates the strategy of collaging different styles together. Rowe and Koetter advocated that the city should be viewed from a perspective to "pursue the coexistence of order and non-order, simplicity and complexity, eternity and accident, private and public, revolution and tradition, retrospect and prospect."<sup>401</sup>

The design proposal of Chan Street tries to achieve the objective of "recreating the historical ambience within the contemporary setting".<sup>402</sup> By incorporating elements derived from the past of Chan Street, specifically the Buddhist and educational traditions, the proposal aims to integrate traditional Chinese architectural features with its modern forms. Given that this street has been designated as a 'Historical Features Coordinated Area', the second preparatory task involves conducting an in-depth survey and analyzing locally significant architectural styles which can play as the reference for the regeneration of Chan Street. This groundwork lays the foundation for the "transplant" work in the subsequent phase.

The strategy of 'transplant and collage' primarily applies to the facades of the podiums, where architectural features are incorporated to infuse historical flavors into the street. The construction details can be seen in the section drawings (Figure 64), as if a layer

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<sup>401</sup> Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (MIT press, 1984), 2-8.

<sup>402</sup> Wenzhou Design Group.

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of traditional skin added to the facade of the existing modern building's second-floor podium, whilst the interiors remain intact. In the structural design of the new additions, horizontal attachment to the existing building is achieved through rivets, while vertical load-bearing relies on setting up pillars on the ground floor, repeating at every interval of one facade unit. Therefore, the new podiums form a 'colonnade system' (骑楼系统) that prevailed in cities of southern China since the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Wenzhou, such colonnade space had a specific name as '*luozhu zoumalang*' (落柱走马廊, gallery with columns and can be used for horse riding).<sup>403</sup> This colonnade space connects to shopfront, providing shade from the sun and rain and thus inviting pedestrians. Such colonnade architecture prevailed in commercial streets of southern cities including Wenzhou during the Republic of China. Although new building materials and construction methods are employed, the created colonnade system offers a familiar space setting with relevant activities that is in line with the past.

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

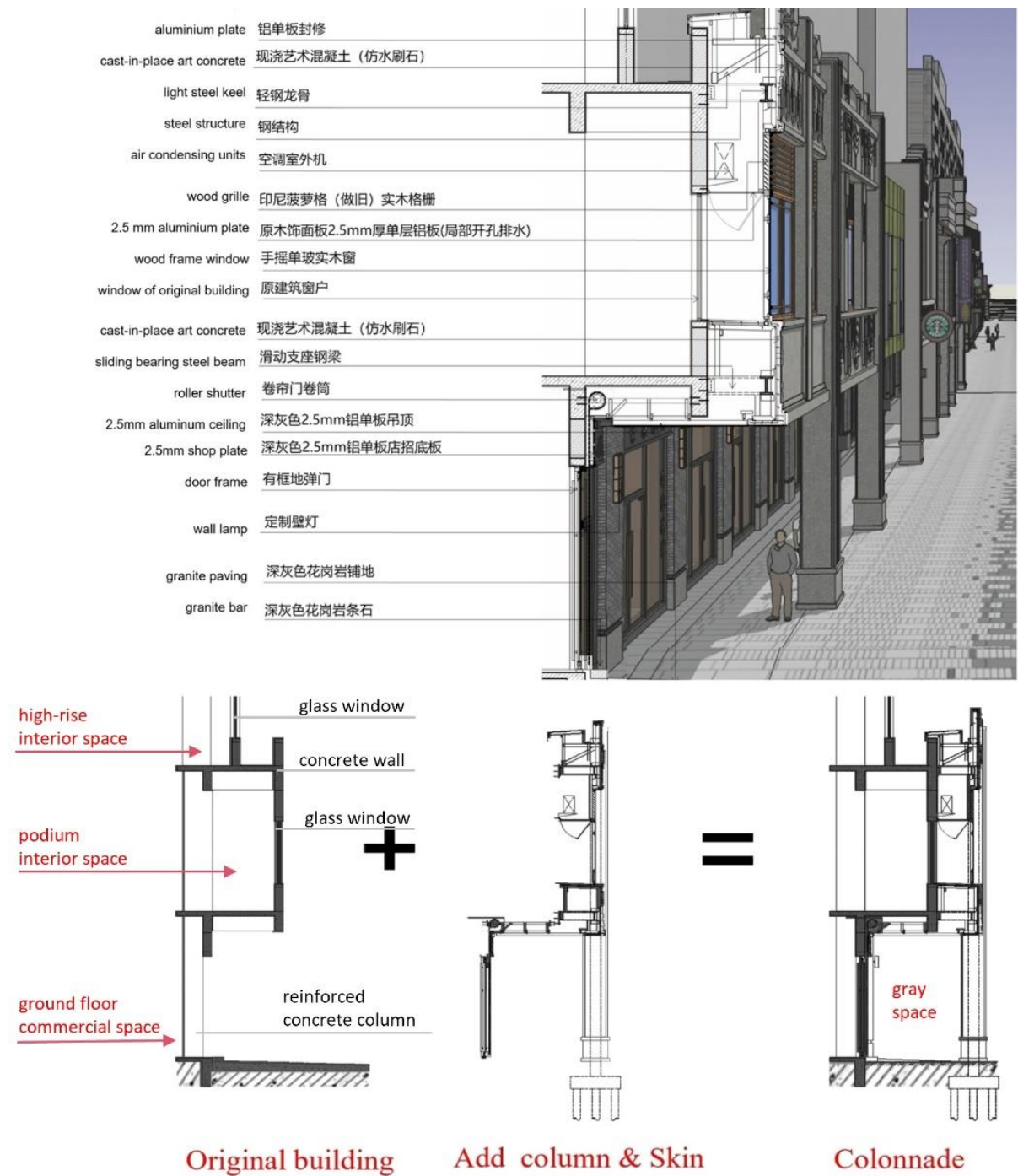


Figure 64 The construction details of a pseudo-classic design unit.

Made by the author in 2024, base on the figure in *Renovation Proposal of Chan Street*, (Wenzhou Design Group, 2018).

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In order to minimize the impact on the use of shops and public spaces on the ground-floor, only the second-floor has the new historical replica facade protruded one meter approximately beyond the original modern facade. Through some opened windows from the exterior new traditional-style facades, the original modern facades inside can be observed, which are revealed in a semi-concealed manner, forming a dual-facade system. Unfortunately, the sole function of the space between the two layers of facade is to accommodate the air conditioner outdoor units. The new podiums encompass a mixture of Chinese-style units, Western-style units, and New Tradition units. This combination aims to achieve a sense of synchrony by combining and comparing traditionality with modernity (Table 4). Furthermore, the upper parts of the high-rise buildings embrace a modern design style with new curtain walls and balconies that are enriched with details and textural features (Figure 65).



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Collage Contents	Features	Classification
Western Style Pseudo-classic on podiums	Transplanted from other local streets. Most in Baroque and Art Deco styles.	Old
Chinese Style Pseudo-classic on podiums	Transplanted from local dwellings. With tiled pitched roofs, wooden windows, wooden siding and gable walls.	
New Tradition On podiums	Modern interpretations to the traditional concepts and elements.	New
Curtain Walls On high-rise parts	New curtain walls form double facades with the existing walls.	
Balcony-shaped Structures On high-rise parts	Weaken the sense of original huge scale. But mostly without function.	

Table 4 The synchrony of old and new features.

Made by the author, 2022



Figure 65 Chan Street after regeneration.

Author's photo, 2019.

Emphasizing vertical lines and rich arc decorations to reveal elegance and grandeur, the Western-style units, mainly containing Baroque and Art Deco features, are reconstituted referring to some European-style buildings from Wuma Street and Jiefang Street, which are two most important historic streets in Wenzhou. Figure 66 shows several transplant elements from Jiefang Street to Chan Street. The composition of Western-style unit emphasizes streamlined forms, repetition of clean shapes, and symmetry that are typical Art Deco feature. Such a Western-style is also named 'Republic of China Style' (民国风) in the design proposal, which tries to recall the historic image of Wenzhou during the Republic of China. In the past, the decorations of the Republic of China Style buildings

were combined with Chinese elements such as dragons and phoenixes, turtles, and cranes. Well integrated with local traditional culture, these historic buildings were described as ‘Wenzhou Style’ in the document of Wuma Street’s renovation (will be discussed in section 6.2). To some extent, these reconstituted Western-style or Republic of China Style buildings seem to be authentic because of their local origin.

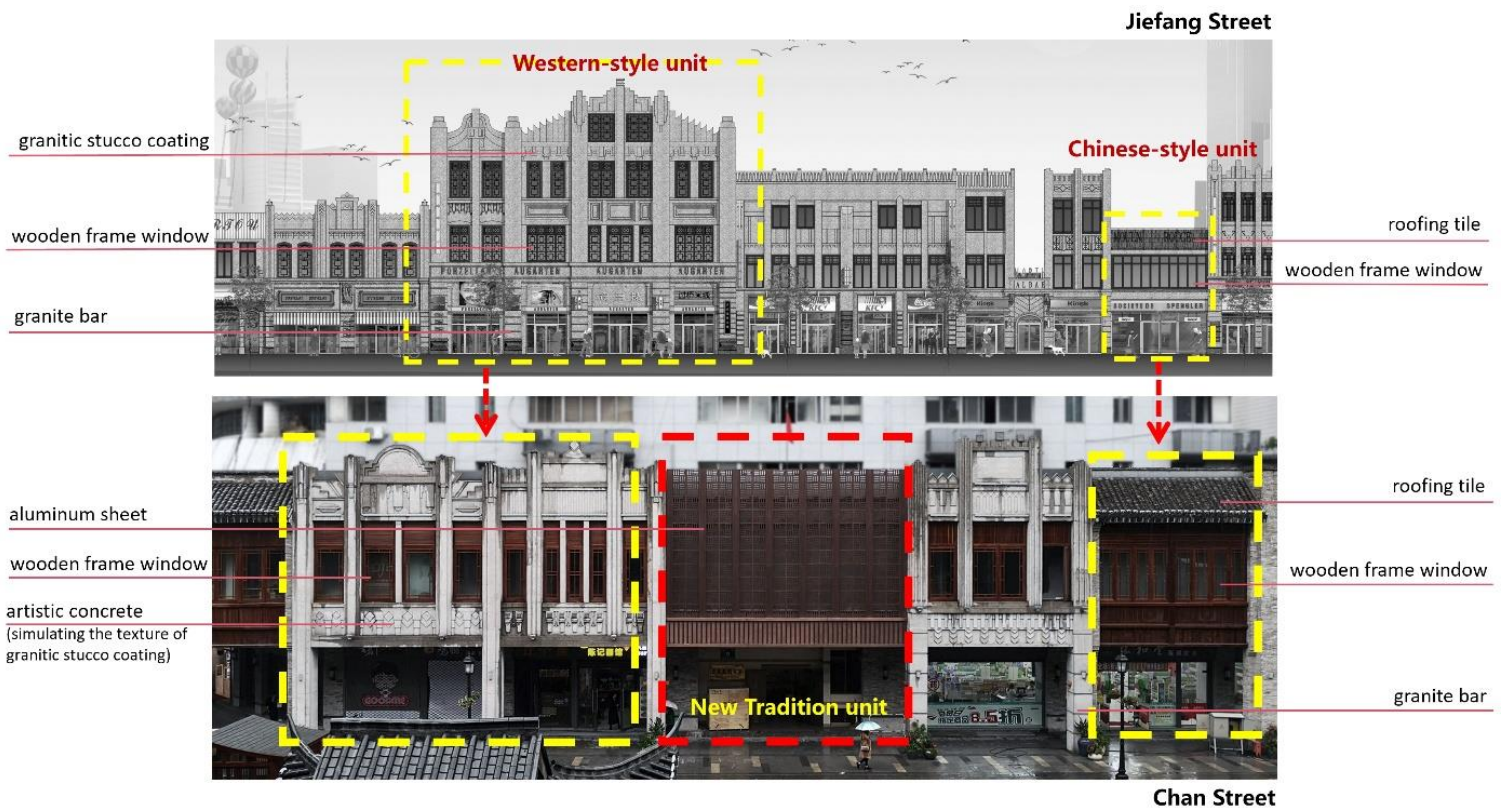


Figure 66 The style of Chan Street is derived from Jiefang Street.

Made by the author in 2024, base on the figure in *Renovation Proposal of Chan Street*, (Wenzhou Design Group, 2018).

The current design of the traditional Chinese facades refers to the traditional dwellings in the urban area of early modern Wenzhou (Figure 67). Unlike local traditional

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houses built with wooden structures, steel structures are used in the regeneration to make the newly added system more stable than the original buildings. However, the execution of architectural details reveals the pursuit of authenticity. Traditional Chinese architectural elements such as pitched tiled roof, wooden windows and doors, and brick gable walls were all employed for the new shopfront. In addition, Chen also considered the different sense of urban scale between the early modern time and present-day Chan Street. The width of most original facades of the high-rise buildings are 50-60 meters, their monotonous and repetitive fenestration highlights a vast scale. The podiums were replaced with smaller 'historical scale' units of 7-8 meters to provide a more human scale, in line with the façade units from Wuma Street (6-7 meters) (Figure 68). At the same time, many regular protruding structures have been added onto the main body of high-rise buildings to attenuate the massive facades.





Figure 67 Local traditional Chinese dwellings and one of the traditional Chinese units from Chan Street.

Left: Wenzhou Xihutou dwellings in 1950s;<sup>404</sup> Right: author's photo for Chan Street, 2019.

<sup>404</sup> Zhen Li, *Wenzhou Old Photos: 1949~1978* 温州老照片: 1949~1978 (Beijing: China Foreign Translation and Publishing Co., LTD, 2012), 280.

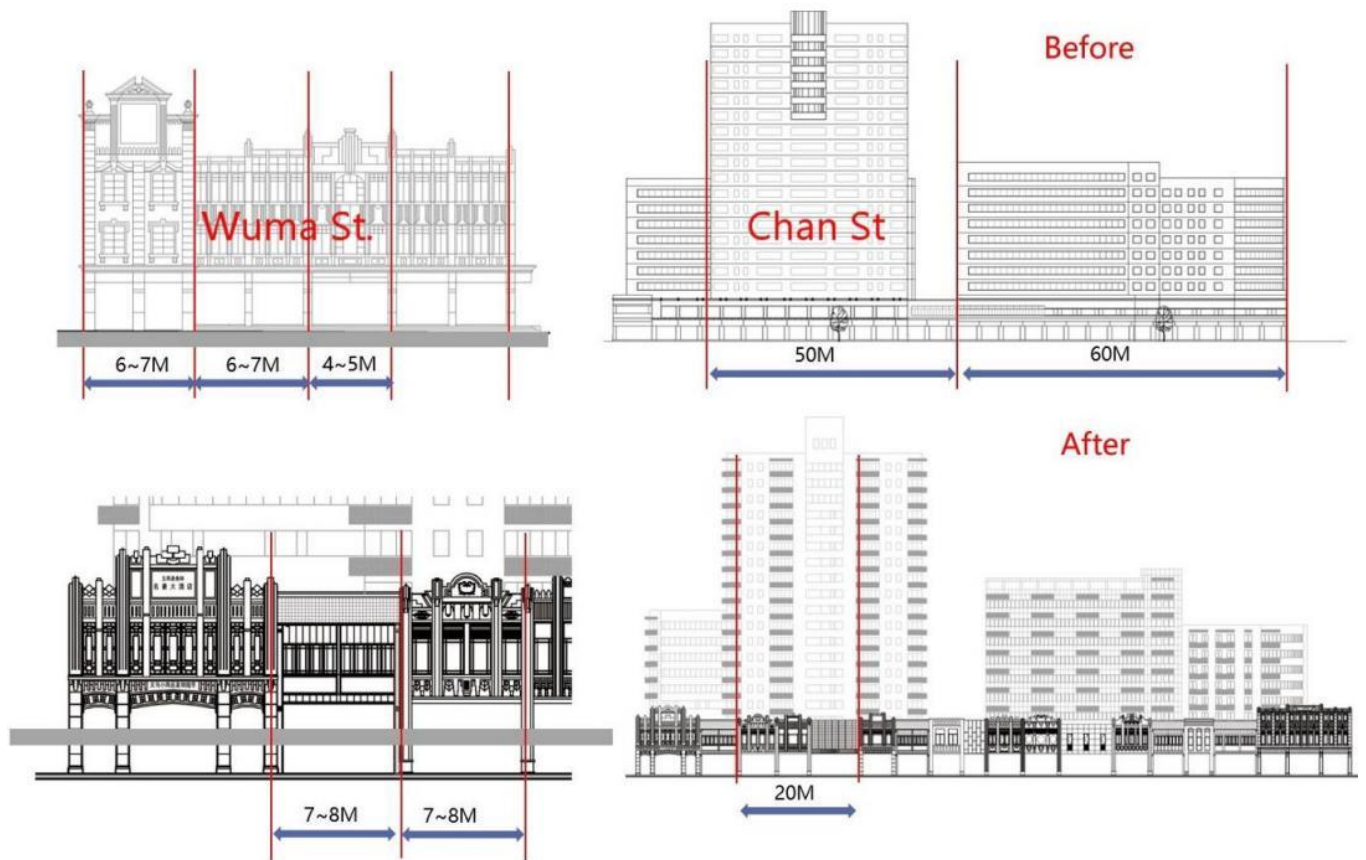


Figure 68 The scale is derived from Wuma Street

Author's drawing, 2019, after *Renovation Proposal of Chan Street*, (Wenzhou Design Group, 2018)

Some New Traditional units, each uniquely designed, have also been constructed. These are like experimental innovations being appropriately embedded into the street scene, for which the central theme is fake historic architecture—with the purpose of providing history with temporality and creativity. For example, one unit has a specific façade which is decorated by a pierced brick wall with some rectangular shaped modern windows (Figure 69).



Figure 69 Isomeric design appears in few facade-units of Chan Street

Author's photo, 2018

A special scene is the education building at the eastern end of the street because of its historical significance to the site. It used to be the Zhongshan Academy (中山书院) before the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was then converted into the County Granary (县仓, the place to store food) in early modern times. It was then turned into the "Wenzhou Teachers College" in the Republic of China, with educational and cultural connotations, and in contemporary times, it has become the No. 8th Middle School. By using the 'collage' strategy, the original modern gate was attached with an arcade of Republic of China Style, and a traditional Chinese *yingbi* (影壁, screen wall) was built on the west side which engraved that the site



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was the first place in Wenzhou to introduce modern education (Figure 70). A traditional style Chinese pavilion was built alongside, where its location references a pavilion drawn on an old map from 1877.<sup>405</sup> The first floor of the building was opened to the public as an exhibition hall of imperial examination and education. These approaches try to communicate the site's historical stories and significance to visitors. In general, this particular building still follows the design strategy of “lower part in traditional style and upper part in modern”.



Figure 70 The façade renewal of the No. 8th Middle School.

Left: Author's photo, 2017

Right: Author's photo, 2024

Based on the street elevation panoramas in the design proposal of Chan Street, a quantitative analysis on the proportions of three types of building styles in street elevation has been undertaken (Figure 71). Among them, ‘traditional Chinese-style units’ account for about 30% of the buildings, ‘Western-style units’ account for about 65%, and ‘modern

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<sup>405</sup> Chong Zhong, *Wenzhou Old Maps* 温州古旧地图集 (Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2014), 16.



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and traditional units' account for only about 5%.<sup>406</sup> The chief architect of this project pointed out that the architects are not the key figures to decide which style should have more, instead, the Wenzhou municipal government leaders are the decision-makers of the above issue, as they attached great importance to this project.<sup>407</sup> It can be seen that though Western-style is still the most chosen by decision-makers of this project, they have come to realize that history is pluralistic and different building styles should co-exist.

An admirable aspect of these traditional style buildings' design and construction process is to involve skilled craftsmen with expertise in traditional construction techniques. According to the project design document, such traditional construction techniques includes brick carving (砖雕), traditional wooden frame window, artistic concrete (艺术混凝土), dry hanging old black brick (干挂老青砖), traditional colour glass, 'golden fengxiu stone' (金丰秀石) pavement, and green plant walls.<sup>408</sup> Among them, the artistic concrete is used to replace and simulate the texture of granitic stucco coating from the Republic era (Figure 66). Many craftsmen were hired to make these building elements in traditional style and technique, ensuring high craftsmanship and historical accuracy. This project demonstrates the designers' understanding of cultural heritage, extending beyond surface-level aesthetics and forms. It encompasses the preservation and continuation of intangible

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<sup>406</sup> The actual construction may differ slightly in some parts, comparing with the original proposal about street elevation panoramas. The proportion of each type of facade cannot be very accurate in statistics. However, these factors do not affect the overall judgment of the research.

<sup>407</sup> According to author's interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>408</sup> Wenzhou Design Group. *Renovation Proposal of Chan Street*.

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aspects of traditional culture, such as building techniques and craftsmanship. Yet they had a tangible outcome reflected on the physical structures.

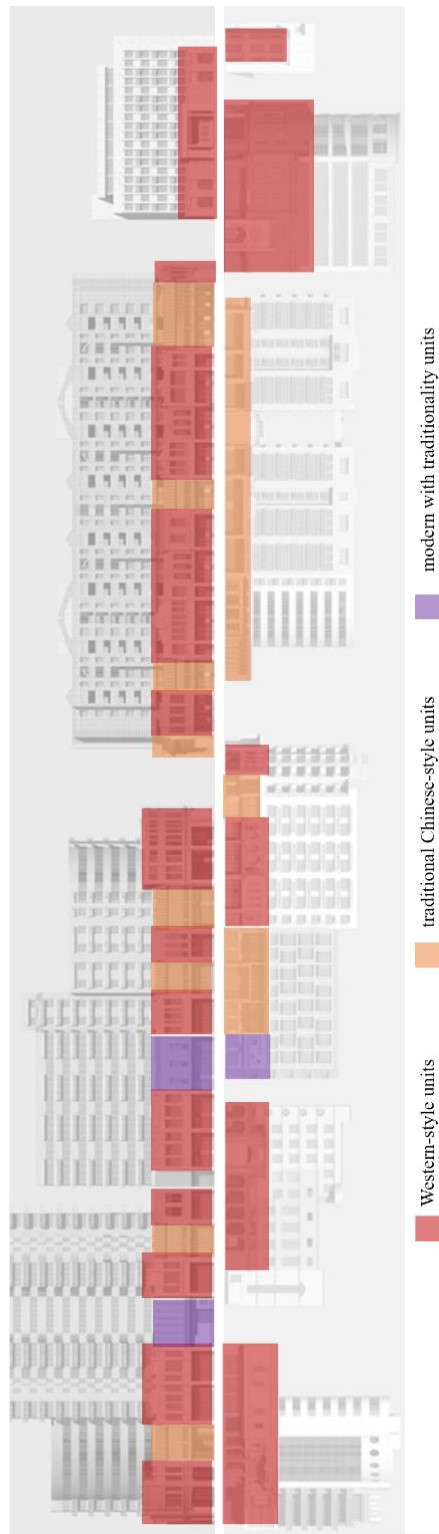


Figure 71 Proportions of three types of building styles on the elevation of Chan Street.

Made by the author, in 2022. Based on the street elevation panoramas from *Renovation Proposal of Chan Street*.

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The width of Chan Street was widened as a roadway in the 1990s, giving an opportunity to making a ‘urban living room’ after its pedestrianization.<sup>409</sup> The reconstituted street still maintains its central axis and symmetrical streetscape. Specifically, different paving materials are used to define two linear urban furniture belts with street lamps, seats, and tables aligned with the central axis. It is worth mentioning that many of these paving materials were old building components that had been reclaimed from some traditional buildings in other places within the Wenzhou area (Figure 72). These reclaimed and reused old materials provide visitors a historical flavor.



Figure 72 Use collected old materials to pave the road.

Author's photos, 2021.

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<sup>409</sup> Zheng, 108-11.

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The twelve modern buildings along Chan Street were collaged by three inventive building styles aforementioned, plus their own modern style remaining on the high-rise parts of the buildings. These styles come together to form a ‘historic rhyme’. Altogether with the pavement design, Chan Street forms a unified but not monotonous image. As Taner Oc et al. describe: “A useful concept in identifying common themes is that of ‘rhyme’. Rhyme involves some similarity in elements and presupposes the simultaneous existence of both complexity and patterns.”<sup>410</sup> The mixture of Chinese and Western styles allows the invocation of past memories of Wenzhou especially from the Republic of China period. However, the existence of modern buildings reminds people that this is just a synchronic construction in the present.

However, the chief architect of the Chan Street project later reflected that there was a bit too much emphasis on the sense of axis, while lacking of network and three-dimensional tour paths. In addition, he said that there were excessive traditional style pseudo-classic works, and some modern elements for embellishment might be better. He worried that these might lead to a sense of monotony and boredom for visitors.<sup>411</sup> On the other hand, there were still deficiencies in the fit between the spatial form and commerce of Chan Street project. The management and operation of it is still in the exploratory stage. Due to the lack of participation by the users of buildings, it must be noted that there are some mismatchings in terms of space and use (Figure 73). Whether for the pseudo-classic or modern part, designers are only required to consider its surface historical style, namely

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<sup>410</sup> Oc, Heath, and Tiesdell, 55.

<sup>411</sup> According to the author’s interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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the ornamental value, but without considering the actual use of space. In the pseudo-classic part, there is only a very narrow space between the original and new facades, with many air-conditioning units ‘looking out’ from the between-window space. The outer wall of the old building can be faintly seen from the outside. At night, most of the second-floor windows are dark, which makes an obvious comparison with the bright first floors. It shows the inefficiency of the use of the second floor. Some additions also form double-layer facades with the old walls in the modern part. Many fake balconies were attached to the facades of buildings without accessible space simply because of the need for aesthetic form. As Tim Heath et al. pointed out “An empty but renovated building does nothing to revitalize a historic quarter, but a building full of tenants does. People and economic activity ultimately add value to the neighbourhood.”<sup>412</sup> The Chan Street project has created a strong and unified visual impression on the exterior, with some rhythmic and varied visual experiences. However, these measures lack adequate consideration for the specific needs of people and activities within the buildings. Unfortunately, while it has significantly enhanced the external street space, it fails to improve the quality of spaces within the buildings.

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<sup>412</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 209.

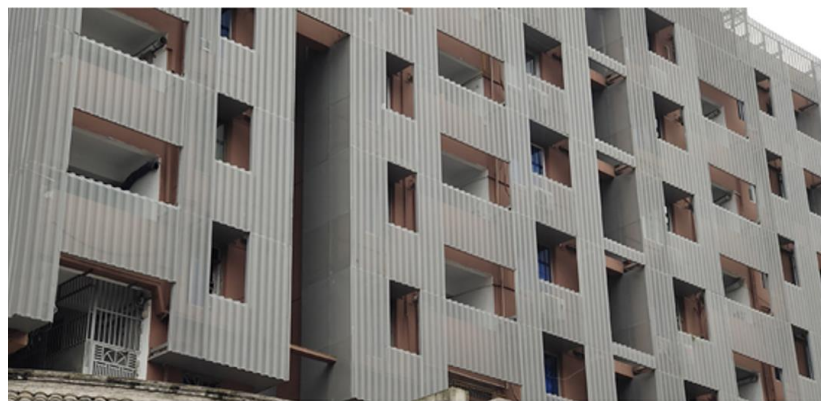


Figure 73 The double facades and the fake balconies.

Author's photos, 2019

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#### 6.1.4 Summary

The Chinese word *chan* (蝉) means Cicada, which symbolizes resurrection and eternal life in traditional Chinese culture.<sup>413</sup> The ‘Cicada Street’ project incorporates historical aesthetics into the podium facades of high-rise buildings, resurrecting a historical atmosphere in present-day Wenzhou. Even though these traditional facades did not genuinely exist in history, and some scholars like Theodor Adorno notes that adding one style to the surface of another is highly superficial and merely decorative, lacking essentiality and even legality.<sup>414</sup> However, by adding traditional style facades, the project of Chan Street successfully evokes a sense of familiarity with a historical setting, drawing people back to it. From David Lowenthal, ‘remaking history’ is regarded as an act of necessity. To improve the past, the approach for remaking could even involve fabrication and embellishment.<sup>415</sup> For modern high-rise buildings, the design strategy of the project has much in common with the Southern Song Dynasty Imperial Street (mentioned in section 2.2.3). The difference is that the Southern Song Imperial Street is a design of many elites, while Chan Street is a common one. Because the former's design team included many top architecture scholars, as Wang Shu claimed that such a model would be difficult to replicate in China.<sup>416</sup> But the latter's design is done by Wenzhou local design institutes,

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<sup>413</sup> Masako K. Hiraga, "Eternal Stillness: A Linguistic Journey to Bashō's Haiku About the Cicada," *Poetics Today* (1987): 5-18.

<sup>414</sup> Theodor Adorno. "Functionalism Today". From: Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 6.

<sup>415</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 411.

<sup>416</sup> Wang, "Zhongshan Road: Renovation of a Road and a City, Hangzhou, China 中山路：一条路的复兴与一座城的复兴，杭州，中国," 14-21.



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which is unable to reach the artistic attainments of the former. However, Chan Street project is more common and propagable, which proves the modernized areas within historic Wenzhou still have potentials for a historical rebirth.

Compared with former pseudo-classic projects in the late 20th century and early 21st century in Wenzhou, the design of Chan Street has a more profound connotation. As in the case of Wuma Street (will be mentioned in 6.2.2), pseudo-classic design makes visitors mistakenly believe that these buildings were originally there in history. However, from the perspective of the intention of replicas, Cesare Brandi thought it was primarily for people to judge whether the representation was fraudulent or malicious.<sup>417</sup> Then, the value of the replicas with historical appearance could be determined. In the case of Chan Street, although a pseudo-classic approach is delivered, it does not attempt to confuse visitors with the authenticity of history. When visitors see the main body of high-rise buildings behind the podiums, they will naturally understand those different architectural styles are synchronic creations from the present day. It attempts to add the street with a historical flavour and displays some intangible historical information to the public. Therefore, its general pseudo-classic intention is 'honest'. Thus, it made people re-examine the significance of pseudo-classic architecture and design methods. It proves that the feeling of historical authenticity is about the existing touchable heritage and our relationship to the past.

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<sup>417</sup> Brandi, 161.

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Although some early modernist architects proposed that the interior and exterior of a building should be consistent, the exterior is a result of the interior.<sup>418</sup> On the contrary, the theory of ‘collage city’ criticized this single and utopian obsession. Rowe and Koetter note that ‘collage’ borrows existing knowledge [styles or cultural symbols, etc.] and transforms the text to rediscover an indirect or polysemy authenticity. Possibly with metaphorical effects. In the production of space, especially in the urban environment, collage as a method that compromises and reuses the ready-made and generated forms. It establishes a structural combination by using the remnants and debris of the elements.<sup>419</sup> Eamonn Canniffe points out that the appearance of postmodern cities is full of printing and electronics, which is convenient for replacement and replication.<sup>420</sup> The communication scholar Gary Edgerton, who metaphors TV as a historian, noted that “the media selects and shapes public memory”.<sup>421</sup> Therefore, the medialized postmodern cities also have the same role. Today, the actual past has gone forever, while the invention of historic Chan Street is a processed and reproduced cultural exhibit. Although the design is controversial, it is full of new opportunities, potentials and personalization.

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<sup>418</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 2013), 213.

<sup>419</sup> Rowe and Koetter, 68.

<sup>420</sup> Eamonn Canniffe, *Urban Ethic: Design in the Contemporary City* (London: Routledge, 2006), 118.

<sup>421</sup> Gary Edgerton, "Television as Historian: An Introduction," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 7-12.

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## 6.2 Wuma Street: Rebirth of Historic Grandeur

### 6.2.1 Historical Setting

*The Wenzhou Records* (《温州府志》) from Ming Dynasty recorded that the carriage of Wang Xizhi<sup>422</sup> was pulled by five horses (*wuma* means five horses), and people established Wuma Lane (五马坊) in memory of him.<sup>423</sup> Within Wenzhou's ancient urban planning mindset, the city's southern region had consistently been designated as a hub for market activities (mentioned in 3.1.2). Even in the early map (1685), Wuma Street has been recognized as one of the main thoroughfares in the southern part of the city (Figure 74). Hence, it can be inferred that this street has long served as the city's commercial centre. In ancient times, Wuma Street existed in a state where it ran parallel to a waterway. However, as the need for road widening emerged in modern times, it was among the first streets to undergo the process of canal infilling. After that, it has become a busy commercial street by 424 meters long and 13.5 meters wide. Its lined buildings served as typical instances of modernization and commercialization. In 1984, it transferred from the most congested road (Figure 75) to the only pedestrian shopping street in the city.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Wang Xizhi (王羲之) was a famous literati in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (东晋) and also was the prefect of Wenzhou.

<sup>423</sup> *Selected Architectural and Environmental Elements in the Historical City of Wenzhou* 温州历史城区建筑与环境要素选集, 33.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

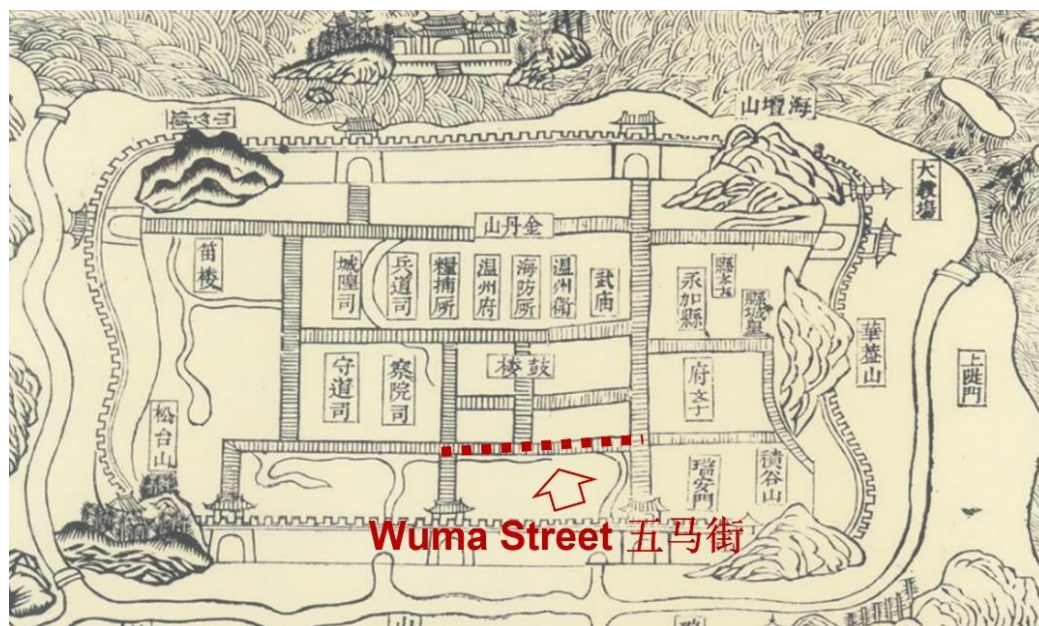


Figure 74 The location of Wuma Street in historic Wenzhou.

Base map from: Wenzhou Fu Zhi, vol 1, 1685.



Figure 75 Wuma Street in 1950s.

See: [http://www.360doc.com/content/16/0831/10/34440246\\_587219539.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/16/0831/10/34440246_587219539.shtml), accessed on Sep 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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As a port city in China, Wenzhou was one of the earliest to open up to the Western world in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, it nurtured a group of Wenzhou merchants with access to various information sources. They were enthusiastic about learning about Western products and technologies, but in many cases, these products and technologies were introduced through Shanghai (as mentioned in 3.2.1). So, they were keen to gentrify their buildings with an international image by imitating the Western-style architectures from metropolitan Shanghai.<sup>425</sup> In particular, the grand Western-style buildings, such as those found on Nanjing Road, Shanghai's bustling commercial street. These impressive structures resonated with the aspirations and preferences of the Wenzhou merchants. They were captivated by these buildings' grandeur and elegance, symbolising the progress and prosperity associated with the Western world. As Jacques-Francois Blondel claimed in the 18th century: “different types of architecture have different personalities... Among them, public buildings correspond to grandeur.”<sup>426</sup> The more successful Wenzhou businessmen became, the more fascinated they were with the grandeur of architectural style. Wuma Street became the most representative location for them to invest in and construct commercial buildings with such character. It became Wenzhou's version of "Nanjing Road in Shanghai". It served as a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit and prosperity of Wenzhou's business elite, who sought to create a distinct and impressive environment to conduct their trade and display their success.

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<sup>425</sup> Xi Chen, "Towards More Open Citizenship" (PhD, Newcastle University, 2019), 37.

<sup>426</sup> Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architecture Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present*, trans. Guixiang 王贵祥 Wang (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2005), 107.

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The most influential merchant in the early modern time was Xu Shuyu. He began to buy real estate on Wuma Street in 1919 and had been obsessed with investing and constructing European architecture. He had taken local architects to Shanghai multiple times to learn about that time's prevalent Western architectural styles. By visiting Shanghai, they had the opportunity to study firsthand the intricate details, the use of ornamental elements, and the overall aesthetic appeal of these structures. The knowledge and inspiration from these trips were then incorporated into the design and construction of new commercial buildings in Wenzhou, ensuring that they captured the essence of the Western style.<sup>427</sup> This cross-pollination of ideas and architectural influences helped create a distinct visual identity for Wenzhou's commercial landscape, showcasing the fusion of Western and local elements. From 1927 to 1932, he invested in building Wenzhou's first commercial complex - composed of a large shopping mall and the Central Grand Theater (中央大戏院) (Figure 76), named Yunbo Great Market (云博万物联合大市场). It is a mixture of Baroque and Art Deco styles, judged, at the time, as the most magnificent building in Zhejiang Province. Xu's actions also made other businessmen follow his way. Thus, there was an increasing number of grand Western-style buildings on Wuma Street. Due to the presence of these distinctive buildings, subsequent renovations of Wuma Street showed a deep respect for its historical significance. Even though some modern buildings had been constructed, no high-rise buildings appeared on this street.

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<sup>427</sup> Yousaf and Fan, 104-79.



Figure 76 The Central Grand Theater in 1930s.

Left: Shao Du's photo. Right: Huang Xinglong's photo.<sup>428</sup>

During the 1980s-1990s, in the early time of China's Reform and Opening-up, the 'Wenzhou Model' of economic development was famous across the whole country (discussed in section 4.2.3). As the most representative commercial street in Wenzhou, Wuma Street is naturally the place where such 'Wenzhou Model' is embodied – as some of the facades of the commercial buildings along the street were modernized regardless of the original architectural style, and all buildings were adorned with numerous billboards and advertisements. Many traditional decorations on the facades of the existing buildings were obscured (Figure 77). Even some private shopkeepers went as far as modernizing larger buildings' facades to better accommodate giant billboards. They intended to create more prominent advertising spaces that could attract maximum attention from passersby (Figure 78). This showcased the commercial competitiveness and the vibrant modern business environment of Wenzhou. This bustling and visually dynamic streetscape

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<sup>428</sup> Dan Wang, *Lucheng Old Neighborhoods* 鹿城老街坊 (Hangzhou: Xi Leng Yin She Press, 2009), 34.

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captured the essence of Wenzhou's prosperous private market economy during that period. In southern Zhejiang Province, Wuma Street was once a prominent hub for commodity trade, especially daily necessities.

However, the street view had become chaotic due to the long-term disorderly construction of the shop's owner along the street.<sup>429</sup> Except for some large companies and large government agencies occupying an entire building, many private buildings were a mixture of low-floor for commerce and high-floor for residence. Many buildings along the street only had 2-3 stories but with a large proportion of billboards. Behind these vast billboards are the unimportant, broken architectural epidermis (Figure 79). As Canniffe E. argued, the appearance of the post-modern city is presented in printing and electronic, which are convenient and replicated. The most important function is to be spread, which is fundamentally disposable.<sup>430</sup> The transformation of building facades from traditional decorations to billboards reflects the predominant economic interests and the driving model of that era. The emphasis on commercial success and maximizing profits often overshadowed the preservation of traditional culture. Thus, various additional components on the facade of the buildings along the street looked casual and even chaotic.

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<sup>429</sup> Chen, 134-40.

<sup>430</sup> Canniffe, 18.



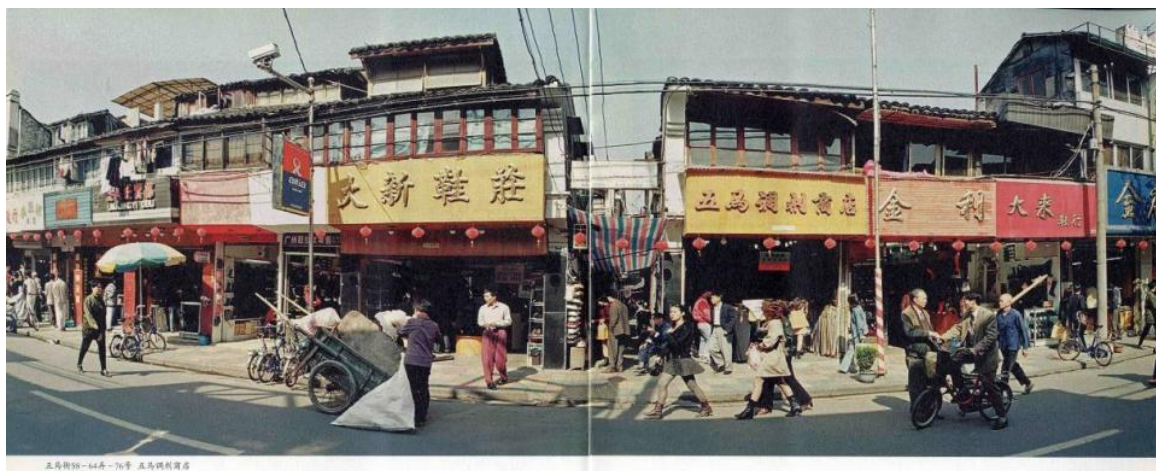


Figure 77 The traditional Chinese-style houses on Wuma Street in the 1990s.

Source: Yang, Baomin. *Wenzhou Old City 温州老城*. (Beijing: China Race Photograph Art Press, 2010), 20-21.



Figure 78 The early modern style architectures on Wuma Street in the 1990s.

Source: Yang, Baomin. *Wenzhou Old City 温州老城*. 18.



Figure 79 The building façade without decorations after the billboard was withdrawn.

Source: Li, Mengyao. "Xu Fang: Wuma Street Renovation must Reflect the overall Consciousness 徐放: 五马街再改造要体现整体意识." *Wenzhounese*, 21(2017):5.

### 6.2.2 Macro Transformation in 2000

In 1996, based on recommendations from experts like Qian Weichang, the Chinese government established a special fund to conserve historical-cultural cities. This fund was primarily allocated for the planning, maintaining, and renovation of key historical districts. In the following years, numerous historical cities across China initiated a 'historical appearance renovation' movement to revitalize and enhance the historical character of important areas.<sup>431</sup> Following this wave, a regeneration project called *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*<sup>432</sup> was launched in 1999 and completed in 2000.

The design objective was clear: clean away the chaotic elements and unify all

<sup>431</sup> Yisan Ruan and Meng Sun, "Research on the Protection and Planning of Historic Districts 我国历史街区保护与规划的若干问题研究," *Urban Planning* 10, no. 25 (2001): 25-32.

<sup>432</sup> Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute. *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. (2000).

buildings into European-style (mainly in Baroque and Art Deco) for Wuma Street to regain a sense of grandeur and create a more cohesive and visually pleasing streetscape. The project mainly pursues stylistic consistency by removing the cluttered and disparate elements, replacing them with European architectural elements, and aiming to create a cohesive and harmonious streetscape. It typically matches the characters of the ‘Chinese Stylistic Restoration’ (discussed in section 2.2.3). The project primarily differentiated three types of buildings and employed distinct strategies for each:

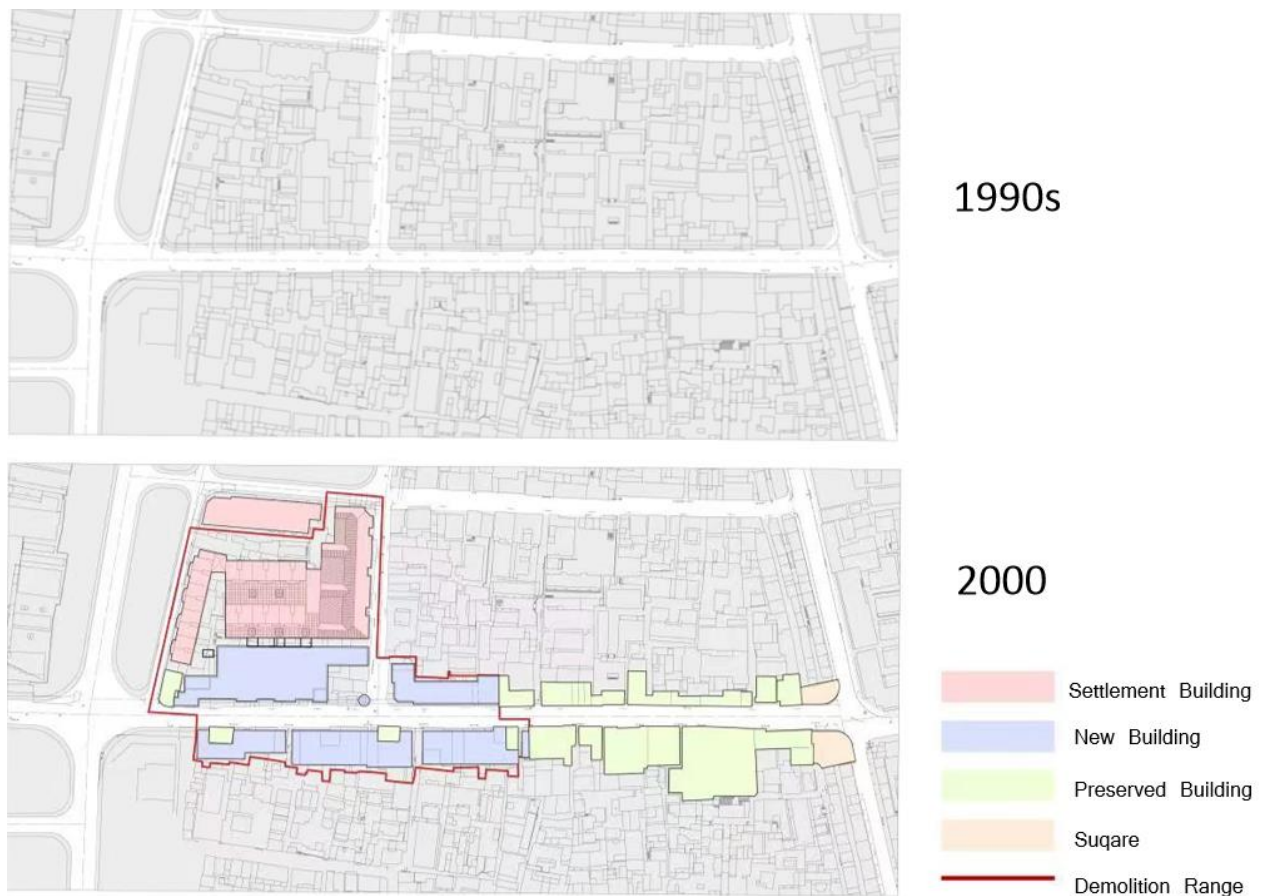


Figure 80 Comparison of urban texture before and after regeneration in 2000.

Zhu Shijie and Author's drawing, 2022.

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**First, the ‘preserved buildings’** (green area in Figure 80). It included European-style buildings and some building facades that had undergone modernization in the 1980s and 1990s. The approach taken for the former involved removing the cluttered advertisements on their facades and restoring the corresponding architectural elements to their original style. As for the modern-style facades with large billboards were indeed demolished and redesigned to incorporate classic European architectural elements such as reliefs, columns, eaves, and gables (Figure 81, Figure 82, Figure 83). Only few facades were designed based on accurate historical images, while most of these pseudo-classic facades were resulted from the designers' creative interpretations about history.





Figure 81 The comparison between before and after the restoration of Wuma Street. (Part One)

Source: *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute. 2000.

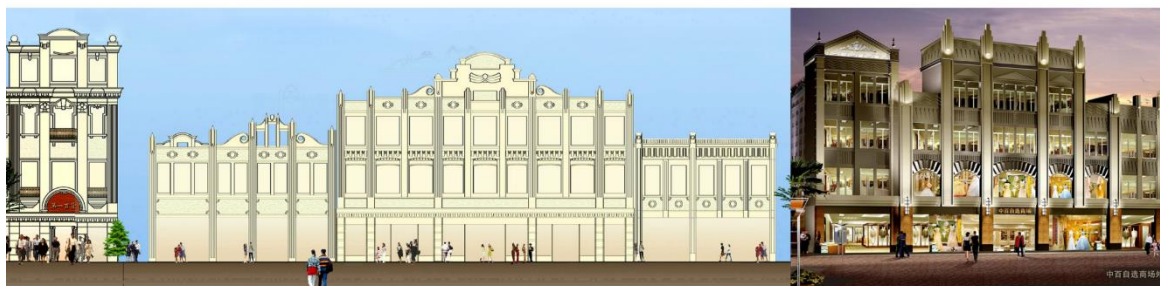


Figure 82 The comparison between before and after the restoration of Wuma Street. (Part Two)

Source: *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute. 2000.



Figure 83 The comparison between before and after the restoration of Wuma Street. (Part Three)

Source: *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute. 2000.

It was widely published as the project ‘preserved’ many Chinese-western hybrid architectures, including “First Department Store” (第一百货商店), “Five Flavors and Grocery Stores” (五味和副食品商场), “Jin San Yi Silk Store” (金三益绸布店), “Lao Xiang Shan Pharmacy Store” (老香山药店), “Wenzhou Restaurant” (温州酒家).<sup>433</sup> But the real situation was far beyond the essential meaning of preservation, even not ‘restoration’. It should be described as containing many ‘fabrications’ and

<sup>433</sup> Mengyao Li, "Xu Fang: The Renovation of Wuma Street Have to Reflect the Overall Consciousness 徐放: 五马街再改造要体现整体意识," *Wenzhounese*, no. 21 (2017): 5.

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‘embellishments’.<sup>434</sup> It was ‘remaking the past’ much more than preserving history. Take the building of Wenzhou Restaurant, for example. It was a simplistic modernism-style building in the 1970s (Figure 84). This kind of modernism was trendy among socialist countries in the early times. The undecorated portico presented a kind of solemnity and many political banners on the façade. Thus, they indicated this was an important public building. From the photo in the 1990s, it turned out that the solemn sense of public building completely disappeared and wholly transformed into a commercial building. During this time, it was the well-known “Wenzhou Restaurant”. However, its function has been transformed into several scattered commercial stores and restaurants. In the contemporary restoration project, all the facades of buildings along Wuma Street were defined as European-style, mainly in Baroque, Gothic and Classical. So, this building was added with a lot of European-style decorations. On its ground floor, large-scale glass windows and stone wall were used to take place in the original portico. Thus, it tries to keep the consistency with the other ground floor stores.

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<sup>434</sup> “Preservation”, “restoration”, “fabrication” and “embellishment” are important terms and secondary titles from: Lowenthal’s book *The past is a foreign country-revisited*, in part four “Remaking The Past”.



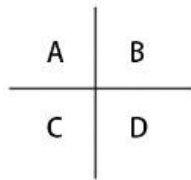


Figure 84 Comparison of the same building in three different periods.

A is in the 1970s.<sup>435</sup> B is in the 1990s.<sup>436</sup> C and D is in the 2020s (Photographed by the author in 2021).

<sup>435</sup> *Contemporary Chinese Cities Development Serious: Wenzhou* 当代中国城市发展丛书·温州, 99.

<sup>436</sup> See: [https://www.sohu.com/a/245533784\\_163941](https://www.sohu.com/a/245533784_163941). (accessed on May 6, 2021)

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“Some people questioned me why I made it so troublesome instead of clearing down everything and rebuilding brand new ones?” the chief architect of this project Xu Fang<sup>437</sup>, said, “I want to protect the old buildings to the greatest extent. If you cannot keep it all, try to retain part...For those old buildings with memory, it is easy for citizens to find them again. Retrieve their stories related to these old buildings.”<sup>438</sup> It can reflect that at that time, many people, including government officials, hoped to tear down the old ones and build new European-style buildings. The designers have no choice but to preserve the old ones as much as he could.

**Second, the ‘new buildings’** (blue area in Figure 80). The ordinary Chinese traditional-style buildings along the street were considered to have limited historical value, and their small size did not align with the grandeur of European architecture, prompting their complete demolition. They were predominantly then replaced with three-story pseudo-classic European-style buildings.

To present the local identity of Wuma Street itself (through the pseudo-classic design) and simultaneously meet the needs of modern urban life, the first step was to investigate and figure out the historical characters in the Wuma Street Quarter. Xu Fang said, "We recorded the status quo of every historic building in the Wuma Street Quarter,

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<sup>437</sup> Xu Fang was born in Wenzhou, a professor of the University of New South Wales, Australia. A chance in 1999 made him the chief designer of the reconstruction of Wuma Street.

<sup>438</sup> Li, 5.

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especially those on Jiefang Road and Wuma Street. We classified the form of buildings according to the theory of architectural typology. On this basis, refine the various constituent elements of historic buildings, and summarize the typical characteristics of existing historic buildings."<sup>439</sup> In the design proposal, these historical characteristics were considered ‘Wenzhou Style’, which was applied to the design of the new building on Wuma Street (Figure 85).<sup>440</sup> Such a survey of different kinds of European architectural components and ornaments from a typological way is also somehow related to the way that Viollet-le-Duc did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (discussed in section 2.1).

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute, "Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street," (2000).

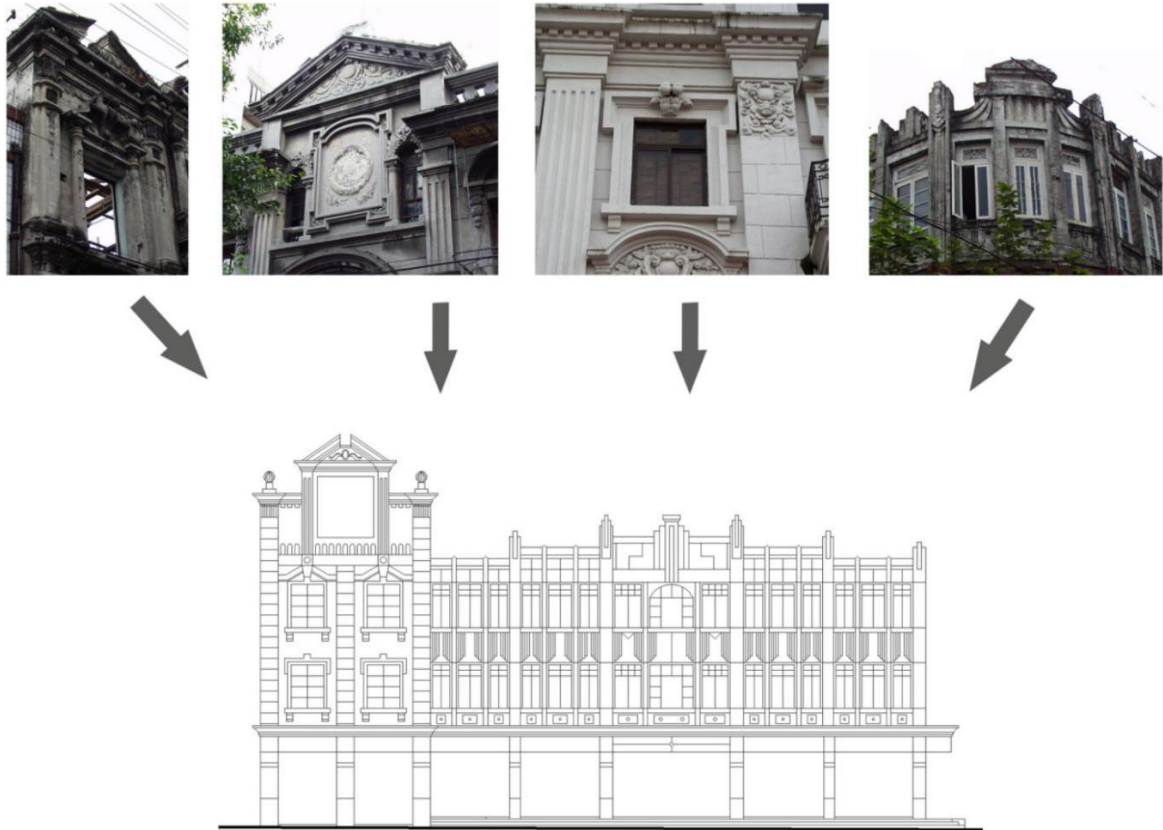


Figure 85 A new building of Wuma Street was originated from other existing historic buildings.

Source: Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute, *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. 2000.

In fact, a diversity of styles was proposed during the initial design stage. But finally, the government still decided to use a unified European style. The reason was the European style was more durable than the Chinese. The shortcoming of this approach was obvious - it caused visitors to be unable to distinguish between real and fake historic buildings. Twenty years after the completion of the project, Xu Fang admitted in a forum that he regretted only adopting a unified Western style and expressed helplessness with this matter:

Due to the distinction of the parties participating in the decision-making, many creative design ideas could not be implemented. ... The original attempted to diverse

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and intersperse the facade of Chinese and Western buildings of different periods. But that was finally replaced by a unified Western style. Secondly, in terms of cultural connotation, we planned to set the historical story introduction of the building at the entrance of each important building. But it had not been realized.<sup>441</sup>

During that time, without understanding authenticity theory, the architectural structure had not obtained consistency. The internal structures of the new Wenzhou European-style buildings did not follow the history but used modern steel. To some extent, this was worth comparing with the case of the Republic of China, in which the facades were European, and the inner courtyards were traditional Chinese (Figure 86). They both have facades for appreciation, while internal structures reflect the characteristics of pragmatism. One building could be constructed by distinguishing aesthetic value and practical value.

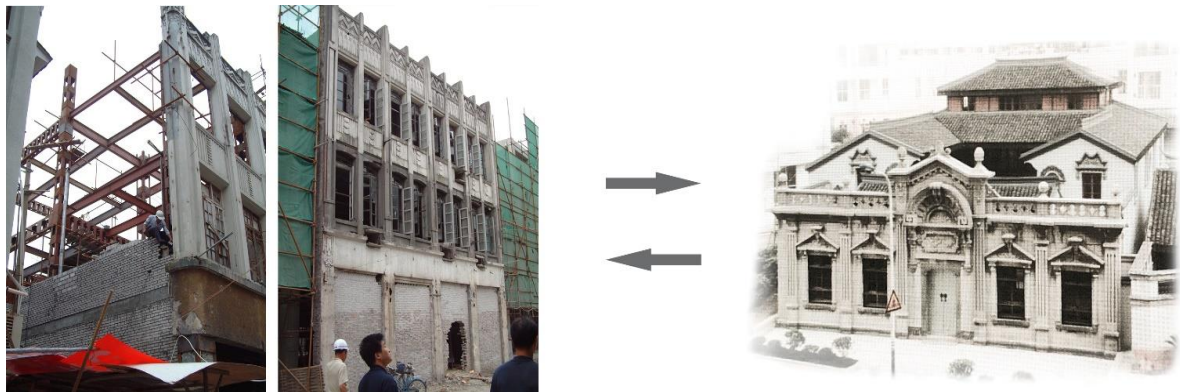


Figure 86 A building constructed along Wuma Street in 2000: European-style facade + internal steel structure VS A Building from the Republic of China: European-style facade + internal traditional Chinese courtyard.

Sources: Left: “Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street”, right: photographed by the author.

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<sup>441</sup> Li, 5.

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In this pseudo-classic approach, new materials refurbished entirely the old buildings without regard to the 'age value' of old ones. Visitors could not distinguish between the old and new parts. The variety of historical evolution will be absent because they must be fixed in one or several specific architectural styles. So, the trace of historical accumulation has been solidified in one particular era, as unified eaves, doors and windows and architectural details. This will inevitably lead to the loss of a large amount of historical information, leading to the breakdown of the context of the quarter.

In addition, although unity was the dominant idea of design, this was only presented in the uniformity of the facade of the main Wuma Street. Some fascinating contradictions can be found in one of the new buildings, as the elevation style facing Wuma Street differs entirely from the elevation facing other streets or alleys. An even more dramatic sample is a corner building with three surfaces. Two of them along the street were restored in European historical style, but one in the middle part towards the corner is modern (Figure 87). Therefore, it can be said that for single buildings, there is no unified integration design thinking method. This situation reflected that the design attitude towards history focused on embellishment. While the concept of authenticity seems to be unaware of it at all.



Figure 87 Different styles for different elevations on one building.

Author's photo, in 2018.

**Third, the ‘settlement buildings’** (red area in Figure 80). To the northwest of Wuma Street is a block of apartments to accommodate the residents whose houses were demolished (Figure 88). The actual plan doubled the size of the original settlement area, in order to accommodate more residents and sell some of the properties as commercial housing. It was built at the cost of entirely demolishing the old residences in that block, which made the new urban texture not harmony with the surroundings. The almost no-decorated apartment buildings are high-density, row-style, multi-story. No stylistic or formal coherence exists between this area and Wuma Street. It obviously goes against the ‘organic renewal’ idea. In addition, the second and third categories both involve demolishing traditional Chinese architecture, confirming that the historical value of ordinary old houses was not recognized and respected then.





Figure 88 The area and appearance of the settlement buildings.

Left: made by the author. Right: Author's photo, in 2020.

### 6.2.3 Micro Modification in 2019

Wuma Street and the Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter are highly significant in historic Wenzhou. Since the city was bestowed with the prestigious accolade of being recognized as the 'National Historic and Cultural City' in 2016, the local government has taken the initiative to embark upon a comprehensive revitalization project for this venerable street. The project named as *Conservation and Improvement Project of Wenzhou Wuma Historic and Cultural Commercial District* encompasses more than just the regeneration of the main street. It also contains the revitalization of nearby alleyways and courtyard spaces. The project has a comparatively longer timeline, as its preliminary design commenced in late 2017 (preceding Chan Street), and its construction was completed in 2019 (later than Chan Street).



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Compared to the macro transformation of Wuma Street in 2000, this new project was a micro modification to the existing buildings. It matches the words pointed out by Chinese President Xi Jinping about urban regeneration in 2018:

Urban planning and construction must attach great importance to the protection of history and culture, do not rush to benefit, and do not make ‘Big Demolishment, Big Construction’. Highlight local characteristics and improve the living environment using micro-modification as ‘embroidery’.<sup>442</sup>

The chief designer of this project seems to be generally satisfied with the final outcome.<sup>443</sup> He felt relieved about this project as he didn't have to take the guilt of erasing the traces of history because all the approaches to the buildings along the street were conservative. All the memories were still there. The conservative approach in this project fully respects all existing structures, including those ‘fake antiques’ with ‘Wenzhou local European-style’ built in the 2000s. These buildings have been treated with the same level of respect and minimal intervention as historical architecture.

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<sup>442</sup> The original Chinese text is: “城市规划和建设要高度重视历史文化保护，不急功近利，不大拆大建。要突出地方特色，注重人居环境改善，更多采用微改造这种“绣花”功夫”。From: Shifu Wang, "Guangzhou Thinking with "New Vitality of the Old City" “老城市新活力” 的广州思考," *Urban Observation 城市观察*, no. 5 (2019): 5-6.

<sup>443</sup> From author's interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), who was the project's chief designer, in 2024.



Figure 89: The one-point perspective street view of Wuma Street.

With the reinforcement of the vertical components and lights, buildings present unified upward trend, which is also an important character of Art Deco style.

Author's photo, in 2021.

As Viollet-le-Duc believed, a building should be restored to reflect its ideal form rather than its historical reality.<sup>444</sup> The second-phase regeneration still strives for stylistic perfection. Thus, this practice can still be considered an extension of Viollet-le-Duc's theory. Regarding detail approaches, especially for most buildings with a historical look, the ground elevation is a key restoration area. It further reduces the occupied area of the billboards on the facades and unifies the styles of the upper and lower floors (Figure 90, Figure 91). Some decorative components were repainted, and some minor additional components were added to make the buildings look more elegant. The further reduction of

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<sup>444</sup> Fitch, 283-98.

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billboards on building facades, accompanied by an increase in decorative elements, indicates a shift in people's understanding of the value of Wuma Street. It indicates that the cultural value of the street has taken precedence over its commercial value and an intentional effort to create a visually appealing and culturally rich environment.



Figure 90 Street facade renewal in the “Comprehensive Design for Wuma Street in Historical District of Wenzhou”.

From “Conservation and Improvement Project of Wenzhou Wuma Historic and Cultural Commercial District”, 2017.



Figure 91 A comparison of Wuma Street before and after renewal.

Author's photos. Left: in 2018; Right: in 2020.

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In the previous round of regeneration in 2000, some building facades were given a European architectural style. However, they still appeared too plain and lacked decorative elements, failing to match the character of grandeur exhibited by most buildings on the street. Alternatively, for various reasons, some buildings (shown on the left in Figure 90) were not constructed according to the initial design proposal. Therefore, several of these building facades have been selected for improvement renewals in this new regeneration round. The Wu-Wei-He (五味和) building is a typical example (Figure 92). From the photo of the 1990s, it can be found that it was a simplistic modern-style building. Both design proposals completely disregarded the original facade style during the initial design stages in 2000 and 2017. They transformed it into an Art Deco style (since most of the street already featured it). Fortunately, neither of the initial plans were implemented. The implemented proposal of 2000 only removed some huge billboards and added several classical columns. The recently implemented plan was to refine the building into a more elegant classical style. In this classical design proposal, the eave was decorated, the shape of the window frame was changed, and a large balcony on the left side of the façade and many small balconies on the right side were added. Comparing it to the 2017 Art Deco proposal, even though significant changes were made, these alterations did not completely erase the original style of the building. Instead, they enhanced the rhythm of windows as its aesthetic appeal. This approach aligns more with the concept of ‘embroidery’ proposed by Xi Jinping.



Figure 92 A facade renewal process of Wu-Wei-He Building.

(Made by the author) Source: Left: Yang, Baomin. *Wenzhou Old City 温州老城*. (Beijing: China Race Photograph Art Press, 2010), 18.

Middle: *Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street*. Wenzhou Urban Planning Institute. 2000.

Right: "Conservation and Improvement Project of Wenzhou Wuma Historic and Cultural Commercial District", 2017.

In addition, the designers recognized that the use of pseudo-classical elements could lead to a misguided perception of the original architectural style among the public and regarded with Xu Fang's regret about the absence of a historical exhibition at the entrance of important buildings in the regeneration project of the 2000s (mentioned in section

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6.2.2).<sup>445</sup> They selected some significant historical sites and architectural structures to showcase their original and authentic styles by displaying photographs on the building walls, aiming to compensate for the previous oversight. This approach allows visitors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the historical stories and appearance of the buildings. For instance, the information on the Nike building's inner wall reflects its complete appearance evolution, including its image as the building of China National Products Corporation when it was first built in the 1940s (Figure 93). The old photos show that its facade was an early modernism style, emphasizing vertical lines on the facade. While the facade of the 1990s resembled an abstract and concise modern version of the Renaissance/Baroque chapel. Its roof was a triangular gable shape with decorative pilasters on the wall.<sup>446</sup> In the renovation plan of Wuma Street in 2000, the overall idea of the renewal analyzed in the previous article was making the entire street into unified European styles, mainly in Baroque and Art-Deco.<sup>447</sup> The renewal plan provides two different proposals for the building: the first plan still maintains the image of a Renaissance/Baroque church style, adding many decorative details to the original modern facade to make it more like Renaissance style. The second plan removed the triangular gable wall of the roof and added some decorative details. It tries to recover the original emphasis of vertical lines on the facade; thus, this design is finally accepted. In the second regeneration of Wuma Street, the decorations on the second-floor façade of this building were cancelled and replaced by simplistic and modern large glass windows. The third and

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<sup>445</sup> Li. Xu Fang: Wuma Street Renovation must Reflect the overall Consciousness. *Wenzhounese*.

<sup>446</sup> Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.



fourth-floor façades remained unchanged. Many precious and interesting historical information is displayed indoors, bringing visitors' thoughts back to its history and providing information of interest.

China National Products Corporation (中国国货公司) in 1940s. (Photos on the interior wall)



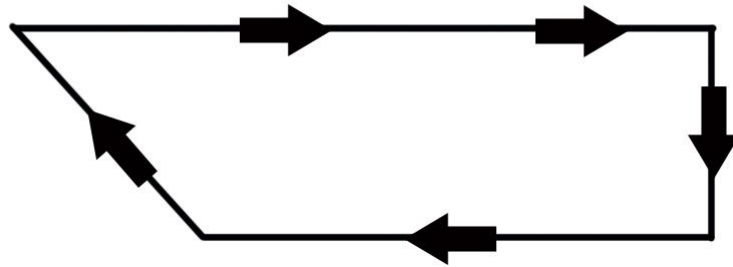
Zhong Bai Optional Mall (中百自选商场) in 1990s. (Photo from the "Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street" (2000))



A renewal design choice from the "Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street" (2000)



Another renewal design choice from the "Protective Renovation Project of Wuma Street" (2000)



The photo of the Nike Store taken by the author in 2020.



Figure 93 The transformation of a commercial building on Wuma Street.

Made by the author in 2021.

However, regardless of how aesthetically pleasing the facades were designed in both the first and second rounds, inefficient utilization of the upper floors in practical use arose. If visitors were to look up into the windows of these upper floors along the street,

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especially during the night, they would likely find them dark or only dimly lit (Figure 94). Most of these upper floors were used as negative spaces, such as storage, starkly contrasting the bustling activity on the ground floor. This phenomenon is similar to what was observed in the case of Chan Street (mentioned in 5.1), and it continues to persist in other street regeneration projects to this day. On the other hand, in some cases, buildings underwent independent renovations by the shop owners, where they opted to remove the complex traditional window grilles installed by the government on the upper-floor windows and replace them with large, simple glass panels (Figure 95). In addition, the government's neglect of supervision also shows that the original unified design of window grilles is not conducive to highlighting the commercial characteristics of each store.

Interestingly, the upper-floor spaces in the buildings that removed the old window grilles exhibited a greater sense of publicness and openness, leading to better utilization. The chief architect of the second time Wuma Street project said that “both during the designing process of the 1st or 2nd regeneration, the designers were only asked to design the facades, while not required to consider the commercial format inside the building - from the overall spatial distribution ratio of different store types to the specific function in a single building.”<sup>448</sup> This led the designers to be only responsible for the beauty of building facades, almost entirely regardless of utility.

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<sup>448</sup> According to author's interview to interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.





Figure 94 The contrast between ground floors and upper floors.

Author's photos, 2019

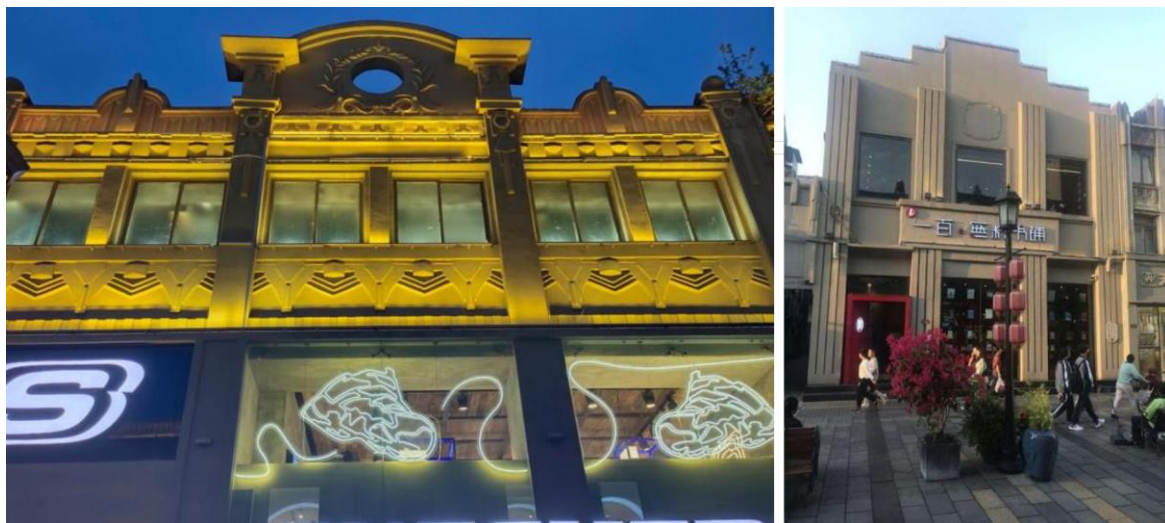


Figure 95 Upper-floor windows without any traditional window grilles.

Author's photos, 2020

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#### 6.2.4 Summary

The contrasting approaches to the renewal witnessed in Wuma Street vividly illustrate the evolving perspectives on heritage values across time. As Alois Riegl pointed out, there is a natural conflict between ‘newness value’ and ‘age value’ among all value categories. The ‘age value’ also embodies people’s education - the more educated people are, the more precious it is. While rich people with low education tend to prefer ‘newness value’.<sup>449</sup> During the early years of China's Reform and opening up, the generation of Wenzhou merchants primarily consisted of individuals who had limited formal education and started from scratch. As Wuma Street was a bustling centre for commercial activities, a wave of new modern architectural styles emerged spontaneously. However, the government lacked comprehensive control over this phenomenon, continuously disappearing older European and traditional Chinese architectural structures.

Consequently, the street's appearance became chaotic and disordered. Regrettably, the construction activities during this period largely failed to reflect a reverence for history. The subsequent ‘macro transformation’ in 2000 represented a turning point where history began to receive attention. However, there was a partial understanding regarding which historical period to focus on and a lack of comprehensive knowledge about authenticity. The emphasis was primarily placed on the grandeur of European-style architecture, reflecting a pursuit of the ‘newness value’ that emerged with newfound wealth. In contrast, the recent ‘micro modification’ approach, while making numerous alterations to the facades of buildings along the street, has been carried out with a strong foundation of respect for

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<sup>449</sup> Wu and Guo, 342.

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the original historical objects. This exemplifies a more diversified understanding of historical values among people who have acquired higher educations, particularly emphasizing the importance of the ‘age value’.

Indeed, both the two times’ regenerations of Wuma Street share certain characteristics with the ‘stylistic restoration’ theory. They pursue stylistic unity and perfection, emphasizing the collection and incorporation of style elements during the design process. Furthermore, while the predominant architectural style may lean towards Europe, pursuing unity remains a characteristic feature of Chinese urban construction models. China strongly emphasises fostering social cohesion and nurturing shared values, which drives Chinese cities to aspire towards a harmonious urban landscape.<sup>450</sup> This pursuit is exemplified through the consistent adoption of similar architectural styles, materials, and design elements, culminating in a cohesive visual experience.

## **6.3 Gongyuan Road: Reproduction of Historic Scenes**

### **6.3.1 Historical Setting**

The Gongyuan Road is located in the southeast of the historic Wenzhou. In the old times, as a typical representative of the East Temple (东庙) functional area of historic

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<sup>450</sup> Xie Li, "A Great Chinese ‘Rural’ metropolis—the Unity and Contradictions in Beijing’s Urban Identity," in *Cities’ Identity through Architecture and Arts* (London: Routledge, 2018), 3-8.

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Wenzhou, many temples were scattered on both sides of the street.<sup>451</sup> In the *Song* (宋) and *Ming* (明) Dynasties, this place was named as *xi li fang* (习礼坊, Customs and Manners Lane). In the *Qing* (清) Dynasty, it was known as City God Alley (县城殿巷) since the City God's Temple (城隍庙) was located there. The temple fair was a remarkable cultural phenomenon in ancient China, encompassing a variety of social activities such as commerce, recreation, and religious devotion. The temple not only functioned as a site for spiritual contemplation and reverence but also as a hub of communal interaction, catalyzing the dynamism of urban space. Many streets gained widespread notoriety due to their bustling temple fairs, attesting to their central role in the city's vibrancy.<sup>452</sup> Thus, it can be surmised that City God Alley was amongst Wenzhou's most bustling and prosperous areas in the old times.

According to the layout from the late *Qing* Dynasty (Figure 96), City God Alley was along a river channel with several bridges crossing. There were many public places around it. The most important are the City God Temple, Kaiyuan Temple, City's College and Confucian Temple. It is worth noting that to the east of the street was the Jigu Mountain (积穀山), with no way to pass through, and the street ended by an ancestral hall.

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<sup>451</sup> See 4.1.2, which has described the function layout of the historic Wenzhou.

<sup>452</sup> Qin, 197-200.



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The 1937 city map of Wenzhou shows that the southeast part of the city wall was the first to be demolished, and Zhongshan Park was built in the corresponding area (Figure 97). The existing City God Alley was extended to the east to provide a new direction for the city's future development and a new way to escape during the war (mentioned in 3.2.1). Thus, it was renamed as Gongyuan Road (公园路, Gongyuan means park) after Zhongshan Park (中山公园, this name is in honor of the historical famous Sun Yat-sen).<sup>453</sup> The evolution of the names reflects the importance of different sites in different eras. It has been transformed into a commercial pedestrian street since the regeneration in 2020, but the name Gongyuan Road is still used as the inheritance of its specific historical information.

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<sup>453</sup> *Selected Architectural and Environmental Elements in the Historical City of Wenzhou* 温州历史城区建筑与环境要素选集, 34.

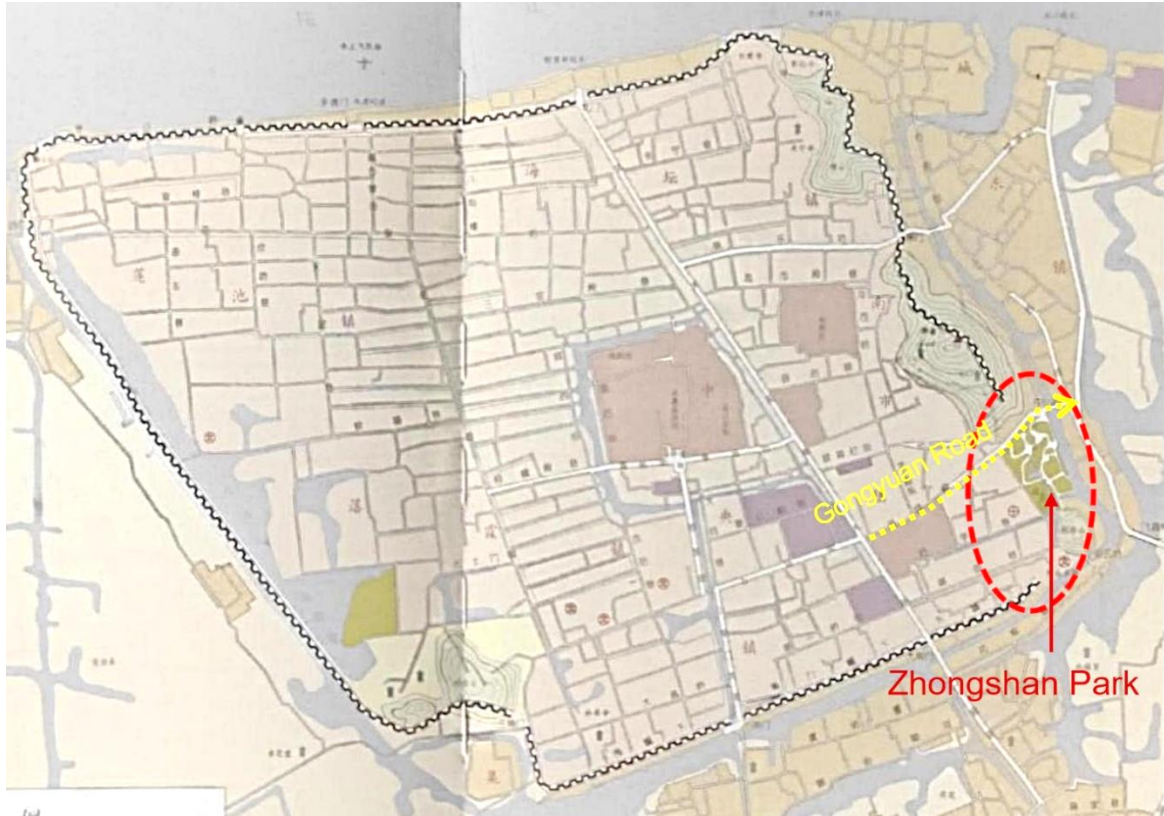


Figure 97 The Zhongshan Park and the absence of southeast city wall in the map of Wenzhou in 1937.

Author's drawing. Base map from *Lucheng Memories*.<sup>454</sup>

Regrettably, the four significant temple buildings mentioned previously have since been demolished, making way for modern architecture construction on their original sites. Once adorned with numerous temples of diverse forms and bustling with temple fairs, the street has entirely lost those historical characters. It can be found in the map of early conservation plan of historic Wenzhou (2005), this road did not belong to the scope of historic quarter (section 5.1). Later, in the quarter-level conservation plan, it was classified as a part of Wuma-mochi Historic Quarter (section 5.2.1). In the 2010s, unlike the unified image of a streetscape in Chan Street and Wuma Street, Gongyuan Road was a mixture of

<sup>454</sup> Yang and Sun.preface



different architectural styles and building volumes (Figure 98). It includes a high-rise office building, a high-rise apartment building, a few multi-story modern buildings, many time-worn traditional Chinese houses, a European-style house (identified as a historic building) and so on. Designers inevitably adopt different strategies for different situations, leading to a more diversified and fragmented historic street.



Figure 98 The vastly different architectural styles and different building volumes on Gongyuan Road in 2016 (before regeneration)

Screenshot from “Baidu Street View Map”.



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### 6.3.2 Regeneration with Diversified Approaches

The *Renovation and Upgrading Design Project of Gongyuan Road* project was designed in 2019 and completed in 2020. The government intentionally integrated the historical and cultural elements of the street with the park beside it. Thus, the scope of the site in this project encompasses Gongyuan Road and includes Zhongshan Park in the southeastern corner of historic Wenzhou (Figure 99). The logos with a red font background are ten poetic attraction names, the main historical scenes reproduced from this project. For the expression of this area's historical characters, diverging from the explicit design strategy in Chan Street and Wuma Street, it encompasses many distinct methods to reinterpret the region's heritage. Subsequently, it will systematically delve into the application of each individual approach.

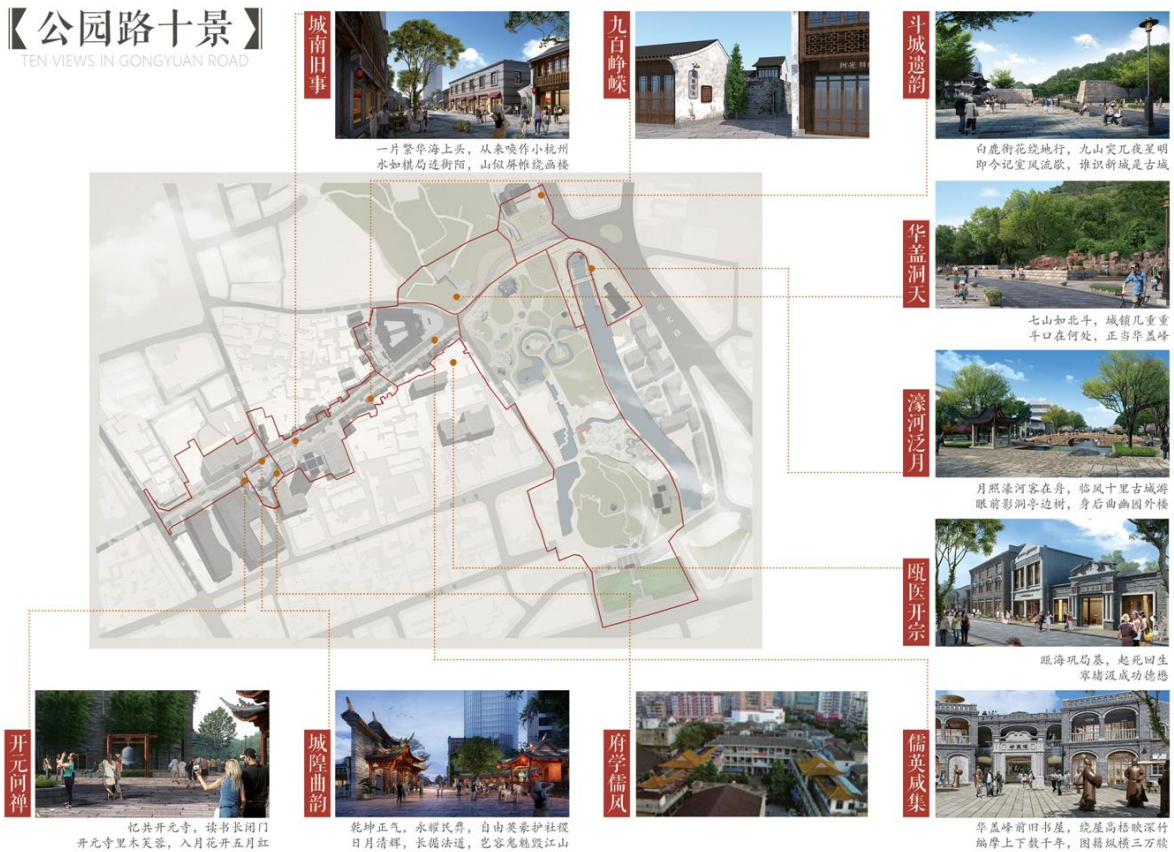


Figure 99 The locations of ‘Ten Sceneries’ in the master plan, with each having a poetic name and poetic description.

Source: “Renovation and Upgrading Design Project of Gongyuan Road”, 2019.

## Big Demolition, Big Historically Construction

The start-up project even began several years before the overall regeneration plan of Gongyuan Road, located on its west end, is a brand new and substantial commercial shopping mall named Mingcheng Square (名城广场) [To be precise, it is an entirely separate project]. This place used to be the location of two important places: the Confucian Temple (孔庙) –the worship of the Chinese educational saint, and the City’s College (府

学) - the highest-level educational institution in the region of Wenzhou.<sup>455</sup> Judging from the ancient drawing (the upper drawing in Figure 100), its layout combined multiple courtyards. Some courtyards were extensive, and the buildings were of high grade. During the Republic of China, this place was transferred into a governmental workplace for Yongjia County. In the early period of the People's Republic of China, this was transferred into an army station.<sup>456</sup> The traditional multiple courtyard fabric had been totally demolished and then turned into a single courtyard with a Chinese early modern style in the 1960s, as the Great Hall of the People (人民大会堂) and later changed to the Workers' Cultural Palace (工人文化宫) in the 1980s.<sup>457</sup>



Figure 100 The Great Hall of the People in 1960s and the Workers' Cultural Palace in the 1980s.

Source from: [https://www.sohu.com/a/343306278\\_355935](https://www.sohu.com/a/343306278_355935).

<sup>455</sup> Kuang Wang and Zhang Li, *Kangxi Wenzhou City Records* 康熙温州府志, vol. 1 (1685). vol.1, 1685.

<sup>456</sup> Yang, Baoming. *Wenzhou Old City*. Beijing: China Race Photograph Art Press. (2010).

<sup>457</sup> See: the report from '703 Net' (七零三网), Sep. 25, 2019. [https://www.sohu.com/a/343306278\\_355935](https://www.sohu.com/a/343306278_355935). (accessed on May 5, 2021)

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Since the early 2010s, the government decided to build a mega structure as a shopping mall on this site to update the commercial grade to a higher level. Thus, the Workers' Cultural Palace was completely demolished in 2013. However, during the excavation of the foundation, the construction team was surprised to discover that the foundation of the Confucian Temple was remarkably well preserved at this location (Figure 101). Subsequently, provincial-level cultural heritage experts were hired to conduct archaeological surveys and excavations on this valuable historical architectural site. Therefore, some experts strongly advocated for overturning the construction plan for the large shopping mall and proposed the reconstruction of the Confucian Temple and the City College based on the findings from the archaeological site.<sup>458</sup> Regrettably, the government prioritises economic value over historical significance, overshadowing the decision-making process.

Consequently, the construction adhered to the original design, resulting in the unfortunate obliteration of this invaluable archaeological site. The project also includes a museum inside the shopping mall dedicated to the Confucian Temple and the City's College. Furthermore, a partial reconstruction of the Confucian Temple courtyard entrance has been established outside the shopping mall. These efforts aim to serve as a reminder and a

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<sup>458</sup> According to the report from Wenzhou City Daily on March 18th, 2014.

<http://news.66wz.com/system/2014/03/18/104037602.shtml>. Accessed on May 6th, 2022.

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reminiscence of the original historical sites.

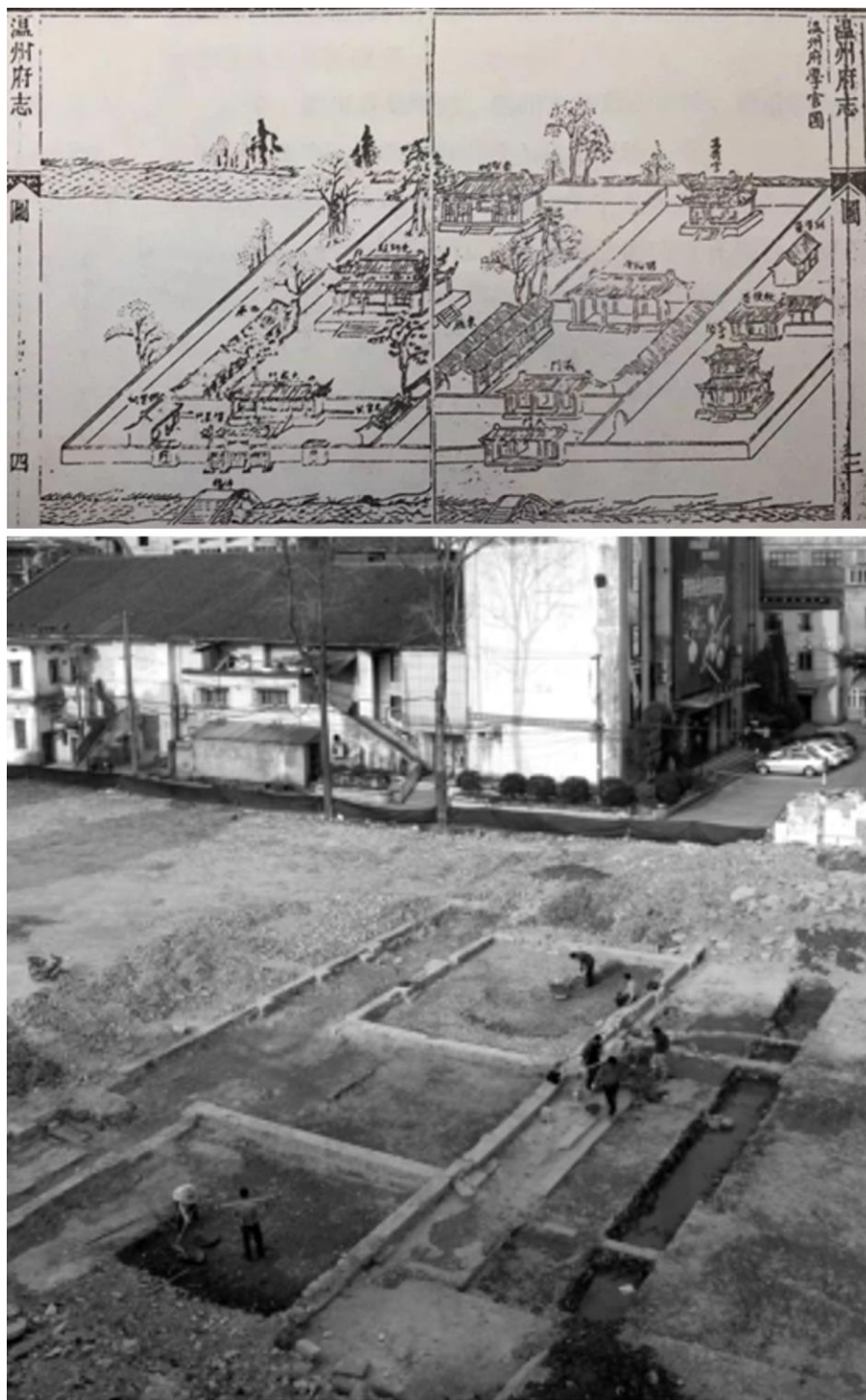


Figure 101 The old drawing and archaeological discovery of the Confucian Temple in 2013.

Top: from “Wenzhou Government Record 温州府志”vol.1, 1685.

Down: from Source: <http://news.66wz.com/system/2014/03/18/104037602.shtml>. Accessed on May 6th, 2022.

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Although the new shopping mall has a considerable volume that far exceeds the traditional houses, it still has a courtyard, and its design tries to coordinate with the traditional style (Figure 102). First, the roofs and walls all show an enlarged version of traditional houses. Second, its façade along the Gongyuan Road shows an abstract image of the Chinese-Western sequence, which can be related to the design of Chan Street. Third, traditional building materials, such as brick, wood, stone and tile, are used to give the building an authentic look, although they are mostly just for decoration. Nancy Steinhardt points out that craftsmen have utilised these four types of materials in China for 5,000 years in the construction system of traditional Chinese architecture. Their combined application in traditional Chinese architecture has been highly standardized, which is a significant reason why the external appearance of Chinese traditional architecture has remained unchanged for thousands of years.<sup>459</sup> However, today, these materials represent the beauty and richness found in the fusion of past and present. Harmoniously incorporating these traditional materials into large-scale monolithic constructions involves a meticulous and comprehensive arrangement.

Compared to the complete disregard for history during the ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ era of the 1990s and 2000s, this project has made efforts in its design to represent history and tradition. It attempts to create a historical flavour and evoke memories of the past. However, in the early stages of its construction, despite the archaeological discoveries of genuine historical remains, they were not given the proper respect they

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<sup>459</sup> Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1.



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deserved. This clearly reflects the limitation of perception regarding historical value from the government as the decision-making side.

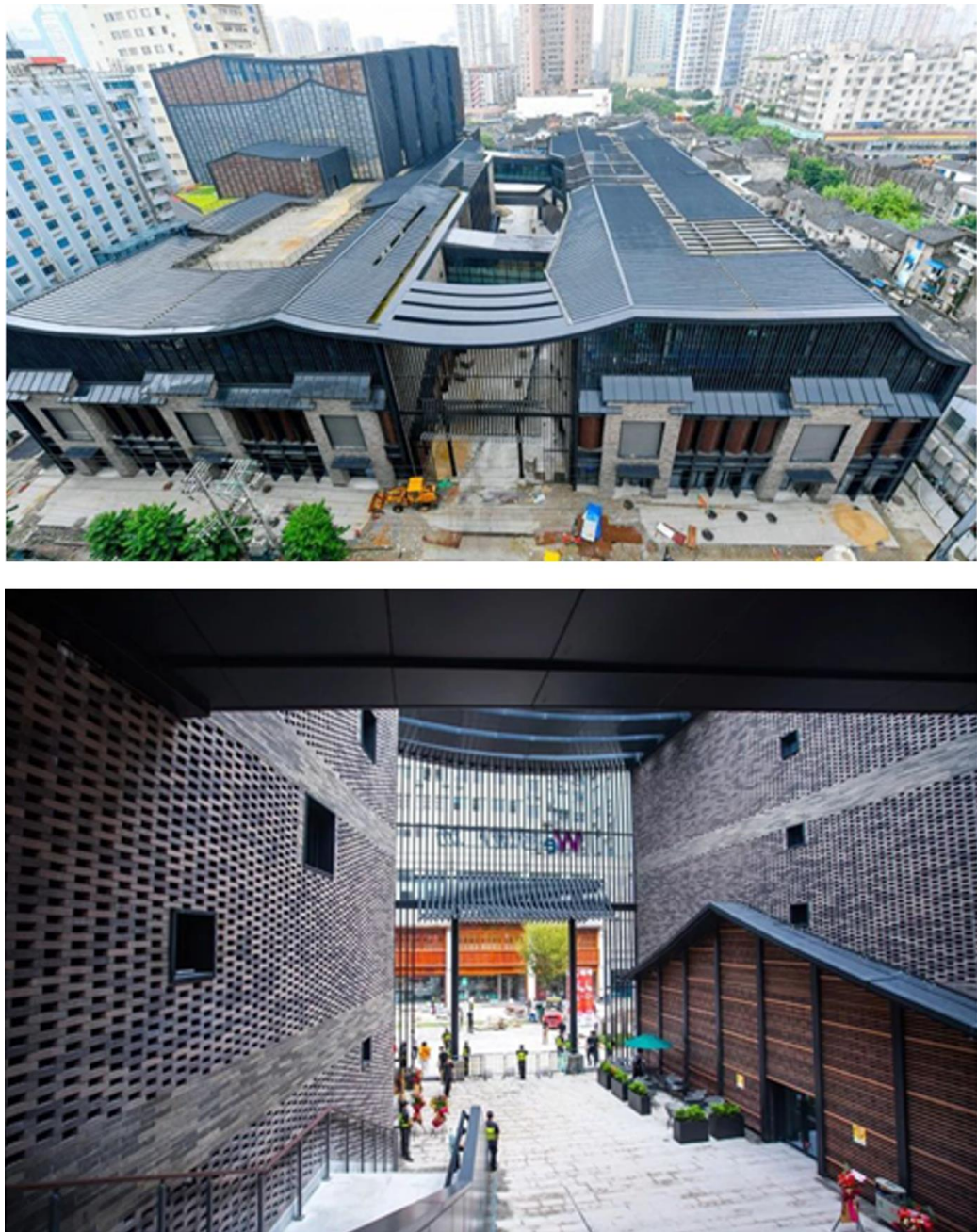


Figure 102 The new shopping mall with ‘new tradition’ style.

Author’s photos, 2021.



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## Limited Accurate Reconstruction

Jokilehto J. noted that the reproduction of earlier architectural forms or the reconstruction of lost monumental buildings according to reliable documentation can be described as ‘authentic reconstruction’ or ‘accurate reconstruction’.<sup>460</sup> Aygen, Z. claimed that the pseudo-classic architectures from such reproduction in gentrification areas could usually give a new identity to a gentrified place.<sup>461</sup> In reproducing many lost historic scenes of Gongyuan Road, the designer carefully remade them most efficiently according to the old photos without incorporating any contemporary design elements.

‘*Chenghuang quyun*’ (城隍曲韵, singing in the City God Temple) is one of the historical scenes reconstructed. Its name is related to the City God Temple (城隍庙) and the drama stage in front of it. The City God Temple was built during the *Wanli* (万历) period of the *Ming* Dynasty (1573 ~ 1620). *Lucheng Literature and History Materials* records: “There is a moon pond in front of the temple and a wide venue. Wenzhou Shangwu Peking Opera set this place in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, which cultivated a group of famous actors for Wenzhou.” Nanshi theatres and public entertainment venues were established in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>462</sup> However, all of those historical elements have been lost, with only photographic evidence recording a fragmental

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<sup>460</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 304.

<sup>461</sup> Aygen, 244.

<sup>462</sup> Online source: [https://www.sohu.com/a/337672332\\_355952](https://www.sohu.com/a/337672332_355952) (accessed on Sep. 5th, 2020).

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part of its real scene (top left in Figure 103). The photo captures the street scene outside the courtyard gate of the City God Temple. The drama stage is situated directly by the roadside, adopting a remarkably open disposition. This arrangement is attributed to the frequent public artistic performances during temple fairs, which further attests to the liveliness of this street. Additionally, it reinforces the traditional Chinese societal context wherein public life primarily unfolded on the streets instead of squares.<sup>463</sup> Therefore, Rebuilding the drama stage helps restore the historic importance of the road to public life.

However, due to the unavailability of more precise information regarding the layout of the City God Temple, the possibility of accurately reconstructing its complete historical spatial pattern is limited. Moreover, considering the scene depicted in the photo, replicating it would result in a narrow and cramped street space. Therefore, the reconstruction occurred in a nearby square, created by demolishing a portion of the surrounding area. Thus, this space was surrounded by a series of pseudo-classic architectures, including an isolated gate of the City God Temple, a drama stage, and surrounding corridors behind the stage. Furthermore, due to the blur of the old photo, only a rough outline of the buildings' form could be discerned. The intricate detail designs of these pseudo-classic structures were meticulously crafted by local traditional artisans, who were invited to contribute their expertise and traditional craftsmanship. Drawing upon their years of experience and deep knowledge of traditional architecture, they intricately carved and crafted the elements to recreate authentic historical aesthetics.

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<sup>463</sup> Ye Yuan, *Settlement Boundary 住区边界* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2020), 73.

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After the project was completed, the historic scene became the most attractive spatial node on the street. It is a public space with a distinct identity and carries the re-enactment of traditional intangible culture. During important festivals, there are often traditional drama performances on the stage. In normal times, it is also one of the most frequently taken photos by tourists. People get a sense of entertainment in its rich historical atmosphere. As the German philosopher Martin Heidegger noted, boundaries have the archetypal quality of things and spaces.<sup>464</sup> The space has regained some historical vitality thanks to reshaping its fragmented boundaries.

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<sup>464</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Speeches and Articles*, trans. Zhouxing 孙周兴 Sun (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore 三联书店, 2005), 162.



Figure 103 The ‘authentic reconstruction’ for a part of City God Temple.

Top left: [http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/zjnews/wznews/201907/t20190716\\_10596870.shtml](http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/zjnews/wznews/201907/t20190716_10596870.shtml). (Accessed on Sep.5th, 2020)

Others: author’s photo, 2020

Another case is the relocated reconstruction of the historic scene - Dongshan Academy (东山书院). According to an old drawing (Figure 104), it was gracefully perched upon the mountainside of Jigu Mountain, nestled within the confines of the city. Flowing beneath the mountain, a serene river gracefully demarcated the temple from the ordinary residential areas of the bustling city. There were three bridges connecting it and architecture

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hidden in the winding paths. In the bygone era, the entire mountain was transformed into an enchanting garden, harmoniously blending the splendours of the surrounding nature with the artfully crafted structures nestled within the city.

However, the Dongshan Academy is deliberately rebuilt in a new location in the regeneration project (Figure 105). Because the eastern mountainside has more vacant land than the real historical site (western mountainside). The current western mountainside has little open space and high-density buildings. As described in the design proposal, the principle of its relocation is to “coordinate with the historical image”.<sup>465</sup> The "historical image" mentioned here is mainly about the academy being surrounded by natural rather than artificial building environments. Thus, it has to give up the authentic historical site to provide a better view space for the scene. While the decision to relocate the academy had its merits, it faced significant criticism from historical experts. Despite that, the designer tried to restore the historic building as authentically as possible. The new architecture's layout design refers to the ancient inscription, “The middle is Xiancun Hall, the back is Jingxu Room, the west is Jinxiu Room, in front of which has a pond...”.<sup>466</sup> It tries to be as accurate as possible in terms of architectural design, but the authenticity is also very limited.

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<sup>465</sup> *Renovation and Upgrading Design Project of Gongyuan Road 公园路片区改造提升工程设计*, 2019. Zhejiang University of Technology Engineering Design Group Co. Ltd 浙江工业大学工程设计集团有限公司.

<sup>466</sup> The original Chinese sentence is “中为闲存堂，后为静虚斋，西为进修轩，轩前有池水……”. From Bodong Jin, *Wenzhou Stone Inscription Collection of the Past Dynasties 温州历代碑刻集* (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2002), 276-77.

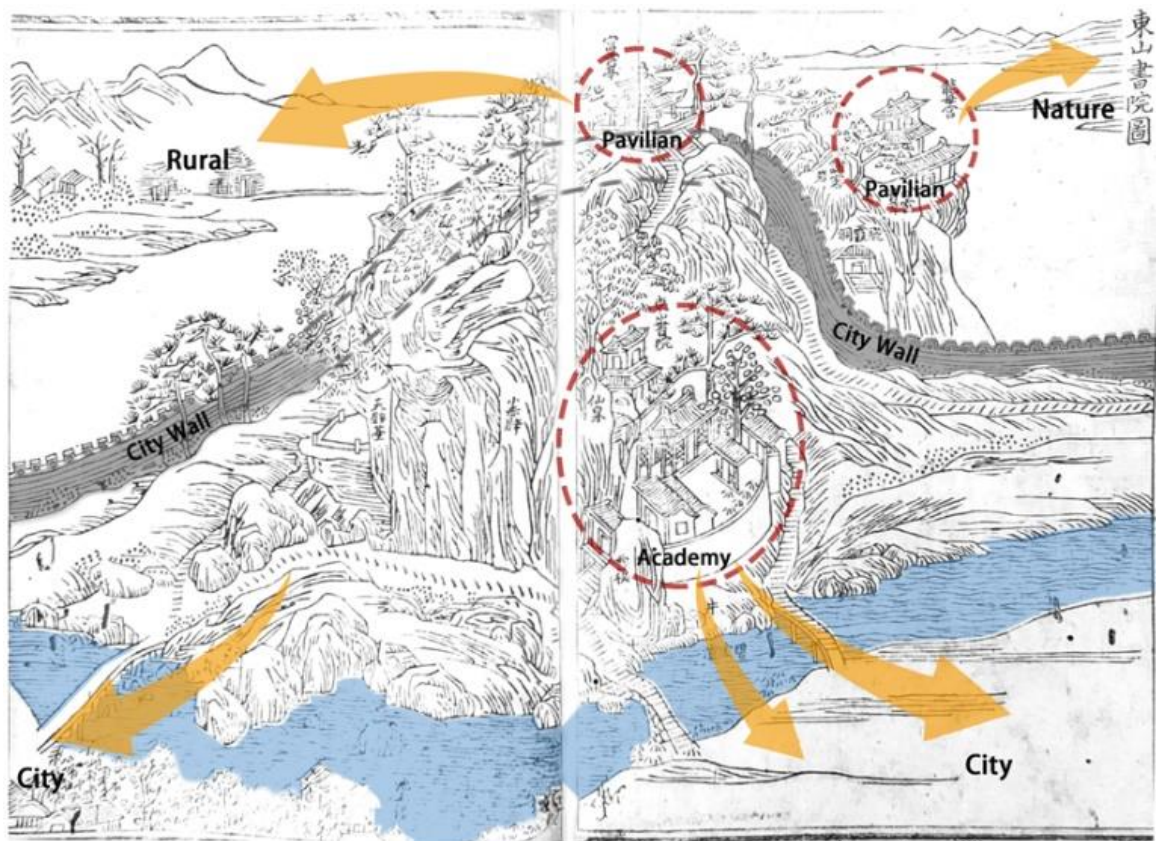


Figure 104 The old Dongshan Academy.

Drawn by the author. Base map source from “Wenzhou Fu Zhi”, 1866, vol 1.



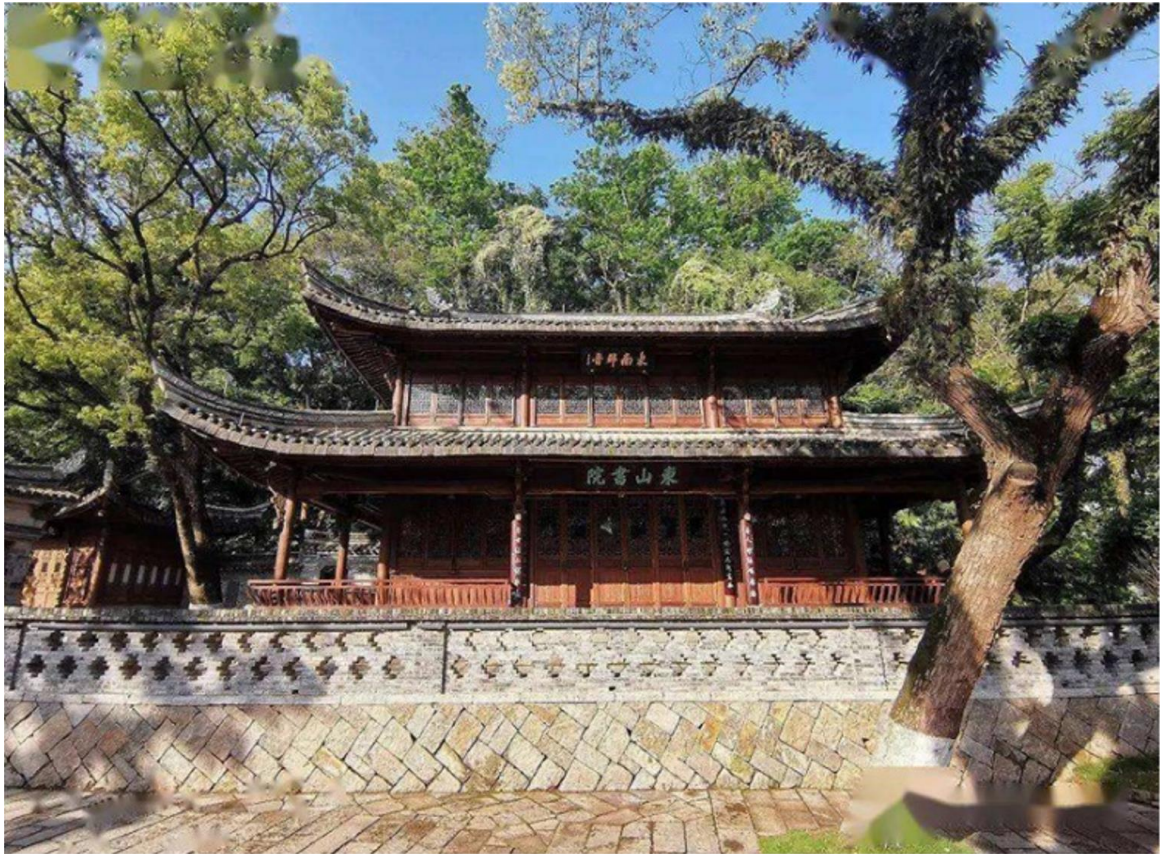


Figure 105 The newly built Dongshan Academy.

Author's photo, 2022

### **Pseudo-classic Facades on Modern Buildings**

Utilizing pseudo-classic elements to renew the aged modern buildings is a significant design approach employed in Gongyuan Road. This approach seamlessly incorporates Western, Republic of China, and traditional Chinese styles, creating a historical harmonious fusion. Particularly noteworthy is the complete adherence to the Chan Street pattern in renewing several high-rise building facades. They are adapted with a mixture of pseudo-classic styles for the podiums and restored with modern style for the upper parts. It is worth mentioning that the height and width of each unit of podiums has been carefully designed to coordinate with the other smaller-scale architectures on the street

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(Figure 106). Most of the facade units are separated by horsehead walls, a traditional architectural feature found in the southeastern region of China, which serve both a decorative and fire-resistant function. By incorporating this approach, the visual impact of the large-scale structure is softened, creating a more nuanced and visually pleasing composition. Therefore, it brings more coherent pedestrian facades and reduces the dissonance of the original colossal volume gap between high-rise and low-rise buildings on the street.

A typical Republic of China style pseudo-classic case is the new historic scene named ‘*ruying xianji*’ (儒英咸集), which means a place where the Confucian elite gathered. Before regeneration, this place was a desolate commercial centre with a time-worn modern style. According to the *Yongjia Xian Zhi* (永嘉县志 *Record of Yongjia County*), this site was *Xian Xue* (县学), an important educational place for the city.<sup>467</sup> However, there are no remaining original historic buildings, and no old photographs are available. There isn't enough historical documentation to restore it to the ancient Chinese traditional courtyard-style architecture. As a result, the volume and primary structure of the old commercial centre are preserved, while a ‘Republic of China-style’ façade is applied on its surface. The pseudo-classic design elements refer to some actual, local historic buildings from the Republic of China. It contains the gateway, brick walls, decorated windows, arches, handrails, parapets, verandas and so on characteristics of that period. Moreover, the facade's unit sequence design also respects that period's proportion and scale. The meticulous

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<sup>467</sup> Baolin Zhang, *Guangxu Yongjia Xian Zhi* 光绪永嘉县志 (1882 *Yongjia County Records*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2000), 56.



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incorporation of design elements and the careful attention to detail create an appearance that indeed presents an authentic ‘Republic of China-style’ architecture.

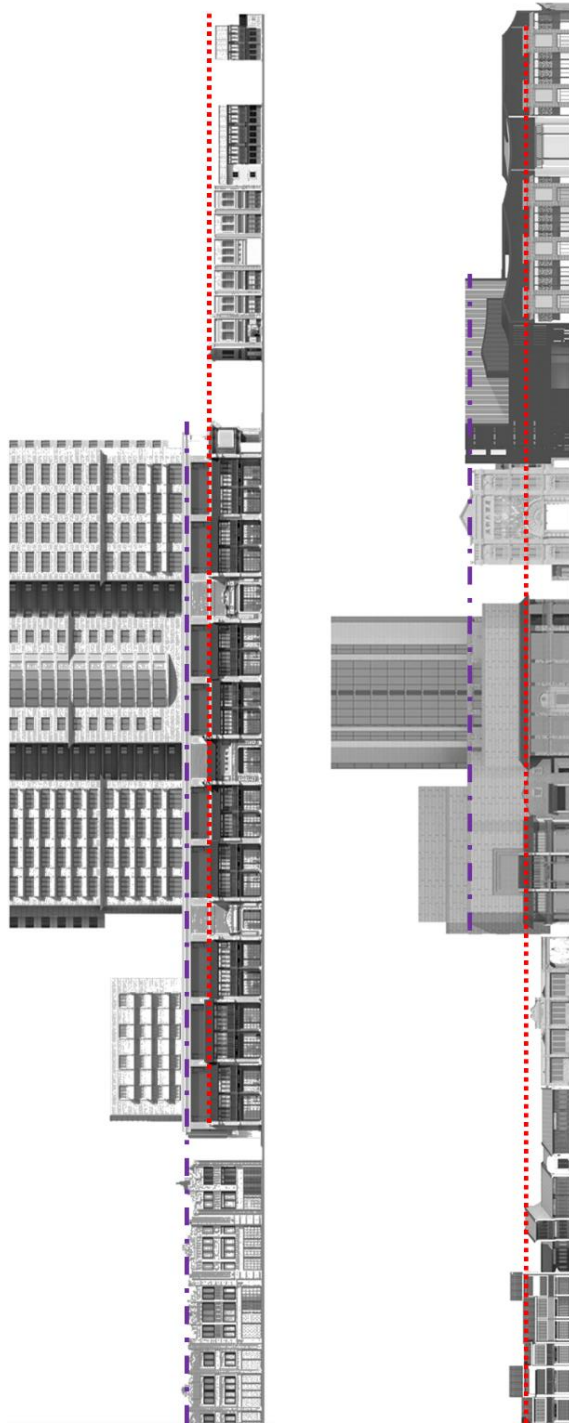


Figure 106 The height coordination of the pseudo-classic facades.

Author's drawing, after the elevation design from “*Renovation and Lifting Design Project of Gongyuan Road*”, 2019.



Figure 107 Before and after the renewal of 'Ru Ying Xian Ji'(儒英咸集).

Author's photos from 2018 to 2020.

However, such an approach encounters a similar issue as Chan Street and Wuma Street: the lack of cohesion between the interior and exterior design. While the façade may have an authentic historical feel, the interior design lacks historical characteristics. This is partly because two different design companies planned and designed the exterior and interior. For the *ruying xianji* building, during the design of the façade, its functional purpose was broadly defined as commercial. Only during the interior design phase was it specified as a food centre. Such disconnection may result in a disparity between the historical aesthetics seen from the outside and the contemporary functionality experienced within the space.

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## **Restoration of Traditional Dwellings**

For traditional dwellings along both sides of Gongyuan Road, most of them are transformed into commercial uses. Their standard features are brick walls on the two sides, the facades facing the street, and internal structures predominantly made of wood. These houses typically featured two to three floors with sloping roofs. However, three modern time transformations (as mentioned in 4.2) have significantly damaged their traditional historical features. Especially in the past few decades, during the process of independent renovation by homeowners, although the height and volume of these houses have been restricted, the transformations of their architectural style have been uncontrolled. Many of them had utterly transformed into flat-roofed concrete structures. During the early phase of the Reform and Opening-up era, the prevailing ethos revolved around pragmatic practicality and the pursuit of economic prosperity.

Consequently, the bustling streets witnessed a surge in demand for shop facades adorned with billboards strategically positioned to captivate the attention of passersby. Flat roofs, which provide more usable space, were preferred over sloping roofs without access. The populace, fixed on progress and material gain, seldom revered the ornamental value of traditional wooden structures, especially considering the poor waterproofing of the original wooden facades.

However, a transformative shift has taken hold within the collective psyche, as a resurgent admiration for the aesthetics of yore and a profound appreciation for the tapestry of history have become the guiding principles of today's zeitgeist. A prevailing passion for heritage has permeated society as the populace yearns to reconnect with the narratives and

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cultural legacies woven into the fabric of traditional wooden structures. Thus, the reconstruction of timber frames was delivered as the primary approach for dwellings in this regeneration. However, what is truly intriguing is that designers have deliberately employed various restoration approaches. For instance, some houses have undergone a meticulous transformation, which completely removed concrete structures and thoroughly reconstructing their internal wooden frameworks and brick walls on their flanking sides (Figure 108). However, not all concrete houses have undergone such thorough renovations. Some have experienced a ‘flat-to-sloping roof conversion’(平改坡),<sup>468</sup> wherein the flat roofs have been replaced with sloping ones (Figure 109). At the same time, the internal structures have been preserved with only essential restorations. The concrete facades have been purposefully preserved in some cases, particularly the well-decorated ones. This differentiated restoration approach showcases the diverse historical facets of different eras, encapsulating a profound respect for every chapter of history, proofing that the “Chinese culture is an organic system of multiple coexistence” and “flexible attitude toward reconstruction” (mentioned in 2.2.1) (Figure 110).

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<sup>468</sup> Yingqing Lin, "Shanghai's "Flat-to-Sloping Roof Conversion" Adds Luster to the City 上海"平改坡"为城市添彩," *Housing Industry*, no. 1 (2006): 4.



Figure 108 Entire reconstruction of old dwellings.

Author's photo, 2020



Figure 109 The partial restoration of dwellings.

Author's photo, 2020



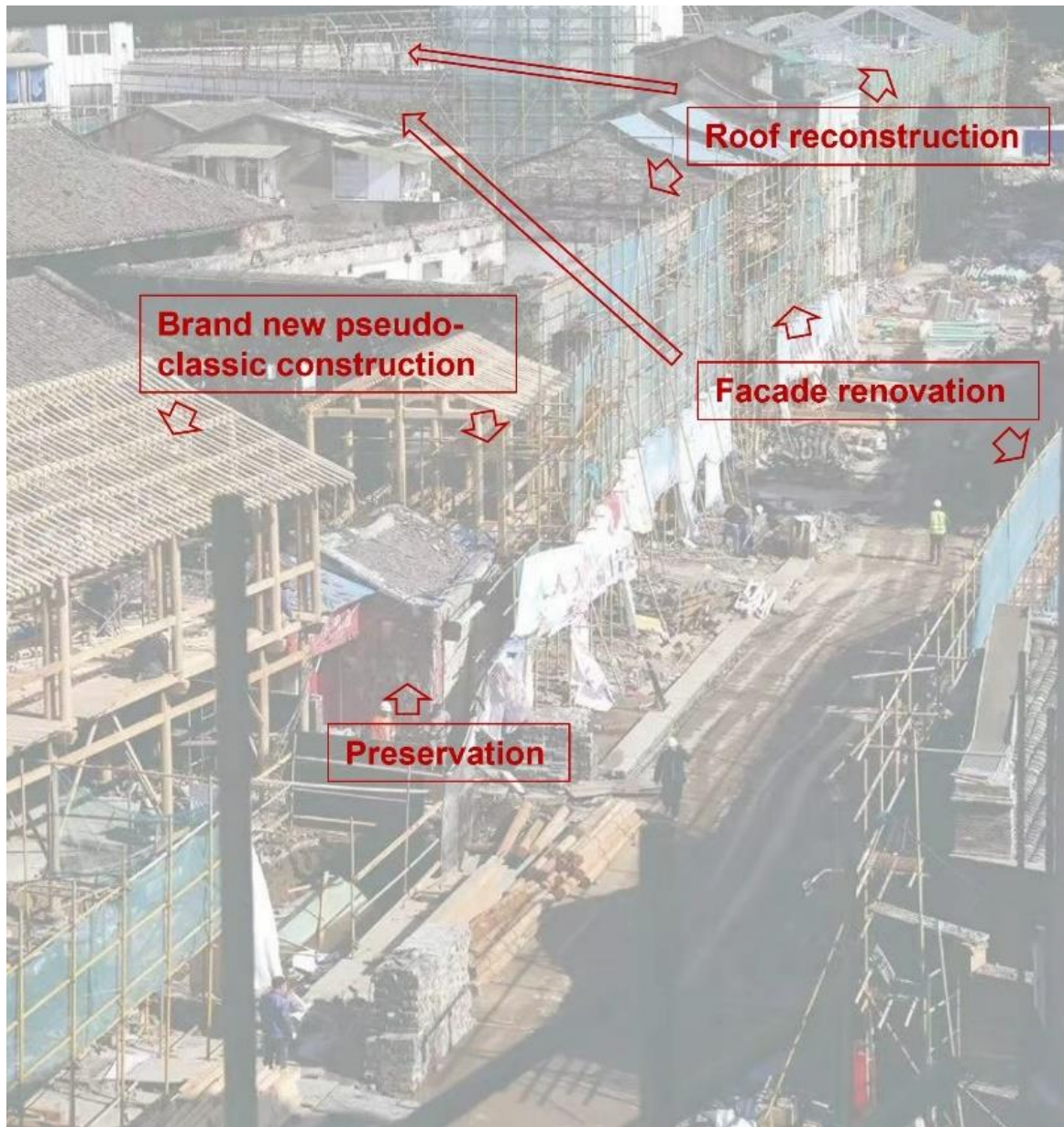


Figure 110 Various restoration approaches can be seen during the early construction period on Gongyuan Road.

Made by the author, based on Zhendong's photo, 2019

Furthermore, from the photos (Figure 111), it is evident that timber processing carried out by skilled carpenters can be witnessed directly at the construction site. In this practice, the time-honoured mortise and tenon technique for woodworking is prominently employed, showcasing a remarkable continuity and development of traditional

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craftsmanship. The tools utilized in this process predominantly adhere to tradition, including saw, plane, file, mortise chisel and so on. In this way, the construction site becomes a living testament to the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and the profound impact of non-material heritage. The preservation of traditional woodworking techniques enriches the architectural restoration process. It sustains the cultural fabric, ensuring the preservation of invaluable skills and the preservation of the intangible essence of craftsmanship.



Figure 111 The process of construction by carpenters in the Gongyuan Road project.

Author's photos, 2020

In terms of their specific functional use, since the ownership of these houses underwent a transition from private ownership to government acquisition, the authorities subsequently governed the determination of their functions. Consequently, the operators commissioned by the government played a pivotal role in setting the overall vision and

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objectives for utilising these properties. These functions include a variety of businesses with traditional cultural characteristics, such as restaurants, clothing stores, daily necessities shops, flower shops, and bookstores. This is often described in present China as *'jiuping zhuang xinjiu'* (旧瓶装新酒, new wine in old bottles), which metaphorically represents the change of internal function while retaining the historical exterior.<sup>469</sup> This phenomenon can also be found in the case study of Tunxi Old Street conducted by Jing Xie and Tim Heath, where they discovered that the reuse of traditional low-rise courtyard houses, especially in the form of culturally enriched hotels, can effectively revitalize the area.<sup>470</sup> In the Gongyuan Road project, due to the small size of the houses along the street was not suitable for conversion into hotels. Instead, the planners transformed a more enormous courtyard from an alley into a hotel, bars and other cultural spaces themed around Zhang Ailing.<sup>471</sup> As a cultural figure from the Republic of China era, Zhang Ailing had a historical connection to the nearby area of Gongyuan Road, having resided there for some time. Therefore, this courtyard within the alley was rebuilt in an architectural style reminiscent of the Republic of China period. Although the architectural style of this area may not be based on precise historical records, the pseudo-classic courtyard enhanced its cultural appeal and brought economic vitality.

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<sup>469</sup> Xiaolei Gao, "Looking at the Transformation of Contemporary Chinese Aesthetic Spirit from the Reuse of Traditional Cultural Resources" (Shandong University, 2012), 16.

<sup>470</sup> Xie and Heath, 181.

<sup>471</sup> Zhang Ailing (张爱玲), 1920-1995, famous Chinese female writer.





Figure 112 The comparison before and after the renewal of Gongyuan Road.

Author's photos, left: 2018, right: 2021.

### Special Significance of Gates

Nancy Steinhardt notes that gates can separate the sacred or imperial space behind them from the mundane world in front or outside.<sup>472</sup> As physical and psychological structures, gates can be freestanding or attached to walls. Thus, gates hold a special significance, as they mark the commencement of a new experience, symbolize a transition between different realms, or act as symbolic passages. In the context of traditional Chinese architecture, the gate evokes boundless imagination of the inside courtyard space. Li Xiaodong and Yang Jiangshan clarified that gate aids in defining and delineating areas, complicating space hierarchy, blurring boundaries, and unifying adjacent spaces into a cosmic blend.<sup>473</sup> The study conducted by Xu Zhipeng sheds light on the rich heritage and cultural values associated with the gates (locally called *Mentai* 门台) in historic Wenzhou.

<sup>472</sup> Steinhardt, 6.

<sup>473</sup> Xiaodong Li and Jiangshan Yang, *Chinese Conception of Space* (Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press, 2007), 111-14.

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During the early modern period, gates reflect the house owner's taste and social status.<sup>474</sup> Western-style gates became mainstream in Wenzhou during the Republic of China, including styles such as Baroque, Eclecticism, Art Deco, etc. But there were also a lot of Chinese elements as decorations integrated into the Western-style gates. A dramatic thing was that, although many traditional courtyard buildings have been completely demolished during the 'Big Demolition, Big Construction' process, some well-decorated gateways remain (Figure 113).



Figure 113 The demolition of old residential area in historic Wenzhou in the early 2000s, with only the gate remaining.

Source: Edited by Wenzhou Mingcheng Construction Investment Group, *Selected Architectural and Environmental Elements in the Historical City of Wenzhou* 温州历史城区建筑与环境要素选集. (2014), 80.

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<sup>474</sup> Zhipeng Xu, "Overview of Early Modern Architectural Gateways in Wenzhou Historic District 温州历史街区近现代建筑门台概述," *Wenzhou Relics* (2016): 12-20.

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Therefore, it can be said that the gate has witnessed a longer historical evolution and has special significance. In the regeneration design proposal for Gongyuan Road, the designer intends to enlarge the special significance of the gate. In addition to preserving the old gateways during demolition, deliberate efforts were made to create new gates on Gongyuan Road. These new gates encompass a variety of styles, including the traditional Chinese style, the Republic of China style, and the Baroque style (Figure 114). The pseudo-classic designs of the Republic of China and the Baroque-style gates mainly refer to some residential gates in historic Wenzhou, and the designs of Chinese-style gates mainly refer to the image of gates from some old villages in Yongjia County within the Wenzhou region. But these are not wholly copied, including some slight adjustments in form.



Figure 114 Gateways on the Gongyuan Road.

Author's photos, in 2020.

From the perspective of architectural style, whether it is based on the restoration of the original style or made by pseudo-classic design, in general, the style types on the street facades of Gongyuan Road can be classified into three categories. They are 'Western-style',

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‘traditional Chinese-style’ and ‘modern with traditionality style’. They are not composed as ‘units’ like Chan Street (section 6.1.2), but are more based on its original corresponding architectural characteristics. With the help of the analytical drawing based on its street elevation panoramas (Figure 115), it can be seen that ‘Western-style’ accounts for about 45%, ‘traditional Chinese-style’ accounts for about 45%, and ‘modern with traditionality’ accounts for about 10%. Comparing with the proportions of Western-style facades in the former two projects, it accounted for almost 100% of the Wuma Street regeneration in 2000 and 65% of the Chan Street regeneration in 2018. A declining trend can be seen about the level of how Western-style is favored by decision-makers in regeneration projects. On the other hand, the degree of diversification of street facades shows an increasing trend.

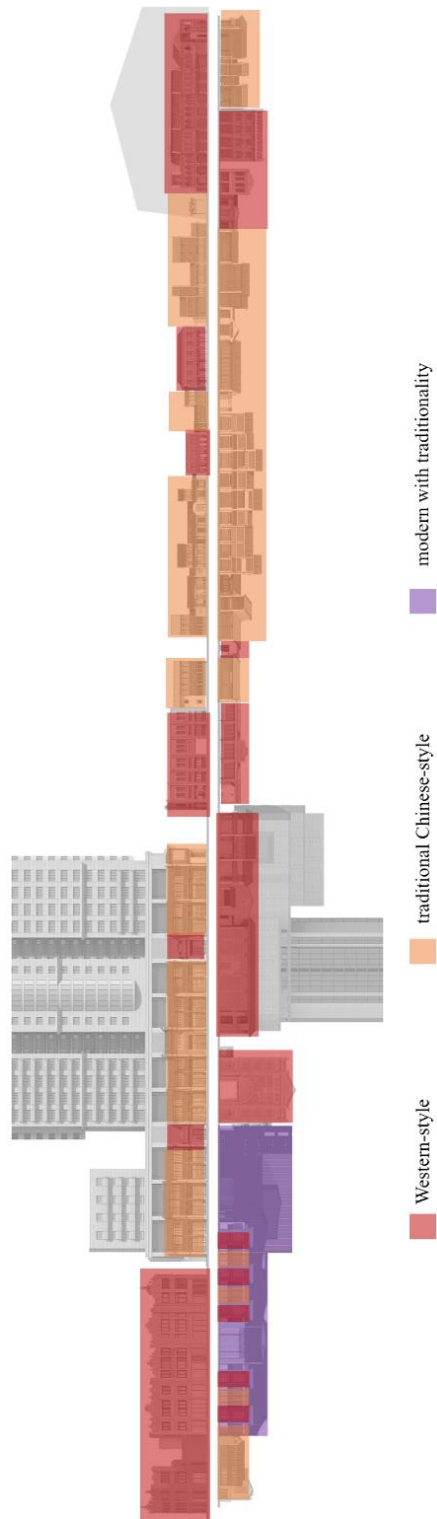


Figure 115 Proportions of three types of building styles on the elevation of Gongyuan Road.

Made by the author, in 2022. Based on the street elevation panoramas from *Renovation and Upgrading Design Project of Gongyuan Road*.

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### 6.3.3 Summary

Compared to the previous two regeneration projects emphasising the transformation of street-facing building facades, the Gongyuan Road project cares much more about the design and use of inside spaces. It places significant importance on redesigning the street interface and pays additional attention to other aspects, such as integrating a natural mountainous park and creating courtyard spaces. Even the various kinds of gates in the project are indirectly related to the inner courtyard spaces. According to the formation mechanism of traditional Chinese cities, the importance of street is not as significant as that of ‘centre’ and ‘courtyard’. As Nancy Steinhardt asserts, “space builds around four-sided enclosures... Chinese buildings are not considered as independent structures, every building complex has one focal building”.<sup>475</sup> Therefore, as a type of building complex, courtyards contain much more wealth of traditional architectural culture within their interior spaces.

With an expanded understanding of the significance of the abovementioned traditional cultural elements, Gongyuan Road comprehensively embraces diversified historical details, local identity, emotional memory, and subjective experiences within the new historical realm. Its design proposal did not adopt a particular dominant method or strategy but an attempt to integrate many existing models. The chief architect of this project Zheng Yuanhong points out, the Gongyuan Road project breaks through the dilemma of

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<sup>475</sup> Steinhardt, 41.

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homogenization in historical streetscape design, by referring the theory of 'spatial narrative' and adopting strategies of 'spatial translation' and 'deconstructive streetscape narrative', which helps the narrative subject presents the characteristics of partial, fragmented, multi-semantic and synchronic.<sup>476,477</sup> The effects of the approaches show diversity and richness depending on different situations (Table 5). For the vanished historical scenes, the design approach is usually based on literal evidence or photos to recreate some fragmental historical information. For the traditional dwellings, conservative repair and radical reconstruction methods are delivered to preserve the historical remains to a certain extent. For the big shopping mall, although it is a pity that it does erase the authentic historical relics, it responds to history with the appearance of a 'New Tradition'.<sup>478</sup> For the time-worn modern buildings, their elevations were transformed into Western style. The high-rise buildings' podiums were attached with Chinese and Western style pseudo-classic appearances to enhance the uniformity of the historical flavour of the street.

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<sup>476</sup> Yuanhong Zheng, Chong Gao, and Xiaoang Cai, "Spatial Translation of Wenzhou Park Road District's Historical Context," *Zhejiang Architecture* 40, no. 3 (2023): 18-22.

<sup>477</sup> Yuanhong Zheng, Chong Gao, and Xiaolong Zhao, "Spatial Design of Historical and Cultural Blocks Based on Landscape Narrative Theory: Taking Wenzhou "Park Road" Historical and Cultural Block Reconstruction as an Example," *Architecture and Culture* 4 (2023): 162-65.

<sup>478</sup> The idea of "New Tradition" has been discussed in section 2.1.2.

Object (before)	Object (after)	Design Approach	Historical Effects
Vanished scenes	Gateways, city wall, Dongshan Academy, City God Temple, Zhongshan Bridge, Ouhai Hospital and so on	Fragmented accurate rebuild based on evidence.	To reappear historical informations and help citizens to retrieve memories.
Dwellings as cultural protection units	Exhibition halls	Repair with minimal intervention.	To protect and pass on historical remains.
'Workers' Cultural Palace'	Big shopping mall	Demolish and rebuilt with a "new tradition" modern approach.	Responds to history in an abstract and innovative way and reflects the Contemporaneity.
Time-worn dwellings	New Chinese-style houses	Renew their structures and materials, through downframe overhaul or partial roof reconstruction.	To preserves the historical remains in a certain extent.
Time-worn modern buildings	Chinese-style pseudo-classic houses	Newly build them in Chinese-style pseudo-classic.	To enhance the historic flavor.
	Western-style (Republic of China style) pseudo-classic buildings	Renew the elevations in Western-style pseudo-classic.	To enhance the historic flavor: To some extent, it highlights the historical information of the place.
Podiums of high-rise buildings	Chinese-style + Western-style pseudo-classic podiums	Renew the elevations in Chinese-style/Western-style pseudo-classic.	To enhance the historic flavor.

Table 5 The objects, design approaches and historical effects from the Gongyuan Road regeneration.

Made by the author, 2022



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Gordon Cullen appreciates the characteristics of the architectural styles of different periods in the historical city. He describes good urban design as: “The consensus of distinguishing within the discernible tolerance of behaviour.”<sup>479</sup> Jukka Jokilehto claims to give respect to ‘historical integrity’, which means that different periods of history should all be respected.<sup>480</sup> Miles Glendinning notes, “Heritage is not something that is ‘just there’ and has ‘always been there’. It has a story, a dramatic history.”<sup>481</sup> If one-style-oriented restoration represents the thinking of ‘just there’, then the ‘always been there’ results should be divided and mixed. The conservation of urban heritage must be a “future-oriented movement drawing on the past”.<sup>482</sup> Wang Zhenzhen believes that the simultaneous construction and coordinated development of ‘history’ and ‘modern’ are necessary and complementary to the monotonous modern urban spatial and social environment.<sup>483</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath recognize that new developments within the historic quarters must contextually align themselves with new architectural styles. But new developments must respect the ‘contextual harmony’, including ‘contextual unification’, ‘contextual juxtaposition’ and ‘traditional transformation’.<sup>484</sup> Therefore, a historic street needs to have historical buildings loyal to the tradition and a creative ‘neo-tradition’ style to be faithful,

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<sup>479</sup> Gordon Cullen, *Concise Townscape* (London: Routledge, 2012), 79.

<sup>480</sup> Jukka Jokilehto, "The Context of the Venice Charter (1964)," *Conservation and management of archaeological sites* 2, no. 4 (1998).

<sup>481</sup> Glendinning, 1.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>483</sup> Zhenzhen Wang, *The Modernity of Historic Urban Quarters 历史街区的现代性* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2015), 219-27.

<sup>484</sup> Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 187-97.

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lively and contextually harmonious.

We can see the conceptual shift from single strategy to multi-strategy coexistence from the Gongyuan Road case lines with the postmodern heritage conservation thought advocated by David Lowenthal. He argues that conservation is not an objective matter, as different stakeholders have diverse evaluations of value, multiple answers and multiple evaluation criteria should be accepted.<sup>485</sup> Thus, the objectivity of history is not the core to be considered, while people pay more attention to the subjective interpretation of history.<sup>486</sup>

Meanwhile, the fragmentary historical scenes in Gongyuan Road reflect the balance between diversity and integrity. That is, the pursuit of integrity does not have to stick to morphological completeness. The Chinese architectural Pritzker Prize winner Wang Shu advocates providing a postmodern theoretical cognitive model for traditional Chinese cities: "A textured city is a contradictory community of different trivial units".<sup>487</sup> However, it also has to prevent the one-sided pursuit of diversity, just as Oc, Heath and Tiesdell articulate: "Too much spatial diversity destroys spatial coherence, continuity and enclosure...the balance between the parts and the whole is critical to the historic urban quarter's sense-of-place."<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Chen, "The Imagined History and Invented Heritage: Introduction of David Lowenthal's "Heritage Trilogy" 历史的想象与遗产的建构评大卫·罗温索的遗产保护三部曲," 136-37.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Shu Wang, "Fictional City 虚构城市" (Tongji University, 2000), 140. (The original Chinese text is "一座织体城市就是一个差异性的琐碎单位的矛盾共同体".)

<sup>488</sup> Oc, Heath, and Tiesdell, 72.

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## 6.4 Subsequent Use and Influence

The dynamic organic renewal of the historic street is also reflected in the subsequent continuous management. Once, the historic streets in Wenzhou lacked dynamic and interactive experiences of historical elements for the visitors.<sup>489,490</sup> As tourism-oriented projects, the historical and cultural information restored and displayed along the axis composed by the three streets has significantly improved the awareness of history. These areas have become the most important tour route to arouse visitors' curiosity to explore historic Wenzhou. Local government, various cultural institutions, and enterprises are all keen to choose them as venues for public events, greatly enriching the experience of citizens and tourists. The bustling atmosphere of traditional temple fairs that used to take place in these streets has been restored to some extent [but no longer temple-based]. Therefore, they attract huge passenger flow to historic Wenzhou and stimulate huge economic consumption. According to the statistics in recent years, about 90 public events are held each year from 2020 to 2023. Take the year 2022 for instance, the annual passenger flow of these three streets after regeneration reaches 25.35 million, and visitors spent about

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<sup>489</sup> Xiaowei Qian and Wanjun Wang, "Research on Spatial Optimization Strategy of Rbd in Historical Areas Based on Place Theory——Taking the Wuma Commercial and Recreational Area in Wenzhou as an Example 基于场所理论的历史地段 Rbd 空间优化策略研究——以温州五马商业游憩区为例," *Chinese Business Theory 中国商论*, no. 6X (2014): 205-07.

<sup>490</sup> Hao Jiang, "Discussion on the Renewal and Protection of Urban Historic Districts 城市历史街区更新与保护的探讨" (China Academy of Art 2012).

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3.8 billion yuan for commercial activities.<sup>491</sup> People are more willing to go there because there are more reasons. These activities have allowed the community to reconnect with their history and heritage, allowing them to reflect on the past and develop a deeper appreciation for it, which has fostered a sense of nostalgia.<sup>492</sup> Thus, it is confirmed that the street regenerations have significantly improved the historical experience for the public.

In addition, it cannot be ignored that the advocated ‘Street Vending Economy’ (地摊经济) by China’s ex-premier Li Keqiang in 2020 also highly contribute to the prosperity of these newly regenerated streets. Li pointed out that the “Street Vending Economy is an important source of jobs... it is China's vitality source.”<sup>493</sup> After the regeneration, Chan Street and Gongyuan Road underwent a complete transformation into pedestrian streets, liberating the space once occupied by cars. A notable utilization of this liberated space is for temporary street vending. On Gongyuan Road, the local government has curated a selection of culturally distinctive shops, providing uniform tents and imposing restrictions on the number of daily street vending stalls.<sup>494</sup> Consequently, these street vendors differ from the disorganized, low-end, and unkempt barbecue stalls in people's previous impressions; most of them appear clean and tidy. They serve as platforms where petty dealers can showcase and sell a wide range of traditional snacks and handicrafts (Figure

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<sup>491</sup> The data is from Construction Service Center of Historical and Cultural District, Lucheng District, Wenzhou City (温州市鹿城区历史文化街区建设服务中心), according to "Wuma Smart Business Circle" (五马智慧商圈) big database.

<sup>492</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee F (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>493</sup> See: [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-06/03/content\\_5516900.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-06/03/content_5516900.htm). (accessed on Sep. 12, 2023)

<sup>494</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee F (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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116). While as Chan Street is referred to as the ‘urban living room’ (mentioned in section 6.1.2), it presents a more organized approach to street vending. The strong axial layout of Chan Street influences the arrangement of street vending stalls on the ground. Unlike the daily presence of street vending on Gongyuan Road, the ground of Chan Street resembles a linear and spacious square on regular days. The street vendings here often herald big festival events such as snack festivals, coffee festivals, cultural and tourism festivals, among others. Therefore, the street vending on Chan Street often has a clear theme, and the corresponding temporary structures change with the varying event themes (Figure 117). In summary, the two street vending models of Chan Street and Gongyuan Road complement each other. Their temporality, semi-self-organization, and dynamism infuse the streets with freshness without excessive disorder.



Figure 116 Street Vending on Gongyuan Road.

Author's photos, in 2023.





Figure 117 Street Vending on Chan Street.

Top: on regular days; bottom: on festivals.

Author's photos, in 2022.

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Another important usage of these liberated spaces is for cultural venues hosting folk activities that allow traditional culture to be re-enacted during festivals, such as traditional Dragon Boat Lanterns on Wuma Street, stage performances on Gongyuan Road and Chan Street (Figure 118). In addition, some traditional labour practices will be displayed on the street in the form of sculpture, as well as in the form of live demonstrations and encourage people to participate. During some special festivals, some local traditional theatrical performances like Ou Opera (瓯剧) will be performed in front of the newly rebuilt museum in the ‘Republic of China style’ on Chan Street, or the pseudo-classic traditional stage on Gongyuan Road. Usually, tourists will wear traditional costumes in the streets in front of various scenic spots for taking photos. David Lowenthal noted:

Re-enactment is not an interpretation of the authentic past, but full of traces of contemporary artistic processing. Even so, interactive and immersive role-playing in historic sites is a monument to history”;<sup>495</sup> “Only knowledge of the past is eschewed, while empathetic feeling is exalted.”<sup>496</sup>

As these re-enacting strategies have greatly strengthened and enriched the historical significance to the public, they are indispensable to revitalization of historic Wenzhou.

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<sup>495</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 464-96.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

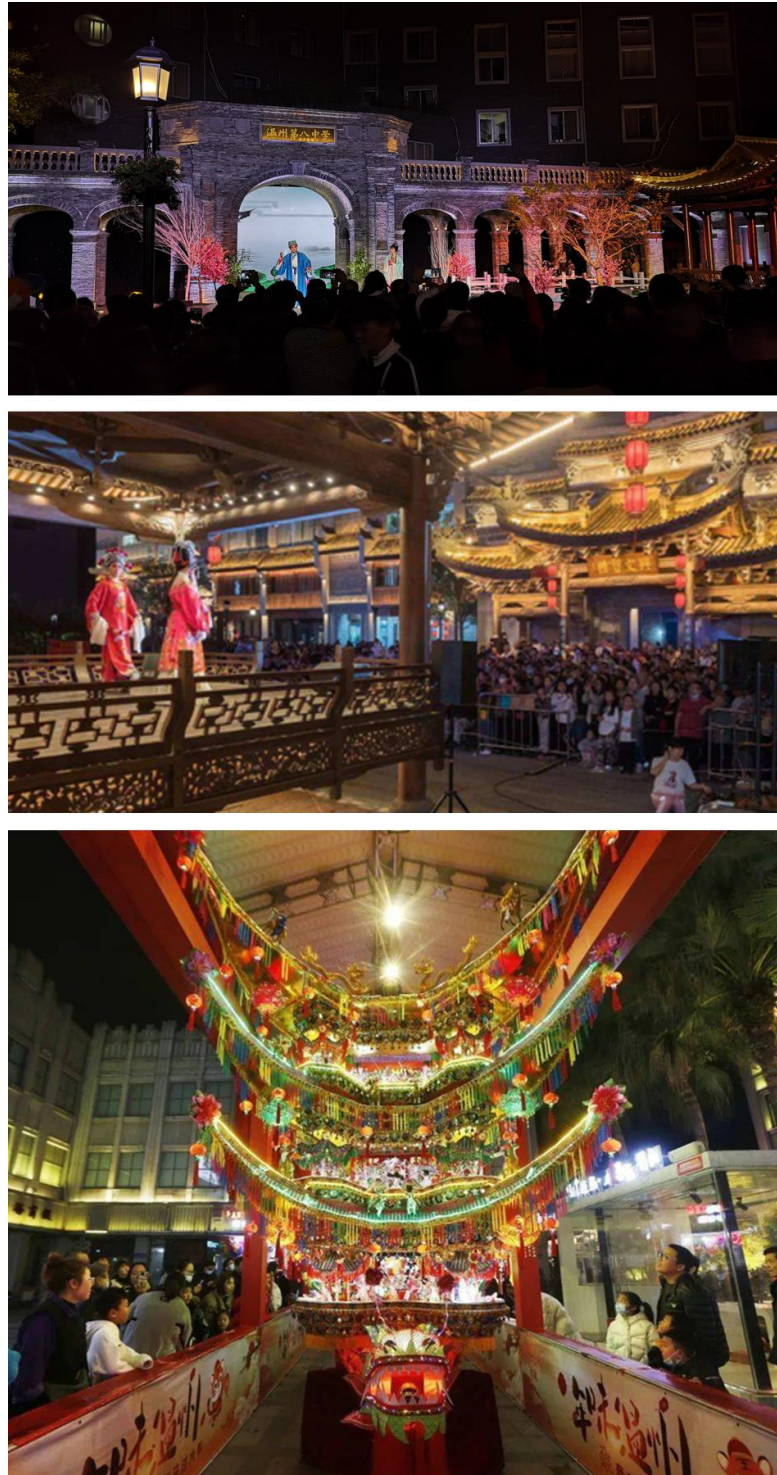


Figure 118 The traditional activities on Chan Street (top), Gongyuan Road (middle) and Wuma Street (bottom).  
Author's photos in 2022



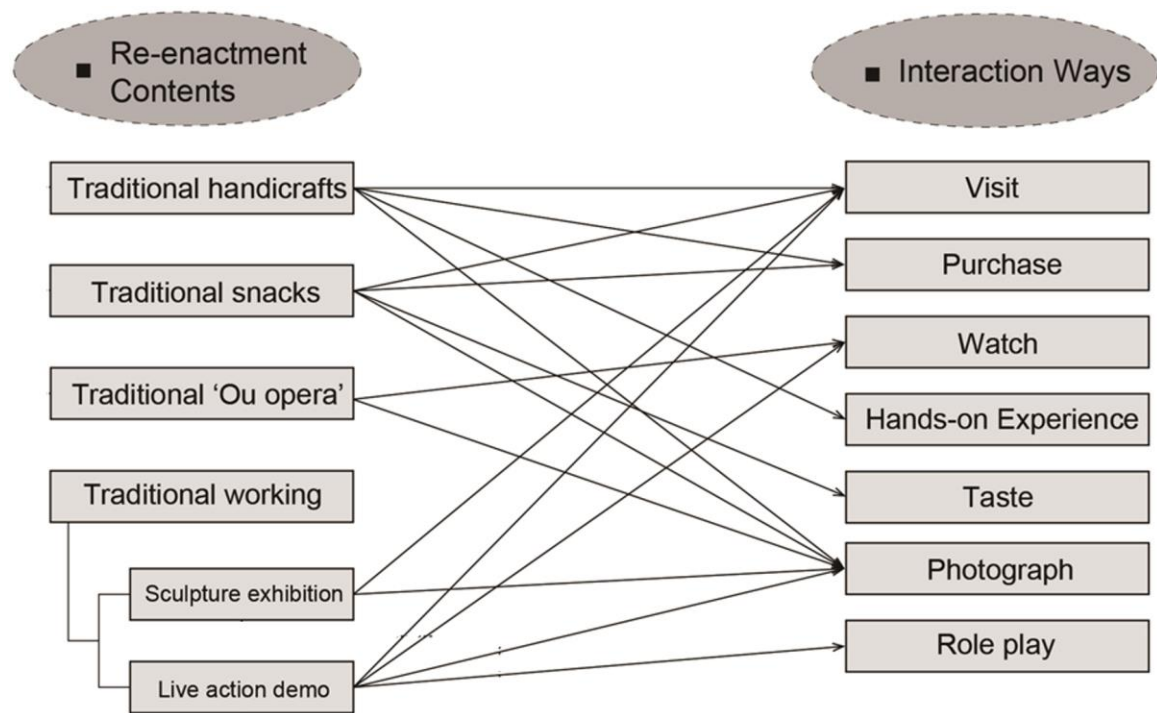


Figure 119 The ‘Re-enactment’ and public interacted activities on regenerated streets.

Author’s drawing, 2022

These three streets have played a pivotal role in spearheading the overall revitalization of historic Wenzhou. Consequently, in 2021, the Municipal Housing and Urban-rural Construction Bureau of Wenzhou (温州市住房与城乡建设局) issued the “*Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Conservation of Famous Historic and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages in Wenzhou*” (《温州市历史文化名城名镇名村保护 “十四五” 规划》), with highly affirmed the regenerations of the three streets, articulating that:

“Relying on the renewals of ‘Chan Street- Wuma Street- Gongyuan Road’ to connect the landscape of the ‘Big Dipper City’, build a ‘historical and cultural

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display ring’ of the historical city, to form the cultural experience of the historical city and the sightseeing route for the visitors.”<sup>497</sup>

After receiving positive public feedback, the pseudo-classic strategies used in these three streets, especially the one used for podium from Chan Street, has been regarded as an exemplary design for the renewal of historic street in historic Wenzhou.<sup>498</sup> Subsequently, the ‘transplant and collage’ strategy of incorporating historical elements into high-rise buildings has been widely adopted in other renewal projects throughout historic Wenzhou. However, the situation for other streets is not two rows of neat high-rise buildings like Chan Street but a mixed state of different building types, construction ages, and scales. So, it becomes a specific reference source for designers dealing with the ‘high-rise part’ in many streets and areas from historic Wenzhou, such as Gong’an Road (公安路), Gongyuan Road (公园路), Shamao River (纱帽河), Mochifang(墨池坊) and Jiefang Street (解放街). Such an approach has even influenced the planning and designation of subsequent quarter-level developments, as it has expanded the recognition of historical heritage. For example, in the ongoing development of the new phase of the conservation plan for Qingnianfang Historic Quarter, the already fully modernized Xinhe Street will be included within the historic quarter.<sup>499</sup> In the regeneration of the Mochifang in 2023, modern apartment buildings on

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<sup>497</sup> Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute, "Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Conservation of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages in Wenzhou 温州市历史文化名城名镇名村保护 "十四五" 规划," (2021), 22-23. ([http://zjj.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2021/6/29/art\\_1229206191\\_3971587.html](http://zjj.wenzhou.gov.cn/art/2021/6/29/art_1229206191_3971587.html)) (accessed on Nov. 16, 2022)

<sup>498</sup>See:

[https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MzI5Mzg5NDMxNQ==&mid=2247527619&idx=5&sn=a3d4bbab34426c487d4abaeab5ab09e3&chksm=ec690d07db1e841197db2550e3290faf92e6b4f2fb96166591ff41ef4db7a18a55b14b0c0c92&scene=27](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzI5Mzg5NDMxNQ==&mid=2247527619&idx=5&sn=a3d4bbab34426c487d4abaeab5ab09e3&chksm=ec690d07db1e841197db2550e3290faf92e6b4f2fb96166591ff41ef4db7a18a55b14b0c0c92&scene=27). Accessed on Nov. 16th, 2022.

<sup>499</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee G (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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both sides of Gaoying Lane (高盈里) and Xianhou Lane (县后巷) (Figure 120) were also incorporated into the overall scope of the historic quarter. In the renewal of Jiefang Street, a modern residential building was built in the 1990s, with its facade redesigned in 2021 (Figure 121). In this case, it can be seen from the photos of the construction process that the newly added structure is wholly separated from the original building to ensure the firmness of the new and the integrity of the old. In addition, two different materials are used for the new structure: antique grey stone and blue steel. Viewed from the outside, the blue steel part is not even fitted with windows, revealing some details of the original building facade. This part does not use old materials and techniques to achieve an ‘authentic pseudo-classic’ state. Still, it expresses the fundamental relationship between the facades of the later added historical ones, and the original modern ones and the juxtaposes of two different levels of pseudo-classic states. It proves, once again, that history can be expressed in a variety of pseudo-classic approaches.



Figure 120 The under constructing façade renewals for old multi-story apartments in Xianhou Lane.

Author's Photos, in 2023.



Figure 121 The attached façade on buildings along Jiefang Street.

Made by the author, 2021.

Both Chan Street and Gongyuan Road are cases of transformation from an ‘unhistoric street’ into a ‘historic street’. Although Chan Street had been popular in the first two years of its regeneration, it should be pointed out that the vitality of Chan Street is obviously not as sustainable as Gongyuan Road. Gongyuan Road has been a huge attraction for tourists since its completion, meanwhile visitors to Chan Street have declined in recent years. According to the ‘Wuma Smart Business Circle’ (五马智慧商圈) Big Database, from 2021 to 2023, it showed that the number of visitors to Chan Street each year was only

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about half that of Gongyuan Road. One of the main reasons of Chan Street's popularity waned is because of its spatial monotonicity: Chan Street's renewal efforts are primarily focused on the historical beautification of building facades, lacking the exploration of diverse spaces. As mentioned above (in this section), the street vendings on Chan Street change in line with the themes of festivals, but on regular days, it lacks of vitality. In contrast, Gongyuan Road not only has street vendings to stimulate its daily vitality, but its regeneration construction in 2020 did not cover everything, leaving some spaces remain to be dealt with. Over the subsequent years, these fragmented spaces have been gradually renovated by shop owners, providing a continuous sense of freshness for visitors. As shown in the figure, this is a concave courtyard space beside the main street. It remained in a pending state until 2022, when the shop owner completed the facade renewal (Figure 123). The map indicates that there are at least eight such fragmented spaces on both sides of Gongyuan Road that were renewed gradually after 2020 (red dots in Figure 122). In addition, by 2024, in the plan of local government department, a block with traditional dwellings beside Gongyuan Road (pink area in Figure 122) will be regenerated as the next step.<sup>500</sup> Thus, Gongyuan Road combines government-organized with shop owner-initiated models, reflecting an obviously stronger dynamism and continuity - making it more diverse than Chan Street. This diversity satisfies the preferences of different people and brings rich behavior patterns to the street, which plays a crucial role in the continuation of its vitality. However, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the renewal of other streets primarily follows the approach taken by Chan Street in dealing with modern architecture, lacking the

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<sup>500</sup> According to author's interview to Interviewee E (see appendix 4), in 2024.



consideration for the sustained vitality and dynamism observed in Gongyuan Road. Consequently, the future sustainability for these streets is a matter of concern.

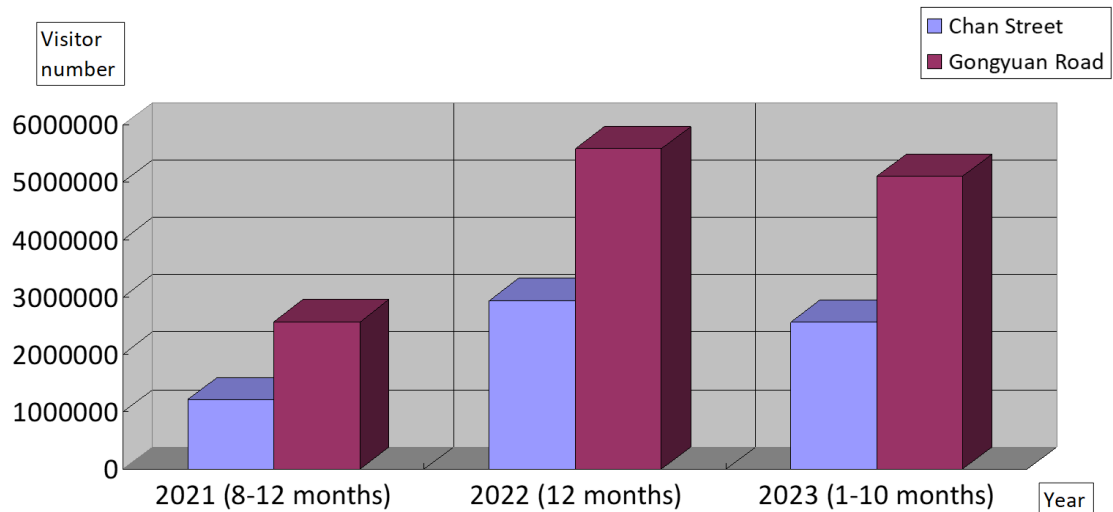


Table 6 The number of visitors to Chan Street and Gongyuan Road.

According to the "Wuma Smart Business Circle" big database.



Figure 122 The subsequent renewals of Gongyuan Road after 2020.

Made by the author.



Figure 123 Before and after the renewal of a courtyard space beside Gongyuan Road.

Author's photos, in 2020 and 2022.

## 6.5 Summary

The regeneration of each street has re-introduced distinct public space orders and historical appearances to historic Wenzhou. Firstly, the honestly ‘transplant and collage’ design strategy enables Chan Street to function as a linear historical ‘urban living room’. It not only having arcades to enrich spatial hierarchy, but also having a broad central lane as



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a large temporary vendor space. Secondly, through two times of regenerations, Wuma Street provides a grandeur historical looking in the center of the three. At the same time, it offers contrast on two very different approaches to historic buildings and stakeholders [especially the residents]. Thirdly, Gongyuan Road is a synthetical project that combines many different ways to reinterpret the lost histories and different ways in dealing with local residents and shopkeepers. From a spatial perspective, its ‘organic’ regeneration involves some courtyard spaces as complements to its linear street, creating much more opportunities for social interaction and engagement. In subsequent use, all these regenerated spaces provide venues for the ‘re-enactment’ of traditional culture and the ‘street vending economy’ model, significantly enhancing the prosperity of the streets. Distinctly, this reconstruction of historical axis provides diversity ways of history reinterpretation, contributes to the integrity of historical structure and achieves good interactivity between visitors and spaces.

In addition, the author made a timeline (Figure 124) for the entire development process of historic Wenzhou, in order to more clearly summarize the important time nodes and corresponding transformations, documents conservation plans and regeneration projects that analyzed in Chapter 4, 5 & 6. From the ‘Provincial Historic and Cultural Famous City’ to the ‘National Historic and Cultural Famous City’, from the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan* to the *Wenzhou Historic and Cultural City Conservation Plan (Revision)*, from the historic quarter conservation plans to the second round of historic quarter conservation plans, and from the in progress street regenerations, the repeated names reflect that the conservation and regeneration of historic Wenzhou is a

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circular development process. In the future, more regeneration projects and conservation plans will be carried out on the basis of the previous. However, the reinterpretation of history, the understanding of ‘organic renewal’, and the attitude towards stakeholders will undoubtedly continue to be improved.

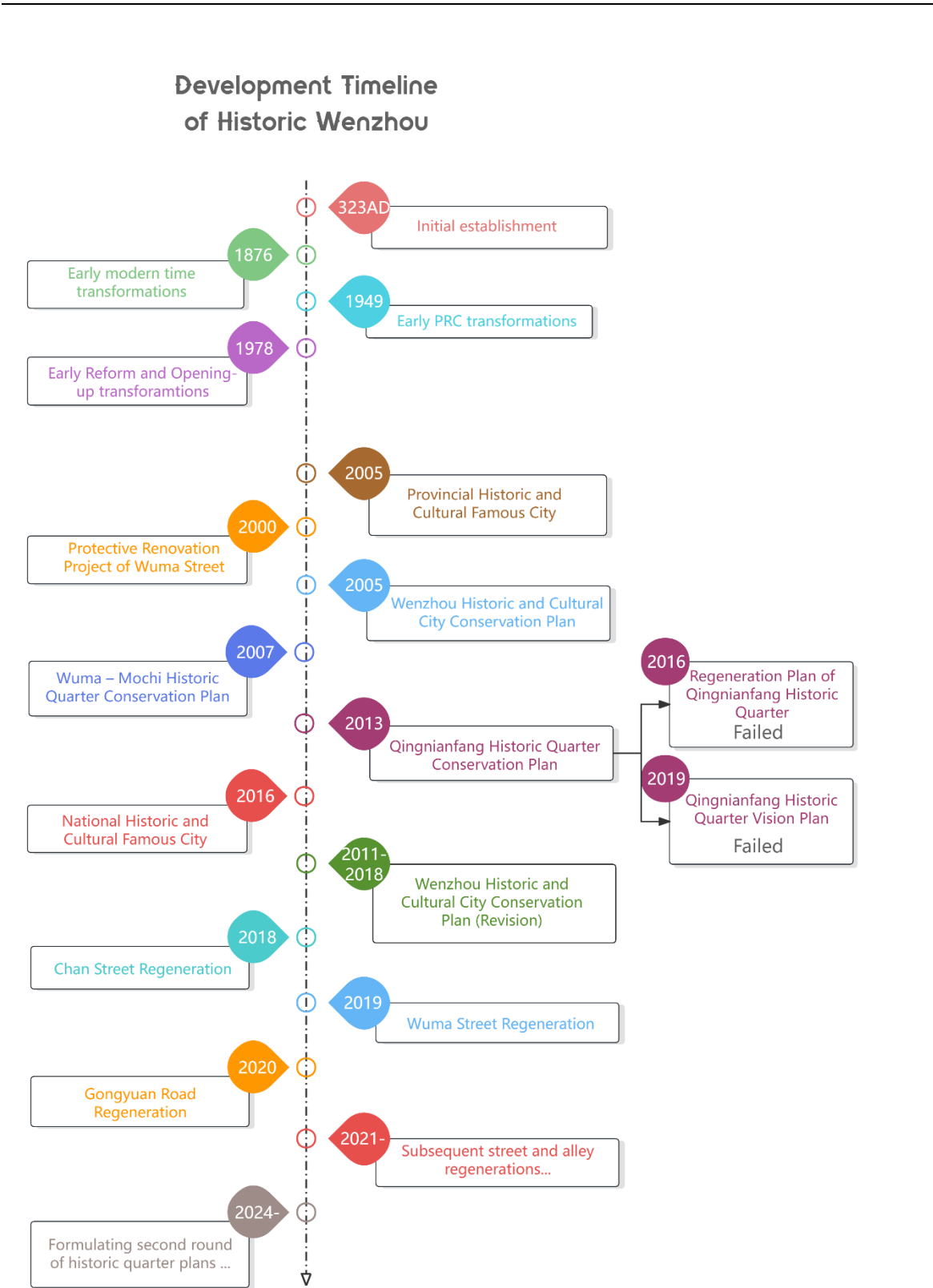


Figure 124 The development timeline of historic Wenzhou.

Made by the author, 2024.

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## Chapter 7: Discussions and Reflections

By combining the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and case studies about the historical transformations (Chapter 4), conservation plans (Chapter 5) and street regenerations (Chapter 6) of historic Wenzhou, the purpose of this chapter is to make in-depth reflections of the characteristics in the current history-recreating process of Wenzhou and even China's historical cities. The content will correspond to the three themes presented in Chapter 1, which are: the reinterpretation of history; the 'organicness' reflected in the regeneration process and outcomes; the roles and concerns of stakeholders involved in the regeneration process.

### 7.1 Reinterpretation of History

Diane Barthel claims: "History is not god-given, it is humanly made. And what was once socially constructed can be socially reconstructed, through interpretation."<sup>501</sup> Brandi, C. believed that restorers should "exist in the present moment of history by translating the past into contemporary artistic language".<sup>502</sup> David Lowenthal reminded us: "Relics are never just preserved. They are always strengthened or weakened by future generations".<sup>503</sup> The on-going regeneration of historic Wenzhou shows good evidences that prove the reality

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<sup>501</sup> Barthel, 10.

<sup>502</sup> Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 228-30.

<sup>503</sup> Lowenthal, "Stewarding the Past in a Perplexing Present," 18.

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about history is always reinterpreted. Following this point of view, this section will provide discussions combining with relevant theories and the practice of historic Wenzhou, respectively about the issues on ‘cognition of authenticity’, ‘values of pseudo-classic design’, as well as ‘innovative re-creation of tradition’.

### **7.1.1 Cognition of authenticity**

Nowadays, regeneration strategies pay increased attention to social aspects such as culture and humanistic cares. The Chinese Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development clarifies that “...Do not change the social structure, do not cut off the relationship between people, land and culture...”.<sup>504</sup> Accordingly, the understanding of authenticity is gradually extended to the level of these intangible factors. Or rather, authenticity is not only the intrinsic characters but also the subjective judgements, including self-identification, spiritual feelings and so on. In era of people-centred heritage practice today, Carol Ludwig and Yi-Wen Wang remind us to question “what purpose stringent and limiting concepts of authenticity serve in preserving, remembering and transmitting heritage intergenerationally?”<sup>505</sup> The constraints of Western focus on scientific evidence of authenticity are largely outdated and unoperationable in China today. The Nara Document of Authenticity mentioned: “Depending on the nature of cultural heritage, cultural context, and time evolution, authenticity evaluation may be related to the value of many information sources. These sources can include many aspects, such as form and design, materials and

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<sup>504</sup> “Notice of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development on the Prevention of Big Demolition Big Construction Issues in Urban Regeneration Implementations 住房和城乡建设部关于在实施城市更新行动中防止大拆大建问题的通知.” [http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/wjfb/202108/t20210831\\_251375.html](http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/wjfb/202108/t20210831_251375.html).

<sup>505</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 164.

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matter, use and function, tradition and technology, place and setting, spirit and emotion, and other internal and external factors".<sup>506</sup>

In specific street or building renewal projects, an assessment of authenticity can vary greatly from different perspectives. The feelings of authentic from the perspectives of tourist and residents may be different. For example, the residents of Chan Street perceive an additional narrative layer of exterior walls beyond the original building facades. As this layer often lacks coherence with the real functional aspects of the interior, the residents might feel that it is not authentic. However, visitors experience and appreciate its strong sense of history, with many materials, techniques, and styles that are authentically derived from local resources. This difference verifies that the public attitude toward the authenticity is usually flexible compared to the rigidity of preservationists.

Combined with the analysis of the historical transformation of historic Wenzhou in Chapter 4, some buildings may have several different authentic states. This has led to an ongoing debate when it comes to the conservation of some courtyard houses: one view is to preserve the existing multi-family status [the neighborhood relationship formed after 1949] - in order to preserve the ‘continuity or authenticity of life’; the other view insists on emptying the original residents, with the government buying up the entire courtyard houses and reusing them as a whole, which can better restore their original physical image.<sup>507</sup> Both the life-level and the physical-level are important carriers that can reflect the authenticity.

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<sup>506</sup> ICOMOS, "The Nara Document on Authenticity."

<sup>507</sup> According to author's interview to Interviewee A (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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When these two cannot be both, we need to analyze rationally and individually. If they are ordinary residences with low historical value, the continuity of life can often be given priority; But if they are structures with high historical value, especially having some cultural connotations on some physical components, then priority should be given to the restoring of their initial physical image.

In fact, there is another priority of considering authenticity, which is about the ‘social ideology’ aspect. Jing Xie found that important construction activities in traditional society could often helped to evoke a good social and cultural atmosphere [for example, in Pingjiang Road of Suzhou City, many streets or important buildings were named in honor of noble squires who had locally made important contributions]. He asserts: “It’s important ... to consider carefully how to capture and represent the societal concordance, devotion and inspiration of its former Confucian glory.”<sup>508</sup> When the physical image of a historical building contains more important social significance, its value will inevitably exceed its physical entity. Although China's traditional social ideology is very different from today's overall social ideology, we should recognize those excellent qualities in traditional ideology that are worth inheriting. Similar to Suzhou, Wenzhou also has many good social ideologies [e.g. the Confucian ideology, the idea of the unity of nature and man, and unique business awareness of Wenzhounese] worth passing down. Therefore, it is necessary to combine those cultural re-enactments of the historical streets (mentioned in section 6.4) with authentic historical social ideologies, to promote the formation of a good

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<sup>508</sup> Jing Xie and Tim Heath, "Conservation and Revitalization of Historic Streets in China: Pingjiang Street, Suzhou," *Journal of Urban Design* 22, no. 4 (2017): 455-76.

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moral atmosphere in today's society.

### **7.1.2 Values of pseudo-classic design**

As reviewed in Chapter 4, the historic environment of historic Wenzhou had been weakened throughout the 20th century. Meanwhile, the dramatic transformations in historic Wenzhou from the 20<sup>th</sup> century had left diversified histories for today, providing historical-led regeneration a large number of choices in history reinterpretation. Through the paradigm shift of the two overall conservation plans (Chapter 5), it is obviously that merely passive preservation is replaced by active reinterpretation of history – through constructing an ‘overall historical spatial structure’ and ‘eleven axes’ in historic Wenzhou.

The three street cases in Chapter 6 are different in purpose and significance, which provide diversified approaches for reinterpreting history. The authentic history of Chan Street is lost, so it re-created a new historic view. It also can be considered as a way to regain the losses caused by radical modernism as ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’. The first regeneration of Wuma Street in 2000 created and reinforced the single European-style. However, this is extremely exclusive - it negates the significance of others, such as the traditional Chinese dwellings. Then, all of the existing historical architectures has been preserved and their styles has been enhanced in the street's second regeneration. Its respect for all ‘fait accompli histories’ reflects a reflection and correction toward the first regeneration. The interpretation of history in Gongyuan Road includes both factual restoration and new creation of history. It neither arbitrarily negates certain histories nor blindly follows all ‘fait accompli histories’. It embodies the adaptation to diverse conditions by multiple approaches. Therefore, from the three street cases, it can be observed that



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historic Wenzhou is not seeking a singular history but rather aiming for a constantly evolving, diverse historical state.

It also can be found that memory and architectural style on façades are usually deeply connected to each other in the practice of historic Wenzhou. Especially in historic environment, Richards defends the facadism by claiming that “the façade is generally capable of differentiation from the building as a whole”, and “is important in its contribution to the public domain”, and “users may want the image and perceived prestige of a historic façade combined with modern functionality”.<sup>509</sup> Thus, stylistic facade renewal has become the primary measure that local governments utilise in the regeneration practices of Wenzhou, especially in the case of Chan Street and Wuma Street.

Besides, it worth to be mentioned that the European style received special attention in restorations and pseudo-classic constructions, which is evident in all three street cases included in Chapter 6. Diane Barthel criticized that phenomenon as "developers serve the fickle demand of the market".<sup>510</sup> In Chapter 4, it can be found that within the long history of Wenzhou, such a European architecture style only dominated the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China periods covering just several decades. It is worth pondering why these specific periods of history are particularly popular. K. Sizheng Fan believes the booming of European-style architecture in contemporary China is related to a specific ‘cultural need’.<sup>511</sup> Just like the Renaissance, architecture addresses the cultural needs of the

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<sup>509</sup> J. Richards, *Facadism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>510</sup> Barthel, 117.

<sup>511</sup> K Sizheng Fan, "Culture for Sale: Western Classical Architecture in China's Recent Building Boom," *Journal of Architectural Education* 63, no. 1 (2009): 64-74.

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rising the glorious past. The meaning of traditional Chinese style had already been associated with the ideology that served a centrally planned economy. To some contemporary Chinese people, European style architecture might represent an ideology of a more open and liberal economy.<sup>512</sup> For Wenzhou, during the Late-Qing Dynasty, the Chefoo Convention (烟台条约) forced the city to be opened as a trade port to the Western countries.<sup>513</sup> Since the Reform and Opening-up, the ‘Wenzhou Model’ has become a typical representative of economic development in China. These two eras require the city to show its identity as a liberal economy. Thus, as a representative of the liberal economy – the ‘cultural needs’ for the two eras, European Style is favoured in both the restoration of historic buildings and the construction of new pseudo-classic buildings. Chen Xi posits that having experienced foreign invasions, Wenzhou still carries a lingering ‘colonial ghost’.<sup>514</sup> Consequently, when selecting architectural styles in the Wuma Street project and Chan Street project, there is a greater favour in Western-style pseudo-classic designs.

An essential contribution of this study is the re-examination of the forms of pursuit of authenticity, particularly regarding pseudo-classic designs in ‘heritage production’ that are often disparaged as ‘fake antiques’ by academia.<sup>515</sup> In order to judge the value of a historical replica, Brandi noted that people should first understand whether its intention of

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> See:

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%AD%E8%8B%B1%E7%83%9F%E5%8F%B0%E6%9D%A1%E7%BA%A6/974314?fromtitle=%E7%83%9F%E5%8F%B0%E6%9D%A1%E7%BA%A6&fromid=1997795&fr=aladdin>

(Accessed on 12. 08.2021).

<sup>514</sup> Chen, 104.

<sup>515</sup> Ruan and Xiao, 113-18.

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production is fraudulent.<sup>516</sup> In this respect, a part of the Wuma Street project is the typical creation of ‘fake antiques’. And, to some extent, this has the effect of misleading visitors into thinking they are all real historic buildings. On the other hand, the design mode of Chan Street does not intentionally confuse true and false. Its historical existence is false, but its expression is true, and its intention is generally honest. When visitors see the high-rise buildings above the podiums, they understand that the historical appearances of the podiums are collages or makeups, merely displaying a ‘historic flavor’ to the public. So, it can be found that pseudo-classic design did not die out but rather promoted its strategies and enriched the value of the historic area. Wang Xudong and Yang Qiusheng even suggest that marking the construction time of pseudo-classic buildings and improving pseudo-classic methods are also necessary.<sup>517</sup> In response, the regeneration of Chan Street not only excels in the use of traditional techniques and methods for fake historic production, but also features inscriptions that clearly documented its design and time of construction. Once the factor of ‘confusing truth and false’ is removed from fake historic works, more positive values can be revealed. Assuming that once the stringent and limiting concepts of authenticity is removed from pseudo-classic works judgement, anything could become as heritage.<sup>518</sup> Therefore, the new argument of heritage practice in this era is to be cautious about the selection of purposes, sites, styles, and references for pseudo-classic design.

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<sup>516</sup> Brandi, 161.

<sup>517</sup> Xudong Wang and Qiusheng Yang, "The Positive Aspect on the Construction of the Pseudo-Antique," *In Scenic Resources and Cultural Heritage* (2013): 133-36.

<sup>518</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 164.

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In fact, every generation tends to rebuild history through their own choices and based on their own cognitions in a specific era.<sup>519</sup> As there are countless authentic statuses for a building with a long history,<sup>520</sup> the pseudo-classic design of a specific historical era is just one choice available to contemporary people. It is usually believed and should be demonstrated that the chosen history should have more valuable significance than other choices. From the perspective of authenticity, the choice should be based on historical evidence, including written records, old paintings, old photos, other similar surviving buildings, and traditional craftsmanship. The regeneration process of Chan Street and Gongyuan Road indeed prioritizes the respect for the aforementioned elements as much as possible when making its choices on historical reinterpretation. David Lowenthal worries that the current generation does not have a clear idea about which period of history is worthy of attention.<sup>521</sup> Therefore, helping the public to choose and rebuild their memories is the responsibility of today's decision-makers in historic Wenzhou.

This authentic pseudo-classic design has sparked a reevaluation of the definition of truth and fake. It is worth mentioning that many media outlets have claimed Chan Street as having the ‘original taste’ or ‘authentic flavour’(原汁原味).<sup>522</sup> Some even described by many media reports as ‘historical street’, ‘old street’, or “a benchmark demonstration project for the protection and construction of historical and cultural blocks”(历史文化街

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<sup>519</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 69-72.

<sup>520</sup> Caple, 66.

<sup>521</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country-Revisited*, 586-90.

<sup>522</sup> This word is frequently mentioned by local government leaders in Wenzhou, when dealing with pseudo-classic projects. <https://www.163.com/dy/article/DT7V5ON10514DTPM.html>. Accessed on May. 6th, 2020.

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区保护建设的标杆示范性工程).<sup>523</sup> These terms are not strictly correct, as Chan Street is not belonging to any historic quarter. They reflect the public's recognition of the rebuilt historicity of Chan Street. This confirms to Lowenthal's claim that: "heritage fabricated by the media often seems more real because more familiar than the original."<sup>524</sup> Echoed by Edgerton that "it is the media that selects and constructs public's memories".<sup>525</sup> Indeed, the appearance of the post-modern city is imbued with printed and electronic ways to be replaceable and replicable.<sup>526</sup> The podiums of modern high-rise buildings along the street become the "history printing carrier".

Thus, a critical question arises: Does such pseudo-classic street (like Chan Street) belong to heritage? The Chinese architectural heritage scholar Chang Qing articulates that if the concept of 'architectural heritage' is narrowly understood, it will inevitably be limited to a single historical building legally registered on the protection list.<sup>527</sup> The Chinese legal concept of 'historical area' (历史地段) or 'coordination area of historical features' (历史风貌协调区) usually requires a certain degree of real physical historical remains. Then, Chan Street cannot meet the conditions or find its classification from the concept of heritage. However, for Martin Heidegger, truth is related with "the experience of beings as a whole",

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<sup>523</sup> See the report from Zhejiang Daily, 2018.

<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1608636649956641415&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

<sup>524</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165.

<sup>525</sup> Edgerton, 7-12.

<sup>526</sup> Canniffe, 18.

<sup>527</sup> Chang, 13.

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truth has its openness and freedom so that it is often not immutable but changes with individual cognitions.<sup>528</sup> We can learn from the application process of Carcassonne for the World Heritage that the efforts of restoration itself should also be considered (mentioned in section 2.1.1). Thus, the issue of whether Chan Street is a true historical heritage needs to be considered from an open perspective. Laurajane Smith advocates that more attention should be paid to the general public as the cognitive subject of heritage construction.<sup>529</sup> Since the public has already recognized its historicity, the author believes that relevant professional communities and institutions need to reconsider and classify Chan Street as a specific heritage type after its history resurrection. Therefore, to some extent, it is a case of reflection and breakthrough of the conservation system based on “historic quarter” for a long time.

### **7.1.3 Innovative re-creation of tradition**

In the last decade, China has been searching for its new urban identity to symbolize its soaring national spirit and status as a global superpower.<sup>530</sup> The display of history is undoubtedly one of the important ways to express that kind of urban identity. The approaches to reinterpreting history have gradually become richer and more diverse along with large number of practices. Erik Cohen states that the commercially adjusted national culture, or cultural performances, could prevent further decline and loss of culture. It could

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<sup>528</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," *MP Lynch, The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives* (2001): 295-316.

<sup>529</sup> Smith.

<sup>530</sup> Xie and Heath, *Heritage-Led Urban Regeneration in China*, 189.

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also generate new creations, resulting in the invention of novel cultural presentations to enhance the sense of pride and acceptance that could later be accepted and regarded as tradition.<sup>531</sup> Thus, it is necessary to affirm that the commercialization cases of the three historical streets in this study have a positive role in promoting cultural innovation. However, on the whole, the cultural innovation capability of historical cities in China is still relatively low.

Today, it is no doubt that Wang Shu is an important representative of practitioner in cultural innovation, who appeals to developing Chinese architectural typology to express the Chinese cultural consciousness.<sup>532</sup> In order to infuse modern structure with a sense of traditional aesthetic, Wang developed a wall construction technique called ‘Wa-Pan Wall’ (瓦片墙). It involves repurposing fragmented materials such as tiles, bricks, and ceramics salvaged from dismantled traditional buildings and embedding them onto the surface of modern concrete walls.<sup>533</sup> A typical example is the external wall of the Ningbo Museum, which is metaphorically likened to ‘a transaction with time’. In the Southern Song Imperial Street project (as mentioned in section 2.2.3), Wang Shu considers those newly creations with traditional elements as ‘stimulating catalyst’ that contribute to the conservation efforts.<sup>534</sup> As acknowledged by Wang himself, the case of Southern Song Imperial Street

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<sup>531</sup> Erik Cohen, "Rethinking the Sociology of Tourism," *Annals of tourism research* 6, no. 1 (1979): 18-35.

<sup>532</sup> Shu Wang, "Question Hill across the Bank: An Architectural Typology Gathering Rich Diversity 隔岸问山——一种聚集丰富差异性的建筑类型学," *Architectural journal*, no. 1 (2014): 6.

<sup>533</sup> *Building Houses 造房子*, 92.

<sup>534</sup> "City Revival by Chinese Original Architecture: The Preservation and Renovation of Zhongshan Road in Hangzhou 用中国本土的原创建筑来保护城市——杭州中山路存遗与城市复兴," *Heritage Architecture*, no. 03 (2016): 19-27.

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is impossible to be entirely replicated, especially considering the collaborative nature of its design process.<sup>535</sup> Because Wang invited a diverse group of architects with profound theoretical backgrounds, primarily from academic institutions, to design various architectural units, thereby achieving a level of diversity.

However, the key strategy of Southern Song Imperial Street project about the invention of a ‘colonnade system’ obviously had significant impact for the design of Chan Street project in historic Wenzhou. The most commendable aspect of Chan Street project lies in the widespread applicability of its design strategy. Since the implementation of Chan Street project, local government decision-makers, planners and architects have gradually come to the widespread realization that the existing modern high-rise buildings can also be ‘historicized’. This new realization has not only been widely applied to other street regenerations but has also influenced the delineation of boundaries in the new round of historic quarter conservation plannings (mentioned in section 6.4). Additionally, although the three street projects demonstrate a great deal of respect for traditional construction techniques, they lack innovation in the design toward traditional style, which are not yet bold enough to integrate new forms and technologies into historical areas. Because they are projects undertaken by local design institutes, they might not achieve the high level of innovative design like Wang Shu.

After this, the Gongyuan Road project provides more diversified means of pseudo-classic design. Although these different approaches are based on different volumes of the

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid.



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existing buildings - some are small traditional houses, some are high-rise modern buildings, and some are multi-story modern buildings. However, they have a common feature, that is, the efforts and effects of pseudo-classic design are mostly reflected in the height between 1st to 2nd floors (in a few cases, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor is also included). The facades above this height were renewed in modern style. Therefore, the Gongyuan Road can be seen as an extension of the Chan Street design strategy to some extent, as it makes a balance between uniformity and diversity, and provides a model for renewing complex historical urban spaces in the future. It is foreseeable that if following this trend, people can honestly experience the grand feeling of traditionality at a podium height all over historic Wenzhou.

However, in 2024, from the author's personal experience in a review meeting of a regeneration project in historic Wenzhou, he found that the reality is not so ideal.<sup>536</sup> First of all, the property rights in the area have been fully acquired by the government, and the decision-makers can change the architectural features relatively freely [except for a few registered historic buildings included in the site]. Therefore, the review meeting is almost discussed in the context of pseudo-classic architectural design. However, the design proposal rarely shows any consideration of ‘authentic’, ‘evidence-based’ or ‘honest’ aspects in pseudo-classic design. It can be predicted that the implementation of this proposal will turn many buildings in this area into ‘fake antiques’ - difficult to distinguish between real and fake. It is strange that the project was made by a team of urban planners, rather than a more professional team of architects. Therefore, it is very lacking

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<sup>536</sup> The author was invited as an expert reviewer to suggest changes to this regeneration project. However, his proposals based on authenticity considerations were rarely adopted. This situation will be further explained in section 7.3.2 that as a general level expert, the discourse right is very weak.

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consideration in both authenticity and creativity aspects. The famous Chinese architect Ma Yansong articulates that:

In the contemporary architectural design projects, especially government-led projects, tend to have greater limitations in terms of the creativity for traditional culture. In this kind of project, it is difficult for designers or project decision-makers to get out of the inherent figurative cultural expression.<sup>537</sup>

Meanwhile, it means the contemporary Chinese architectural projects lack of abstract creations in design. Therefore, although in some international metropolis-level cities in China can have projects with innovative re-creations for traditional culture. But in a second-tier city like Wenzhou, the historic street projects that are expected to represent the city's identity are mostly funded and operated by local governments. In terms of design concepts and approaches, their decision-makers and designers mostly only make conservative decisions.

## **7.2 The Organicness**

Currently, the idea of ‘organic renewal’ has been explicitly advocated in urban

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<sup>537</sup> From Ma Yansong’s speech in a seminar named “Chinese Modern Architecture in Global Perspective” on August 1st, 2024.

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regeneration by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China.<sup>538</sup> In some prior Chinese research papers on the conservation and regeneration of historic Wenzhou, it has also been mentioned to use this theory as a guiding principle.<sup>539</sup> It is essential to discuss and figure out how and to what extent historic Wenzhou has applied this principle. Also, this section will provide reflections about whether this idea or principle is implementable.

### **7.2.1 Is Organic Renewal a utopian proposition in China?**

It is clarified by Wu Liangyong that the ‘organic renewal’ advocates autonomous, small-scale, progressive, creative, connective and dynamic renewal processes.<sup>540</sup> Jane Jacobs once also compared cities to living organisms, noting that urban issues are complex, similar to the complexities in life science. There are many variables, but they are not rushed and chaotic. The bottom-up regeneration mode in historical cities should not try to eliminate specific groups of people, functional categories, or existing building types.<sup>541</sup> Tong Ming et al. point out that the organic city differs from the machine-mode city in that it has ‘blurred boundaries of interactions’, ‘unity and correlation of form and function’, and

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<sup>538</sup> "Notice of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development on Advancing Urban Renewal Work in a Solid and Orderly Manner 住房和城乡建设部关于扎实有序推进城市更新工作的通知," ed. Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (2023).see: [https://www.gov.cn/govweb/zhengce/zhengceku/202307/content\\_6891045.htm](https://www.gov.cn/govweb/zhengce/zhengceku/202307/content_6891045.htm)

<sup>539</sup> Gao, 73-78.

<sup>540</sup> Wu, *The Old City of Beijing and Ju'er Hutong* 北京旧城与菊儿胡同, 20.

<sup>541</sup> Jane Jacobs, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities.," *New York: Vintage* (1961).The Death and Life of Great American Cities. 199.

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is a ‘dynamic autonomous whole’.<sup>542</sup> Based on the definitions and descriptions of these characteristics, we need to combine them again in the context of contemporary China and Wenzhou for further evaluations.

Reviewing the stages of urban (historic area) development in China (section 2.2.1), compared to the ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ phase, the objectives and implementation methods pursued by ‘organic renewal’ are clearly the opposite side of the coin. However, the state-owned urban land policy in China making local government very powerful to allocate the land. This not only leads to efficient urban constructions, but also makes the ‘dynamic autonomous’ power from populace, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is very weak. This significantly differs from those in most Western countries, whose city dwellers naturally have stronger autonomy in private housing renewals because of the private ownership of land. Therefore, to a certain extent or in a narrow sense, within the context of the existing land system in China, implementing ‘organic renewal’ in urban regeneration is fundamentally a utopian proposition.

However, in a broader sense or from a more optimistic perspective, the slogan of ‘organic renewal’ can not only promote reforms and improvements in China's urban land system, but also guide the regeneration in a more diversified and integrated manner. Today, the application context of ‘organic renewal’ have become more and more diversified, and different cognition and understanding of this concept have led to different action subjects adopting different strategies for urban issues. For example, from the ‘Big Demolition, Big

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<sup>542</sup> Tong, Bai, and Jiang, 50-58.

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Construction' to smaller scale renewal, is regarded as 'organic renewal' by some people. From pseudo-classically designing a unified style for a whole street or even a quarter, to adopting multi-style designing, is also regarded as 'organic renewal' by some people, including government officials and architects.<sup>543</sup>

While in face of overly chaotic historical areas, the key role of this theory is to integrate all the small parts into an organic whole. The integrality it pursues much accommodate diversity, which is different from the single idealized integrality pursued by modernism. *The Charter of Machu Picchu* claimed:

The new concept of urbanization seeks a continuity of the built environment, implying that each building is no longer an isolated object, but an element of a continuum, requiring a dialogue with the other elements to complete its own image.<sup>544</sup>

Such benign reform can address the stylistic and volumetric incongruities between modern buildings and older structures in many urban historical areas - seems to be an idealized status that could be realized some day under China's political and social system.

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<sup>543</sup> According to author's interview to Interviewee C, D, E, in 2024.

<sup>544</sup> ICOMOS, "The Charter of Machu Picchu," (1977).

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### 7.2.2 The organicness in historic Wenzhou

In historic Wenzhou, the demolitions in the 1990s and early 2000s has caused irreparable destruction to large areas of historical value (see section 4.2.3). Later, the preserved historic quarters were regarded as the main body of protection. Even in China, there are still many cities that take a whole historic quarter as the scope of regeneration project. Gao Qixin proposed in 2015 that the regeneration of historic quarters in Wenzhou should be guided by the principles of respecting ‘authenticity’, ‘continuity of life’ and ‘integrity of traditional character’.<sup>545</sup> Among these, the physical aspect of authenticity, which includes the integrity of traditional character, is more easily recognized. However, achieving the intangible aspect of authenticity, which involves the continuity of traditional living conditions, is often challenging. Subsequently, several quarter-level renewal plans could not successfully be implemented. For example, the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter (discussed in section 5.2.2), if without a substantial consensus of national-level experts opposing it, the local government had the capability to implement a renewal project that completely contradict the principle of ‘organic renewal’, based on extensive demolition and the relocation of residents. On the other side, the number of renewal projects at the individual building level was also limited, as it might result in overly fragmented cityscapes. Thus, the street-level regenerations since 2017 become a mainstream in historic Wenzhou.

Ruan Yisan et al. point out that the ‘organic renewal’ should pay attention to the protection and continuation of urban fabric, because the traditional fabric is full of historical

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<sup>545</sup> Gao, 73-78.

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and cultural memory. He also pointed out that historic quarters contain three fabrics as ‘plane fabric’, ‘spatial fabric’ and ‘vertical elevation fabric’.<sup>546</sup> However, in specific practical projects, the cognition of the above three types is often incomplete, resulting in the organicness is often one-sided. Accordingly, it is worth noting that the organicness reflect in each street case from Chapter 6 is different and limited.

The organicness in Chan Street project is especially reflected in the facade renewal of modern high-rise buildings, which especially concerns about the “historical vertical elevation fabric”. With almost no demolition involved, it preserved most of the building's internal functions. But, as explained in the last section (7.1) that its diversity and innovation of interpretation of tradition cannot achieve as high level as the Southern Song Imperial Street project. Thus, from the perspective of ‘organic renewal’, it only achieves the state of organic correlation between the modern style and traditional style. However, it is not a dynamic process, and does not allow each unit to develop its own diversity. Moreover, it should be pointed out that because its spatial form overemphasizes a sense axis, it does not involve the internal alleys and courtyard spaces, making the tour space lack of flexibility. This has resulted in a lack of vitality and popularity in the street on normal days. While in festival, the wide space in the middle is often used for themed street vending. It is the temporality and flexibility provided by street vending that saves its street vitality, making it limitedly deserves the title of ‘urban living room’.

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<sup>546</sup> Yisan Ruan, Xiaofeng Cai, and Huawen Yang, "Repairing Fabric and Reshaping Style -- an Analysis of Style Renovation of "Traditional Commercial Block" in East Street of Nanxun Town 修复肌理 重塑风貌——南浔镇东大街" 传统商业街区"风貌整治探析," *Urban Planning Forum 城市规划学刊*, no. 4 (2005): 3.

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The organicness in the first-time regeneration of Wuma Street is reflected in the conservation of the plane urban fabric. Although the project did involve some demolitions and reconstructions, it was a lucky thing for Wuma Street to retain a significant portion of the old urban fabric, especially considering that ‘Big Demolition, Big Construction’ was the mainstream during that particular era. Obviously, this project has many non-organic sides, which include the housing for relocation is not in harmony with the traditional environment, and the complete clear away of other styles buildings except European ones. Therefore, it did not achieve the continuation of the spatial fabric and elevation fabric. The second-time regeneration of Wuma Street made only minor adjustments to the facades of all the existing buildings, which is obviously an improvement in the aspect of elevation fabric. However, its regeneration still did not fully integrate the external facade design with the specific use of the building's internal space. Therefore, it was not successful in the aspect of its spatial fabric.

The organicness in Gongyuan Road project lies in the respect for every status quo and the adoption of multiple means to form diversified spaces [not a single linear street space]. In addition to the main street, it has continuous explorations of the spaces inside the blocks, which is the missing content from Chan Street and Wuma Street projects. Nan Ellin claimed that the ‘integral urbanists’ advocate for timely intervention in places to stimulate their vitality and enhance mobility by building connections and focusing on neglected and abandoned ‘dead areas’.<sup>547</sup> Eliel Saarinen believed that city construction should remain flexible and can make the necessary adjustments to accommodate the growth of this

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<sup>547</sup> Nan Ellin, *Integral Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 9.



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‘organism’, especially when conditions change or new requirements appear. He also advocated that planners should move in a planned and guided way towards predetermined directions and goals, so as to gradually evolve the city.<sup>548</sup> Stephen Marshall believes that in street design, a concrete image “will kill countless possibilities and will not inspire open-ended interpretations”.<sup>549</sup> Therefore, the historical area needs to be treated with a dynamic attitude so that the historic city as a whole will always maintain new characteristics - inevitable adjustments are always needed in long-term conservation. The operation mechanism of Gonyuan Road project intentionally left some fragmented ‘dead areas’, allowing shop owners to autonomously carry out renewals in the subsequent years. In addition, the half-organized and temporary ‘street vendings’ improve a continuous freshness and vitality to the street space. Therefore, its continuity and dynamism of organicness character are notably stronger compared to the other two streets. These self-organized spaces are often more diversified and more well-matched with the spatial fabric. Paul Cilliers summed up the phenomenon of self-organization as “the ability of complex systems to spontaneously and adaptively develop or change their internal structure to better respond to or deal with their environment.”<sup>550</sup> Lu Jiansong & Jiang Min pointed out that “spontaneous is not equal to perfect, reasonable and feasible. The spontaneous construction process may make the system stay in a relatively low state of stability and managers and designers will need to make reasonable interventions to develop the settlement and make

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<sup>548</sup> Saarinen, 50-51.

<sup>549</sup> Stephen Marshall, *Streets and Patterns*, trans. Sinan Wan (Beijing: China Building Industrial Press, 2010), 220.

<sup>550</sup> Paul Cilliers, *Complexity & Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*, trans. Zeng Guoping 曾国屏 (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2006), 125.

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the system transition to a higher state of stability.”<sup>551</sup> Therefore, the combination of top-down and bottom-up from Gongyuan Road, helping to achieve a stable state of vibrant urban public space.

Through recent years’ regenerations, the historical experience of the original isolated Wuma Street now has been extended much longer, forming the core public space of the city with Gongyuan Road - Wuma Street - Chan Street running through the historical city from east to west. Both Christopher Alexander and Wu Liangyong had mentioned city should be designed as an ‘organic integrity’.<sup>552,553</sup> In the historical environment, both new and old buildings need to have the image of historical continuity. Especially benefiting from the regeneration mode toward high-rise modern buildings in the Chan Street project, more and more ‘modernized’ streets are receiving ‘historization’ renewals.

From an ideal and optimistic point of view, the old concept that once protecting the four historic quarters in isolation (because they were divided by modern constructions) could be gradually broke-up, along with making continuous adjustment of conservation plans. It can be foreseen, with implications of rebuilding historical appearance street by street, historic Wenzhou's overall spatial structure, main axes and spatial nodes can all be linked to form a more comprehensive and complete historical space. The whole historical urban structure of historic Wenzhou will be dynamically rebuilt. Thus, from the perspective

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<sup>551</sup> Jiansong Lu and Min Jiang, *Architectural Regionalism in Spontaneous Buildings* (Beijing: China Building Industry Press, 2021), 176-77.

<sup>552</sup> Christopher Alexander et al., *A New Theory of Urban Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6.

<sup>553</sup> Wu, "From "Organic Renewal" to a New "Organic Order": Approaches to the Renovation of Residential Areas in the Old City of Beijing (Ii) 从“有机更新”走向新的“有机秩序”: 北京旧城居住区整治途径 (二)," 7-13.

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‘organic renewal’, it will achieve the state of ‘organic integrity’ by gradually combining every component together.

Combined with the idealized city under traditional Chinese culture described in section 4.1, a complete ideal city of Wenzhou should be a huge ‘courtyard’. To rebuild this pattern, its central space is crucial. However, as the core of this huge ‘courtyard’ - ‘inner city’ is still a meaningless car parking lot. What's worse, governments across China have generally experienced financial difficulties since 2023, leaving Wenzhou’s municipal government with few financial resources to devote to the city’s regenerations.<sup>554</sup> This further leads to an extreme imbalance of resources to devote to the development of each historic quarter. The department originally set up by the municipal government for the regeneration of the entire historic Wenzhou is now almost exclusively responsible for investment and development of the Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter. Among the other three historical quarters, only the Shuomen Street Historical Quarter has gained more attentions because of the excavation of state-level archaeological sites. Considering its proximity to the Oujiang River and the characteristics of maritime culture, so its development is in charged by another administrative department that is responsible for the entire city belt along the Oujiang River. As for the Chengxi Street Historic Quarter and Qingnianfang Historic Quarter, only their respective communities are responsible for the daily piecemeal protection work at present, without any large investment considered by the municipal government.<sup>555</sup> Although some good results have been achieved from the renewal projects

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<sup>554</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee E (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>555</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee E (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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in Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter, this is a serious imbalance in the allocation of resources. The current isolated and decentralized administrative management of the four quarters is obviously not conducive to the reconstruction of the overall historical framework of historic Wenzhou. The status of ‘organic integrity’ of historic Wenzhou is still a distant vision.

### 7.3 Concerns of Stakeholders

Michel Foucault once pointed out that society is not a single entity with only one kind of power operation but a juxtaposition, connection, reconciliation and hierarchy of different powers with their own characteristics.<sup>556</sup> As Claudio Magalhaes states: “Although urban regeneration is often regarded as a comprehensive, holistic discipline, encompassing all the aspects described above, in practice, it is rarely, if ever, truly comprehensive”.<sup>557</sup> Recently, the China Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development announced that “Support the participation of social forces, and integrate public participation into the whole process of urban regeneration to achieve co-construction, co-governance and sharing”.<sup>558</sup> It is necessary to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and engagement, as different stakeholders' perceptions, intentions and needs related with the historical area have to be reconciled. This section focuses on the roles and concerns of the three most important

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<sup>556</sup> Jeremy W Crampton and Stuart Elden, *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, trans. 莫伟民、周轩宇 (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2021), 191.

<sup>557</sup> De Magalhães, 919-25.

<sup>558</sup> "Notice on the Solid and Orderly Promotion of Urban Regeneration Work 扎实有序推进城市更新工作的通知."

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categories of stakeholder: governments, professionals and residents.

### 7.3.1 Governments

In current Chinese context, governments are the primary stakeholder in promoting urban regenerations, and they are much more powerful in decision-making than that in Western countries.<sup>559</sup> The category of government contains two levels – the national level and local level. For the national government, heritage represents national identity, cultural heritage, and historical significance for the country. As cultural capital has become an indispensable new contributor to the world economy, urban policymakers are eagerly competing to capitalize on their jurisdictions' distinctive cultural and historical values to create a unique urban identity and drive local economic development.<sup>560</sup> Aygen Zeynep once acknowledged that historic preservation is closely related to the definition of national identity and selectivity in collective memory.<sup>561</sup> Therefore, there seems to be no doubt that this activity is inherently a top-down collective, as the state was the first to develop conservation principles.

In the practice of historic Wenzhou, the adjustment in the scope of protection in conservation plans and the change in the design mode of street regenerations are inseparable from the evolution of policies promoted by the national central government.

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<sup>559</sup> Shi, 268-69.

<sup>560</sup> Yue Zhang, "Steering Towards Growth: Symbolic Urban Preservation in Beijing, 1990-2005," *The Town Planning Review* (2008): 187-208.

<sup>561</sup> Aygen, 222.

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However, on the other hand, there is a great contradiction between local governments and the central government's awareness of protection. Many local government officials are not fully aware of the importance of urban heritage, and still think that those old houses are a factor hindering urban economic development. Therefore, in the past few years, a large number of traditional 'urban villages' except historic Wenzhou have been demolished followed with the policy of 'Big Demolition, Big Rectification' (mentioned in section 5.2.2).

Jing Xie and Tim Heath claim that "historic preservation projects in China are now purposefully planned, designed and developed similarly to and often with similar profit-driven motivations to modern commercial developments".<sup>562</sup> As history and heritage remade with Chinese identity can be sold as 'cultural display' and 'urban branding', not only to the Chinese people, but also to international tourists and attract investment.<sup>563</sup> Bandarin and Van Oers note that

Historic areas are often transformed into something closer to a shopping centre or a theme park, where the original values link to history, memory functions and social atmosphere are converted into commercial opportunities for a transient population.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> Xie and Heath, *Heritage-Led Urban Regeneration in China*, 166-67.

<sup>563</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 302.

<sup>564</sup> Francesco Bandarin and Ron Van Oers, *Reconnecting the City: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Future of Urban Heritage* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 54.

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So, history-consumption becomes an essential goal of conservation, which is also a worldwide phenomenon. Thus, tourists are often prioritized in the conception of heritage conservation projects, impacting the decision-making process.<sup>565</sup> Therefore, investors can form powerful ‘growth coalitions’ with local governments to leverage the economic value of urban heritage.<sup>566</sup>

For many projects in historic Wenzhou, especially those only involve street façade renewals, the local government is acting directly as developer. Different from private developers, these regeneration projects seem do not driven by direct economic profit, as beautification is the primary concerned. They sometime only have indirect contribution to the economic, like attracting tourists and consumptions. For a certain project, the government as a direct investor will pay more attention to the driving effect of the project on the vitality of its surrounding areas, rather than just evaluating the economic vitality of the limited project site. Anyway, the local government of Wenzhou plays an absolute leading role in the practice of urban regeneration, which is conducive to the rapid transformation of the city’s fabric. In many situations, arbitrary decision-making occurs in urban regeneration process. Short-term economic benefits and consumption vitality are often primarily aimed - contrary to the long-term and dynamic nature advocated by ‘organic renewal’.

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<sup>565</sup> Xie and Heath, *Heritage-Led Urban Regeneration in China*, 171.

<sup>566</sup> Jingxiang Zhang and Fulong Wu, "Mega-Event Marketing and Urban Growth Coalitions: A Case Study of Nanjing Olympic New Town," *The Town Planning Review* (2008): 209-26.

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### 7.3.2 Professionals

Ordinary professionals, such as local urban planners and architects, can utilize their expertise to directly propose design schemes for the renewal of urban heritage. However, they often play the role of employees serving the investor. In historic Wenzhou, local government usually directly acts as the investor. Consequently, in many instances, these designers feel their voice is not strong enough, and their aspirations to achieve ideal states through design are often constrained by the perceptions of local government officials. Despite designers aim to create more innovative forms, government officials prefer to present an ‘authentic flavor’ of history.<sup>567</sup> Therefore, sometimes those pseudo-classic buildings are designed reluctantly by architects. Thus, in the case of Chan Street, architects are not the key figure to decide the overall proportion of each style. In more extreme cases, local governments sometimes only pursue the superficial aesthetics of street architectures. As Richards notes that the ‘facadism’ treated the townscape like a stage set, although its contribution to the continuity of the historic streetscape must be recognized, it diminishes the meaning of architectural design.<sup>568</sup> Under such development mode, architects only need to pay attention to the aesthetics of the facade, while can ignore the organization of interior space, which to some extent leads to the inconsistency between the refined historical stylistic exterior design and the poor interior space use. In such situations, even architects are aware that this one-sided approach will result in problems in the subsequence use, yet they find themselves powerless to change it.<sup>569</sup> For example, the Chan Street project and

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<sup>567</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.

<sup>568</sup> Richards, 2.

<sup>569</sup> According to the author’s interview to Interviewee C (see appendix 4), in 2024.



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the second renewal of Wuma Street did not involve very much of the internal functional re-organizations, and the use of many second-floor is inefficient.

Another type of professional, possessing a higher level of cognition and holding significant status within the architectural industry or academic circles, can influence the decision-making process as expert reviewers. They can sometimes exert substantial influence by suggesting modifications to a specific urban renewal plan. Especially when government officials still adhere to the 'Big Demolition, Big Construction' model, which is detrimental to heritage preservation, these experts can sometimes directly reject a design proposal altogether, thereby constraining the 'absolute power' of local government in decision-making to some extent. For instance, the initial renewal plan for the Qingnianfang Historic Quarter was provided by a developer commissioned by the local government. That proposal included extensive demolition and reconstruction, which was unanimously rejected during the review by national-level architecture and planning experts. As a result, this historic quarter has remained under protection, with no significant renewal actions taken thus far. Moreover, these experts have helped local government officials understand that developers' focus on economic interests is unsuitable for urban renewal projects in historical areas. Consequently, in subsequent urban renewal projects, the government has taken on the role of the investor directly.

Comparing the two types of professionals, it is evident that within China's socio-political system, discourse power is often crucial. Sometimes, even when ordinary designers perceive the problems, they lack the discourse power to correct the issues. In contrast, the same advice, if voiced by nationally renowned scholars or experts, can

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significantly influence local government in decision-making. This also indirectly confirms that the existing Chinese system is excessively top-down.

### **7.3.3 Residents**

For citizens residing in historical areas, urban heritage has great potential to represent a sense of belonging, cultural identity, and a connection to their community's history. The fact is, however, that urban regenerations of historical area in China have rarely been acted in accordance with the needs of its residents – they are often identified as the vulnerable and passive group in the regeneration process.

In the process of historic Wenzhou's regeneration, the residents' voice has been always weak, and they have always passively accepted the relocations arranged by local government, sometimes stay to continue living but suffer some bad impacts from the renovation. For example, in the first regeneration of Wuma Street, all residents along the street were forced to move into the multi-storey houses nearby. In the Chan Street project, some residents have to accept the blocking of indoor sunlight by new external structures. The residents nearby Gongyuan Road have to endure the noise of its prosperity. Under this circumstance, many scholars are calling for local governments to appropriately and further decentralize power to individuals in urban regeneration. They argue against excessive commercialization of historical areas that were originally meant for everyday living. For instance, Yuan Ye emphasizes the importance of shifting focus from mere physical 'appearances' to fostering meaningful 'interactions', as a crucial undertaking for Chinese

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cities in the present day.<sup>570</sup> Lu Di calls for the idea of heritage renewal to move towards a more nuanced hierarchy of community life.<sup>571</sup> Jing Xie notes that when establishing the sustainable renewal mechanism of the community in the historic district, more attention should be paid to the inheritance of the cultural environment within the historic district and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships.<sup>572</sup> While such relationship is a long-term, evolving trend, not a predictable, fixed one - it is also one of the intrinsic characteristics of 'organic renewal'.

Nevertheless, mobilizing individual enthusiasm for historical conservation remains a challenging task. Lai and Liu find that in historic Wenzhou, the replacement of commercial storefronts along the streets is relatively easy to carry out, large-scale transformations within the neighborhoods often lag behind or even remain postponed.<sup>573</sup> The main aim of those regeneration projects led by local government and developers is to attract tourists, while the living conditions of the indigenous residents are still not markedly improved. In historic Wenzhou, there are some courtyard houses with high historical value, having complicated property rights and poor architectural quality, just like Zhu's family house (section 4.2.2). Their residents see preservation as a burden, and hope for relocation

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<sup>570</sup> Yuan, 7.

<sup>571</sup> Di Lu, "The Architectonics Heading "into the World of Life"-the Transformation of Architectural Heritage Values and Architectural Rehabilitation 走向"生活世界"的建构 建筑遗产价值观的转变与建筑遗产再生," *Time Architecture 时代建筑* 03 (2013): 5.

<sup>572</sup> Xie, "Disembodied Historicity: Southern Song Imperial Street in Hangzhou," 182-200.

<sup>573</sup> Pingping Lai and Beilei Liu, "The Contradiction between the New Function and the Material Environment of Wenzhou Historic District and the Adjustment Path 温州历史街区新功能和物质环境之间的矛盾及调整路径," *China Ancient City*, no. 9 (2013): 70-72.

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or demolition with lucrative compensation from it. The regeneration plan of Qingnianfang Historic Quarter (section 5.2.2) not only reflects the profit-seeking of local governments and developers, but also reflects the residents' inactive attitude towards historical preservation. It is obvious that blindly relying on the wishes of these residents will do harm to the target of historical preservation in the city core. This highlights the complex dynamics involved in balancing the preservation of historic areas with the interests and needs of the local residents. Therefore, whether to relocate the inhabitants, or to allow them to continue their lives in old houses, has been a puzzle for experts and government decision-makers for long time.

The author believes that for the historical buildings with high historical value, the complicated property rights should be acquired by the local government to facilitate unified management. But, for a large number of general old buildings, urban decision-makers often look forward to a short-term effective means, while ignoring long-term and slow transformation methods which can have effect from qualitative change to quantitative change. It is people's ignorance of the historical value of Wenzhou city that leads to the inactive protection attitude; It is people's lacking understanding of the valuable architectural culture in Wenzhou that result in the lack of cultural consciousness; It is the urgent demand of the disadvantaged residents for improving the quality of houses that causes the destructions. Thus, the most important thing is nurturing. By nurturing a sense of belonging within the historic neighbourhoods and conscious respect for history and culture, it becomes more likely that residents will actively engage in and support efforts for conservation and sustainable development. Anyway, efforts must be made to address the

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concerns and motivations of residents while promoting the long-term value and benefits of historical preservation for both individuals and the community as a whole.

Therefore, a good participatory governance, education and management system is needed to ensure the sustainability. As Tong Ming et al articulate that “the creation of an organic living environment inevitably depends on the broad participation of society, rather than a phased urban movement, and the key to its realization is to form a sustainable mechanism...”<sup>574</sup> Therefore, in addition to the entire street renewals, the local government has implemented a supplementary approach as ‘courtyard gentrifications’.<sup>575</sup> Such strategy involves acquiring traditional courtyards and then renting them to artists or traditional craftsmen with cultural characteristics at discounted or even free rates. Subsequently, these new occupants are encouraged to transform the traditional courtyards into cultural spaces, and regularly organize cultural activities. This initiative aims to elevate the cultural flavor of the historic district, fostering a greater love for the community among local residents. Such approach draws inspiration from Kuanzhai Alley as ‘microcirculation model based on courtyards’ and Tianzifang as the ‘hub of non-stop cultural activities’ (section 2.2.4). Although the effects of such a strategy may manifest slowly and require a considerable amount of time for evaluation, it possesses sustainability and organicness. In the long run, by enriching local residents' social participations, it contributes to the establishment of a more cohesive community identity. The ideal ultimate goal should be for each ‘city cell’ to

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<sup>574</sup> Tong, Bai, and Jiang, 50-58.

<sup>575</sup> According to author’s interview to Interviewee E (see appendix 4), in 2024.

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have the ability of autonomous renewal.

## **7.4 Summary**

In this chapter, the author first reflects on the reinterpretation of history in urban regeneration. From the implementation sequence of the three street cases, it must be acknowledged that the reinterpretation approach is diverse and constantly evolving with the times. It is suggested that we should not arbitrarily deny pseudo-classic design. The contemporary Chinese architect should shoulder the responsibility to help the public choose and produce the correct and appropriate history, with ‘cultural consciousness’ contained in the design.

Secondly, the author evaluates and reflects the organicness in historic Wenzhou's regeneration process. Strictly speaking, due to the lack of spontaneous power, most urban renewals in China cannot be considered as true ‘organic’. However, broadly speaking, the regeneration of Wenzhou demonstrates characteristics of small-scale, gradual progress aligned with the principles of ‘organic renewal’. Its organicness is reflected in the renovation of the modern architectural facades, contributing to the integration of the historical atmosphere; its ‘organic integrity’ is reflected in the shifting of protecting the fragmented and isolated historic quarters into an integrated and wholistic reconnecting of the whole historical city.

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Finally, the author reflects on the roles and concerns of the governments, professionals and residents in the ongoing regenerations. In a heavily top-down social system, discourse power is extremely important: even for the same advice, when conveyed by national-level experts to local governments, can have a significant impact, which ordinary planners and architects cannot achieve. Meanwhile, residents have even less discourse power. There is a need to enhance the participation of residents, granting them a more significant voice. Simultaneously, effective public engagement can only be positive to history when residents possess a strong awareness of historical and cultural preservation – the most important thing to do is nurturing.

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## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

This chapter will begin by reviewing the overall research questions and intentions of the study. Secondly, it will evaluate and summarize the key findings in each part of the research and explain how they addressed each research intention and contributed to the field. Thirdly, it will reflect on the general lessons learned by explaining the trends of future development and making recommendations to practitioners, both in broad and narrow senses. Lastly, it will acknowledge the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future exploration.

### **8.1 Review of Research Intentions**

This study takes the regeneration of the urban historic core as its theme and addresses the main research question: “How could a city’s history be organically reinterpreted?” It reviews the relevant theories, with a focus on the theme of ‘remaking the past’. It reveals various paradigm shifts concerning urban heritage regeneration through constructing a multi-level thinking framework. The study takes historic Wenzhou as a case study. On multiple levels, the content ranges from the national level to the city, quarter, street, and architectural levels. Using a sociological methodology, it primarily employs qualitative analysis, incorporating genealogical, chronological, historical, comparative, and positivist methods. In general, these methods successfully help the author find the relationships among knowledge, power, and the human subject during the urban regeneration process, which helps explain the reasons behind urban and architectural



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phenomena. This, in turn, helps the author identify the development trend: the interpretation of the above themes and ideas is becoming more inclusive to adapt to various historical conditions.

Generally, integrating a comprehensive review of heritage theories, with the historical characteristics, conservation plans, and street regenerations of historic Wenzhou, the research has constructed discussions pertaining to urban heritage regeneration in three key aspects:

(1) *History reinterpretation*: First of all, Wenzhou, as a city with long history and rich historical significance, it is insufficient to strictly protect the remaining urban heritage, as much of its history has been destroyed or lost, the past needs to be reinterpreted with more inclusive attitudes and more diverse strategies. Then, behind these diversified regeneration strategies, different perceptions of authenticity are evident. It is worth noting that in different street practice cases in Wenzhou, the perceptions of authenticity on the material level have gradually tended to be diversified. However, there is a lack of recognition and exploration of ‘living authenticity’, and even the higher level as ‘spiritual authenticity’ or ‘ideological authenticity’ [e.g., ‘Wenzhounese Spirit’ and traditional Chinese fengshui ideology] in regeneration practices.

(2) *Organic renewal*: There is no doubt that the regeneration of historic Wenzhou needs to be carried out in an organic way. While the organic quality exhibited by different projects vary greatly. Compared with the first, the second conservation plan for historic Wenzhou is more actively remaking history rather than solely preserving it, which proved the progress of its cognition at the macro level of ‘organic integrity’. However, in the

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subsequent practice renewal projects, it still lacks the awareness of comprehensively planning and managing the whole historical city, so that different historic quarters receive extremely unbalanced attention. In addition, in terms of the scale of the land in regeneration project, the most suitable scale for historic Wenzhou is to regenerate street by street, rather than taking the entire historic quarter once and for all. It is still a great challenge for designers to deal with the organic renewal of the ‘horizontal’, ‘spatial’ and ‘vertical’, elements of the urban fabric resulting in the ‘organicness’ that is often one-sided.

(3) *Concerns of stakeholders*: In the regeneration projects of historic Wenzhou, the decision-making power lies primarily with the government and designers, and there is a lack of participation from residents and shopkeepers. At the same time, designers also feel that their discretion is largely limited during the design process. They cannot design fully in accordance with their own aesthetic and understanding of heritage conservation. This proves that in an existing top-down social system, local government leader’s knowledge and awareness of urban heritage are crucial, as their decisions can have the greatest impact on the overall image of the city’s historic core. Although the Chinese government is attempting to shift from this fixed model by encouraging a bottom-up approach, or a more thorough organic renewal model, this ideal remains a distant goal within the current social context of Wenzhou.

## **8.2 Main Findings and Recommendations**

In this research, a comprehensive exploration was conducted on urban heritage issues that emerged throughout the conservation and regeneration process of historic

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Wenzhou. By reflecting on these issues within both a broad and local context, the research addresses existing gaps. Broadly, this study provides insights that could benefit other cities and contribute to academic understanding. On a local level, it offers valuable suggestions for government officials, planners, and architects for the future development of historic Wenzhou. This section aims to explain the main findings and corresponding recommendations that can be drawn from the research as follows:

### **(1) From partial preservation to overall regeneration**

Since the first overall conservation plan in 2005, old buildings in historic quarters of historic Wenzhou have been strictly protected. The conditions and options for residents to renovate these buildings are very limited. As a result, many buildings have become dilapidated or uninhabitable. Moreover, each historic quarter is isolated, which runs counter to people's impression of the entire structure of historic Wenzhou. And the 2018 version of the conservation plan shows more about regeneration than preservation. By constructing multiple interlinked axes, the goal is to reshape Wenzhou into a cohesive historical network. As Patricia Melvin claimed, the construction of an ‘organic city’ includes a shift in mindset from focusing on individual components to considering the ‘sense of the whole’ and the ‘overall texture’.<sup>576</sup> Therefore, a transformation from the ‘partial preservation’ phase to the ‘overall renewal’ phase represents a fundamental trend and an ongoing developmental stage.

In addition, the change of thinking mode is closely related to the change of decision

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<sup>576</sup> Patricia Mooney Melvin, *The Organic City: Urban Definition and Neighborhood Organization 1880–1920* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 2014), 7.

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makers' understanding of authenticity. That is, from the narrow physical protection to a more inclusive attitude of accepting the pseudo-classic buildings, reconstructed buildings, innovative historical expression methods, and so on. Currently, the construction of the primary historical axis has just been completed, which can be seen as the initial phase of building a historical network. To align with this paradigm shift, the conservation plans of historic quarter level have also been continuously adjusted. A notable characteristic is the consistent expansion of the scope of each historic quarter in each planning adjustment, incorporating an increasing number of modernized areas into their realms. Consequently, although the conservation plans of historic Wenzhou prioritise 'historic quarter' as crucial conservation entities, the inherent fragmentation within the historic quarter poses a challenge to achieving a comprehensive organic renewal. Thus, within historic Wenzhou, there is a diminishing value for the existence of 'historic quarter'.

Thus, the current state of isolated administration for the four historic quarters that discussed in section 7.2 needs to be rearranged. This research suggest that the whole development of historic Wenzhou should be comprehensively planned – just as the pre-modern Chinese planned the city as a huge Confucius' courtyard.<sup>577</sup> Firstly, the significance of core of this huge courtyard - 'inner-city' (mentioned in section 5.1) should be finely redeveloped. In addition, considering about the limitation of financial resources, some areas that need for priority renewal within the entire historic Wenzhou must be designated, with distribution related to the four historic quarters as equal as possible - instead of only concern about Wuma-Mochi Historic Quarter. Then, making these priority

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<sup>577</sup> Ruan, *Confucius' Courtyard: Architecture, Philosophy and the Good Life in China*, 37-43.

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areas become ‘catalysts’ to drive their surrounding areas to fully and autonomously renewal.

## **(2) Turning modern to historical**

The modernized areas should be carefully considered in efforts to reshape the overall historical cityscape. It is necessary that many modern buildings must be adapted with historical elements. The Chan Street project could be regarded as a very valuable initial exploration, which will provide inspiration and reference for the future renewals. However, in the following renewals of other streets and alleys in recent years, especially those following the approach of Chan Street, most of them only consider a unified facade appearance and a single linear spatial effect. Even, the precisions in pseudo-classic design are not as good as Chan Street. It should be avoided that when decision-makers are planning a new street project, they simply mimic Chan Street’s appearance and approach by regarding it as a ‘benchmark model project’ (mentioned in section 6.1). The suggestions for the government and designers are future street design should strive to explore multi-style pseudo-classic architectural design and especially explore innovative ways to reinterpret history; Having more cultural consciousness in reinterpreting traditional Chinese architectural characters; braking up the limitations of facadism, while paying attention to the practicability and adaptability of the interior space transformation. At the same time, with the continuous practice of pseudo-classic design, the academic community also needs to rethink the value and significance of this approach, giving more inclusive and constructive guidance to it.

## **(3) From uniformity to diversity**

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In terms of the cognition of history, this study realizes that different approaches should be accepted in reinterpreting history, preserving historical architectures, and reacting traditional behaviors. As elucidated by Maurice Halbachs in the book *On Collective Memory*, this differentiation highlights that history is singular and scholarly, whereas collective memory is diverse and constructed through narratives by community members.<sup>578</sup> Through ongoing dialogue with history, people redefine heritage and determine how to preserve or reinterpret it.<sup>579</sup> The case of Wuma Street that only pursues the grandeur feeling of the European style building facade along the street, while ignoring other aspects such as the diversity of styles, the richness of space, and the organicness of resettlement, should not be advocated anymore. The strong linear and unified historical appearance of Chan Street was formed an alternation between pseudo-classical Chinese and European styles, while the innovative design was suppressed under the leading decision of local government officials. The Gongyuan Road project includes a variety of design approaches, and even the selection of the site involves a variety of space types. As a result, Gongyuan Road has achieved the highest level of prosperity and recognition among the three streets because of its richness. Therefore, this study suggests that the government should consider the inclusion of diverse spatial types, rather than just linear building facades along the street, when planning a regeneration project. At the same time, policy makers should empower designers to explore more innovative approaches, instead of

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<sup>578</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Ran Bi and Jinhua Guo (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002), 59.

<sup>579</sup> Chen, 3-4.

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overly influencing architectural styles with their own personal tastes.

#### **(4) Using intangible cultures and activities to dynamically optimize the tangible space**

With historical space as the carrier, more intangible cultural heritage can be cultivated and inherited. This not only contributes to the inheritance of traditional culture, but also helps enhance the vitality of urban space. As indicated by Carol Ludwig and Yi-Wen Wang, with the dissemination of intangible heritage, more ‘experienced-centred’ are being widely accepted in China, and overpowered ‘object-centred’ modern notions of heritage.<sup>580</sup> The three streets analyzed in this study all have intangible aspects in subsequent developments in recent years, such as sales and displays of traditional handicraft works, and organizing traditional drama performances. They have provided visitors with rich cultural experiences and interactions. Scattered in some small courtyards in historic Wenzhou, there are also some studios of traditional craftsmen. The presence of culture and art can also provide impetus for the continuous optimization of the existing tangible spaces. However, this continuity is rarely reflected in historic Wenzhou, which can only be found in some small courtyard spaces around the Gongyuan Road by the time this thesis is completed. Therefore, this study recommends that the local government should shift from the one-off renewal mindset to a dynamic, continuous Organic Renewal mindset, through ongoing intangible practices to discover the potential for optimizing the tangible spaces.

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<sup>580</sup> Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 156-59.

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## **(5) From tourist-oriented to community/residents-oriented**

The idea of ‘organic renewal’ advocates for bottom-up dynamic and continuous adjustments to the fundamental cells [e.g., courtyard houses] and organs [e.g., blocks and quarters], in accordance with their intrinsic order.<sup>581</sup> However, despite the remarkable economic and cultural success achieved in tourist-oriented street regenerations, another overlooked issue persists – local residents. Among all different stakeholders, decisions made by local officials, developers, and designers typically take precedence, in urban regenerations. While it should be noticed that community and resident participation remains minimal and is still in the early stages of exploration, which reflects a common phenomenon in China's urban regeneration process.<sup>582</sup> For residents living in high-rise buildings along the streets in historic Wenzhou, the transition from modernized to historic renewal has not substantively improved their quality of life. Instead, it has subjected them to a noisier environment, with little say in urban regeneration decisions. This issue is likely to become more widespread, particularly the design strategy to high-rise buildings from Chan Street is being advocated.

The problems from Wenzhou local government's full-powered planning mechanism need to be compensated by the development of social forces. The local government must devolve some power to the private sector and individuals. Sun Heyuan and Zuo Jinfeng

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<sup>581</sup> Tong, Bai, and Jiang.

<sup>582</sup> Bingsheng Liu et al., "What's Wrong with the Public Participation of Urban Regeneration Project in China: A Study from Multiple Stakeholders' Perspectives," *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management* 29, no. 1 (2022): 91-109.



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point out that a ‘smart city’ should be guided by people-oriented ‘smart governance’, and the in-depth development of ‘smart governance’ should be based on the ‘smart autonomy’ of the grassroots level.<sup>583</sup> Alexander C. et al. claimed: “the design should be regulated as a procedure or a process, not as a constraint on the final form... In some cases, through the interaction of individual constructing behaviors, it can organically produce overall rules on a larger scale”.<sup>584</sup> Therefore, the whole society should actively participate in the regeneration process. The government needs to formulate reasonable and sustainable rules and regulations for residents' independent renewal and diminish to play the role as investors. Some decision-making power in the renewal of the historic district could be held in the community neighbourhood committee to enable residents to participate in the decision-making process.

On the other hand, many residents lack fundamental awareness of conservation. Thus, the local government should introduce cultural and artistic professionals to live and work in the historic neighborhoods, with the hope that they can foster a favorable artistic atmosphere and cultivate emotional ties between local residents and their community. However, the effectiveness of this strategy requires a long period for evaluation. The whole society needs to continuously and patiently cultivate the sense of nostalgia among public, by introducing more cultural activities and people with a high level of cultural literacy. This approach can lead to better public engagement, as well as more valuable public opinions

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<sup>583</sup> Heyuan Sun and Jinfeng Zuo, "The Reference Value of the Organic Urban Renewal and Smart Urban Governance Mechanism in Extraterritorial Cities for China," *International Journal Of Legal Developments And Allied Issues* 8, no. 2 (2022): 153-72.

<sup>584</sup> Alexander et al., 37.

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for future efforts.

## **(6) From function priority to ideology priority**

Today, it seems that the basic purpose of all construction activities is to make it convenient for people to use buildings or spaces, which leads to a functionalist way of thinking. However, Rykwert reminds us that a city also “had to enshrine the hopes and fears of its citizens”.<sup>585</sup> Rooted in the minds of pre-modern Chinese people, the priority of construction was closely linked to their cosmological, political, and social views. Jing Xie points out that the pre-modern Chinese elites devote their time and wisdom in exploring and enjoying such artistic way of living, rather than in scientific venture for achieving progressive growth.<sup>586</sup> Accordingly, an important aim of construction behaviour (especially important buildings) is to promote the foundation of a good social order. From the case study of this research, pre-modern Wenzhou City from the macro-scale whole, to the middle-scale streets, and then to the micro-scale architectures, all reflecting the pursuit of the noble, ideal, and unified Chinese order. The Chinese culture should not only be regarded as some artistic symbols on the building components, nor should it be regarded as some entertainment activities to add to the lively atmosphere of the streets in festivals, nor should it be regarded as some places for economic profit. Key figures in urban planning

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<sup>585</sup> J. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>586</sup> Jing Xie, *Chinese Urbanism: Urban Form and Life in the Tang-Song Dynasties* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2020), 210.

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should think about how to transform the city's historic areas into sources of social order and moral integrity, appreciating their symbolic value within the urban landscape.

### **8.3 Limitations and Future Explorations**

#### **(1) Conducting more comparative studies among different city case**

A comprehensive understanding of urban regeneration models in China's historical areas requires a substantial number of case studies. However, given the vast size of China and the presence of numerous historical cities, it is not feasible to document all cases. Therefore, this study is limited to defining heritage theories and concepts within the Chinese context and to describe their practical strategies. The case study on Wenzhou is unique and may not reflect a universal phenomenon across all Chinese cities. Different local governments and citizens in various cities may respond differently and have varied practices and experiences under the influence of the same national policy document. Future research could explore comparative studies of urban heritage regeneration in various cities. Additionally, as mentioned above, the theory of 'organic renewal' is not perfect in content at present, which makes it difficult to determine whether a particular renewal method is 'organic' in a specific context. Therefore, future studies involving more urban cases can further discuss the contemporary development and innovation aspects of the 'organic renewal' theory, and engage in discussions with more city decision-makers about the possibilities of realizing them.

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## **(2) More regeneration case studies in historic Wenzhou**

In genealogical study, an ideal model should meticulously and patiently rely on ‘a vast accumulation of source materials’.<sup>587</sup> However, the regeneration of historic Wenzhou is an ongoing subject. More and more regeneration projects are being constructed. The current research focuses on only three street cases, excluding others with different characteristics. These three streets not only have their own typical characteristics but also contribute to the formation of integrity on the same urban axis in historic Wenzhou. However, these cases only reflect a small portion of the changes in urban regeneration mechanisms and concepts. Meanwhile, a new round of historic quarter conservation planning is in the process of being made. The author could only gather limited information from planners’ investigations in relevant departments and cannot get a comprehensive understanding of their details for the time being. It cannot be guaranteed whether other street projects and the new historic quarter plans will all follow the trend stated in this research. In the coming years, more time will be needed to study additional regeneration projects and gather public opinions to validate the development trends identified in this study.

## **(3) Collecting More Historic Information**

During the work of historical data collection, the author often found a lack of textual information and historical photographs. The lack of historical data can also lead urban regeneration practitioners to ignore a lot of important historical information, resulting

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<sup>587</sup> Julie McLeod, "Foucault Forever," *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 22, no. 1 (2001): 95-104.

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in the destruction of urban heritage. This also makes it difficult to evaluate the authenticity of some contemporary architectural renewals. At the same time, some reconstruction designs may rely too heavily on conjecture. Therefore, methods like oral history recording, digital surveying, and 3D modelling can greatly contribute to the improvement of architectural history information in the future.

#### **(4) Exploring collaborative workshop**

For collecting the attitudes and willingness of various stakeholders related to the regeneration of historic Wenzhou, the author interviewed different individuals separately. However, decision-makers who aim to respect public opinion often require extensive negotiation. This requires building a bridge of communication among different stakeholders. For example, organizing a ‘collaborative workshop’ can help resolve conflicts of interest, reach a consensus on development vision, and form a local self-governance capacity.<sup>588</sup> This approach is widely used in some Western developed countries, but it is still a new model and concept in China. Limited by various factors such as venue organization, activity funding, and government approval the author was unable to organize a ‘collaborative workshop’ among different stakeholders in the regeneration of historic Wenzhou in this study. Future research could explore how to organize and design collaborative workshops. Building on this, further discussions could be held on how to

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<sup>588</sup> Xun Li et al., "Collaborative Workshop and Community Participation: A New Approach to Urban Regeneration in China," *Cities* 102 (2020): 102743.

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develop an integration of top-down and bottom-up urban regeneration mechanisms in Wenzhou and other cities.

#### **(5) Exploring more ways to utilize big data**

Moreover, there has been limited extensive data analysis conducted by government departments and planning institutes regarding various indicators of historic Wenzhou. As a 'smart city' should achieve greater transparency and openness in data management.<sup>589</sup> The relevant government department has recently begun using big data monitoring systems [using cameras, mobile phone signals, and other Internet-connected devices] in some of the newly regenerated historic streets, including the three street cases covered in this study. Data on consumption, visitor flow, and land use can now be captured in real-time. However, data from before the street renewal is missing. Thus, achieving a comprehensive and detailed comparison of these streets before and after the renewal is difficult. In addition, the recent implementation of the big data system coincided with economic disruptions due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the low visitor flow and consumption levels in December 2022 were impacted by the peak of the epidemic. In the future, excluding the special impact of the epidemic and the accumulation of big data monitoring systems, in the future, the big data monitoring system will provide more accurate evaluations of specific areas of historic Wenzhou. In addition, to contribute a more objective and comprehensive evaluation to the conservation and follow-up

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<sup>589</sup> Eiman Al Nuaimi et al., "Applications of Big Data to Smart Cities," *Journal of Internet Services and Applications* 6, no. 1 (2015): 1-15.

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management of historic urban areas, future studies can further discuss what kind of data should be collected and how to use them in more ways.

Throughout my doctoral journey, China's architectural industry has experienced a shift from extreme growth to rapid decline. On the other hand, the infinite potential of urban regeneration has been gradually discovered in this process. Transforming the physical environment and improving living standards are enduring needs in cities. With the limitations and future directions outlined above, I am committed to continuing my research in this field!

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## Appendix

### 1 Research Ethic Approval

Since the approval form of Research Ethics Checklist is very long, only the beginning part of this document and the approval signature page are shown below.



The University of  
Nottingham

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Research Ethics Checklist for Staff and Research Students

[strongly informed by the ESRC (2012) *Framework for Research Ethics*]

A checklist should be completed for **every** research project or thesis where the research involves the **participation of people, the use of secondary datasets or archives relating to people and/or access to field sites or animals**. It will be used to identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

You must not begin data collection or approach potential research participants until you have completed this form, received ethical clearance, and submitted this form for retention with the appropriate administrative staff.

The principal investigator or, where the principal investigator is a student, the supervisor, is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.



If you have ticked any shaded boxes you will need to describe more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. Issues to consider in preparing an ethics review are given below. Please send this completed form to the Research Ethics Officer who will decide whether your project requires further review by the UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee and/or whether further information needs to be provided.

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's **Research Code of Conduct** and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. **This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. For guidance and UK regulations on the latter, please refer to the Data Protection Policy and Guidelines of the University of Nottingham:**

Policy and guidelines - <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/governance/records-and-information-management/data-protection/data-protection-policy.aspx>

**Any significant change in the project question(s), design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the School Research Ethics Officer and may require a new application for ethical approval.**

Signature of Principal Investigator/Researcher:

Signature of Supervisor (where appropriate):

### Research Ethics Panel response

- ☒ the research can go ahead as planned
- ☐ further information is needed on the research protocol (see details below)
- ☐ amendments are requested to the research protocol (see details below)

Unit REO...*Sherif Welsen*... *Byung-Gyoo Kang* ... Date 12<sup>th</sup> Sep. 2024.

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## 2 Participant Consent Form

Both English and Chinese versions of Participant Consent Form are shown below:

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Project title** Reinterpretation of History: Urban Regeneration in Historic Wenzhou, China

**Researcher's name** .....Kejun Shao

**Supervisor's name** ..... Jing Xie

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that the interview/data collection [*omit as appropriate*]. will be recorded/filmed [*omit as appropriate*].
- I understand that data will be stored in accordance with data protection laws.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require more information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Nottingham, Ningbo if I wish to make a complaint related to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** ..... (participant)

**Print name** ..... **Date** .....

#### Contact details

Researcher: Kejun Shao ([Kejun.Shao@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Kejun.Shao@nottingham.edu.cn))

Supervisor: Jing Xie ([Jing.Xie@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Jing.Xie@nottingham.edu.cn))

UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee Coordinator: Mr. Byung Gyoo Kang ([Byung-Gyoo.Kang@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Byung-Gyoo.Kang@nottingham.edu.cn))

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## 参与者同意书

项目标题 Reinterpretation of History: Urban Regeneration in Historic Wenzhou, China

研究者姓名 Kejun Shao

导师姓名 Jing Xie

- 本人已阅读声明，项目组织者已经向我解释了研究项目的性质和宗旨。本人理解并同意参与。
- 本人理解项目的目的和在项目中的参与作用。
- 本人明白可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出，不会因此影响现在以及将来的状况
- 本人明白研究过程中信息可能会被公开，但本人身份不会被确认，个人的调查结果始终是被保密。
- 本人知道面谈/数据采集（酌情省略）将会被录音/拍摄（酌情省略）
- 本人了解数据会根据数据保护相关法律进行存储
- 本人知道，如果需要进一步有关研究的信息可以联系研究者或者导师，如果需要对参与研究提出投诉则可以联系宁波诺丁汉大学科研伦理小组委员会。

参与者签名.....

日期.....

### 联系方式

研究者: Kejun Shao ([Kejun.Shao@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Kejun.Shao@nottingham.edu.cn))

导师: Jing Xie ([Jing.Xie@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Jing.Xie@nottingham.edu.cn))

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书: Mr. Byung Gyoo Kang ([Byung-Gyoo.Kang@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Byung-Gyoo.Kang@nottingham.edu.cn))

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### 3 Interview Form

#### **Demographic Information:**

Name:

Position/Title:

Organization/Institution:

Years of experience in the conservation or regeneration of historic Wenzhou:

#### **Section 1: Role and Planning [mainly for government officials and planners]**

1. Can you describe your role and responsibilities in the regeneration of historic Wenzhou?
2. How were the planning strategies developed for the regeneration project? What were the main considerations and challenges?
3. What criteria were used in selecting the specific areas or sites for regeneration in historic Wenzhou?
4. Are there any relationships between the local conservation plans with the national centre government policies?
5. Can you discuss the stakeholder engagement process in the regeneration project? How were the concerns and input of local communities, businesses, and residents taken into account?
6. Are there any future plans or phases for the regeneration project in historic Wenzhou? What are the key priorities moving forward?

#### **Section 2: Design and Architecture [mainly for architects]**

7. How were the architectural and design concepts developed for the regenerated areas in historic Wenzhou? What were the main design principles and considerations?
8. Can you describe any unique architectural or design features incorporated into the regeneration project? How do these features enhance the historical and cultural value of the area?
9. What strategies were employed to balance the preservation of historical heritage with the introduction of modern amenities and infrastructure?

- 
10. Can you discuss any challenges or obstacles faced during the implementation of the regeneration project? Did they change the original aim and objectives during the design process? Why did these changes happen, and how did you address them?
  11. Have you considered 'authenticity' in the design process? What aspects of your design project could be regarded as authentic?
  12. For reinterpreting of history, are there any source for doing pseudo-classic design?
  13. How do you think about using innovative design methods in a historical context? What innovative methods did you use in your project?

### **Section 3: Community and Sustainability [mainly for government officials]**

14. How do you engage with the local community in historic Wenzhou to ensure their active participation and ownership of the regeneration project? Can you describe any community-led initiatives or collaborations?
15. Can you discuss any initiatives or programs aimed at promoting cultural and educational activities in the regenerated areas of historic Wenzhou? How are these initiatives expected to contribute to the cultural vitality of the area?
16. Is there any digital technologies used in the regeneration process? Can you provide examples of their applications and benefits?
17. How has the regeneration project influenced or shaped the broader urban development strategies or policies in the region? Can you discuss any ripple effects or connections to other development projects?
18. In your opinion, what are the key factors that contribute to the long-term sustainability and legacy of the regeneration project in historic Wenzhou? How can these factors be ensured and maintained over time?
19. For the situation of multiple families living together in traditional courtyard houses, do you think they should be relocated or should they keep living there? If relocated, what is the resettlement policy in this xxx regeneration project? If keeping their living status, what should be improved?

### **Section 4: Impacts, Reflections and Recommendations [mainly for professionals and government officials]**

- 
20. What are the most bad aspects do you think about the xxx regeneration project? How has the regeneration project in historic Wenzhou impacted the local economy, tourism, and community development?
  21. How do you measure the success or effectiveness of the regeneration efforts in historic Wenzhou? Are there specific indicators or metrics used for evaluation?
  22. What are the regrets for the former projects in historic Wenzhou? If you could do the design again, what do you think can be improved or done in a totally different way?
  23. Based on your experience and expertise, do you have any recommendations or suggestions to the regeneration of other cities with similar contexts?
  24. What do you think the next generation of designers and government officials should do for the regeneration of historic Wenzhou in the future?

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## 4 Interviewee Details

The following are the institutions and related key interviewees (to protect personal privacy, only the position of each person is displayed):

### 1. Wenzhou Municipal Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning

Its predecessor was the Municipal Planning Bureau.

- Interviewee A: the former head of the Department of Conservation of Historical and Cultural City in this bureau.

### 2. Wenzhou Design Group

It is a state-owned architectural design enterprise in Wenzhou and has undertaken many street regeneration projects in the historical city.

- Interviewee B: Chief Architect of this enterprise, who is a senior architectural expert.
- Interviewee C: Deputy Chief Architect, who is in charge of the renovation design of Chan Street and Wuma Street.
- Interviewee D: Deputy Chief Architect, who is in charge of the regeneration design of Shuomen Street Historic Quarter.

### 3. Historical and Cultural District Construction Service Center of Lucheng District, Wenzhou City

This is the government department directly in charge of the project decisions, investments, and operations in historic Wenzhou.

- Interviewee E: Director of this government department.
- Interviewee F: Big data technician.

### 4. Wenzhou Urban Planning and Design Institute

It was used to be an independent state-owned urban planning and design Institute in Wenzhou, which undertook the overall conservation planning of Historic Wenzhou and each quarter-level conservation plans. Now it is one of the departments belong to Wenzhou Design Group, but still with strong autonomy.

- 
- Interviewee G: the head of Department for Conservation Planning, who has participated in the editing of the overall conservation plans of historic Wenzhou, as well as in charge of several historic quarter-level conservation plans.



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## 5 Publications

### Accepted papers' abstract and acceptance certificate

#### 1. Journal of Urban Design (under review)

### Flexible Authenticity: heritage remaking on modern buildings in Chan Street, Wenzhou, China

Kejun Shao<sup>1</sup>, Jing Xie <sup>2\*</sup>, Yat Ming Loo<sup>3</sup>, Tim Heath<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham Ningbo China; College of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou, China.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham, UK

\* Correspondence: Jing Xie  
jing.xie@nottingham.edu.cn

**Abstract:** Authenticity is a core evaluation criterion in the field of architectural heritage. Looking back at the development of heritage theories and international conventions, one can see that such a criterion has been continuously expanded and diversified over time. This is particularly evident in Western scholarship on heritage in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, David Lowenthal's "Critical Heritage Studies" identified that the essence of heritage should be regarded as a cultural production and exhibition. Heritage evolves dynamically, and its value is given by people, which varies from person to person. This paper first discusses the theoretical foundations and implementation method of heritage remaking. Then, it analyses the project of Chan Street in historic Wenzhou, China, including its historical setting, orientation, design strategies and subsequent influences. Through the case study, it illustrates how Chan Street has been transformed from a completely modern street to a historical street. It draws reflections about the ideas of authenticity, historic streets, historic quarters, and historical city conservation. The intention of this study is to have far-reaching influence on the future regeneration process of historical cities.

#### KEYWORDS

heritage; authenticity; Chan Street; historic Wenzhou; regeneration



**Taylor & Francis**  
Taylor & Francis Group

**Journal of Urban Design**

**Flexible Authenticity: heritage remaking on modern buildings in Chan Street,  
Wenzhou, China**

<b>Submission ID</b>	243248609
<b>Article Type</b>	Research Article
<b>Keywords</b>	heritage, authenticity, Chan Street, historic Wenzhou, regeneration
<b>Authors</b>	Kejun SHAO, Jing Xie, Yat Ming Loo, Tim Heath

For any queries please contact:

[journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com](mailto:journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com)

Note for Reviewers:

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For Peer Review Only - Non-Anonymous PDF

Cover Page

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2. Accepted by JOURNAL OF WENZHOU UNIVERSITY.

## The Perspective Shift from Authenticity to Axiology: The Introspection on the Rehabilitating Historic Wenzhou

KEJUN SHAO<sup>1</sup>, VINCENT PEU DUVALLO<sup>2</sup>

(1. Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham  
Ningbo, China 315000; College of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Wenzhou  
University, Wenzhou, China 325035;

2. School of Public Architecture, Wenzhou Kean University, Wenzhou, China  
325000)

**Abstract:** In the field of architectural heritage restoration, debates about authenticity have existed since the 19th century. While the axiology is instructive for reflecting on such contradictions. Taking the rehabilitating historic Wenzhou as a case study, this paper attempts to transform the evaluation model of heritage restoration from a critical authenticity perspective to a more comprehensive axiological perspective. Led by value-enhancement from the 2nd round of conservation planning for historic Wenzhou, a series of historic streets represented by Chan Street, Wuma Street and Gongyuan Road were rehabilitated. Among them, Wuma Street focuses on boosting the art-value of Western style buildings on both sides of the street; Chan Street has repaired the missing historical features in the historical city and recovered part of its historic-value. The various methods involved in Gongyuan Road reflect the current society's pluralistic recognition of heritage values and inclusive coexistence. Through the analysis of the characteristics of these cases, the author further triggered the reflection on the concepts related to urban heritage, such as original form and original style, fragment and whole, restoration and reintegration, so as to enlightens the regeneration of historic Wenzhou and even other historical cities in China in the future.

**Keywords:** Value; Authenticity; Rehabilitation; Historic Wenzhou.

## 拟用证明

邵钊钧, Vincent Peu Duvalon 作者:

尊文《从真实性到价值论的视角转换——反思整修中的温州古城》(稿件编号: 2022.04.29.0004), 于 2022 年 6 月 30 日通过本刊终审, 拟录用, 刊期将根据我刊具体情况予以安排。



### 3. Published as a chapter in *AMPS PROCEEDINGS SERIES 35.1*.

Kejun Shao, Vincent Peu Duvalon. "FROM AUTHENTICITY TO AXIOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF WUMA STREET IN WENZHOU, CHINA". Chapter 48, in *AMPS PROCEEDINGS SERIES 35.1*. Ed. by Jitka Cirklová. (Prague: Czech Technical University & AMPS, 2023), 477-488.

