

Historical Accumulation and Contemporary Activation: A Study on the Reconstruction of Cultural Brands and Spatial Design Strategies of Chaozong Street in Changsha

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Abstract:

Chaozong Street, an important district of the historical and cultural city of Changsha, carries multiple cultural layers such as traditional trade, modern education, and the Republic of China Pavilion, but faces the contradiction of historical conservation and commercial development in contemporary urban renewal. Based on field research and literature analysis, this study analyzes the current situation of Chaozong Street from the dimensions of spatial texture, architectural features, and cultural connotations, proposes the cultural brand positioning of “Weixin Wharf · Spatio-Temporal Dialogue” (weixin matou · shikong duihua), and formulates the spatial design strategy combining hierarchical protection and innovative intervention. The study emphasizes the organic integration of historical authenticity protection and contemporary context, optimizes the visual environment of the block through guidelines such as materials, colors, and lighting, and provides theoretical and practical references for the sustainable development of historical blocks.

Keywords:

Historic District, Cultural Brand, Space Renewal, Visual Design

1. Introduction

In the context of rapid urbanization, the preservation and renewal of historical districts, as important carriers of urban cultural memory, have become important issues in contemporary urban development. Changsha, a national historical and cultural city, has a system of historical districts that carries rich urban historical stratification and cultural connotations. Chaozong Street, one of the best-preserved historical districts in the central urban area of Changsha, not only retains the spatial texture of the traditional commercial district but also integrates multiple cultural resources such as modern education and the buildings of the Republic of China

mansions, making it a typical case for studying the reconstruction of cultural brands and spatial design of historical districts.

However, with the advancement of urban renewal and cultural tourism development, Chaozong Street faces many challenges in the balance between protection and development. On the one hand, its unique cobblestone pavement, the group of mansions from the Republic of China era and other material relics have significant historical value and urgently need systematic protection; On the other hand, the influx of the contemporary influencer economy has fragmented the visual environment of the neighborhood, blurred the positioning of cultural brands, and there is no organic connection between the historical context and contemporary functions. This contradiction not only affects the cultural recognition of Chaozong Street, but also restricts its potential for sustainable development. Therefore, how to reconstruct the cultural brand of Chaozong Street through scientific design strategies and achieve the organic integration of historical accumulation and contemporary context has become an urgent theoretical and practical problem to be solved.

This study takes Chaozong Street in Changsha as the research object. Based on the cultural stratification characteristics of the historical block, it analyzes its current conditions from multiple dimensions such as spatial relationship, material remains, and cultural connotation, and clarifies the cultural brand positioning of Chaozong Street through horizontal comparison with other historical blocks in Changsha. Based on this, the design principles of “historical authenticity, spatio-temporal dialogue, and innovative integration” are proposed, and differentiated spatial visual design strategies are formulated for different functional zones, aiming to explore the synergistic path for the protection and revitalization of historical districts.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in expanding the analytical framework for the study of cultural brands in historical districts, taking the systematic correlation between physical spatial characteristics and cultural connotations as the core basis for brand building; The practical significance lies in providing an operational methodological system for the renewal design of Chaozong Street and similar historical districts, helping to achieve a dynamic balance between the protection of historical culture and the development of contemporary cities. Through this research, we expect to provide solutions that are both culturally profound and adaptable to The Times for the sustainable development of historical districts.

2. A Multi-dimensional Analysis of the Current State of the Environmental View of Chaozong Street District

2.1. Location Characteristics and Spatial Relationships

Chaozong Street is located in the northern part of the central urban area of Changsha, at the intersection of Xiangjiang Middle Road and Zhongshan Road in Kaifu District. The area is within the core of the “One River, Two Banks” historical urban area as defined in the Changsha Historical and Cultural City Protection Plan. It is bordered by the Huangxing North Road commercial center to the east, the Xiangjiang Scenic belt to the west, the Kaifu Temple Historical and Cultural district to the north, and the Wuyi Square business district to the south. From the perspective of historical development, the area where Chaozong Street is located has been an important commercial and residential district in the northern part of Changsha since the Qing Dynasty, and its spatial layout reflects the traditional urban texture feature of

“streets formed by water” in Changsha. In contemporary urban development, Metro Line 1 and several bus routes converge here, making it an important node connecting the historical urban area of Changsha with the modern urban space. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Map of the Chaozong District.

2.2. Analysis of Physical spatial characteristics

The physical space of Chaozong Street shows typical historical stratification characteristics. First of all, as one of only three remaining granite streets in Changsha, Chaozong Street preserves a complete system of granite pavements. The main street, which is 511 meters long and 9 meters wide, is paved with granite slabs that are unique to the Changsha area, and the surface of the stone shows obvious signs of abrasion due to long-term use.

From the perspective of the street texture, Chaozong Street presents a typical fishbone-like texture of “one main and multiple branches” in terms of spatial structure. The main street formed in the Qing Dynasty serves as the spatial axis to form the spatial framework; During the Republic of China period, with the expansion of the city, a system of side alleys was gradually developed, with many side alleys such as Liansheng Street (Liánshēng Jiē) and Ziyuan Lane (Zīyuán Xiàng) extending to both sides, forming a hierarchical pedestrian network; Contemporary micro-updates, on the other hand, have largely maintained the original context, with refined design and functional enhancement of node Spaces.

From the perspective of architectural interface features, the buildings along Chaozong Street exhibit a distinct blend of history and modernity. The building height is generally controlled at 2-3 storeys, creating a pleasant proportion of street space. The historical buildings often adopt the traditional construction of blue bricks and grey tiles, with the white lines between the brick joints creating a delicate texture

contrast with the dark grey walls; The new construction uses modern materials such as steel and glass, and through the careful combination of materials and colors, it creates a harmonious dialogue with the historical building. This organic blend of the old and new interfaces retains the spatial charm of the traditional district while meeting the demands of modern usage functions, embodying the balance of conservation and renewal of the historical district. (Figure 2)

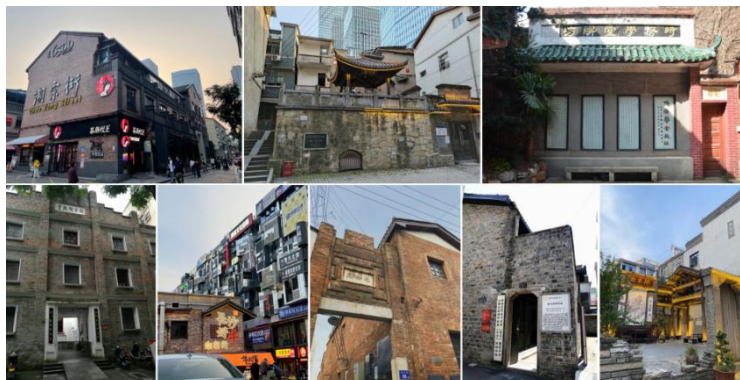


Figure 2. View of Chaozong Street.

2.3. Four-dimensional Analysis of the Cultural space

The cultural space connotation of Chaozong Street can be systematically interpreted from four interrelated dimensions:

(1) The dimension of commercial life memory

As the core area of Changsha's modern rice market docks, Chaozong Street still retains abundant remnants of grain stacks and commercial buildings. According to historical records, the area had developed into an important grain trading center in the Qing Dynasty and was known as the "Rice Market" and "Rice Street". Thanks to the convenience of water transportation on the Xiangjiang River (Xiāngjiāng), it once presented a prosperous scene of "a thousand ships gathering" and became an important spatial witness to the historical saying "When Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong and Guangxi (the regions collectively referred to as Huguang) have bumper harvests, the whole country will have sufficient food (Húguǎng shù, Tiānxià zú)". The clearly distinguishable "front shop, back workshop" (Qiándiàn Hòufāng) layout in the existing buildings, as well as the structural details such as ventilation holes and loading and unloading platforms, reflect the spatial organization logic of traditional commercial districts.

(2) Dimension of historical memory

Chaozong Street, an important urban functional area of Changsha during the Republic of China period, still has the Jiuru Li (Jiǔrúli) Mansion complex. The complex as a whole presents typical features of Changsha residences during the Republic of China period: a brick-and-wood mixed structure, small blue-tiled roofs, and partial use of Western-style decorative elements. Among them, Nanmu Hall No. 6 (the site of the Jinjiu activity) was used as the office [1] of the provisional government of Korea between 1937 and 1938. The existing building, which was renovated in 2009, has largely retained its original main framework and spatial layout. In general, the Jiuruli District mansions have partially achieved the contemporary functional transformation of historical Spaces through adaptive renovations.

(3) Dimensions of the dissemination of educational ideas

From the perspective of the dissemination of educational ideas, the Chaozong Street Historical district preserves precious remnants of the development of modern education in Changsha. The former site of the Shiwu School (Shíwù Xuétáng) (founded in 1897), an important educational institution during the Reform period, has a spatial layout that combines the central symmetry of traditional academies with the open characteristics of Western-style lecture halls. The adjacent former site of the Cultural Bookstore (Wénhuà Shūshè, founded by Mao Zedong in 1920) witnessed the early - stage dissemination of Marxism in Hunan. In addition, the district also preserves the remains of modern school buildings such as the former site of Xiangya Medical College (Xiāngyǎ Yīxué Zhuānmén Xuéxiào) and Futao Girls' High School (Fùtáo Nǚzǐ Zhōngxué), which were established during the Republic of China period, together showing the historical process of the transformation of modern education in Changsha from tradition to modernity. These educational buildings, through their spatial forms and functional layouts, vividly record the spread and practice of modern educational ideas in Changsha.

(4) Dimensions of contemporary cultural innovation

From the perspective of contemporary cultural innovation, Chaozong Street presents a fierce collision between historical buildings and trendy culture. In the traditional street texture, avant-garde commercial Spaces contrast sharply with historical buildings: Biaoxing Position Youth Innovation Space transforms old factories into creative Spaces with a strong industrial style, and shops along the street challenge traditional commercial forms with avant-garde designs. On the facade of the building, neon advertisements and metallic decorations create a visual contrast with the original granite pavement and blue brick walls. This clash of old and new elements is not intentional but a cultural tension formed naturally in the course of urban development, preserving the place memory of the historical district while infusing it with the vitality of the contemporary city. This unique spatial conflict is precisely what sets Chaozong Street apart from other historic districts. (Table 1)

Table 1. Analysis of Spatial Characteristics of Historical Buildings on Chaozong Street.

Cultural dimension	Spatial characteristics	Representative cases	Core Values
Memories of business and trade life	① Granite pavement and wooden storefronts ② “front store, back workshop” functional layout ③ Storage and transportation structures such as ventilation holes and loading and unloading platforms	Granary sites and time-honored shops	Show the logic of traditional commercial space organization and the culture of the rice market
Gongguan Building Complex	① Blue brick facades with Western-style moldings ② colonnaded space layout ③ cast-iron railings with arched window and door details	Jiuruli Mansion Complex, Nanmu Hall No. 6	It embodies the architectural art and social life of the Republic of China era
Remains of educational institutions	① Central symmetrical academy layout ② Brick-carved school motto plaque ③ Arched lecture hall space	The former site of the Shiwu School and the former site of the Cultural Bookstore	Witness the transformation of modern education and the dissemination of

			ideas
Contemporary cultural intervention	① Industrial-style metal components implanted ② Neon signs placed side by side with traditional plaques ③ Contrastive transformation of new and old materials	Mark the star position, Listen to the Mountain · Foli lamp	Showcasing innovative models for revitalizing historical Spaces

3. Comparison of Cultural Brands of Historical Districts in Changsha and Positioning of Chaozong Street

3.1. Comparative Analysis of Cultural Brand Characteristics of Historical Districts in Changsha

Changsha, as a national historical and cultural city, has preserved the spatial memory of the city's development in a complete historical block system. In addition to Chaozong Street, the main historical districts include Taiping Street (Tàipíng Jiē), Pozi Street (Pōzǐ Jiē), Duzheng Street (Dōuzhèng Jiē), Xiyuan Beili (Xīyuán Běilǐ), etc. Each district has formed a differentiated cultural brand based on different historical resources.

Taiping Street has created its “Hunan-Xiang cuisine” brand image through a uniform antique horse-head wall and wooden shop signs, and its vermilion color system creates a strong visual identity with the continuous building cornices; Pozi Street uses neon lights and advertisements from the Republic of China era to enhance the visual identity of the “folk night market”, and wide roads and arcade Spaces provide ample space for commercial activities; Du Zheng Street creates a “market life” atmosphere with lanterns and antique wooden plaques, and the narrow alleys and the spatial scale of quadrangle courtyards create a sense of intimate life; Xiyuan Beili, with its blue brick walls and climbing plants, creates a “quiet and elegant living” style, with its detached mansions and quiet alleys forming an elegant environment quality.

In contrast, Chaozong Street shows more distinct trendy cultural characteristics in its cultural and tourism development. The concentrated emergence of various internet-famous shops, fashionable installations and pop-up Spaces fully reflects the cultural and tourism features of Changsha as a “internet-famous city”. However, this development model that overly relies on trendy elements has obvious sustainability problems: on the one hand, the rapidly changing trendy elements can attract visitors in the short term, but it is difficult to create lasting cultural appeal; On the other hand, modern visual elements such as cyberpunk-style light signs and electronic screens clash strongly with the historical cobblestone pavement, lacking systematic design integration. This fragmented cultural expression, while embodying contemporary commercial vitality, has not yet established organic connections among the diverse elements, making it difficult to form a neighborhood brand image [2] with historical depth and cultural continuity.

3.2. Construction of Chaozong Street's Cultural brand positioning

Based on a comparative study of historical districts in Changsha, Chaozong Street, while maintaining its traditional commercial characteristics, also has unique resources such as the birthplace of Reformist ideas and the architectural complex of Republic of

China mansions, forming a complex cultural foundation of “rice market docks + educational enlightenment + modern residence”. In response to the current problem of visual confusion and brand ambiguity caused by the proliferation of Internet celebrity elements, the positioning of “Weixin Wharf · Spatiotemporal Dialogue” focuses on three key factors: First, the need for differentiated competition to avoid homogenization with existing brands such as Taiping Street’s “market delicacies” and Duzheng Street’s “traditional residences”; Second, the integration of historical resources, incorporating scattered rice market sites, school sites and mansion buildings into a unified narrative framework; Third, the balance point of sustainable development, which enhances cultural depth while retaining the vitality of trendy elements. The positioning highlights ideological height through “renewal”, highlighting the enlightenment spirit legacy of the Current Affairs School; The “dock” continues the warmth of the marketplace and preserves the life memory of the rice market trade; Through the design concept of “dialogue of time and space”, build an organic connection between historical genes and contemporary context, ultimately forming a brand core that is both culturally recognizable and adaptable to The Times.

4. Spatial Visual Design Strategy

4.1. Design Principles

(1) The principle of historical authenticity

Chaozong Street, as an important carrier of Changsha’s urban memory, the preservation of its historical authenticity is the primary principle of the design. This principle emphasizes the protection of the integrity of the material cultural heritage of the neighborhood, including historical elements such as well-preserved cobblestone pavements and the buildings of the Republic of China mansions. In the process of protection, not only the physical form of the buildings themselves should be maintained, but also the historical and cultural information they contain should be safeguarded, so that Chaozong Street can continue as a “living history”. Through the preservation of authenticity, a solid cultural foundation is laid for subsequent innovative designs.

(2) The principle of spatio-temporal dialogue

While ensuring historical authenticity, design should aim to activate the vitality of historical space. This principle advocates for an organic dialogue between historical elements and modern life through innovative design approaches. The focus is on uncovering the contemporary value of historical Spaces so that they can retain their historical charm while meeting modern usage requirements. Through the dialogue of time and space, the historical and cultural heritage of Chaozong Street can be rejuvenated in a contemporary context, achieving a shift from “historical preservation” to “historical activation”.

(3) The principle of innovative integration

In the face of the development trends of contemporary trend culture, design needs to be innovative and integrated with a prudent and open attitude. This principle requires that the involvement of trendy elements must form a meaningful dialogue relationship with the historical context, rather than a simple superposition or conflict. Innovation should be based on a deep understanding of history and culture, and through the creative transformation of design language, trendy elements should become new carriers for the continuation of historical context. While maintaining the

overall appearance of the historical district, inject new vitality that conforms to the characteristics of The Times into Chaozong Street.

4.2. Style Guidelines

(1) Material guidelines

The use of materials in Chaozong Street should follow the principle of “dialogue between the old and the new, organic coexistence”. The historic conservation area must strictly use traditional local materials, including original blue bricks, local granite, traditional wood, etc., and be restored according to historical craftsmanship to ensure the authentic expression of the texture of the materials. The renewal area encourages the use of innovative materials while meeting modern functional requirements, but emphasizes the dialogue relationship with the historical environment through reasonable control of material proportions, optimization of detailed transitions, etc., to avoid jarring fractures. In particular, the use of highly reflective materials should be restricted to ensure that the new and old materials maintain a harmonious and unified visual texture.

(2) Color Guidelines

Block color planning adopts a control strategy of “uniform tone and distinct layers”. The historical reserve strictly adheres to the traditional color spectrum, with low saturation tones such as bluish-gray and the original color of granite. The renewal area may moderately expand the color range while maintaining the harmony of the color scheme, but the differences in lightness and saturation must be controlled to avoid visual fragmentation. Focus on limiting the use area of high-impact colors. All new colors must pass an environmental adaptation test to ensure they blend into the historical environment under different seasonal lighting conditions. Maintain the overall historical and cultural atmosphere of the neighborhood through this progressive color transition. (Figure 3)

Primary color palette			Secondary color palette		
 F7F2ED	 CDAC98	 B24F4F	 574340	 545766	
 E8DECD	 574340	 619878	 53604F	 7A8D93	

Figure 3. Color Design of Chaozong Street (Source: Liu Ameng [3]).

(3) Lighting guidelines

Lighting design follows the principle of “respecting history and using light sparingly.” Modern commercial lighting is prohibited in historic conservation areas, and only concealed functional lighting with warm color temperatures is permitted. The landscape lighting in the renewal area should use low-brightness projections and strictly control light pollution and glare interference. All dynamic lighting effects must be set with time controllers to ensure that they do not affect the nighttime atmosphere of the historical environment. This restrained lighting strategy meets both modern commercial needs and maintains the historical weight that the neighborhood should have.

4.3. Visual design strategy for the area to be updated

There are several areas in Chaozong Street that have potential for renewal, including the brick-concrete housing complex in Liansheng Street, the old granary area in Shuidao Lane and the traditional courtyard area in Ziyuan Lane. There are

common problems such as aging buildings, single functions and poor environmental quality in these areas, and there is an urgent need to improve the spatial quality through environmental visual design while continuing the historical and cultural context of the neighborhood.

North Section of Liansheng Street Residential Area: Existing brick-concrete houses from the late 20th century, with aging facades and lack of uniformity. As a transitional zone between the main street and the residential area, the area is positioned as a “city life experience zone”, taking into account the living needs of the indigenous people and the extension of cultural and tourism functions. The design strategy is based on the core concept of “coexistence of the old and the new”, achieving an organic renewal of the visual environment through the dialogic combination of traditional materials and modern elements while preserving the main structure of the building. The commercial space renovation focuses on exploring the local life memories of Changsha, embedding cultural and creative elements through lightweight design techniques, and infusing the neighborhood with a dynamic atmosphere that conforms to contemporary aesthetics while continuing the historical context.

Waterway Lane Granary District: The red-brick granary complex preserves relatively complete industrial heritage features, but has a low space utilization rate. Positioned as an “industrial memory creative zone”, it showcases the history of grain and oil storage and transportation in Changsha while activating its functional use. The design strategy highlights the “dialogue between the old and the new”, retaining industrial elements such as red brick facades and steel structures, and revitalizing the space through interventions such as rusty steel plate identification systems and light-transmitting canopies. The lighting design highlights the structural features of the building, and the landscape implantation uses movable installation art to create a creative display environment while respecting the historical style.

Ziyuan Lane Courtyard Area: The traditional courtyard house complex preserves the original living atmosphere, but the quality of the public environment needs to be improved. Positioned as a “traditional life experience zone”, it focuses on maintaining the scenes of urban life. The design strategy follows the principle of “restoring the old as it was”, restoring the blue-brick courtyard walls and stone-paved floors, and updating the infrastructure in understated dark grey tones. By using modular landscape furniture and soft floor lighting to enhance the comfort of the space while maintaining the historical atmosphere. All interventional elements are designed reversibly to ensure the authenticity of the traditional courtyard space is sustained.

5. Research Conclusions and Prospects

Based on empirical research of the Chaozong Street Historical and Cultural block in Changsha, this study constructed a cultural brand positioning system of “Weixin Wharf · Spatio-Temporal Dialogue” through systematic analysis of its physical spatial characteristics and cultural connotations. The study found that the value of Chaozong Street, as a typical sample of modern urban development in Changsha, is mainly reflected in three dimensions: First, the well-preserved granite pavement and the architectural complex of the Republic of China mansions form a unique spatial texture; Second, the cultural and educational relics such as the Shiwu School carry significant ideological enlightenment significance; Third, the culture of the rice market docks records the spatial memory of traditional commercial activities. In response to the

current development of visual confusion and brand ambiguity, this study proposes a design strategy that combines graded protection with innovative intervention: emphasizing authenticity protection in the historical core area and maintaining the historical atmosphere through material restoration and color control; In transition areas, recognizable interventions are used to establish a dialogue relationship between the old and new elements; In the innovation experimental zone, a moderate modernization is allowed, but it must be in harmony with the overall environment. These strategies together form a systematic solution that takes both conservation and development into account, providing new ideas for the sustainable development of historic districts.

Future research can be further deepened in the following areas: First, it is necessary to explore long-term mechanisms for the brand operation of historic districts, especially the collaborative participation model of local residents and business entities; Secondly, the application potential of digital technology in the interpretation and experience enhancement of historical environments remains to be explored; Finally, a dynamic assessment system should be established to continuously track the socio-economic benefits of updated practices. The theoretical value of this study lies in proposing an analytical framework for the “cultural gene chain” of historical blocks, while its practical significance is reflected in providing an operational strategy system for the protection and renewal of similar blocks. With the continuous development of the concept of urban renewal, the conservation practice of Chaozong Street will also face new opportunities and challenges, which require the continuous attention and research of the academic and practical communities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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