Investigation of Genius Loci Theory on Historic Commercial Blocks in China

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Abstract

As a result of economic development and globalization, cities, especially their commercial blocks, are becoming highly similar because their local culture is crashed by foreign ones. As an essential component of a city, commercial blocks represent the image of the city and have a positive value of local culture. Thus, it is necessary to find out how to create both attractive and unique commercial blocks.

This thesis is aiming to explore the feasibility of keeping the spirit of commercial blocks. Genius Loci, a powerful phenomenological theory, is going to be studied, while some deficiency of it will also be pointed out. The importance of culture and society is introduced to supply Genius Loci. It starts with the problem that nowadays historic commercial blocks are losing unique features and indicates the importance of historic commercial blocks. Afterwards, the concepts of local culture and Genius Loci are illustrated, followed by some related theories about the design of commercial blocks. Moreover, it discusses the application of Genius Loci as a useful guideline in commercial block design. After analyzing two cases of commercial blocks (Old Street commercial block in Gaochun and Tianzifang commercial block in Shanghai, both in China), the results and conclusions will be presented and discussed. In the final part, this thesis evaluates Genius Loci and summarizes the critical points of historic commercial blocks.

**Key words:** Historic Commercial block, Genius Loci
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the research

Even though the city construction is more rapid than ever before, there are still many historic commercial blocks preserved in China. Historic commercial blocks exist in different regions and formed in several periods. They represent structure and texture of a city; they record the historic footprints and culture of the place; since they display some typical periods of the city's development. They are irreplaceable parts of a city. It is reasonable that historic commercial blocks should be treated carefully as they could present the unique attribute of places.

However, the ideal situation is not easy to achieve. Cities today are developing quickly due to the modern science, traffic and media. A deep crisis is hiding behind the huge construction achievement: the image of the city is becoming generic, and the local feature of the city is fading. People fell lost because of the similar environment. In addition, since globalization is irresistible, traditional culture is fiercely crashed by modern ones. As a result, the historic commercial blocks are facing a severe question: survive or perish? In 1999, the 20th UIA (International Union of Architects) constituted Beijing Charter. In the charter, Liangyong Wu (1998) indicates that culture is the sediment of history, it exists among the architectures, blending into life; it has imperceptible influence on city construction and human behavior; it is the soul of a city. However, the cultural globalization separates human and traditional spaces. Local culture is disappearing; the standardization and commercialization of architectures causes the fading of traditional architecture attributes. “How to retrieve the attributes of cities” is a serious question to all designers. Before answering this question, there is an essential problem to be solved, which is how to protect the historic commercial blocks and make them regenerate.

1.2 Problems and objectives

With the development of cities, a lot of old districts are transformed into modern architectures directly. Among them, traditional architectures are replaced with modern office buildings and supermarkets which can make best profit to the investors (Image 1-1). The fantastic memory about the historic districts is abandoned. The "money comes first" thought ruin many historic buildings which are pretty precious. The whole city, even the whole country, is crashed by the economic growth. People feel lost in cities.
If the physical things are destroyed, how can physiological things exist? Since historic commercial block is one of the most essential part of a city. The protection and regeneration of historic commercial blocks are becoming an issue for us.

The objective of this paper is to find a proper way to protect the historic commercial blocks and give them rejuvenation. The paper emphasizes Genius Loci as an important direction. Two cases (Tianzifang and Gaochun Old Street) will be studied, and will be potentially used for future designs. As a result, finding the preserve principles in the reconstruction of historic commercial blocks will induce the image of a city.

2 Research approach

2.1 Research question and methodology

The research question is "How to preserve and regenerate a historic commercial block with existing local culture based on Genius Loci?".

In order to find out the answer, the paper introduces Genius Loci as a fresh perspective into the historic commercial block, including its background and connotation. Genius Loci is an essential concept of the phenomenology of architecture, it can be seen as the soul of a place. It focuses on human's subjective feeling in a place, emphasizes that the spirit of a place is inherent. It is useful and interesting to set genius loci as a departure point. Based on two case studies of historic commercial blocks with existing local culture, analyzes are done to find the methods of preservation and regeneration of historic commercial blocks.

The Analysis methods are data collection and empirical investigation.
2.2 Study Area

Case studies for historic commercial block are Gaochun Old Street and Tianzifang (Image 2-1). Old Street is located in Gaochun. It was built more than 500 years ago, and it was a commercial block already in the beginning. There are houses which were built in Ming and Qing dynasty. The block is full of local elements. Nevertheless, Time flies, the block is losing its energy, it needs a renewal. With the conservation project, Old Street holds its spirit and continues its commercial function. A lot of people are attracted to visit the block. Another case is Tianzifang commercial block in Shanghai. Tianzifang is a historic block which keeps the Longtang style (a architectural style in old Shanghai). It was a residential block before, however, after the regeneration, it became a mix-use place. Now it has commercial function also. People like to experience the atmosphere of the old period. It is a successful case of conservation. Some experience can be learned from these two cases. In addition, since these blocks have different situation, it is interesting to make a comparison between them.

2.3 Main content

To provide an appropriate solution to solve the problems, this paper attempts to introduce Genius Loci as a guidance theory. At the same time, some relevant theories about how to preserve historic blocks are mentioned. After analyzing the theories, some principles and basic methods will be suggested for providing a possible solution. Then two cases are researched to prove and evaluate the results above. Finally, some conclusions are drawn to help the future work.
CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL STUDY

3 Basic information about related concepts

3.1 Commercial block

Definition of commercial block

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines block as "a usually rectangular space (as in a city) enclosed by streets and occupied by or intended for buildings area in a city surrounded by streets" (Image 3-1).

It is easy to find out that block has close relation with grid system. In a city, streets are crisscross to each other; the relative unattached units are blocks. Cities consist of streets and blocks of different styles. Streets and blocks rely on each other and restrict each other at the same time. In other word, a commercial block is a place surrounded by buildings and streets which consist with shops, restaurants, bars, gyms and other business functional parts (Image 3-2).
The Chinese commercial blocks are formed with the commercial activities. Since Song Dynasty, the city streets have become commercial streets (Zheng dongjun, 2011). People's activities happened there mostly. The traditional Chinese painting, “along the river during the Qingming festival”, shows the prosperous business activities in Song Dynasty. It displays the traditional commercial blocks in a vivid way (Image 3-3).

Characteristics of commercial block

A successful commercial block can reflect the local culture- that is why visitors always choose it to get an image of the place when they firstly come to somewhere (Liu, 2011). There are two main characteristics of the commercial blocks: Participation and Benefits

①Participation
Participation is the source of vitality of commercial block. As an important driver of economy, commercial blocks have the duty of satisfying customers. Nowadays, customers hope that they can take more participation in experiencing the spirit of the place. The design of commercial block needs to meet the different kinds of demands from people, in order to create a place for public gathering for various activities. This issue can be solved by improving artistic and cultural elements in those blocks.

②Benefits
One objective of commercial blocks is the financial benefit. Since people eat, live, visit, shopping, and relax in this place, commercial blocks have a comprehensive efficiency. It can promote the development of relevant industries including business, traveling and catering. It has significant economic benefits. In addition, the relationship between residents can be more harmonious because of the commercial block plays a crucial role in social activity.

Finally, an attractive commercial block can bring environmental benefits to the region.
3.2 Historic block

About 20 years ago, it is easy to find places with old buildings in China. Sense of history can be caught from visiting them. There were many historic blocks in the past. Nevertheless, after the urban construction, these blocks disappeared a lot. In fact, in some cities, there is no historic block at all after the modern construction. However, no one can deny that the historic blocks are a part of the city. They belong to the memory related to a place such as public squares, market zones. The history of the site is not completed without them.

The definition of historic block

Liangyong Wu (1998) argues that historic block is an architectural complex with a significant status in history and culture (mostly in cities), reflecting the local context and character. Not every building inside has to be a heritage.

Chengpu Ding (1999) points out that historic block is an architectural complex (in both cities and countries) which can represent the local history development and the local economic, social and cultural value. In his opinion, the environment around the architectural complex is also included.

Dehua Li (2001) insists that historic block is a district which preserves a certain number of historic buildings and structures. The buildings should have comparatively complete styles.

As another scholar, Zhao Yang (2004), who hold a different definition: "Historic block means a block which can represent a historical period of local traditional styles, social character, economic character and cultural character".

These scholars focus on different scopes and objects. However, their basic thoughts are similar. In brief, historic block can be defined as a block (in both cities and countries) which preserves a certain scale of historical buildings, and can represent a typical historical character of some periods and give people an atmosphere with social, cultural and economic characters.

The development of historic block conservation

In international, the concept of "historic block" protection is brought up after 1960s (Wang, 2009). After the World War II, the economy started to increase again. A large number of populations came into the city, and a high rise residential construction began. The common way followed is tearing down the old blocks and building high rise buildings. Soon after, people realized that the historical relation was cut while the characters of the place changed.

The first country to set up legislation to protect the historic architectures is France (Wang, 2009). Historic Architecture Law was published in 1840 which was the first law about historic things. Then, in 1962, Malraux's Law was published. This law allows defining urban perimeters within which buildings have to be restored and must not to be destroyed (GLOSSAIRE, 2012).
Cultural Property Protection Law was published in 1975 in Japan (Wang, 2009). It defined the areas for traditional architectures, which need to be protected. Every change inside the area needs to be approved based on construction, expansion, and renovation. The city planning department should make the preservation project.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy reported that historic district designation enhances a sense of neighborhood pride, serving to improve the social fabric of the community (New York Landmarks Conservancy, 1977).

In October of 1987, International Council of Monuments and Sites approved the Washington Charter. In the charter, the historical districts were defined as the districts which have historical significance in the city, including the ancient center of the city and other districts which saved the historical scene (Barry Goodchild, 1997). The charter focused on the space structure, the relationship of the site and its surroundings. The function and the role of the site in history were particularly emphasized.

The Landmarks Law defines a historic block as an area that has a "distinctive character or distinctive historic or aesthetic interest", represents "one or more periods of styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of the city" and constitues "a distinct section of the city" (Historic District Council, 2007).

It is easy to figure out that people become more concern about the historic block, and a deeper understanding of historic block is formed gradually. In China, from the perspective the emergence of national policy and regulation, the concept of historic districts was advanced in 1986. Historic block means the block has a certain scale and number of historical heritages and built environment (GB5037-2005). It is an essential part of a city.

Situations and regulations of historic block in China

1) Phase I (1970s-the beginning of the 1990s)
In the 1970s, China implemented the reform and opening-up policy, since then, Chinese economy had developed rapidly. The transformation of the old city had economic support because of the establishment of the dominant tertiary industry and the foreign investment. New construction out of the old city eased the pressure and contradictions. The destruction of the traditional monuments, ancient buildings were suppressed, ancient buildings were suppressed; the cultural relics’ protection system and operation of the regulations had won initial success (Zongxiao Liu, 2000).

However, the problems of historic block issues were quite difficult to eradicate, and new problems were also appeared in the new age. The city sustained high-speed development and the new area development were increasingly saturated. Policy oriented economic construction and public awareness of conservation were quite frail, which lead to the blindness of the old city transformation and mass-demolishing and mass-construction in the whole country. The city preservation regulation in this period was limited to the entity environmental protection and repair, but the overall style and spatial pattern was damaged due to the lack of attention. There are some
regulations at that time like Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (1982), and Cultural Relics Protection Law of Association (1992) (Zongxiao Liu, 2000). This "constructive destruction" style was similar to the Renewal Movement in early stage in the West world.

2. Phase II (the beginning of the 1990s- the middle of the 1990s)
Since the year of 1982, the Chinese State Council have issued three national historical and cultural city list, indicated China's urban preservation system began a new form. It preserves both old buildings and historical city, also puts forward to "preserve the historical and cultural area". In the early 1990s, China already has the city protection regulations and a more comprehensive management system.

However, the destruction of the historic district in the reality remains pervasive: (1) Due to noncompliance with the law and out of control planning, the reconstruction of the old city continues to threaten the survival of historic blocks. (2) The rigid management style, oversize protection scale, and misunderstanding of the relationship between cultural and architectural forms leaded to collateral damage of the real traditional culture. (3) Business company aimed at the business opportunities of cultural assets; they vigorously developed cultural tourism resources. The culture became a vassal of the tourist economy. In the meantime, the transformation of the historic block was still in the stage of exploration and experiment.

Some of the project has made considerable progress at that time, for instance, Tong Fang block in Suzhou, Juer alley in Beijing, Nanjing Road in Shanghai, Tun Xi Old Street in Huangshan City (Zongxiao Liu, 2000). Nevertheless, there are also some problems appeared: too much emphasis on commercial viability and the development of tourism lead to regional commercial imbalance between supply and demand; lack of understanding of the original tenants living demand lead to the loss of neighborhood relations and social life.

To conclude, during this period, the preservation method of city styles and features was under transition. It turned from imitating from the physical form to inheriting it from protection of cultural relics (dot) and commercial street (line) to the protection of historic block (large area).

3. Phase III (the middle of the 1990s till now)
In 1997, Interim Measures for the Huangshan Tunxi Old Street Historical and Cultural Protection Areas was promulgated, indicated the pattern of overall protection (old buildings - historic block-historical and cultural city) came into being (Zongxiao Liu, 2000). In this period, many experts and scholars paid attention to economic transaction, social network, cultural life and neighborhood relationship in the preservation of historic block. The transformation of the old cities turned to cooperate with city planners, sociologists, economists, and developers.

In conclusion, urban regenerate process and the preservation of historic block in China have its own complexity and characteristics. We should make full use of the advantages, learn from the lessons of Western urban transformation, and carry out the protection that reference to the plan. The protection of historic block is developing- the appeal of the cultural sector, the attention of the
government, the strengthening of civil awareness are beneficial to advance the preservation work. From the city's long-term development perspective, how to seek historic block health protection principle and sustainable development will be even more critical. The protection and development of the historic block is complementary. If the preservation is well done, the urban context can be continued.

**The characters of historic block**

There are three basic characteristics of historic blocks (Guo, 2007). Continuity of history is the first one because they can reflect the process of development and evolution. In addition, truth is their second feature since they are real in daily life. They play roles in the modern society and undertake certain functions. Finally, they have a characteristic as integrity which means they should have a defined boundary to record the precious atmosphere.

**3.3 Historic commercial block**

After the discussion about commercial block and historic block above, it is clear to get the definition of "historic commercial block". Such blocks consist of historical buildings and record the certain history of the place while their main function is commercial.

Shopping in modern commercial blocks gradually becomes a typical shopping mode in the last 20 years, in China. However, there are some defects of the modern commercial block shopping. Firstly, people lose a lot of face to face meeting opportunities; they only go to the shops and shot their goals directly. There is not much socializing during the process. In contrast, people trend to do more communication in a historic commercial block since it is always more attractive. In addition, where open market sale in the street shopping is replaced with the malls and super markets, the sense and pleasure of shopping are disappearing. This change of life style makes people feel lost, and also disappointed about the similar shopping environment.

As a result, the historic commercial block has a bright future since it can provide the unique atmosphere to the visitors. Jinli Old Street is an excellent example of historic commercial block (Image 3-4). It is the oldest commercial street in Sichuan Province. In order to reclaim the street's prosperity of former days, it was restored with contributions from the Wuhou Memorial Temple and was opened to public in 2004 (Jinlizhi, 2010). It attracts tourists all over the country and even abroad to appreciate the beauty of the traditional buildings.
3.4 Local culture

Definition of local culture

Edward Burnett Tylor (1929) is the first scholar who gave "culture" an exhaustive definition. In his famous book "Primitive Culture", he argues that culture is a complex totality which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. He suggests that all the life styles are included in the subject "culture". There are two kinds of life styles: psychic style and physical style. Psychic style includes the structure of belief, value and standard while physical style includes all the practical factors of people's eating, clothing, housing, traveling, working and entertainment. In fact, Edward states a wide definition to culture.

Sharon Zukin argues that culture is neither an unimportant adjunct of the material transformation of cities nor a purely symbolic realm for differentiating social roles. Instead, cultural symbols have physical consequences, and are more valuable material consequences as cities become less dependent on traditional resources and technologies of material production. Culture is a euphemism for the city's new representation as a creative force in the emerging service economy.

Shen Yiren (2004) argues that local culture is characteristic of a place which makes it obviously different from other places. There are two aspects of local culture: content and form. The content of a place means its tradition, folk custom, economic structure; the form of a place means its natural environment, architectural style and so on.

The character of a city is just like the individuality of a person. A city lack of characters must be dull and unexciting. Zhang fengqi (2008) points out that local culture is the summation of people's behavior in a place. It consists of three levels: physical, institutional and philosophic aspects. The physical aspect includes the local language, food, architecture, cloth, implements; the institutional aspects involve the local custom, ceremony, institution, law, religion and art; the philosophic aspects contain the values, aesthetic, personality of the people in the place. She also points out that
these elements can only be analyzed in a theoretical level, and it is hard to separate them from practice.

Thus, we can get the conclusion that local culture is the attribute of a region which makes the place different from others. It is formed with the local climate, environment, history, custom etc. Local culture is growing with the city's development. It can represent the history of the city. It is quite obvious that local culture means a lot to make people find their meaning in a place.

**Local culture and historic commercial blocks**

Sharon Zukin (1995) states that "Yet culture is also a powerful means of controlling cities. As a source of images and memories, it symbolizes 'who belongs' in specific places. As a set of architectural themes, it played a leading role in urban redevelopment strategies based on historic preservation or local 'heritage'."

Nobody will deny that local culture is a crucial element to commercial block, since every successful commercial block is tied to local culture if we analyze. The space structure, architecture style, even the pavement on the ground can reflect local culture.

Nowadays, the influence of globalization is totally a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the emergence of the global cooperation and division system promotes a wider communication and currency; on the other hand, facing with the crush from the foreign culture and economic, local culture has a crisis which is more dangerous than ever before. Wu liangyong (1999) argues "the character and diversity of local culture is fading and disappearing; the architectural standardization and commercialization increase the fading of the character of architecture, architectural culture and urban culture tend to emerge the character crisis at same time."

Because of globalization, the protection and development of local culture have become a paramount project of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). They hope people come to realize the value of different cultures. Since the cultural diversity is understood and respected, the world can develop in a balanced way, and the conflict can be reduced.

**3.5 Expression of local culture**

There are two aspects of local culture in historic commercial block: physical and spiritual (Wei Zhang, 2008). The physical culture parts are architectural environment and spatial structure. The architectural environment means buildings, signs, pavement and vegetation etc. The spatial structure means the way buildings gather and the spatial relationship between buildings and roads. The spiritual part includes local life style and custom.
3.6 The meaning of preservation and regeneration

Historic block has a certain scale and remains history (physical entity) and reflects a certain historical period and the distinctive characteristics of local culture or an ethnic group. Besides, from the perspective of China's historical and cultural heritage protection, the conservation of historic block has greater significance and value.

There is no doubt that the premise of preserving historic block is to figure out its value and significance. To re-examine the preservation of historic block from the view of sustainable development will contribute to a deeper understanding of the value and significance of the historic block conservation.

①The preservation of historic block will implement the ecological concept and sustainable development

Lack of resources, energy crisis and environmental degradation are three main problems in the present age, thus proposed the idea of sustainable development and has become the consensus of people. During the urban construction, the demolition of the old buildings and construction of new is an extremely common practice. However, it consumes a lot of resources and manpower, and the operation would bring noise, dust and environment pollution. Besides, some old buildings are formed after a long history of accumulation, well-coordinated with surroundings, and they have potential uses for a long time. Therefore, to some extent, demolition and reconstruction of those buildings which can still be used does not comply with the ecological city construction requirements. The conservation of historic block will not only improve the neighborhoods environment and facilities, but also maintain the regional historic look and meet the residents demand. This will fully exert the potential use of old buildings; reflect the sustainable development of energy conservation and environment protection,

②The preservation of historic block is conducive to the protection of urban culture and characteristics creation

Since the Second World War, along with the modern architectural movement in the worldwide, originally different cities became more and more similar. The lack of urban character is one of the prominent issues in urban construction. Historic block reflects the traditional style of a historic period, is the culture and characteristic of a city, such as the Old Street of Tun Xi, Fuzi temple of Nanjing. Historic block plays a vital role in culture preservation and characteristics creation.

Elie Saarinen once said, "Let me see your city. I will be able to say what culture are the residents desiring" (Saarinen, 1965). Even though, the modern civilization can be reflected from modern buildings, plaza and green land, modern civilization should contain the city's historical continuity, heritage and traditional style. Therefore, the improvement of the city’s cultural grade is not only about the use of modern technical means to create a variety of substances to meet the modern needs of the residents; more importantly, it is about preserving the heritage legacy, historic block
and the ancient city pattern after urban development.

Historic block and the current life of people share joys and sorrows with each other. The preservation of historic block, on one hand, can display traditional way of life and customs, neighborhood relations and spatial atmosphere; on the other hand, it can enrich the diversity of urban life as well as the cultural levels. Ultimately it will improve the city's cultural grade and promote social progress.

The preservation of historic block is conducive to the improvement of living environment

Preservation of the historic block is not just for the protection of heritage and traditional style. It has to adapt to the needs of modern life. During the process of preserving historic blocks, we should continue to improve neighborhoods municipal utilities, public service facilities and service level; adjust population density and traffic flow; increase public green land and venue. Preservation of historic block is conductive to the improvement of living environment; this can get the understanding and support of residents to reduce the conflict between the historic district protection and modern living.

The preservation of historic block is conducive to the development of tourism, attracting investment and promoting regional economic development

The historic building itself has intrinsic value and external influences. The preservation of historic block maintains the traditional style and regional specialties; it will establish a favorable image of the city, attract investment, indirectly promote the economic development and boost tourist income. As a result, the preservation of historic block is under coordinated development with economic development, city image and social progress.

Take Fuzi Temple (Image 3-5) as an example, from the year of 1984, the government started to comprehensively repair and construct Fuzi Temple area (about 0.5 km2), reproduce the historic look, restore for the tourist and commercial center of Nanjing folk, bring about a significant overall benefit. The annual turnover of this area has reached 700-800 million, account for a pivotal position in the financial income of the Qinhua District. The tourists are also increasing, 150 thousand/day in weekdays and 200-300 thousand/day in the highest peak. It also solves the employment problem for 7-8 thousand people, which has vastly promoted the development of the local tourism industry and economy (Jianqiang Wang, 2010).
4 Genius Loci

4.1 The origin of Genius Loci

The multiplex development of architecture in western countries during the 1960s and 1970s created a wide world for discussion by the fields of social culture and architecture scholars. The fancy of urban designers changed from the functionalism to humanism. Social culture became a powerful role of urban design. With the influence of Kevin Lynch, Aldo Rossi, and Christian Norberg-Schulz, designers became to study the experience in the urban environment and space based on psychology (Wang, 1997).

Phenomenology of architecture means people use phenomenology to study the relationship between people and the environment. The core concept of the phenomenology of architecture concerns human, environment, place, architecture, and the world and so on. That is the background of the Genius Loci theory.

Since the economy developed so fast, architecture progressed a lot at the same time. People were seeking for a better quality of life, and a new idea of design comes out: in-physical design (Wang, 1997). In-physical design or spiritual design is an awareness of the value of design, reflecting a significant improvement of the contemporary architecture design. At first, people focus on function and commercial benefit, but now, unphysical desire comes first. That means people now are seeking for spiritual satisfaction.

Innovation is the soul of architecture design. The requirement of new style and format is promoting the development of the diversity of architecture. Norberg-Schulz argues that diversity is formalism based on technics. It makes architectural space special. Nowadays people's demand of architecture creation is more than before. They argue against the same images and styles of architecture. Characteristic architecture is required (Wang, 1997).
Phenomenology and phenomenology of architecture both emerge with a crisis. The crisis of modern science and philosophy gave birth to phenomenology, and the crisis of modern environment generated phenomenology of architecture. One of the basic aims of phenomenology of architecture is to explain the essence and sense of architecture environment. By the way, the essence and sense are contained in the concept of "place". "Place" makes a collection between human and world in a more positive and powerful way (Wang, 1997).

Martin Heidegger (1971) suggested the concept and essence of the term 'dwelling' in his book 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. He afforded a new method and measure for the research of human property. Norberg-Schulz (1980) succeeded his ideas, continuing a deeper study. He illustrated his understanding of the theory in his famous writings: 'Intention in Architecture', 'Existence, Space and Architecture', 'Meaning in Western Architecture' and 'Genius Loci-Toward a phenomenology of architecture'. He argued that architecture is a foothold for people; the basic spirit of it is return life as it returns itself. He believed dwelling is more than a shelter, but a place where life happens. The genius loci theory is the key point of the phenomenology of architecture. It pays attention to human activity and experience though inspecting people's most basic life world.

4.2 The content of Genius Loci

4.2.1 Place

The Webster dictionary illustrates 'place' like this: a building or locality used for a special purpose. Norberg-Schulz (1980) argues "It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences take place". Therefore, a place must be connected to human activity. When we come to define the term "place", it is necessary to consider it more than an abstract location, but a "totality made up with concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and color". Together these things determine an "environmental character", which is the essence of place. In general a place is given as such a character or "atmosphere". It is fascinating that different things form different atmosphere by various combination.

In order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomena of place, it's necessary to analyze two points: space and character. "Space" denotes the three-dimensional organization of the elements which makes up a place while "character" denotes the general "atmosphere" which is the most comprehensive attribute of any place.

4.2.2 Space

We never describe something happens in a homogeneous, isotropic space; instead, we always emphasize a meaningful space by qualitative differences like "between" and "under". "The outside-inside relation which is a primary aspect of concrete space, implies that space possess a varying degree of extension and enclosure." (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) An accurate example of the relationship between extension and enclosure is the relationship between landscape and settlement- which is figure-ground. If the relationship is ruined, the identity of the settlement will disappear. Just as the landscape will be comprehensive extension without its identity.
In most situations, enclosure is likely to be a center, especially in a wider context. Then it will be a "focus" to the surroundings. This can also be seen as the space extends with a rhythm in different directions. Obviously, the most significant directions are horizontal and vertical— we are told by earth and sky. As a result, centralization, direction and rhythm are also essential properties of concrete space.

Boundaries define enclosures. "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized the boundary is that, from which something begins its presenting" as Heidegger (1971) said. In general, boundary gives a place extension, direction and rhythm.

1 Existential space

Existential space comprises the basic relationships between human and environment. According to Norberg-Schulz (1971), existential space is a relatively stable system of perceptual schemata, or an "environmental image".

Based on the structuring of existential space, Norberg-Schulz divided the existential space into several levels. Firstly, "geography"— the most comprehensive and widest level which includes nations, continents and regions beyond direct experience. Then, "level of the landscape", it is formed by the interaction between human behavior and the environment. After that, is the "urban level", which means space is created by human activity in the man-made environment. "House" is the fourth level, and Norberg-Schulz stresses the role of the house as " the central reference point of human existence". "The House, therefore, remains the central place of human existence, the place where the child learns to understand his being in the world, and the place from which man departs and to which he returns"(Norberg-Schulz, 1971).

Existential space is an abstraction from the numerous phenomenons' homophyly, having a character to be an object. Here, are the elementary organizational principles of existential space:

1 Centers or places

Human behavior is self-focused. "House" is the center for people's dwelling and "plaza" is the center of the city, from these centers, men extend their space by their separate value system. People feel comfortable within limited extension. However, if we walk beyond the boundary, we feel cold, unpeaceful, worried and even scared. All the centers are the places work for man's activities. The size, boundaries, and characters give meanings to man's behaviors. They are the focuses of "gathering" and protect man's existence. In a word, they are brought about by proximity.

2 Directions or paths

They are brought about by continuity. We always need a clear direction when we move. All the places have directions. Space is meaningless if be regarded as a pure geometric physical space. Therefore, existential space has to be considered with man's activities. Nevertheless, human behaviors are not the only factor which define the direction of existential space, the world (as a
whole environment), also has the power. The horizontal and vertical directions have significant meanings of that.

3 Areas or domains
Paths cut the environment into different areas. Domain is a place in some extend. Domain can be seen as a ground while places and paths can be seen as figure which have a character of centralization. They are brought about by enclosure. Places, paths, and domains are basic factors of the existential space. The way they work together consist the fundamental topological schemata for people's existential orientation.

② Architectural space
Architectural space is defined as a "concretization of existential space". Norberg-Schulz argues that existential space and Architectural space should have the same system. Then, architectural space includes the points as:

1 Places and nodes
Kevin Lynch (1960) argues that nodes are "points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling". The definition of "place" is based on the gestalt theory which emphasizes proximity and closure.

2 paths and axis
Path is defined by Kevin Lynch as a road which has a possibility to be passed by the observer all day. Axis organizes the space but does not have a real intension to crease the movement. It is rather a symbolic direction which gathers most elements. However, path and axis are often coincident.

3 Domains and areas
According to K.Lynch, a district is an area which can be entered by the observer's heart as its identity and communion, then be perceived. The consequent theme determines the physical characteristics of the area. It is constituted by many characteristics as texture, space, shape, details, symbolism, architectural type, function, activity, residents, topography... A characteristic cluster is formed by these characteristics. In the environment, there are natural environment and man-made environment. In both of them, the boundary and texture are the two essential elements which determine the character of the place.

In structure, architectural space also has landscape, urban and house levels. In the level of "landscape", people explore the general environment around them from ancient times; in the level of "urban", the design can be done with concepts as areas, paths and nodes; the essence of a "house" is making people enter inside.

4 interactions of the elements
The architectural space is totality made of place, path and domain, just as existential space. These
elements consist "field".

4.2.3 Natural place

The landscapes we live in are more than a phenomena; it has its structure and concrete the meaning. Mythologies emerge by the structure and meaning, as a result, the base of dwelling has been formed.

The understanding of natural place can be divided into five modes: thing, order and character, light and time. From the tales in different cultures, the forms of the world are introduced which means human start to study the living environment from the very beginning. Things or natural elements are based on the marriage between earth and sky. According to Mircea Eliade (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), the main natural "things" like rock, vegetation and water make places meaningful. The second mode is relying on a cosmic order which base on the changing events. In China, Yangtze River is famous not only because it breeds local people, but also because it crosses the nation from east to west, giving directions as "in the south of the river" and "in the north of the river" (Image 4-1). It is an essential classification for culture, agriculture, architecture and people's identification. Character of natural place can be abstracted, and be used to describe human's attributes. The Greeks are skilled at that. As the landscape in Greece is unique and understandable, it is easy to find an appropriate god to be matched. Among them, "thing" and "character" link to the earth while "order" and "light" are related to the sky, finally, "time" makes everything to be dynamic.

"Through the interaction of surface, relief, vegetation and water, characteristic totalities or places are formed which constitute the basic elements of landscapes"(Norberg-Schulz, 1980). In a word, sky and earth make the definitive influence of the structure of natural place. Man's activities happen on the ground which makes them easy to find the place meaningful. However, we hardly have interaction with the sky because it is too far away, and in fact we do not have the ability to control it. A horizontal plane pierced by a vertical axis is the simplest model of existential space.

The spirit of natural place, as Norberg-Schulz defined, has four types: romantic, cosmic, classical and complex.
Romantic landscape has a main character which is "diversity". The Nordic region gives a typical illustration of it because it is flexible, natural elements and less of order (Image 4-2). Norberg-Schulz (1980) describes the Nordic landscape as "In general we may characterize the Nordic world as a romantic world, in the sense that it brings a man back to a distant 'past', which is experienced emotionally rather than understood as allegory or history.". The romantic landscape has an intimate relation with the earth while its character is determined by details. It is reasonable that the original forces are most strongly felt and advocated in Nordic places.

Cosmic landscape makes an absolute and eternal order obviously. It seems that the universe dominates it. Desert obeys infinite, monotonous environmental rhythms, even the animals of it (Image 4-3).

Classical landscape has a meaningful order of distinct, individual places (Image 4-4). It is different from the romantic landscape because the individual does not have to seek his private hiding-place. Also, it differs from the cosmic order since the individual is not absorbed by the abstract system. All dimensions are "human" and constitute a total, harmonious equilibrium (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). As a result, a true "gathering" becomes possible, which fulfills the main elements of dwelling.
Romantic, cosmic and classical landscape is the three original types of natural place. In fact, they hardly appear by their own alone. In most situations, they work together and participate in different syntheses. That is why the forth type is called complex landscape. A perfect example is Naples, where classical spaces meet the romantic atmosphere of the sea and the chthonic forces of the volcano (Image 4-5).

4.2.4 Man-made place

Now we come to the man-made environment. "When the man-made environment is meaningful, man is 'at home' “(Norberg-Schulz, 1980). 'Home' means familiar and meaningful places, which give us the sense of belongingness. It is not satisfied for us to live in a place which is only useful. Structure and embodied meanings are both crucial for the man-made place. Man-made place represents people's understanding of the natural place and the existential situation. Since the man-made place has its own structure and meanings, we have to take the relationship between man-made place and the natural place as the point of departure, as Norberg-Schulz emphasizes.

Architectural history shows that the early architectural civilizations can be interpreted as a concretization of understanding of nature, which needs things, order, character, light and time to be represented. As we introduced above, the three steps, "visualization", "complementation" and "symbolization". By mocking everything they observe in the natural world, man express their understanding of nature in order to get an existential foothold. For example, nature defines the
space then we learn it and try to create enclosure. That is visualization. Complementation means we add things which are missing of the existential place. In the end, it is necessary to symbolize the understanding of nature. It is a transformation from the current situation to man-made one. In Chinese classical gardens, designers use stones and water to organize an image which represents the natural landscape (Image 4-6). One of the most significant rules is "the garden looks like natural although it is man-made".

There are several modes of architectures. The first one is to concrete the natural forces. There are no better examples than the Egyptian pyramids. They are man-made mountains, which mocks the real, natural mountains. Besides, order, characters, light and time are also crucial facts. Man-made place with remarkable genius loci can be created by architectures. That spirit is determined by "visualization", "complementation" and "symbolization".

Just as the division the natural environment, Norberg-Schulz also defines the man-made environment into four types. They are romantic, cosmic, classical and complex architecture. Romantic architecture means the multiple, varied and subjective architecture. It is easy to find the "strong atmosphere" of romantic architecture. Also, romantic space is topological rather than geometrical. The Medieval town in central Europe is an excellent example of the romantic settlement because their visible towers and spires (Image 4-7).
Cosmic architecture is distinguished by uniformity and "absolute" order. It seems hard to find the particular "atmosphere" in cosmic architecture. It focuses on "necessity" than "expression". The Islamic architecture illustrates the cosmic architecture clearly (Image 4-8).

Classical architecture is recognized by its image ability and articulate order. The absence of a general, dominant system is an obvious character of it. Its space may be defined as an additive grouping of individual places (Image 4-9).
In this complex architecture, it consisted by three original types. The Baroque garden-palace, man-made and natural place are living together, with the romantic and cosmic implications, while the palace itself has a classical style (Image 4-10).

4.2.5 The spirit of place

Genius Loci, or the spirit of place is the distinctive atmosphere found in a place. In Roman mythology, each place was protected by a guardian deity (a 'genius'), embodied in the form of an
animal or supernatural being. Man "receives" the environment and makes it focus on buildings and things. The things thereby "explain" the environment and make its character manifest. Thereby the things themselves become meaningful.

The essence of a place is to make people's existence meaningful. Architecture consists places and then highlights the style and sense of people's life. The spirit of place is associated with the structure of place.

There are two psychological functions involved in the spirit of place: orientation and identification. Orientation emphasizes the spatial aspect which means a man has to aware where he is, and then gains the sense of safety. In addition, identification focuses on the character aspect, which means, the man needs to know how he is in a certain place, and receiving the sense of belonging.

Everyone has the need to "find the orientation" wherever he/she is. When someone comes to a new place, the first thing that pops in mind is: where am I? Just like every morning we wake up, the first move is to look around and make a confirmation of the room. Furthermore, we can know that people feel uncomfortable and afraid in a strange place. It is obvious that people have the demand to figure out the directions and the relationship between "me and place". Human behavior could be understood as "goal--route". Goal is a basic element to consist a place; people's activities are always related to a goal. Routes or axes are the complements at the same time. The Forbidden City of China is a powerful example because it is organized with a south - north axis (Image 4-11). Identification means the place is meaningful; people have a correlation with the place. In other words, we "get" the world by understanding it.

Image 4-11 A perspective of the Forbidden City
(Source: http://www.360doc.com/content/10/0731/17/754218_42755534.shtml)

4.3 Summary

There are three steps of people's experience about the environment around: perception, cognizance
and identification. Perception is to define the relationship between his location and the environment around. Cognizance is when the things appear again, people feel familiar and recall the similar things happened before. Identification based on a clear cognizance process, ensuring the structure and atmosphere of the space. As a result, a link between people and the place is built based on the understanding of the place:

Perception- feels the relationship between people and the place;
Cognizance- being familiar with the place;
Belongingness- analyzing the environment, ensuring the emotion about the place.

Based on the theoretical study about genius Loci and historical commercial block, the relationship of understanding are categorized and listed below for implementing in the case studies for detail analyses:

1 The expression of orientation

①Boundary
Boundary is the primary and most obvious character of a place. The situation of boundary determines the character and spatial character. The most significant function of boundary is that it gives a definition of the place. There are three main points which play a pivotal role of that. They are entrance, edge and spatial fabric.

- Entrance
Entrance is the link between the two domains- inside and outside. It can concrete the relationship between the interior and exterior space. The first image of a place usually is created by the entrance. If the entrance is successful, then people can have a clear sense of orientation in the beginning.

- Edge
Edge can give a scope of the place, make it clear to be recognized. There always an interaction between the inside space and outside space. Edge is the premise of the unique atmosphere; it provides a basic orientation.

- Spatial fabric
Spatial fabric includes the spatial relationship between buildings and how the buildings rise to the sky. In brief, there are horizontal and vertical directions in spatial structure. The spatial fabric, especially the road structure, can give people a strong feeling of where they are and where should they walk.

②Node
Node is in the cross of roads, mostly. There will be a bigger space in the node compare to the roads. It plays the role of center, and more activities happen here. People tend to have a stay in the node, then decide the next step since there is a better view.
Sign System
Sign system is not only the ones tell people directions, but also the characteristic ones which help people locate themselves. In commercial blocks, the signboards of the shops are quite valuable for visitors.

2 The expression of identification

1. Architecture format
The construction mode of buildings has an essential influence on their characters. Also, the way they are decorated represents their meanings.

2. Color
Color can contribute a joyful or solemn situation based on its presentation.

3. Texture
Stone, brick and wood are different "presences" which express the way buildings "are" on earth. The "classical" or "cosmic" character are created by different materials.

3 Cultural elements
Cultural perspective is suggested as a supplementary to Genius Loci. In avoid being repeated, there are two aspects, which have a different view from genius loci. They are life style and local custom.

1. Life style
The style the local people live, and the way they communicate. That creates a spiritual sense of a place.

2. Custom
The local custom represents a unique atmosphere just as the local life style.

These elements will be discussed later to reach a deeper understanding of the historic commercial block.

CHAPTER3 THE CORRELATION RESEARCH
5 Genius Loci and historic commercial block

5.1 Characteristics of Genius loci in historic commercial blocks

The Genius Loci of historic commercial block has its unique attributes. These attributes are the integration of different factors. Continuity, manifoldness and harmony are the three most influential characters of historic commercial blocks’ Genius Loci.

1. The continuity of historic commercial block’s genius loci

The historic commercial block witnesses the evolution of the time and its character of culture, society and space are all changing gradually. It can be seen as an organism which has its life and metabolism. Most cities in China are developing based on the traditional cities or towns. Genius Loci of historic commercial block can be found in the spatial structure and texture of cities. The succession is a "channel", the information about foretime could be transported to days now and then passed to the future. This is a useful method for preserve culture and other historic heritage. Thanks to the succession of historic commercial block’s Genius Loci, the historic commercial block has been realized as an essential part of city's heritage and got preserved.

2. The manifoldness of historic commercial block’s genius loci

The historic commercial block's Genius Loci have various characters. It is gathered by multiplex environment on the physical aspect. For example : 20 -30 years back , People use to get water from city well and it was considered as a feature however, as course of time new water sources are formed and that will turn into the new character of Culture. The Multi-valence is a charming character of historic commercial block.

3. The harmony of historic commercial block’s genius loci

The historic commercial block tends to rely on the natural environment. It considers more about the relationship between human and nature, human and society. Most historic commercial blocks are with the width of 5-6 meters which is suitable for walking. The buildings on both sides are 1 or 2 floors, which is also the proper scale for business and living. An intense atmosphere of living is created due to the scale. In addition, the relationship between neighborhood, nature and society are harmonious.

5.2 The application of Genius Loci

5.2.1 Apply Genius Loci as a guidance

"Through building, man-made places are created which possess their individual genius loci. This is determined by what is visualized, complemented, symbolized or gathered." (Norberg-Schulz, 1980)
Place can be regarded as space with character. Genius Loci or the spirit of place have been treated as an event which has to be faced and compromised in daily life for a long time. Architecture makes the spirit of place present and the ideas of an architect are creating a meaningful place which is suitable for people's dwelling. In the design of commercial block, it is necessary to apply Genius Loci. It can be used to evaluate the place and help to choose a right way of reshaping the environment.

Based on the analysis of the connotation of Genius Loci, analyzing the structure-character and space-of place are extremely valuable in order to figure out the way to preserve a historical block which represents the Genius Loci perfectly with local culture.

5.2.2 Use Genius Loci as a scientific method

"As you get to know Europe slowly, tasting the wines, cheeses and characters of the different countries, you begin to realize that the important determinant of any culture is- after all- the spirit of the place." (Durrell, 1997) The cultural symbol of Genius loci is the characteristic and meaning of a place. From some extent, Genius Loci determines the quality of architecture and the environment.

Bon the analysis of the structure of the place, the place may change with the environment elements. However, the spirit of the place does not have to change or disappear. How to protect and succeed the historical and traditional local culture is the essential part of the rejuvenation of historic districts.

According to the theory of Genius Loci, if people get identification from the genius loci, then the place could be saved and succeeded. The understanding of identification is the precondition to the sense of belongingness.

The modern architecture theories include a lot of branches. People apply architectural semiotics, psychology, aesthetics, typology and other theories to analyze architecture. If we only study from the scientific perspective, it is easy to neglect characters of the concrete environment. As a result, Genius Loci could be used as a supply for the scientific subjects; the "humanistic" aspect should be paid attention.

5.3 Genius loci in historic commercial block

Norberg-Schulz (1980) argues that there is natural environment and man-made environment in a place. In historic commercial blocks, it should also include the man-made environment which is consistent with cultural and social elements. The spirit of historic commercial block is reflected by the concentration and generalization of the character of the environment.

5.3.1 Natural environment in historic commercial block

Natural environment includes the water elements, Rocky Mountains and green plants. In fact, it is
like the background, and man-made structures are added further. In most cities, the force of nature is not so obvious since all the things on the land are redesigned by human. However, this does not mean that the natural environment is unimportant. Human tends to change the surrounding in order for various needs.

The condition of the natural environment determines a lot of significant elements of man-made places. The elements such as topography, climate, water system and plants constitute the natural world. These elements impact each other and form the foundation of human existence. Rivers, mountains, climate and even the sunshine make people choose different life and architectural styles. Man-made place has to be based on the natural place, people learn to respect the environment around them and adjust themselves to it. As a result, the local architectural styles, the man-made spatial structure and the detailed decorations are all getting an obvious influence from the natural elements.

Natural environment does have a significant influence on the historic commercial block. The different natural condition makes historic commercial blocks with different styles. The historic commercial blocks in Shaoxing, Zhouzhuang and Suzhou are famous for their water system because they are located in the Yangtze River delta which is influenced by the humid subtropical monsoon climate, the city was built inside the complex water system; most of the historic commercial blocks were just built beside the rivers (Image 5-1).

However, Chongqing, a city which is also located beside the Yangtze River, has quite a distinct format of the historic commercial block due to its topography. Lingjiang district of Chongqing is located in the cross of the Yangtze River and Jialing River. The topography is complicated, reflecting the Chongqing's character as "a city on the mountains". The historic commercial block in this site was built on the mutative height. The styles of the buildings are diversified and the structure of the space is flexible. The buildings have a tight relation with the natural condition.
Man-made environment has a closer connection with human. The existence of human is realized by the space of life in various formats and meaning. The man-made environment in historic commercial blocks includes spatial structure, path, node, architecture, signage, vegetation, etc. Among them, spatial structure is an essential factor in historic commercial block.
Architecture

Architecture is the most essential element in the man-made environment. Every architecture building is located in a certain place according to the roots of the surrounding environment. The topographic condition, meteorological condition, natural condition and the existing architectural style restrict it. Usually in China, Forbidden City is referred as solemn, and the old buildings in Suzhou as elegant. When people think of Hui style, Matou wall are the highlights; the courtyard dwellings in Beijing represent north styles in China (Image 5-3). The location of architecture determines different architectural styles, different character, and different spirits.

Image 5-3 Different styles of architecture
(Source: taken by author)

The architecture in historic commercial blocks involves the typical local residences. Local residences usually have obvious attributes which adapt to the natural environment. Simultaneously, it is influenced by the local culture like human behavior, Fengshui theory and ritual law.

6 The expression of genius loci in historic commercial block

In this section, the expression of genius loci in historic commercial block will be introduced. Before the conservation and regeneration, it is quite necessary to find out how the spirit of the place was expressed. If these significant expressions can be respected, then the conservation will be successful.

As the two main purposes of Genius Loci, the discussion will be done from these aspects: orientation and identification.
6.1 Orientation

6.1.1 Boundary

"The distinctive quality of any man-made place is enclosure, and its character and spatial properties are determined by how it is enclosed." (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) Boundary is the beginning of enclosure. The degree of enclosure and the spatial direction is both defined by the boundary. Within the boundary, the character of the block can be caught clearly. It is easy to figure out the block with the boundary. In addition, the relationship of the boundary with the sky is also a significant point to be noticed. Then it is necessary to discuss the boundary of historic commercial block.

In historic commercial block, the atmosphere is limited in certain boundary. This helps people to feel the "interior" part and gets a better understanding of the block. How do the buildings distinguish from the one outside; how do they stand on the earth and face the sky, these are the questions which need to be solved.

**Entrance of the block**

An entrance is the link between exterior space and interior space. It can point out the axis of the block. As an old saying "an excellent beginning is half of success", so does the entrance of a commercial block. From the commercial perspective, people should be able to find and enter the entrance easily. More importantly, it has to be attractive. It is the boundary of an outer space and the inside block. In most historic commercial blocks in China, there is an entrance called Paifang in the beginning of the block (Image 6-1). Paifang is also a landmark which gives people a sense of orientation.

![Image 6-1 Paifang in Ciqikou historic commercial block, Chongqing](http://www.foolor.com/chongqing-ciqikou.html)

**Edge of the block**

There must be some difference between the outer space and the block. In the case of a historic commercial block, the edge will differ in historic buildings and the modern buildings in
Architectural style.

**Spatial fabric of the block**

The upper space in the building is defined by its ceiling. However, the upper edge of a block is determined by the sky in most situations. The light from the sky plays a vital role from both inside and outside. Paths can give people an obvious sense of orientation. In China, most paths are south-north direction or east-west direction since sun rises from the east and the buildings are oriented according to the sunshine. The whole block is like a body, then paths are its blood vessel; the larger paths are artery and the smaller ones are veins, thus gives the activity in the block.

6.1.2 Node

The main element of a city is its center or core, when it comes to a block, the element is node. In historic commercial block, the place which people stops by and have an occupation is node. It usually occurs in the cross of the roads. Centrality is the character of node. When someone stands in a node, it means he/she can get a better field of vision and easier to find his way.

6.1.3 Sign system

The signage system includes the signs which are made for shops and transportation. The visual image which formed with words, graphs and symbols can express contents, orientation and principles. The signage in historic commercial blocks are more than environmental elements, it should be treated as a guide which points out the subject of the place. Therefore, the signage system is a symbolization of the local culture in historic commercial blocks.

6.2 Identification

6.2.1 Architectural format

Architecture is the most attractive element in historic commercial block. The patterns of the buildings express different characters clearly. The character of architecture is defined by the types of construction used such as skeletal, open and transparent; massive and enclosed. Also, the different ways of biding, joining, projection and erection. In the historic commercial block, the original buildings are meaningful and impressive. They have unique values that need to be preserved. Visitors can have a sense of the past period with the buildings.

6.2.2 Color

Color is one of the main stimuli which formed people's sense of sight. Different colors can make people feel warm or cold, near or far, light or heavy. The resource of people's primary identification about color that comes from the natural environment they live. The form of local color often reflects people's imitation of the surrounding color or their desire to the color they lack. As time passed, these colors are loved by the local residents and will not be changed by any other
conditions. Therefore, the local colors become an essential element of presenting the spirit about the place.

6.2.3 Texture

Texture is an attribute or a property of the material. It was used to describe the sense of touch. In the architecture, the sense of quality means the feeling about different materials which are presented by varied techniques. Texture reflects the historic character and "atmosphere" of the material creates various spaces. There are sense of natural texture and sense of man-made texture. Natural texture means natural character like air, water, stone, and trees. Man-made texture is artificial character such as brick, ceramic, glass, fabric, plastic etc. Materials have a strong influence on the sense of texture. It can manifest that different kinds of materials present diverse kinds of atmosphere. In addition, local architectural materials are helpful to emphasize the local character, making people feel familiar to the place.

6.3 From a cultural perspective

It is quite obvious that Genius Loci only focus on the visual section and the spirit of a place is invisible, because it can be only experienced. However, there is something invisible and essential to the historic block- culture. Since the main view of this paper is Genius Loci. the culture is applied as a supplementary perspective.

Local culture is formed and succeeded by ancestors in a certain area for a long time. Its origin is the need of human society. It has the strength which hides in people's behaviors, languages and psychology. It has a typical local character. People need it to have the sense of identification. The classification of local culture varies. Nevertheless, the most significant aspects of culture which have a close relationship with the spirit of historic block are local life style and local custom.

6.3.1 Local life style

Local life style is the local residents living habit. In brief, it can be summarized as "apparel, diet, dwelling and transport ". The way people wear clothes, eating and drinking, building houses have a meaning of local culture, especially in historic commercial blocks. Even the ways, kids playing games and people communicating with each other.

6.3.2 Local custom

Local custom usually is represented as the traditional activities. It also exists in the local language and habits.
CHAPTER 4 CASE STUDY

7 Gaochun Old Street

7.1 Introduction of the block

7.1.1 Information about Gaochun

Gaochun is a small town which is located in the southwest of Jiangsu province in China. The south west part of Gaochun is adjacent to Anhui province. Gaochun is crossed by Guanxi river and Xvxi river from east to west. Gucheng lake and Shijiu lake are both famous as they made the positive impact on Gaochun. The two rivers run from Suzhou and Hangzhou in the east and join Yangtze River to the west (Image 7-1).

![Image 7-1 The location of Gaochun](Source: made by author)

Gaochun is developing with the shipping business relying on favorable terrain (Image 8-2). There are miles of wharf prepared for the transportation boats in Guanxi river. In ancient times, businessmen from the nearby regions like Anhui and Nanjing chose to run their business here because of the positive position. Gaochun is also famous for the land of milk and honey (Image 7-2).

![Image 7-2 The Boat business (left); A land of milk and honey--Gaochun](left)

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7.1.2 Information about Old Street

With the development of the local trading, more and more out-of-town merchants came and ran their business. As a result, a commercial block was built gradually. It is the origin of Old Street.

Old Street is located in the south west of Gaochun, just near Guanxi river-- the source of Gucheng lake. Guanxi River was used as the transportation river which links the south part of Anhui and Nanjing. According to the records (Yisan Ruan, 2002), at least from Ming dynasty the commercial block was already formed.

Old Street is the first commercial block in Gaochun (Yisan Ruan, 2002). It is consisted by 11 streets and lanes: Old Street, Hebing Street, Dangpu Street, Chenjia Lane, Fujia Lane, Xvija Lane, Jing Lane, Wangjia Lane, Small Lane, Jiangnanshengdi and Guanxi Road. Since Old Street crosses the whole block as the biggest one of them, local residents used to call the block "Old Street" for convenience. Buildings in Old Street are Hui style since the town is close to Anhui Province (Image 7-3). Old Street was 1135 meters long in Ming dynasty. Many years passed, it only remains 345 meters now (Image 7-4). Although it has been damaged a lot, the traditional structure, style and format are still preserved.

Image 7-3 A perspective of Old Street

Image 7-4 Old Street
7.2 The expression of genius loci in Old Street

7.2.1 The expression of orientation

1 Boundary

- Entrance

The entrance of Old Street is easy to find and hard to forget. At the entrance, there is a Paifang (Image 7-5), which is a typical architecture form Hui style. Paifang can be regarded as the gate of the block. It defines the space for entrance. It hints the direction of the street since it is parallel to the walls behind it. People can have a clear image of the location of the block.

This Paifang is not shabby. In fact, it was built by the government in recent years, part of the conservation project. It can be seen as a link between modern buildings and the old ones (Image 7-6). For the visitors, it is attractive, and they want to have a look inside the block. For the local residents, it is a landmark to orientate themselves.
Edge
Old Street can be seen as a centralization of the historic buildings. The definition of its conservation scope is done by the government: the streets around it consist a boundary as Xiaohe Road from the east, Guanxi Road from the south and Tongxian Street from the north (Image 7-7). The historic buildings are located in the middle of the area (the red section). The other buildings around are mocking the Hui style to make a harmonious sense. There is an obvious difference between the inside- traditional format and outside- modern format.

Spatial fabric
The function of Old Street is commercial at the beginning. Thus, the design of the street reflects the sense of "hold money". The street is not straight because the Chinese think "straight things will lose money". In fact, the curve of the street looks like the edge of a traditional Chinese wallet (Image 7-8). That is a metaphor in design.
The block is easy to be recognized since this spatial structure. In addition, the main street is parallel to the Guanxi River (Image 7-9). That represents human ancients like to choose residential location near rivers. Maybe Old Street is the easiest block to find the way thanks to its form. Standing in the street and watching the movement is a fantastic experience. It seems like time went back, maybe Ming dynasty, especially when it rains.

It is fascinating to find out that the bigger streets in the block are all parallel to the river, while the smaller ones are vertical to it. These streets cross each other and divide the whole site into 15 sections. In each section, there are about five houses. This road system gives people a clear sense of orientation. That is why the foreign tourists can also get an enjoyable experience without a map: these old buildings can tell people directions directly.

The width of the streets also allow people orientation since they have different levels. The main
streets are about 3.7~6 meters while the secondary ones are 1.2~3 meters (Image 7-10).

The spatial structure is also influenced by the buildings, especially their high walls. The Matou wall (Hui style wall) has different levels in height, normally three levels in a gable. A unique rhythm is created by that (Image 7-11).

In order to keep the traditional spatial structure, the local government arranged all the electric wires under ground (Ruan, 2002). Then, there is no obvious modern equipment in the block.

**Node**

There are several nodes in the block, some of them has a historic meaning based on an old well, an ancient tree, a Paifang or a stone monument, etc. The government choose the characteristic ones, create them into historic sight spot. For instance, the sight spot "Old well Square" was an old well which built in Qianlong period (about 1750s). A small square is designed with the well in the central. Some commercial facilities are added around the square (Image 7-12). It turns from a normal node to an attractive public center. Both historic meaning and commercial function are
Sign System

The traditional Chinese signboards are mostly made of wood or cloth. The government encourage the shops to use traditional ways to attract visitors (Image 7-13).

Some signs are lanterns on which the name of the shop is written. Some are more attractive: show the things which they sell outside markedly. For example, if the shop sells calabash, then the shopkeeper hang a calabash near the signboard (Image 7-14). A lot of traditional shops choose this to follow the historic atmosphere. Clients have a historic feeling about the signs.
7.2.2 The expression of identification

1 Architecture format

The architectural style in Old Street is the typical Hui style. Matou wall and the stone carving represent Hui style totally. Matou wall is a high gable which have different levels on the top. It not only has an interaction with the sky but also create a safe sense for the owners (Image 7-15).

Not every building in the block is heritage; some are characteristic form and some are normal style. Except the core part, the way of preservation of the buildings need to be discussed. The local government classify the whole block into three types: heritage protection spots; core preservation area and general preservation area (Image 7-16).

Heritage protection spots mean the heritages which need to be protected carefully. It includes
Old Street, Chenjia Lane, Xujia Lane and Fujia Lane, and Wu’s Temple. The Heritage protection spot is about 3.77 hectares.

**Core preservation area** means the buildings which are more than 200 years old. The area of historic architecture groups and the characteristic lanes belong to this type.

**General preservation area** means areas focus on the protection and coordination of cultural relics and historical styles. Inside the historic block, all areas are general preservation area except the core protection area. The size of this area is 3.02 hectares.

When it comes to the buildings, there are also division between them. Four levels are applied to distinguish the buildings based on the structures and values of the buildings as below (Image 7-17):

**Protection** refers to keep the original style truthfully to respect the historical heritage. It includes the buildings have considerable construction quality and styles. The replacement and repair of them should be done as the original types. The internal and external space should be kept to ensure its authenticity. Wu’s Temple and the buildings along the Old Street belong to this classification.

**Preservation** is applied in the buildings which keep the original structure and improve the facilities inside. Most of these buildings are built in Ming and Qing dynasty. The format and style are repaired, and the living equipments are improved. It includes the buildings close to the Old Street but not along it.

**Decoration** refers to the buildings stand in the essential part but does not match the atmosphere of the block. Decorating their facade and decreasing their height will make them less strange. The buildings close to the main entrance have a conflict with the traditional form. It is a suitable way for them.
Update refers to the ones which have a strong impact to the traditional buildings and even the ones built violate regulations. A lot of buildings in the general preservation area need a update.

The classification of the preservation areas and buildings provide a clear direction to do the preservation. The essential buildings have been protected; buildings have unsuitable character are removed gradually. The process is done step by step, just as the sustainable regeneration theory argues.

Color

The background color of the block is black and white because the roofs are black and the walls are white. The contrast of color gives the deep impression to the visitors. Another main color is the paint on the wooden architecture. Paint cannot last for too many years. Then it is necessary to repair the damaged part in time. However, when some residents paint the buildings themselves, they choose the wrong color. The original color is dark red, in fact. The new paint is too bright (Image 7-18). With the bright red color, the house seems quite new and does not match the historic theme of the block. Only the dark red can give people a sense of tradition.
Traditional materials can make people feel a historic atmosphere. In Old Street, the main materials of buildings are bricks and wood. When some building need to be fixed, workers always choose the same materials, or at least the most similar one.

The paving of the road is Qing stone and Yanzhi stone which are the most typical materials in traditional block. Qing stone is on both sides, and Yanzhi stone is in the middle of the streets (Image 7-19). Yanzhi stone has light pink color, and Qing stone is green-gray. These two colors are suitable to match each other. Yanzhi stone was paved horizontally while the Qing stone is paved vertically. The pavement is following the direction of the street; thus, it is quite easy to find the way.

![Image 7-7 Paving in Old Street](Source: taken/ drawn by author)

7.2.3 Cultural elements

Life style

Most residents who live in the block manage business. In order to obey the traditional commercial atmosphere, the government set a preferential policy for the traditional type shops. In addition, the visitors do like these traditional shops than the normal ones. As a result, most of the shops are selling the traditional goods like hand-made shoes, feathered fan and hand-made shuttlecock (Image 7-20). Some goods only can be found in the block. The characteristic commercial mode brings a considerable economic benefit to the local residents and attract more visitors.
People have a lot of attractive local activities in the block, like "Tiaowuchang" (Image 7-21), "Big horse", "Hui style Drama" and dragon-boat racing. Tiaowuchang is a ceremony in temple primarily. The origin of this performance emerged in Gaochun from Shang dynasty. It is popular in Gaochun. It imitates the ancient Chinese celestial beings. Wuchang means the five celestial beings who control the five elements as: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. The ancient people thought these five elements are the foundation of natural things. Therefore, the dancers wear masks and costumes in red, yellow, blue, white and black-stand for the five elements, waving different kinds of weapons, pretending they are the five celestial beings. A monk or a Taoist also dance with them. There are a lot of styles of the dance, like invitation dance, ceremony dance, single dance, double dance... The essence of the dance is to hope a harvest by asking hope from the celestial beings. Now Tiaowuchang is not only performed for wishing a better year. It is a valuable activity which attract the visitors in Old Street.
"Giant horse" is another dance which happens in the spring festival (Image 7-22). The "Giant horse" has wooden skeleton, which covered with fake fur. Two people stand in the big house (one stand in the front and another stand behind). A child plays a role of the warrior in ancient time, sitting on the horse. The horse has moves as run, shake, jump and walk under the control of trumpet. The situation is noisy but lively. This activity brings jolly to people. It is also a precious memory of children.

These cultural activities are another aspect of the block's spirit. They have a strong force to recall people's memory and also, representing a character of the place.

7.3 Summary

Old Street has precious value in many aspects. The preservation and regeneration of Old Street is executing under the control of the government. It is a righteous thing that the old buildings got repaired and protected. A traditional commercial block can be experienced due to its structure and architecture. What's more, the local economy do increase because of the tourism.

Thanks to the conservation project above, the unique spirit of the block has been preserved quite well. It is clear that among the spiritual elements:

- Entrance has been emphasized and so does the edge of the block;
- The spatial structure is primarily kept;
- More functions are added to the nodes;
- Signs are following the traditional styles;
- The main construction is about the buildings, based on the classification system, the main character has been held;
- Color and texture both help people have the historic sense;
- Life style and local custom supplement from cultural aspect.
In a word, the basic goal of the government has been achieved.

Nevertheless, many tourists say that they feel happy about the place, but they do not have a plan to come again. It is strange because if the place is fascinating, people should like to have a second visit. If we analyze the problem deeply, we will figure out that the reason is the lost of the vitality.

The local government wants to create a characteristic commercial block which can make a recall of the old time. The objective is irreproachable. However, the mode of protection puts too much attention on the past. It ignores the social development. Nothing can be held forever in the growing society. The preservation will not have a future without regeneration. Indeed, there are some changes which add the new elements to the block. However, that is not enough. In addition, the development mode of Old Street should rely more on itself, or the local residents' desires. If the government is the only decider, the residents will not think they are the owners of the block—which is exactly an essential principle of vitality.

The block regards tourists as their first goal, the link with the local residents are reducing. The improvement of basic equipments is not enough. Some shops are traditional outside, but broken inside. Either the local residents or the foreign visitors fell familiarly to it will be the worst end.

It is essential to change the orientation of Old Street from a "static historic commercial block" to a "lively historic commercial block" which serves both the local and foreign clients.

8 Tianzifang

8.1 Introduction of the block

8.1.1 Information about Shanghai

Shanghai is a city in the middle of China's east coast, near the mouth of the Yangtze River (Image 8-1). It has a humid subtropical climate and experience four distinct seasons. Spring is changeable, and autumn is sunny and dry. In summer, it is majorly hot and humid; in winter, it is fearfully cold. Typhoon also happens here. These natural elements make the requirements of keeping warm in winter and staying cold in summer to the buildings.
8.1.2 Information about Tianzifang

Tianzifang is a residential block located in Luwan district, Shanghai. It is surrounded by Sinan Road, Taikang Road, Ruijin Road and Jianguo Road respectively from east, south, west, and north direction; the site is about 7.1 hectare (Image 8-2).

Tianzifang dates from the 1900s when The French Concession expanded its territory for the third time (Jieqiong Wang, 2009). In 1926, the last boundary, Taikang Road was built up- that was the final establishment of the block.

Then Tianzifang began its urban transformation process. The buildings were built for residential purposes initially because more immigrants were moving into The French Concession and more houses were needed. The architectural styles in Tianzifang are complicated. It is called Longtang style. Longtang means a mix of eastern and western architectural forms. There were garden-style longtang for upper class, new-style longtang for middle class, worn out shikumen longtang style for poor workers and longtang factories for industry. At that period, workers and residents live together in the narrow lanes (Image 8-3).
The advantage of the location attracted a lot of celebrities. From 1920 to 1940, professors, artists, politicians and other upper class came to live here. After 1931, the Xinhua Art University put their dormitory in Taikang Road, then lot of artists joined in the site. That was the initial transformation from residential type to artistic type. At that time, factories, small shops, communities were developing together. After the war against Japan, some houses and factories got damaged. Nevertheless after the liberation in 1949, the damaged parts got repaired; industry area and residential area became separate. With the economy developed, the industry structure of the city changed, which caused the profits of those factories were reducing gradually. Most of the factories were abandoned, becoming a burden of the government. The economic in Taikang site were not as prosperous as before. Tianzifang was leased to small individual business, such as hair salons, dressmakers or snack shops.

As a result, Tianzifang had two emergencies in the late 1990s: ① local government planed to remove all the old buildings for profits; ② local residents complained about the limited residential settings and tended to leave the block.

In 1998, Yilu Culture Company moved into the block as the first member. After that, Yifei Chen (a famous painter), Dongcheng Er, Jieyin Wang, Jiajun Wang (they are all famous artists) joined the Taikang site one after another, opening their design studios there. So did some craftwork shops. Step by step, the block became lively and popular. In 1999, the famous painter Yongyu Huang came to the block and named it as Tianzifang. "Tianzifang" is the name of the earliest painter in China. With such a name, people know that it is an area which gathered by artists.

The old factories were rented to artists; the function of the buildings changed. Tianzifang Creative block was formed. In 2005, the government advertised Tianzifang with its unique styles of the buildings to attract the merchants. Now there are more than 200 shops run their business in the block, artists from counties all around the world come here and set up their workshop. It forms a commercial character as indoor design, visual art and craftwork art. The cultures from different counties develop freely and affect each other. Now Tianzifang is a famous historical block with its typical spirit (Image 8-4).
8.2 The expression of genius loci in Tianzifang

8.2.1 The expression of orientation

① Boundary

- Entrance

The entrances of the block are always the visual center and a lot of decorations make them marked. Unlike the blocks in other places, the Longtang styled block usually has an overhead building at the entrance, which adds more living space for the residents (Image 8-5). By this way, the entrance itself also affords extra space for public life. Take a look from the street outside, the various balconies on the second floor, the different styled parapets and the tiny windows of attics combine a rhythmic image to be recognized. As the original entrance is quite old, the residents improve the appearance of it (Image 8-5). The facade of the entrance is updated; only a few changed details make a more attractive view of the entrance.
Now the main entrance is located in the no.210 of Taikang Road. It is designed as the historic style (Image 8-6). The atmosphere of the block is enhanced by the typical entrance.

Image 8-6 The entrance of Tianzifang
(Source: http://www.tianzifang.cn/home)

- **Edge**
  The boundary of the block is obvious- the houses stand along the streets play the role of "edges". Other houses inside are surrounded by them. Although the streets outside is noisy, the inner block is quiet. It feels like two different worlds in and out of the block. In addition, the block is recognizable with the unified houses along the streets. These houses are visual from both sides since there are a few entrances. However, the block is not totally enclosed, most of the outer houses use their first floor to run a small business. That makes a strong connection between the residential space and the outside public space. The block is sociable by that.

- **Spatial fabric**
  The regeneration process is finished gradually. Thus, the basic spatial structure in the block has been preserved well. The main space structure in Tianzifang is "main lane- secondary lane-residence". In this spatial structure, the main lane space, secondary lane space and the residential space are the significant parts of the block. The main lanes are south-north direction while the secondary lanes are perpendicular to them (Image 8-7).
All the lanes in Tianzifang are quite narrow, only 1 to 6 meters wide (Image 8-8). That is the result of too many immigrants came to Shanghai, but the land was limited, the designers had to make the buildings close to each other. However, the narrow lanes create a close relationship between the residents.

To the outside streets, the space inside the block is interior; however, to the residents who live in the block, the space is exterior. The main lane is defined by the entrance and the orderly gables of the houses. The smaller ones between the gables are secondary lanes. A lot of activities happen in these lanes. Many local residents agree that their childhood memories always link to the them.

The secondary lane is less wide than the main ones, and more private sense. The most private space is inside the buildings. Since their solemn gates and high walls, it is a separate world from outside after closing the gates.
②Node

The nodes in the block are a tiny square which are surrounded by the historic buildings, or a cross of the paths. People can get a better view in the node and take a breath since the lanes are quite narrow. The wires in the upper space create a mysterious but safe sense to the tourists (Image 8-9).

Image 8-9 A node in Tianzifang
(Source: http://space.yaolan.com/108654/blog/14134274.html)

③Sign System

There are many kinds of shop signs in Tianzifang. The most common way is signboards. However, most shopkeepers have creative ideas to attract consumers: wooden model, steel brand, plastic sign etc. Even the design of the signs are various, they all have a harmonious relationship with the original background (Image 8-10).

Image 8-3 Shop signs in Tianzifang
(Source: http://www.tianzifang.cn/home)
8.2.2 The expression of identification

Architecture format

In the past, the main function of Tianzifang was residential. The architecture style, decoration and spatial structure of the block are sundry. Different kinds of buildings from different periods concentrate in the site. Tianzifang remains many styles of historic buildings, and the main three kinds are early-stage shikumen longtang, new-style longtang and garden-style longtang.

After 1840, the first Opium War, Shanghai was forced to open its door to foreign countries. It sank in the situation which was half feudal and half colonial. At the same time, it became an industrial and commercial city from a normal feudal county town. Thus, the concessions of western countries and the sites under the control of Chinese government constituted a unique city structure. Since a large number of the population came to the concessions, and the land was not enough, some solutions emerged. A new style of architecture which combines the traditional south housing style and western semi-detached housing style emerged in The French Concession. By this way, the land could achieve the maximum usage.

The architectural styles in Tianzifang:

Early-stage shikumen longtang

The most outstanding feature of the early-stage shikumen longtang is that the general layout of the traditional spatial residential units in the regions south of the Yangtze River was based on adopting the "row-upon-row" style of western residences ("Shikumen" means "black door with stone frame") (Image 8-11). There was an obvious axis in the layout (Xiaowei, L., 2001). As a result, these buildings combined both Chinese and western architectures at the very beginning.

The unit plan of the house was mainly based on the Chinese traditional three-courtyard house and four-courtyard house (Image 8-12).
The decoration of the houses showed the remarkable feature of the residences in the south Yangtze River regions: the gable form is Matou wall (stepped Wall) or Guanyin Dou, the long vertical windows in the parlor, the decorations on the eaves, and the lattice windows on the wing rooms were all following the traditional ways (Image 8-13).

The front gate is the most outstanding character of shikumen style. The gate stands at the axis of the house, in front of a closed courtyard without windows. Shikumen means the frame of the door is made of stone. The door itself is made by wood which painted in black. The gate is solemn with the copper doorknobs (Image 8-14).
The new-style longtang was a new form which based on the improvement of the early-stage shikumen longtang (Image 8-15). The most obvious change of the new-style longtang is that the shikumen disappears of each building. Iron fence replaced shikumen, playing the role as a gate which installed at the entrance. Matou wall and Guanyin Dou are abandoned. In addition, the outer walls were lower than before. Some even used living green fences directly. The house is usually three floors. Steel windows had already been rather popular. More western elements of decoration were applied to substitute the Chinese traditional ones. Another significant change is that the width of longtang had been bigger considered the cars. It is about 5 meters wide.

Garden-style longtang houses are the third generation of "longtang system" after the new-style longtang. It is a new form of residence with a higher standard. This kind had changed from the "row- upon- row" form into the semi-independent form. The plants and environment got more attention than before. In terms of architectural styles, most of them were westernized, including details of the decorations. As a matter of fact, after it lost the traces of the traditional longtang style in the general layout, it had already become independent garden villas (Image 8-16).
Many small factories established in the longtang because the land in Shanghai was expensive. The small factories are called "longtang factory" due to their location (Image 8-17). They were small scale with rough equipment, and flexible to change the production types. However, their structure-half for production and another half for residence- which adapted to the social economic desire did not change at all.

The image below shows the architectural style in Tianzifang (Image 8-18).

(Source: http://news.sohu.com/20120630/n346926492.shtml)
These buildings have similar spirits to each other, and consisting a harmonious atmosphere together. During the regeneration, all the facades have been kept; while the inside space has been improved. This method works well since the tourists can enjoy the historic environment and the shopkeepers can have a better living situation (Image 8-19).

Color

The typical color of Tianzifang is brick red- just the color of the traditional bricks (Image 8-20). The brick red color makes a sense of old Shanghai. Although the buildings are old, the basic color has been respected carefully. In the repair project, broken bricks are replaced by the same type bricks.
Texture

There are the original materials and new materials in Tianzifang. Red and gray bricks of the historic buildings and gray stones of the paving are the most typical historic materials (Image 8-21).

The shopkeepers like to follow the historic style to decorate their shops. After all, the old Shanghai style is the reason they join the place. If they change the site a lot, the value of the place will disappear. If something is broken, the similar material will be the first choice to fix it. At the same time, since the shopkeepers like to make their shops unique. They use modern materials like glass, steel, wood and acrylic (Image 8-22). The spirit of the block changed from the earliest time. However, the change is slight since the modern elements are only occurring in small parts like doors, windows and the signs. With the new, fresh elements, Tianzifang looks like a charming lady who makes herself up.
8.2.3 Cultural elements

Life style

The space between houses is semipublic - a lot of residential activities happen there. People not only walking, but also cooking, hanging their clothes, talking and having a rest in these narrow lanes (Image 8-23). The residents live inside the houses have quite safe feeling. The local residents all have a clear sense of regionalism and recognition. In addition, with such limited space, the residents have a quite close relation with their neighbors. The Longtang can be seen as a big family. The size of the lanes is not suitable for a high-quality living, but it does help to create a friendly communication with the neighbors. A lot of residents who lived in the block before express that they miss the unique environment and relationship with old neighbors. That is what a modern building lack-harmonious connection with the next door.

![Image 8-23 Life in Tianzifang](http://shbc0617.blog.163.com/blog/static/5917792010428112246932/)

The facades of the buildings emphasize the vertical standing. The decorations on the eaves of the gables, especially on the top of the gables are the most significant factor of buildings. As the lanes are narrow and the gables are high, the sunshine are hardly light the whole block. Usually, the lanes are half bright and half dark. The residents have to hang their clothes in the space of the lanes (Image 8-24). It seems like another three dimensional scene is formed.

![Image 8-24 Residents hang clothes in the lanes](http://shbc0617.blog.163.com/blog/static/5917792010428112246932/)
Foreign visitors like to come to have a visit since the interaction in the block are attractive. Tianzifang is a lovely choice to go shopping or relax. Since there are still residents live in the block (most in the upper floors), the trace of typical "longtang life" can be found everywhere.

**Custom**

Many shops in the block are running a business based on the local characteristic, like silk cloth (Image 8-25). The characteristic shops not only enhance the historic atmosphere of the block, but also bring an economic advantage.

![Image 8-25](http://www.tianzifang.cn/store/212)

**8.3 Summary**

Tianzifang is a successful case which promoted by the private capital. Even with the economic developed, it has faced the crisis of tearing down. Although it was not a commercial block in the beginning, its unique spirit of the past periods has been succeeded by the transformation of its function thanks to the artists' smart ideas.

Preservation does not equal to stop exploiting. In fact, it means to figure out a method to balance the past and the future. Adding new elements to an old block, changing its function gradually with certain rules, have been proved an effective way. It brings a fresh air to the old houses and has a positive influence to the tourism.

In the process of regeneration, the spatial fabric is also retained as Old Street. The biggest difference between them is that a lot of new elements are added to Tianzifang, mostly on the facade. That is because the original function of Tianzifang is residential, not commercial. As a place full of creative shops, the sighs need to be attractive.

The old days seem all went back when visitors walk among the fantastic buildings of different periods. Go straight, you were walking in 1915; turn left you found yourself in 1880; enter a pretty shop which close to you, welcome to the real world. The sense of the block is fantastic.
However, this magic feeling has some relation with one's existing experience, or knowledge. If someone knows nothing about the history, or the styles of the buildings, it may be more difficult for him to analyze the atmosphere in a "right" way. That, proving people's experience about a place is subjective. Obviously a local Shanghai resident has feeling which differs from a foreign visitor. Nevertheless, that does not mean the place means nothing to the person. Architectures can tell stories without a voice. The characters of them already make them have a soul. While the structure of the place could give people a sense of orientation, the features of buildings also can give them an impressive image- even though it might be "I am an outsider". Therefore, the spirit of the place has been succeeded; the judgment of people is another story.

Indeed, Tianzifang has its defect during the regeneration. The residents feel upset about the noisy visitors. They complain the block is on longer as comfortable as before. Some tourists are not satisfied with the new decoration of the architecture. They argue that the spirit of the site has been ruined. The shops in the block have cultural themes from many countries- just as Shanghai was in the old times. However, there are only a few shops which focuses on the local culture in Shanghai. The restaurants in Tianzifang are varied like cafes, bars and India food. But none of them sells the local Shanghai food...

In brief, Tianzifang is a miracle. It not only survived from the modern buildings, but also finished the process without the guidance from the government.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

9 Principles of historic commercial block conservation and regeneration

9.1 Analysis of the two cases

With the case study above, a comparison can be made to achieve a deeper understanding of the expression of genius loci in historic blocks. In order to compare them more distinct, a form is made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old Street</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Tianzifang</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrance</td>
<td>Emphasize the entrance space with the same historical sense</td>
<td>★★ Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edge</td>
<td>Define it based on the buildings</td>
<td>★ Keep the original edge of the block</td>
<td>★ Keep the structure</td>
<td>☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial fabric</td>
<td>Maintain the existing situation</td>
<td>☆ Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Node</td>
<td>Transfer the node to a square</td>
<td>★ Keep the structure</td>
<td>☆</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table, we can see that there are some elements which almost keep the original character as edge, spatial fabric, node and color; some elements have a slight change as entrance and texture; others have an obvious transformation like sign system and architecture format. Tianzifang did a better job in keeping life style while Old Street has attractive, traditional custom. The changes of the elements in the two cases are different. However, both of them have a success in preserving genius loci of the historic block.

In conclusion, the primary character of genius loci is determined by the spatial structure, then the architectural format, the decorations... Bigger scaled factors play a more decisive role in the process. As a result, the "totality" concept is significant to the conservation. If the main factors are retained, the historic atmosphere can be preserved.

From the conservation process, the two cases also have some differences as below:

### Table 9-1 The changes of Old Street and Tianzifang
(Source: make by author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old Street</th>
<th>Tianzifang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign system</td>
<td>Use traditional styles</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Various of materials and forms are applied</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture format</td>
<td>Classify the values of them and preserve them</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep and decorate the facade, improve the quality inside</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Keep the original color</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Almost the same as before</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New materials used in small scope</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life style</td>
<td>Does not be preserved well</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preserved well</td>
<td>☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local custom</td>
<td>Represented in shops and activities</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not be represented in shops</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

☆ Almost no change
★ Change a little
★★ Change some
★★★★ Change a lot

Table 9-2 Preservation process of Old Street and Tianzifang
(Source: make by author)
One of the most outstanding feature of Tianzifang project is the interaction between the block and the investors. The block survives because of the benefits brought by the shops and restaurants, while the commercial system makes a smashing success thanks to the unique environment. That is a win-win situation. However, Tianzifang lack the local culture in its commercial system; it also has some defects like the tourists easily bother the residents. Nevertheless, to sum up, Tianzifang is successful in reaching its goals.

Old Street did a delightful job in preserving the historic commercial block in maximum extent. However, the local residents did not take a pivotal role in the conservation process. Compare to Tianzifang, Old Street is less lively and attractive.

9.2 Principles of historic commercial block conservation and regeneration

With their unique spirit, the historical blocks are excellent choices to be experienced. According to the discussion above, there are some principles for historic commercial block conservation and regeneration.

１ Preserve the block as a whole

Spirit of the historic block is formed by all the meaningful parts includes road structure and spatial structure; natural environment characteristic and architectural characteristic; materials, colors, signs and vegetation. These components need to be analyzed and preserved as a whole. In addition, the cultural elements are the invisible precious which need to be taken care, like social structure, local life style, local custom and traditional commerce. The distinctive atmosphere is based on these factors. As a result, there should be a clear boundary of the block, and the significant elements should be preserved, especially the basic spatial structure.

２ Classify the value

Based on the historic value the historic block has different conservation levels. Firstly, the high valued parts need to be primarily preserved, slight regeneration can be done if necessary. Secondly, the middle valued parts should focus on the characteristic spatial structure, landscape and social life; the preservation and regeneration should be balanced. At last, the general valued parts need to remove the unsuitable things, and improve the equipment.

Not every building need to be kept as it is now. The precious buildings should be preserved, indeed, follow the original rules to fix the broken parts. The buildings with historic values need to be protected by keeping the main structure and adjusting the indoor environment. Some buildings are not suitable to the whole site, but they cannot be removed now, they need to be kept temporarily, decorating the facade and reducing the height. Finally, some buildings are totally
against the style of the site; they need to be removed immediately.

3 Appropriate regeneration

The primary principle of renewal should be protection. Most historic blocks have poor equipment because they are too old; they do need a change. However, the change have to based on the premise that protection is the main direction. One of the most influential aim of regeneration is to enhance the residents' life standard. Removing the buildings which violate regulations, repairing the broken walls and paths and improving the basic life equipments will make a progress. A better way is to finish the improvement step by step and make every decision based on the real situation.

4 Choose the original way

There are a lot of obvious differences between the modern and traditional buildings, not only the styles. Preservation should respect the original architectures. The material, structure, shape and technics of the buildings should be as real as the original ones. If it is difficult to find the original factors in the days before, at least they should be closer to them.

10 Method of historic commercial block conservation

Everything changes - the buildings, the streets, the blocks, the city, the world. If this happens too fast and violent, people feel lost because the environment is no longer familiar to them. It is reasonable that human need to hold the unique atmosphere. There are some steps of the conservation of the commercial historic block:

10.1 Investigate and analyze the block

The relevant information should be studied and analyzed. In general, nation is the first level of background, then city. The district which contains the block is also significant. The historical, cultural, economic information can give a primary image and understanding of the block. The block should be investigated for deeper information. The spiritual elements as spatial form and architectural style should be paid attention in order to help the next study.

10.2 Define the essential spiritual elements of the block

Nothing can be retained static forever, in a scientific way. So does the spirit of s place. As Norberg-Schulz (1980) points out "To protect and conserve the genius loci in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts.". As character and space define the genius loci, if the fundamental structure and character can be respected, the general atmosphere of the place can be preserved. By this way, people can still get their orientation and identification as before. Compare to the monotonous, similar reconstruction which always make people feel lost, changing the place with a mild attitude will be much better. Determine the preserved elements of
the place make an ensure about the success of the conservation.

10.3 Preserve the block in levels

After step 2, the essential elements are picked out. Then the parts of the block can be divided into three main levels: protection, preservation and regeneration.

**Protection** refers to the buildings with high values and need to be kept perfectly. These buildings need to keep their original form and character. The repair and maintenance have to be based on the "Original Principle".

**Preservation** aims at the buildings which represent the historic atmosphere. These buildings have irreplaceable influence to the spirit and spatial form of the block. They usually are the characteristic buildings which have typical style of a certain period in the city, and they have a well condition of quality. The demand of preservation is keeping the original facade and structure, the equipment and inside space of the buildings can be improved suitably.

**Regeneration** is suitable for the buildings which are not matching the total atmosphere. In this type, there are two ways. One way is changing the characteristic elements of the buildings like texture and height, making them have the same or similar attributes to the historic ones. Another way is rebuilding the architectures, creating a new one with the original spirit.

10.4 Add new functions

A place wants to preserve its genius loci, it has to cater for the new demands. The possible changes happen to the place are physical, like practical changes, social changes and cultural changes (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Then the question is "how can genius loci be preserved with the demands of new functions" or "how does the new parts respect the original spirit". Respecting the spirit of a place does not mean plagiarize the extant genius loci directly, but give a new interpretation of the identity. In other words, the new demands have to be based on the original situation. They should be proportional for the place.

10.5 Evaluate the process

Nothing is perfect. There must be some shortcomings in the conservation and regeneration process. Evaluate the process, summarize the advantages and disadvantages will help a lot to the future study.

11 Conclusion

This thesis chose Genius Loci as a fresh perspective to analyze the historic commercial blocks in
China. Firstly, it indicated the problems happened during the city construction in China. After that, it did a theoretical study to analyze the related concepts, and introduced Genius Loci systematically. In addition, the expression of genius loci in historic commercial blocks has been illustrated. In the following case study, it stated the preservation and succession of the spirit of the blocks. With the summary of each case and comparison between two cases, some conclusions have been got to help future study.

Genius Loci has a guidance effect in the preservation of historic commercial blocks. The special atmosphere of historic commercial blocks is based on their genius loci. If the essential elements of genius loci have been respected, the spirit of the place can be preserved. However, it is not the sole element which has a significant influence. The cultural perspective also has a beneficial influence. It needs to be considered in the regeneration process.

Although there are some defects of the phenomenology of architecture like the theory is quite subjective and lacks a standard, scientific analysis, it still makes a noticeable contribution to the architectural field. Norberg-Schulz focuses too much on the physical aspect, ignoring the social and cultural aspects. His analysis trends to the "environmental determinism". That is why this paper tries to abstract the elements from the genius loci and use them in future study.

Nothing can be preserved as its original character forever, especially the architectures. Sometimes, change equals future.
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