

The Charm of Slow Thinking — Taking the Street Museum on the Lihuangpi Road of Wuhan as an Example

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Abstract—The concept of slow thinking is derived on the basis of exploring slow food culture and understanding the concept of slow city. This paper makes a preliminary study on the reconstruction of the historical blocks into a slow street, taking the street museum on the Lihuangpi Road of Wuhan as an example, explains how this mode of slow thinking protects the historical relics of Lihuangpi Road and shows the unique architectural style and aesthetic charm of it. Expounding the introduction of slow thinking can effectively improve the living environment of local residents, show the diversity of streets, promote education and publicity, and actively promote the development of cultural leisure industry. Therefore, developing the life style of "slow thinking" advocating high quality plays a vital role in realizing green and sustainable development of the block, creating a comfortable and pleasant street environment and guiding people to live a healthy life.

Keywords—slow thinking; reconstruction and utilization; street museum

I. INTRODUCTION

The over-rapid development of economic demands in urban construction has transformed many old urban areas into commercial space, and the historical blocks located on Lihuangpi Road in Wuhan are legally listed as the core object of protection and have the responsibility of inheriting the historical context. Although the modernization process has affected the historical style of blocks in Lihuangpi Road to some extent, the overall contour pattern is still intact. The vitality of a city depends on the diversity of streets with historical buildings that connect with the city. The integration of slow thinking into the historic district plays an important role in protecting the historical context, reflecting the diversity of the city, showing the multi-dimensional space of the streets, improving the quality of life and enhancing the vitality of the streets.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL BLOCKS: CULTURAL HERITAGE

With the development of modern city, the old city is undergoing continuous transformation, which leads to the disappearance of the context of many historical buildings from people's view. If people continue to ignore the survival

of the old buildings, the cultural quality of the city will gradually fade into mediocrity. As a result, the contradiction between architectural innovation and historical block protection as well as cultural protection and inheritance has become increasingly prominent, and it is particularly urgent to find solutions.

Wuhan is a city bearing thousands of years of historical and cultural deposits. Located in the concession area of Hankou, it represents the development of Wuhan in modern times and shows the development process of the city since the opening of the port. Lihuangpi Road, established in 26th year in the reign of Guangxu, is an old road in the historical blocks of Hankou. When the Second Opium War broke out, Hankou was set up as concession by all the western powers, and their concession areas started from Jiangnan Road down along the river (as shown in "Fig. 1"). Lihuangpi Road, which is located in the Russian concession area, is in a development state of long-term stagnant due to various reasons. With no clear renovation plan issued by the government, the infrastructure inside the block is aging, the old houses are dilapidated, and the original exotic characteristics are gradually disappearing.

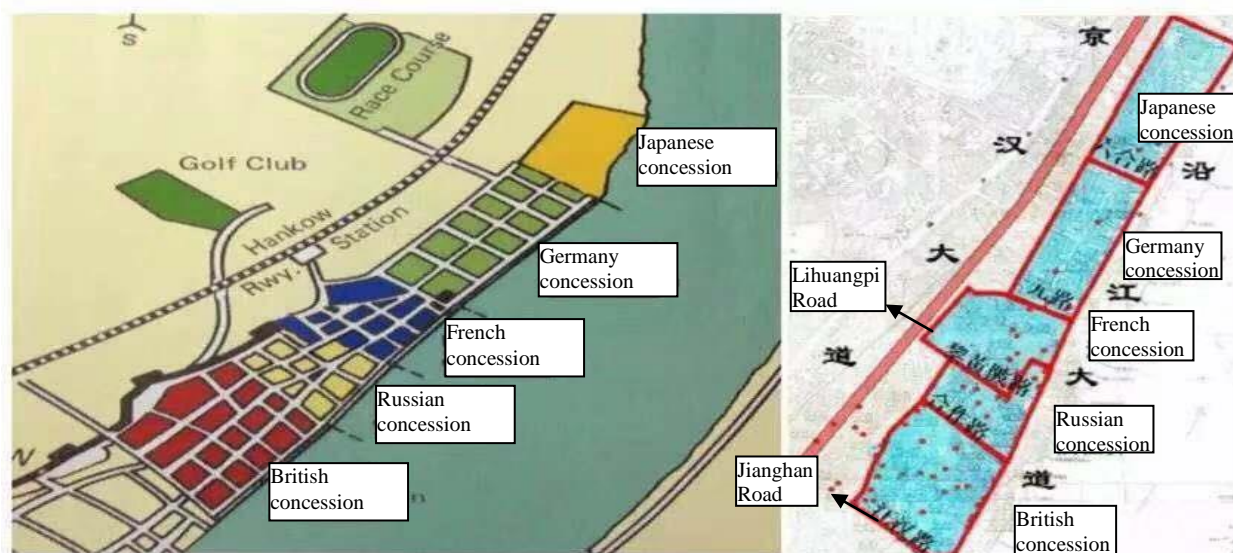


Fig. 1. Map of the concession areas.

In the former concession areas, there were a large number of public buildings with their own characteristics. Taking the Russian concession area as an example, the current area along the Yangtze River and the Li Huangpi Road was surrounded by many administrative, commercial and medical buildings. By now, most of these buildings have disappeared. The reconstruction of the old town of Hankou was not carried out strictly as a protective reconstruction strategy, but a major demolition and transformation. Nowadays, the property rights and functions of many buildings on the street have already been changed and their spatial patterns have been transformed, with original forms beyond recognition. Such phenomena can be seen everywhere on Li Huangpi Road, especially after the shortage of construction funds, the profit-seeking nature of real estate developers eventually led to the constructive destruction of historical blocks. For example, the once popular Banke Garden, also did not survive the baptism of more than 100 years of time. There are also a small number of buildings remain the original function, although their property ownership has been changed. Haven't been destroyed on the whole, though, these buildings have witnessed great changes in their surroundings. Many modern buildings were built around the site, but only a few of the new buildings fit in with the site's history, and most of them were out of place. The large number of these buildings directly damaged the historic character of the historical block of Russian concession. Therefore, it is an urgent task for Wuhan to combine the development of economic vitality of the old blocks with the protection of historical and cultural relics.

With the development of modernization, many buildings in China have gradually lost their landmarks. Those buildings as the sign of the times show the climate of indifference, monotony and lack of personality. The "aphasia" of urban architecture becomes more and more prominent, and people begin to rethink and pay attention to tradition, human relationship and "public taste". Looking at the current landmark buildings, one can find that their

"simple" and "exotic" shapes have completely deviated from the traditional Chinese cultural aesthetic characteristics. How can there be architecture if the cultural context is lost? Therefore, it is necessary to reflect deeply on the misguided contemporary architecture, establish a healthy state of mind, and dig deeply into the core of local culture.

In conclusion, inheriting the cultural context of blocks is of great significance. The mark of a city is not those unconventional and towering buildings, but the deposit of history and culture that displays human characteristics and the integration with the geographical environment, which complement each other and blend into the blood of the city, and remain unchanged for hundreds of years. The historical blocks are not only the necessary environment for people to live and entertain, but also the sustenance of their spirit and emotion. Therefore, in the era when more stress is laid on "humanism" and ecological sustainable development, the maintenance and refurbishment of historical blocks should pay more attention to the integration and a comprehensive balance between people and the environment and society. The characteristics of the region need to be represented by rich neighborhood culture. Traditional culture can bring people a sense of identity and the new cultural trend can create value for the blocks. The combination of the two can better satisfy people's deep-rooted spiritual and material pursuit and play an important role in improving the cultural quality of the historical block. To coordinate the protection and development of historical blocks, it is necessary to take the protection of cultural heritage as the first priority, rebuild the vitality of streets and lanes with the strength of cultural context, and maintain the balance of the ecological environment to achieve a virtuous circle. This is an important task at present. While continuing the historical context, the historical buildings of Wuhan also need to pay attention to the construction of humanized, artistic, modern and tasteful activity venues, create distinctive public space in the community that is convenient for people to communicate, so as to make the artificial environment of the community more

natural and thus to meet people's desire to live in harmony with nature. However, how to achieve such an effect requires us to reasonably introduce and apply new ideas, such as slow thinking development mode, and through a series of urban planning, construction and reconstruction measures, the idea is rooted in the historical context, so as to greatly improve the urban living environment. The artistic construction under the excellent thinking development mode will have its regional characteristics and will not be overwhelmed by the tide of time. The development of slow thinking can help the architectural context of the city last, retain and pass on the cultural essence from generation to generation, and promote the popularity and influence of the city under good development, so as to become a key point to promote the comprehensive development of construction in Wuhan.

III. THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SLOW THINKING THEORY GUIDING THE BLOCK PLANNING

In 1986, the Italian writer on social research and food Carlo Petrini proposed the slow food movement¹, a global impact campaign, with a purpose of making people aware of downshifting. The "slow" does not mean slow and lazy, but represents a sustainable development concept, which allows people to slow down the pace of life, taste life more, pay more attention to the quality of life, and not rush to achieve the development of society and the environment to maintain a balanced and harmonious state. Atelier Peter Zumthor² is the Swiss architect who first proposed to integrate the concept of slowness into design. He emphasized the essence of things and led designers to focus on their works and pay attention to the current life. The preservation of historical sites and the continuation of local culture provide a new direction for people to live a more efficient, high-quality and poetic life, to experience the slow thinking of the living environment and enjoy the small pleasures of daily life.

In essence, the theory of slow thinking has many interconnections with traditional Chinese ideology and culture. China's history and culture are extensive, profound and time-honored, and its inclusiveness also contains slow thinking elements. For example, from the poem "Songs of Wine Drinking — No.5", one can feel Tao Yuanming's enjoyment in the world of nature, and from "If you compare the poor with the carriage and steed, The poor have leisure while the rich gallop with speed" in the "Song of Peach Blossom Cottage", one can see that Tang Yin prefers enjoying his life to pursuing money and power and he thinks that money will be in vain if he is not happy. Since ancient times, excellent art and culture are all born in the people's life after meal hours or in leisure time instead of in the impetuous environment of quick success and quick profit. The creation of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy

focuses on the stability of the state of mind, which is the manifestation of the concept of slow thinking

Yet with the development of the times, China's traditional culture has been invaded by foreign culture, and the slow culture has been eroded by the fast culture. But the Chinese culture is not to be easily defeated, and people have begun to pay attention to the quality of living environment and the return of traditional culture. The Zen thought in particular, mainly a kind of social reflection, teaches that when constantly oppressed by life and lose their pursuit, people should start to pay attention to their inner feelings and return to the original self. While enjoying the benefits of globalization and the confronting the impact of foreign culture shock, it is necessary to protect China's culture and learn to develop it through inheritance.

A. *The Difference Between Traditional Concept and Slow Thinking in Block Reconstruction and Utilization*

With the progress of the times, the urban structure and texture have also undergone great changes. In modern times, due to the rush for success in urban planning and construction and the lack of protection awareness, there have been many problems in the cultural inheritance and protection of historical blocks. Following are the main points. First, excessive exploitation leads to serious damage to existing cultural relics and historic sites, and the overall layout of many historical buildings has been in a state of decay. Second, the overall style of the historic district is gradually fading away. Most of the traditional buildings in the district have been gradually replaced by modern buildings in the reconstruction of old city. As well as the laying of traffic roads, illegal car parking and coexistence of people and vehicles on the block, there is a lack of a safe and reasonable traffic organization. As a result, the existing architectural style has been unable to maintain the original charm of streets, the traditional block characteristics have gradually disappeared, and their era characteristics have also been lost. Third, developers only take advantage of their own economic interests and ignore the public interests of the block. The size of the transformed block is seriously inconsistent with the existing standard of public service facilities, and the service fails to meet the requirements, resulting in the collapse of the surrounding environment. Since there are no written laws and regulations on the protection of buildings, the implement is difficult. In addition, the protection input is not enough for maintenance, which leads to the lag of the plan and insufficient execution ability, and the not optimistic effect of the final protection. In this situation, to solve the problems in urban construction, it is urgent to explore a new development path. The old model cannot keep up with the pace of the new era nor can it contribute to the revival of the historic district, the transformation and sublimation of the traditional pattern, and the improvement of the quality of life of the residents. "Slow thinking" mode is to advocate people-oriented development that focuses on inheriting characteristic culture and reshape the original real way of life so as to achieve the effect of returning to original simplicity. On the basis of the overall urban planning, further planning should be made on the land use, population distribution, public facilities and the

¹ Italian designer Vittorio Giegotti put it this way: "China is now in an era when it is eager to get rid of the past and does not want to mention the past. They are eager to show the world and their people the results of rapid economic development and they need the latest thing — so they will accept an 'egg'."

² [Italian] Carlo Petrini. *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean And Fair* [M]. Yin Jie Tranz. New Star Press, 2010.

allocation of urban infrastructure. Paying attention to the humanized arrangement on the facilities of street life is essentially different from the traditional block. Attention should be paid to people's quality of life, and place suitable for communication and leisure in a living atmosphere should be built. Secondly, in terms of infrastructure, compared with the casual and loose layout pattern of old-fashioned streets, the basic service infrastructure system under "slow thinking" will be more scientific and complete. The ergonomic principle is applied to design the most suitable scale and layout, so that people can enjoy the "slow" pace while traveling for leisure and work with higher efficiency. In this way, people can enjoy high-quality block service and improve the quality of life and work. The mode of slow thinking also covers the ecological system, with strong concept penetration, and can make full use of advanced environmental protection technology to integrate into the detailed construction planning of urban design layout³. In this mode, not only the building itself, but all the surrounding environment can return to nature and achieve harmony and livability.

B. Planning and Design of Historical Blocks Under the Theory of Slow Thinking

Slow thinking theory can play a positive role in guiding and referring to the problems of today's urban historical blocks, which can show the characteristics of urban blocks and give play to their connotation. The specific plan is as follows.

1) *The compatibility of the built environment:* Due to the construction of new-style building in the block, the cultural environment of the street is seriously damaged. Therefore, the building should be made compatible with the environment again to break the incongruous situation. Efforts should be made to analyze the different geographical and background, regional characteristics of each building in the block, re-design the planning and design, repair the previously destroyed historic buildings, and separate the buildings of different styles with the symbiotic environment, so as to avoid abruptness and contribute to harmonious coexistence.

2) *Catering to diverse population and being integrated with the urban population structure:* Today's historical blocks, as sections representing the city style, gathers many groups with different needs. Therefore in the planning, not only the protection design of the building itself should be taken into account, the influence of human factors should also be considered. As a public space, the needs of users, including the old, the weak and the disabled, put forward new development requirements for the block. The slow mode can effectively maintain the vivid space, be

committed to improve the quality of life, meet the needs, and create a comfortable and interesting atmosphere.

3) *Reasonable planning of block road:* It means classifying the residential land, public facilities land, industrial land, storage land, external traffic land, road square land, municipal public facilities land, green land, special land, water area and other land into a general term according to the functions of land use in the city. Among them, the comfortable circulation of traffic is particularly important, which contributes to a large crowd flow being attracted to the historical blocks. The complexity of the building can also lead to the complex bending of the road environment. Efforts should be made to plan the route to guide the crowd, give play to the guiding role of landmarks on streets. In order to adapt to the requirements of the slow theory, people's subjective initiative should be highlighted. Current-limiting should be carried out, and a lane for slow walking should be set without affecting the vehicles. The multiple factors are integrated to meet various needs. The slow mode requires looking for inspiration in the history, from understanding the changes of the city to awakening the memory of the city. Efforts should be made to explore the regional characteristics, get to the bottom of the essence, get to know and play its value and coordinate the relationship among buildings, people and environment, so as to reshape the characteristics in line with the new era.

IV. THE INTEGRATION OF SLOW THINKING AND STREET MUSEUM

In a city, both tangible and intangible material cultures carry the historical and cultural spirit of the city. And the slow thinking is the carrier that guides this spirit. The display of slow thinking will undoubtedly increase or condense the spirit and cultural sense of the city, and create a new connotation of cultural spirit.

The earliest reconstruction of the old street is represented by the new world of Shanghai which adopted the mode of large-scale overall transformation. Although it has achieved rapid renewal of its appearance, it is too commercialized, which destroys its original culture and makes its attraction decline. However, the block reconstruction of the Lihuangpi Road (as shown in "Fig. 2") in Wuhan pioneered a new path. First, it introduced a different concept of slow thinking. Instead of rush for quick results, the government spent more than 10 years on the transformation and protection of its features, from the building to the plot and to the community culture, and the planning was made gradually from multiple levels.

³ It was first proposed by the Swiss architect Atelier Peter Zumthor in his book "Anything Goes, But Slow". It responds to the spiritual concept of slow life, advocates green and natural environmental protection, pursues comfortable and high-quality life, and emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of human and nature. Nowadays, when a series of slow lifestyle is becoming the value trend recognized by the whole world, slow design is also becoming the new fashion of people's home environment.



Fig. 2. Lihuangpi Road.

At the first stage, problems emerged. In the early days after the founding of the People's Republic of China and during the Cultural Revolution, the increasing population led to a shortage of housing, and the use of office space as a residential building became common. In order to meet the living habits, people have transformed the office space where they live, dividing the whole space into many small spaces by building partitions in the interior of the building. In order to expand the utilization rate, in one room lives a family, and in one floor live a dozen of households. At the same time, a

simple public toilet was set up in the corridor. These new partitions blocked out most of the sunlight, leaving the corridors in dim light. Since then, due to the increasing population, the situation of privately built extensions has become increasingly serious. In addition, with too limited space to place their furniture and sundries, the households occupied the aisle. Due to the complexity of the building, traffic is crowded, household garbage is thrown away everywhere, and no one managed it. All these phenomena lead to great security risks (as shown in "Fig.3").



Fig. 3. Built environment map.

The layout of the floor plan and the structure of the space have changed dramatically. These historical buildings have not been effectively repaired, and most of the old buildings along the road have become dilapidated. The exterior wall loses its original color with the weathering of time. The interior of the building has not been regularly inspected and maintained for a long time, and the staircases have been in use for too long, leading to more collapses. Plus peripheral wire and some instruments such as dial winding, there are a lot of hidden dangers. Public spaces are also poorly planned. The streets are poorly equipped, and the space on either side is occupied by motor vehicles, which narrows the road; under the management of no one, self-run vendors leave garbage everywhere, giving off unpleasant odor. Due to the lax management of the government, the history and culture of the blocks are not well preserved and the function is degraded. The Street Museum on Lihuangpi Road represents history, and a kind of cultural heritage, but now it is under a variety of crises and destruction. The illegal building of residence leads to the crowdedness of the street, which cannot even satisfy the basic function of providing rest area. And with single living place, only a few tourists stay, so the Street Museum hardly plays its part.

At the second stage, problems are being solved. In 2000, the government of Jiang'an District began to make a unified plan for Lihuangpi Road, and carried out restoration work strictly in accordance with the principle of "restoring the old as the old"⁴. The floor of the original building has undergone several changes over the decades, from the original wooden floor to cement floor, and then from cement floor to floor tile. And now, the transformation is to restore the floor to wood according to the old appearance.

The kickline has also been replaced with wood and painted in a deep red paint, consistent with the original construction of the building. Some doors and windows of the building were seriously damaged, but the remaining undamaged doors and windows were still well preserved. Construction personnel restored the specifications, forms, colors and materials of the destroyed doors and windows according to the well-preserved ones. Following the old system, door window basically uses brownish red and ivory coating, consistent with the color of floor and skirting line,

⁴ Based on urban master plans, zoning plans or controlled detailed plans, the planning and design used to guide the design and construction of various buildings and engineering facilities is formulated.

giving a sense of elegance and uniqueness. The wall structure has not been changed, and only a fresh coat of paint was given to the wall. The broken parts of the exterior facade have been repaired. The windows, doors and walls have been repaired according to the old system. The old and damaged buildings were repaired, the private buildings were removed, the original features were restored and a series of entertainment facilities were added. The original functional deficiencies were improved, and the internal structure of the

building was partially adjusted. The public areas and shop stalls are planned uniformly to make the space of the street orderly. What's more, nameplates introducing the historical information are inlaid on more than 20 historical buildings on both sides of the street to show the unique historical and cultural features. The reconstruction of blocks in Lihuangpi Road not only protects the traditional features of the blocks, but also serves the modern communities and can be used by local residents (as shown in "Table I").

TABLE I. COMPARISON OF THE STATUS OF LIHUANGPI ROAD BEFORE AND AFTER THE TRANSFORMATION

Before transformation				
Problems at the earlier stage	The streets are narrow with motor vehicles occupying the space	The infrastructure is rudimentary and peripheral wires are around the buildings	The building is dilapidated on the outside and cluttered on the inside	Garbage is dumped on the roadside with degenerated management
After transformation				
The renovation projects	Pavement rehabilitation, regulation of self-employed traders and route optimization	Facility reconditioning, clutter demolition and information sign setting	Repairing building damage and demolishing the self-built buildings	Space regularization, greening environment improvement and road cleaning

Slow thinking concept includes the theory of "reborn" and "reuse". The term "Reborn" is often translated as "regenerate", which means to give new life to historical buildings through moderate renovation and adjustment. "Reuse" refers to the directional and planned transformation of historical buildings according to their urban environment, social, economic development and cultural characteristics, so as to realize and endow them with functions in the new era while retaining their morphological characteristics and value as cultural heritage.⁵

At present, while the style of most cities tends to eliminate individuality, the Street Museum on Lihuangpi Road of Wuhan retains its unique cultural characteristics, reflecting the diversity of the city. It brings together a variety of functions, including culture, business, office, residence,

entertainment, etc., all responding to each other, interacting with each other and enhancing each other's beauty in the atmosphere of the street museum. Even some once lost "culture with Wuhan style" has been found and given new living space.

The street in the slow thinking mode is mainly to be regularly maintained and restored, and the restoration of the original features of the concession is the first priority. Nowadays, 17 gothic and rococo European buildings can still be seen on Lihuangpi Road.

In order to make the slow pace more fully presented in people's life and felt by people, no motor vehicles are allowed in the road planning to separate people and vehicles. The footpath is re-paved with a fan-shaped design without teeth. The combination of dark small stone and rough-faced granite makes the whole street floor form a whole, emulating the classical style to reflect its simplicity, giving people peace and stability, while having durable anti-slip effect. And the street lamps, benches, signs of advertising stores, kiosks, etc. are re-integrated and installed (as shown in

⁵ In November 2013, general secretary Xi Jinping made important instructions on the report on the preparation of the memorial hall for the former site of the central committee of the communist party of China (CPC) in Wuhan, "restoring the old as the old, retaining the original appearance and preventing constructive damage".

"Fig.4"). Its public supporting facilities follow the practical function, integrated with the decorative aesthetic, and

combine tradition with modernity, which is consistent with the style of the historical blocks.



Fig. 4. Street utilities.

In the integration of slow thinking and block museum, the public art works in the blocks also have great changes. Both of block public art and other public art are important components of urban public art. There are much in common between them, but also many differences due to different geographical location, users and viewing angles. From the functional point of view of the street utility, the opinion and participation of the residents of the block is very important. Because it is close to people's daily life and has practical use, it can be a chair, indicator, street lamp, railing and a variety of display objects to meet people's needs in life. On the basis of giving full play to its functions, the public works in the block should also show their artistry. The modeling and layout should be harmonious with the surrounding environment, achieving the unity of practicality and aesthetics, and perfectly displaying the dual attributes of function and art of public facilities. The city is the carrier of public art. Public art exists because of the city, and the street style is the embodiment of the city characteristics. Therefore, the excellent public art style starts with the city and exists for the block architecture. The cultural environment on Lihuangpi Road has become an indispensable element of local public art.

The Street Museum on Lihuangpi Road not only displays the numerous cultural relics, but also the emotional appeal of life. Whether at day or night, there is a special tranquility and romance with no noise, away from pressure and busyness. When people walk here, they will stop and linger. The Street Museum of Lihuangpi Road, as public cultural facilities, has a unique cultural atmosphere. In the process of restoration and protection integrated with slow thinking, the streets and alleys gradually gather cultural palace, cafe, small bar and other cultural leisure places, attracting many creative talents. This provides a space for local residents to relax. At the same time, it also provides a window to show the history and cultural traditions of Wuhan for non-local tourists, and becomes a new resource for cultural tourism, which makes the area with historical features full of new vitality and expands reasonable new functions for historical buildings.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the process of integrating slow thinking into the transformation of Lihuangpi Road in Wuhan, the following enlightenment can be drawn:

A. Integrating with Slow Thinking and Protecting Regional Characteristics

In the protection and reconstruction of historical buildings, it is necessary to pay attention to the historical sources and cultural factors of the city and explore new ways to maintain and repair historical buildings. Through integrating the charm of slow thinking, the buried historical feelings will be awakened, and combined with the development of the new era, creativity will be given play to, to endow it with new vitality, so as to enhance the building itself and social value to attract the public's attention to historical buildings, and the social power will be used protect these old buildings. It is by introducing the new mode into the historical blocks that makes them refreshed with new vitality. It is by utilizing the traditional cultures and taking the architectural space left behind as the carrier of culture that make them continue to spread. These traditional cultures will be the fertile soil. The spirit of traditional architecture is worthy of in-depth research, study and integration into the spirit of modern design, shining with endless splendor in the modern society.

B. Slow Culture, Respecting the History of the Blocks

Although the times keep rolling forward, the characteristics of the historical blocks should be remained. As the inheritor of history and culture, people of this generation should adapt to the development of the times, form their own thinking and combine with the slow thinking theory to guide and spread it. Historical buildings in the concession area of Hankou bear social changes and historical events and are of great significance. From the perspective of architectural culture and daily life, the charm of slow thinking is combined with the blocks. These historical buildings also play a positive and exemplary role in the development of Chinese modern architecture. More importantly, the historical buildings in the concession still carry the daily life of modern urbanites. The mode of slow life tells people that historical buildings are not only public places, but also an internal culture. By connecting architectural design with life, people can find a proper pace of life in them, which can make their life happier. Although urbanization inevitably means changes, what is important is how to deal with them. The slower a city changes, the

stronger its collective memory is, and the faster it changes, the faster urban people forget it⁶.

C. *Turning to Multi-dimensional Development from the Perspective of Slowness*

The protection of historical and cultural blocks is of practical significance for the construction of characteristic cities. Culture is the driving force of economic development. The Lihuangpi Road of Hankou, as a unique historical and cultural block in Wuhan, is endowed with various resource effects, a diversified space, a living cultural heritage and a unique community culture. So it is necessary to not only pay attention to historical buildings, but also protect the contents of immaterial forms and make diversified development. This requires maintaining community traditions, improving the living environment and promoting regional economic vitality. From the point of view of slow life interest, one can feel the elegance sent out by the street and lead the pace of life. Strolling in the streets, people can feel the refreshing slow life, like being put in the old city hundreds of years ago and visiting the European buildings in the period of Russian lease one by one.

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