

Protection and Reconstruction of Urbanized Historic Block

--The Cultural Heritage and Current Situation Renovation of the “Wanshou Palace” Historic Block in Nanchang

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Abstract: The historic block is the annual ring of the city tree. It records the history of a city as a witness; it reflects the traditional culture value of the town and accumulates the culture of a city. Without them, it is like cutting off the blood vessel of history and culture. Historic and cultural cities will lose their time thickness and individuality. The purpose of protecting and reconstructing urban historic areas is not only to restore and emphasize its aesthetic value, but more importantly to make protected areas continue to be inhabited and urban-active areas. Due to long-term historic changes, in these areas with glorious past, residential buildings in large proportion often face problems of functional improvement, not only in the field of aesthetics, but also in social issues such as changes in the structure of residents and in economic activities. The Nanchang Wanshou Palace Historic Block is a commercial block with a long history. Its rise and development history is also a microcosm of the prosperity and development of Nanchang's economy and culture.

Keywords: Wanshou Palace, Historic Blocks, Traditional Culture and Art, Urban Personality, Block Protection

The Wanshou Palace was built to commemorate the local patron saint of Jiangxi, Xu Zhenjun, commonly known as the “Blessing Lord.” Xu Zhenjun, formerly known as Xu Xun, with style name of Jing Yuan. His ancestral home was in Runan, Henan. At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, his father Xu Xiao came to Nanchang from the Central Plains to escape from the war. In the first year of Taikang of Jinwu Emperor (AD 280), Zhenjun was forty-two years old. He was appointed as the county magistrate of Jingyang County in Shu Prefecture. He was close to the sage and kept away from the crafty sycophant, and he was a clean and honest official. His political reputation was excellent and he was deeply loved by the people. After the death of Emperor Wu of the Jin Dynasty, Hui Emperor was unwise, and Queen Jia was in charge of the official affairs, causing the chaos of the Eight Kings. Xu Xun, who had been in charge of Jingyang County for ten years, resolutely resigned his position and went to the east. After Xu Xun died, in order to commemorate him, the local township neighbors and his grandsons set up “Xu Xian memorial temple” in his former residence. It was changed to “Youweiguan” in the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Song Zhenzong gave his name and personally wrote the inscription “Yulong Wanshou Palace”. In the Tongzhi period of Qing Dynasty, *Narration for Reconstructing Xiaoyao Mountain Yulong Wanshou Palace* records that: “my hometown Xiaoyao Mountain Yulong Wanshou Palace was famous at home and abroad for its grand temple, flourishing incense. Although it was very old, the worship people always rushed here for thousands of years.” After many dynasties, the incense of the palace was continuous, and Jiangxi people had established many “Wanshou Palace” in the field, reaching to thousands. In ancient times, where there were people from Jiangxi, there was the Wanshou Palace. It spread all over the country, including urban and rural areas, as well as Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and other regions and countries. It is also the representative of the ancient Chinese Guild culture, so it is also known as the Jiangxi Guild Hall, Jiangxi Temple, Jiangxi Tongxiang Hall, and Yuzhang Hall. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the economy of Jiangxi was developed. Merchants of porcelain, tea, rice, wood and silk traveled across the country, and Wanshou Palace was built in other parts of the country. Wanshou Palace also became the “Jiangxi Guild Hall” in Jiangxi.

Wanshou Palace Mall is located in Zhongshan Road, the prosperous section of Nanchang City. The opposite side of the mall is Shengli Road Pedestrian Street. This is a small commodity

wholesale market with many years of history. The products are very extensive and varied, and the various commodities handled are over 10,000. Business households are more than two thousand; as Nanjing Confucius Temple and Shanghai Chenghuang Temple, Wanshou Palace Mall is the landscape of prosperous city of Nanchang. It has always been famous for its strong incense and the business variety of jade, gold and silver around Cuihua Street. It is a place familiar to Nanchang people.

Today's historic blocks refer to the ancient town centers, including the ancient central district of the city or other areas with historic features. They serve as a testimony to history and reflects the value of traditional urban culture. The formation of historic blocks cannot be separated from natural conditions, population, society, economy, culture, politics and other factors; urban historic blocks include seven values: aesthetic value, architectural value, environmental value, functional value, resource value, business value and continuity value. Ryp-kema summarizes the value of buildings in urban historic blocks into eight areas: economic value, social value, cultural value, aesthetic value, urban context value, architectural value, historic value, and place value. The formation conditions of historic blocks are closely related to the unique natural conditions and the development of economy and culture and art. The city is the product of social development to a certain stage. The natural conditions of the region are the basic conditions for the formation and development of the city, and the social and economic development is its direct driving force, culture is the soul of a city, but with the development of the city, the transformation of urban residents' lifestyle, the protection and reconstruction of historic blocks in the town is imperative.

1 The Formation and Current Situation of the Wanshou Palace Historic Block

The Wanshou Palace historic block is formed by the culture of "Wan Shou Palace". The area between Cuihua Street and the Hetong Lane in the area is the site Wanshou Palace. According to the *Nanchang County Annals* in the thirty-third year of Qing Daoguang, during the Jin Dynasty, Wanshou Palace was built to enshrine the local protection god of Jiangxi who was known as the "Blessing Lord". Nanchang Wanshou Palace is located at the hub of the domestic river north-south route and Jiangnan east-west route - Zhangjiang Wharf. There are many streets in the historic block of Wanshou Palace, including Qiaobu Street, Cuihua Street, Vinegar Lane, Radish Lane, Hetong Lane, Guangrunmen Street and Qipan Street and so on. The block is close to Fuhe river, and the nearby is a very important water and land terminal. Therefore, this block has always been a concentrated area of business in Nanchang. According to the *Nanchang County Annals* in the 59th year of Qing Emperor Qianlong, there were twelve gates in Nanchang in the Song Dynasty. It was called Chaibumen, also known as Qiaobumen. In the Hongwu period of Ming Dynasty, seven gates were rebuilt. It's renamed as Guangrunmen due to its developed economy, implying "increasing business opportunities, making more profit". There is the saying that "Guangrunmen, strong cargo handling". The area around Guangrunmen is a prosperous area where merchants gather to do business, and folks have the idea of "abundant cargo in-and-out door". Guanghuomen, today's Guangrunmen, has been developed into the Wanshou Palace and Cuihua Street small commodity wholesale markets with wide influence in and out of the province.



Figure 1. Map of Wanshou Palace historic block

In the past, the population was concentrated, the economy and culture were developed, and today the grand and magnificent historic streets probably become the declining corners in the hinterland of the city. They are a bit out of place with the modern bustling cities. The Wanshou Palace historic block in Nanchang City is a municipal community that integrates religion, commerce, service, residence and production functions. It is adjacent to Zhongshan Road in the north, Chuanshan Road in the west and Cuihua Street in Dongtong. The total area is about 6.3 hectares. The historic old block of Wanshou Palace is the most populous district in Nanchang City that reflects the life style of the city and owns the most popular houses with Jiangnan dwellings. Before the liberation, this place was presented in the form of space combined with commerce and residence. Due to historic changes, the commercial functions of this block were weakened. Then, some commercial and residential stores along the street gradually evolved into residential communities, and most of the residents were retired workers and low-income groups. The inner building of the Wanshou Palace block is a typical courtyard residential building. The buildings are mostly brick and wood structures, which have a long service life and have basically become dangerous buildings.



Figure 2. The current situation of the historic district of Wanshou Palace

Most of the courtyards inside the buildings have become large courtyards. The courtyard has become a public space for seven or eight households. Many courtyards, kitchens, etc. have been built in the courtyard, and the living conditions are very poor and the environment is bad. Today, the ruined scene of the historic block of Wanshou Palace is in sharp contrast to the modern urban atmosphere of the surrounding high-rise buildings.

2 The Cultural Connotation of the Historic Street of Wanshou Palace

The historic block is the annual ring of the city tree, which records the history of a city; it is also a heavy book that accumulates the culture of the city. Without them, it is like cutting off the blood vessel of history and culture. Historic and cultural cities lose their time thickness and individuality. The purpose for protecting and transforming urban historic areas is not only to restore and emphasize its aesthetic value, but more importantly to make protected areas continue to be inhabited and urban-active areas. Due to long-term historic changes, in these areas with a glorious past, most residential buildings often face problems of functional improvement, not only in the field of aesthetics, but also in social issues such as changes in the structure of residents and economic activities.

2.1 Rich Heritage of Cultural Relics

Since ancient times, the Wanshou Palace block has formed a bustling city with Taoist culture and business services. The district has many historic blocks with a long history, which can best represent Nanchang's history and culture, business development and city culture, as well as the ancient architectural art style. A large amount of historic and cultural resources concentrates in the district. These cultural relics include the overall pattern of the block, architectural decoration, and even some ancient artifacts. The long history, the combination of architectural art and technology

has created an important value for the buildings and artifacts of the historic block. The space form of Wanshou Palace historic block is well preserved, and the proportion of traditional buildings in the block is relatively high. The proportion of existing buildings in the Republic of China era is as high as 52%, and that in the Ming and Qing Dynasties is 2%. The style construction buildings in the city is Wanshou Palace Zhiyuan Hall, Sanyuan Hall, and Cross Street Ancient Door, Luoshi Old House (Qiantang River Bridge designer Luo Ying) and mosque.

2.2 Deep Cultural Heritage of Jiangxi

The formation of the historic block is inseparable from the prosperity of Wanshou Palace. The cultural spirit represented by the Wanshou Palace is immersed in the entire historic area. Among them, there are social changes, famous celebrities and other elegance cultures, as well as folk customs such as city customs, folk art, and street houses. The historic block is a traditional culture rooted in the city's native land. It both represents the material and traditional culture of the city. The preciousness of the historic block is not because of the historic significance of the age, but because the structure and scenery passed down are the traditional accumulation. This accumulation is the essence of urban culture; the Wanshou Palace is built to commemorate Jiangxi Xu Zhenjun. Xu Zhenjun is commonly known as the "Blessing Lord", which makes the Wanshou Palace draped with a strong blessing culture. The emperors used to pray for the country, and the local officials and gentlemen blessed the land and the people through it. Incorporating Taoism and Confucianism, Xu Zhenjun founded the "Jing Ming Dao" and advocated "filial piety, love and respect, loyalty, and trust" and taught the township. Jiangyou Shangbang practitioners were influenced by Confucian "integrity", "self-cultivation" and "relief of people" culture. Although they were in the business sea, there are still factors of Jiangxi Confucian culture in the bones. Xu Zhenjun became the cultural idol of the merchants, which is just the tremendous influence of the spiritual culture on the economy; the blessed culture contained in their Wanshou Palace and the business culture that advocates integrity, which provided the soil for rebuilding the commercial glory of the historic block of Wanshou Palace.

2.3 Business Atmosphere Filled with Traditional Spirit

In the *Kaogong Ji*, there is a record of "the artisans building the city... facing the market." The so-called "city" is the capital city, the "facing" means the front of the palace, and the "market" is the market on the back. The formation of every historic block is inseparable from the promotion of economic factors. Studying the hidden economic history of the ancient block is conducive to finding the password to activate the vitality of the historic block.

The commercial atmosphere in the Wanshou Palace area is very strong, and different streets have different business themes. Cuihua Street was originally a trading market for gold and silver jewellery; radish alley was originally a place to buy and sell silks, hand towels and silk fabrics, also known as Luojin market; Radish Lane was originally a place to buy and sell bamboo baskets and other items. During the reign of Emperor Guangxu, it is abbreviated as Radish Lane and still in use today; the Hetong lane used to rely on the Wanshou Palace and the Chamber of Commerce to survive. Most of them are spaces for negotiating trade and commerce, and shops selling incense and flowers. The origin of Guangrunmen reflects the commercial atmosphere in the Wanshou Palace block. According to the Nanchang County Annals of the Qing Emperor Qianlong in the fifty-ninth year, seven doors were rebuilt in Hongwu period of Ming Dynasty. Because of the commercial development, taking the idea of "increasing the business opportunities, taking more profit", it's renamed as Guangrunmen, and there's a saying of "cargos in and out of Guangrunmen".

3 Protection, Renovation and Reconstruction of the Historic Block of Wanshou Palace

Historic blocks have historic, artistic, cultural, social, and economic values. In order to regain the vitality and attractiveness of historic blocks, we can neither protect wholly nor renovate all out of all recognition, but we should combine protection, renovation and development and utilization, and strive for mutual promotion and unification of social, economic and cultural benefits, to achieve

maximum comprehensive benefits.

3.1 Protection of Historic Block

The Ministry of Construction proposed in 1985 to protect the blocks that have concentrated cultural relics and historic sites, or can reflect the traditional features of a certain historic period and the local characteristics of the district. “As a historic and cultural city, it is necessary not only to see the history of the city and the preserved cultural relics and historic sites, but also to see whether its current situation and style retains its historic features or represents the traditional style of the city.” For the historic street, the first question we should consider is that if the issue of protection and the core of protection are the historic tradition and humanistic spirit of the city, and the focus is mainly on the overall pattern and style of the historic block. The overall pattern and style of historic blocks is the most direct embodiment of traditional culture and art. It is an artistic creation of the aesthetic orientation of living space created by the ancestors of generations industriously. The protection of historic blocks should follow the spatial strategy of “formal integrity”. By understanding the traditional space and grasping the traditional space construction method, the place in the historic block that does not conform to the traditional features and traditional space image can be flexibly repaired. Protecting the overall pattern and traditional style is an important part of the traditional block. The specific content includes the structure of the street, the volume, form, style, materials, color and decoration of the ancient buildings. In the protection of the scenic area, large-scale demolition and construction should be avoided, and small-scale and gradual models should be promoted to avoid the waste of historic and cultural information in large-scale construction.

The historic block of Wanshou Palace should protect the traditional patterns, scales and place names of Cuihua Street, Qipan Street, Radish Lane, Vinegar Lane and Wanshou Palace, and properly preserve and restore the residential and traditional handicraft workshops in this section; The layout, spatial structure and historic buildings, etc. are maintained and repaired; the buildings and objects in the block are clearly engraved with the traces of traditional culture and art to save and protect; the municipal public facilities are gradually improved and rectified to avoid constructive damage to make the historic environment of the block continue. The area consisting of Zhongshan Road, Chuanshan Road and Cuihua Street is the core protection area. The height of the building is controlled below three floors, and the height of the building within 50 meters is controlled below three floors. The architectural style is in harmony with the traditional style.

1. The way to protect and update. The renewal and development of a city is a process of interaction between “time” and “space”. Today’s life will become the history of tomorrow. For the protection of historic blocks, it is necessary to distinguish retention protection and inheritance protection. For the buildings with rich culture and history heritage, high architectural, scientific and artistic value, good building quality and high historic and cultural value should be protected as retention protection. And overall migration should be carried out for the buildings that are hard to reserve at the original place. For those that have been seriously damaged, it is necessary to rebuild the overall image of the block in the premise of respecting the landscape of the historic block, or to dismantle it as a public green space to improve the environmental quality of the block and achieve the inheritance protection of the block as a whole.

2. Attract community residents to participate. The historic blocks form, survive and develop because they carry the life of the residents. Therefore, the residents should be encouraged to participate in the renovation. Their needs should be known to improve the enthusiasm of residents to repair. Only the residents truly become the masters of their own communities, the cultural blood vessel of history can be continued.

3. The relationship between the long-term nature of protecting historic blocks and the whole city. The historic block is the “root” of the city’s history and culture. With the development of the city, changes in urban spatial functions and environment have gradually led to the transformation of urban structure. The renewal of historic blocks is related to the current situation of the city and the future development direction and the continuation of the historic culture blood vessel of the city. Although the update of historic blocks is a transformation of urban local function and space, it has a

global significance. This is a long-term and dynamic process that requires the participation of the general public, architects, cultural departments, planning departments and the active guidance of the government.

3.2 Reconstruction of historic block

The renovation should emphasize the provision of convenient social services for residents and the creation of beautiful material spaces to make the living environment and living conditions safe, sanitary, comfortable and convenient. The renovation of historic blocks should also consider the objectives of environmental and economic sustainable development, emphasize that the renovation should focus on environmental governance and environmental protection, comprehensively consider the industrial layout structure from the perspective of environmental protection, and achieve comprehensive coordination and balanced development of economy and environmental protection.

The renovation of the historic block of Wanshou Palace should be carried out through the surrounding hinterland under the premise of protection, providing supportive recreational and entertainment facilities, and becoming an important urban cultural landscape as a whole, and updating into an attractive and activity space with regional characteristics. Demolition of the street construction in the block will transform the inner streets including Qiaobu Street, Radish Lane and Hetong Lane into a pedestrian street, and some public spaces at the corner, T-junction and other places are set up.

3.3 Realization of Reconstructing the “Wanshou Palace” Historic Block

The protection of historic blocks and economic development can be fully coordinated and achieve “win-win”. Good preservation of historic culture, places of interest and historic sites won’t become a burden of urban economic development, but will form a new economic growth point. As Jacobs said, economic development is the root cause of urban development and renovation. We must study the renovation of historic blocks from the perspective of social economy, and then we can create new vitality in the protection and renovation to promote the healthy development of the neighborhood. The formation of historic blocks is itself the result of high development of ancient business. Today, the vitality of our activation of historic blocks is to reconstruct their commercial status.

Business is about gathering qi together, only gathering people can gather wealth. The traditional blocks of Nanchang Wanshou Palace has its unique historic and cultural charm, which provides very favorable conditions for rebuilding its commercial status. In order to avoid conflict with existing secular buildings, the traditional inner street commercial street form can be used to construct a suitable commercial area according to its historic and cultural characteristics throughout the block. Cuihua Street can be reconstructed into a street of gold and silver jewelry and jewels; vinegar lane can be built as a special food street; radish lane can form a street with traditional fabrics, silk fabrics and so on.

The city is an organic whole with people as the main body, relying on the natural environment, based on economic activities, closely connected with the society, and constantly operating according to its own laws. Therefore, from the perspective of society and the environment, it is inevitable to innovate historic blocks. The social goal of historic block renovation is to provide quality public services to maintain social justice and social harmony in order to promote social and cultural activities. The revival of urban historic blocks should be observed and considered in a broad context, such as the globalization of cities, the post-modernization of cities, the urbanization of poverty, and the expansion of cultural heritage protection. At the same time, the way of revival of urban historic blocks should be sought from multiple angles. In the future, the protection and development of urban historic blocks will be more demanded from the height of cultural heritage, more emphasis on public participation, and more attention to the authenticity protection and sustainable development of historic blocks.

The historic block has unique characteristics, rich cultural and spiritual resources, and traditional commercial features that can be continued. As long as the reformers fully exploit and

utilize these resources, they will surely revitalize some historic districts.

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