



# Analysis of the Current Situation of Cultural Continuity in the Commercialization of Historical and Cultural Blocks Take Beijing's Dashilan Commercial and Cultural District as an Example

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**Abstract.** With the rapid development of urbanization in China, there are some problems like cultural continuity, which have emerged in the period of the historical block's commercial renewal. On the basis of clarifying the concept and main feature of historical and cultural districts, this research did a foreign and domestic literature review on updated research and the cultural continuity. Taking Beijing's Dashilan historical districts as an example, conducting on-site investigation and analyzing the existing problems in Dashilan. Finding that nowadays historical and cultural districts' renewal pays too much attention to commercial development and there is no enough preservation in historical buildings. It is believed that the government should take sustainable development as the basis to preserve, renew and develop historical and cultural districts from the aspects of cultural continuity, residents' life standard and tourism development.

**Keywords:** historical districts · Dashilan · cultural continuity · commercial renew

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of urbanization in China, a large number of old districts' reconstruction promoted historical districts in central area of a city became the main target of developers, many precious historical and cultural districts have been rebuilt and renewed. Historical and cultural districts are the material retention of a city's old memories, and these are the expression of the profound historic heritage and characteristic of a city which have non-renewable precious value. Historical and cultural districts, as the cultural carrier of a city, the renewal and reconstruction of old district may always need to follow the urban context and historical culture. In order to balance

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the preservation of historical values and modern production and life development of historical districts, many districts have been transformed into commercial areas based on modern experiential consumption needs and life of community which can satisfy people's needs in nowadays city areas. However, in the process of developing historical and cultural districts, commercialization has brought many issues at the circumstances of lack of control in many aspects, such as over-commercialization and too much commercialization atmosphere. To be specific, these historical districts are filled with many different kinds of stores like clothes stores, beverages and desserts, Western restaurants, cafes and other shops, which have totally nothing to do with traditional culture. Tourist cannot find any unique traditional culture and historical heritages from these kinds of commercial stores. In general, this research will analyze the renewal and reconstruction of an old historical and cultural district which called Dashilan in Beijing, from the perspective of the current cultural continuity in the commercial renewal and reconstruction of historical district, and find the advantages, argue drawback and make some suggestions.

## **2 Concepts and Values**

Before we analyzing the problem and making suggestions, we should understand the concepts and values of the historical districts. The historical districts, as the carrier of Chinese traditional culture, and as a part of that we cannot ignore in the process of urbanization. With the manifestation of the economic value of the historical districts, local governments have begun to transform and renew the historical districts into tourism and commercialization. Therefore, these historical districts are facing with many issues that government should totally understand the cultural value and landscape value of the historical districts.

### **2.1 Concepts of Historical Districts**

A historical district refers to a district that cultural relics and historical sites are relatively centralized and which can reflect a certain period that traditional style and ethnic characteristics in certain area. What's more, generally, a historical district is a certain area that has unique architectural style or historical representation. Old urban districts, also known as urban historic districts, refers to somewhere that preserve a scale and number of historical relics and has relatively important landscape value and relatively complete urban historical texture, mixed with urban function and living content [1]. Moreover, a historical district also includes representative values of a city and this can be divided into two aspects: architectural characteristics and humanistic characteristics.

### **2.2 Values of Historical Districts**

In general, on the one hand, historical blocks have historical and cultural value. And landscape value is on the other hand. The historical and cultural value of historical districts is mainly in the aspect of humanities. Normally, historical districts have rich and unique cultural traditions, this is which nowadays society cannot ignore in the process

of urban renewal. Today's society even need to maintain and protect it. Reasonable reconstruction and planning of the old districts can effectively protect the historical buildings in the certain area [2]. The traditional culture of Chinese historical features that inherited in the historical districts not only bearing witness of historical changes in China, but also bring us special spiritual touches by taking us changes in our daily life. With the development of society and eras, people always be busy about their work or daily things. However, whenever they mentioned a prolonged historical districts, they will often arouse the feeling from their heart because every corner of the historical districts. The landscape values of historical and cultural districts cannot be ignored whether the purpose of historical districts reconstruction is to develop tourism or build up cultural heritage of a city. It is no doubt that historical district is a unique scenic in a city and which especially reflect the unique charm of a city.

In conclusion, historical and cultural districts should be an important part of the tourism development in a city. The most important source of tourist attraction of historical and cultural districts is the composition of the landscape that characterizes collective memory. For example, people can associate the life scenes of that era according to the landscape. What's more, the central point of it is the daily life of local residents. These forms of daily life are the important object of tourists' landscaping gaze on the local collective memory. In other words, the historical and cultural value and landscape value of historical districts are complementary, the reconstruction of historical districts is inevitable but the protection is also important and cannot be ignored. The centralization of maintaining the landscape value of historical districts should be the daily life scenic under the basis of local history and culture. Also, the collective memory that this kind of scenery represents is the key to distinguishing historical and cultural district from other districts that are highly integrated with local lives. Therefore, local government should closely follow the local context and geographical features when they make plans for the reconstruction of historical districts. In this way, they can protect the important landscape which represent the local collective memory, and continue local residents' life in the basic framework of historical traditions and cultural origins.

### **3 A Review of Researches Related to Big Fence**

#### **3.1 Historical Evolution**

Dashilan is located in the central area of old Beijing, and is one of the largest and most complete historical and cultural blocks in Beijing. It covers an area of about 1.26 square kilometers. Dashilan arose in the Yuan Dynasty and became the busiest commercial and residential district in Beijing several times in history. Since the 1980s, with the construction of large shopping centers, Dashilan has lost its status as a commercial center, the characteristic of the close combination of commerce and culture has gradually disappeared. The landscape of the Dashilan historic District was severely damaged.

#### **3.2 Culture Sorting of Dashilan Block**

① Commercial culture: Dashilar has rich commercial and financial culture, with more than 30 century-old shops such as Tonren Tang, Neiliansheng, Ruifuxiang and Libiju,

which are well known at home and abroad. In addition, Langfang Hutong area was the embryonic form of financial center of “money market” run by the government in Qing Dynasty.

② Folk activities and Handicrafts: There are abundant folk activities and traditional handicrafts in Dashilar Block, such as Langfang Lantern Market, Dashilar Lantern Fair and Zhushikou Lantern Market from the early Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. In this kind of activity, various traditional handicraft skills are very rich, such as rabbit Lord, sugar man and so on.

③ Theater club culture: Dashilan is the birthplace of Peking Opera in China, and a large number of Peking Opera artists have emerged here. During the Qing Dynasty, there were more than 300 guild houses and opera gardens here.

④ Scholar culture: Since the Ming Dynasty Emperor Yongle established his capital in Beijing, intellectuals from all over the country came to Beijing to take the exams, most of them gathered here, there are thousands of scholars activities all year round, there are many former residences of celebrities, such as Ji Xiaolan, Gu Yanwu, Wang Yuyang. Religious culture: Qianmen Mosque, Guanyin Temple, Wudao Temple, Fire Temple and so on all constitute the rich beliefs of local residents.

⑤ Hutong culture: Dashilan area is a gathering place of Beijing hutong, and its residential function has always been a very important component. The hutong culture of old Beijing has been fully reflected here.

### 3.3 Urban Design Orientation of Dashilar Block

There are 16 intangible cultural heritages, 22 former residences of celebrities and many historical and cultural buildings in Dashilar Block; The commercial culture, financial culture, pear garden culture, publishing culture and so on have all formed the unique charm of Dashilan and created dashilan as an important commercial center. All these are the symbol of the history of old Beijing and the prosperous memory of Qianmen area. In 1993, “Beijing City Master Plan” proposed that Beijing Dashilan area as a key historical and cultural protection area is a historical cottage area with commercial, cultural, entertainment and living buildings for civilians. Therefore, urban design should pay attention to people’s feelings and the will of the residents who live here. In 2004, the People’s Government of Xuanwu District defined Dashilan area as a comprehensive historical protection area combining traditional commerce, folk culture tourism and residence.

### 3.4 Culture Continuity of Dashilan Commercial Block

① In Dashilan Historical and cultural Block, some historical buildings are not well protected, while public space is occupied in large quantities, and the original courtyards are piled up without permission, and even illegal buildings are built, which seriously damages the street landscape. Public facilities remain to be improved: the block has been built for a long time, and the public facilities in this area lack of integrated design and public space for residents’ activities, which cannot meet the basic needs of residents to go out and socialize.

② Cultural excavation is not profound enough. In the process of commercial development, cultural excavation is not profound, which leads to the gradual loss of cultural identity, the loss of heritage structure, and the continuous loss of inheritors. Many traditional buildings have also been restored in the wrong way.

### 3.5 Analysis of Tourism Status of Dashilan Street

① Scale has lost its influence: In the early Ming Dynasty, corridor houses were built outside Zhengyang Gate (Qianmen) and various commercial activities began. From the Qing Dynasty, commercial and entertainment places in Dashilan gradually developed, and the commercial scene of Dashilan flourished in the late Qing dynasty and early Republic of China. After 1949, more than 800 private businesses in the Qianmen area were involved in the socialist transformation movement. During the Cultural Revolution, old business signs were replaced with new, politically charged names. Until the early 1980s, the reform and opening-up policy brought new vitality and vitality to Dashilan Business district, and gradually restored the old name of Dashilan Street. But in the new century, the high street has lost its size and influence.

② Conflicts between tourists and residents are prominent

The daily number of tourists in Dashilan Historical and cultural Block is huge. During National Day and other holidays, more than 20,000 tourists are received every day. The noise and environmental pollution brought by tourists have deeply troubled the lives of residents in Dashilar.

### 3.6 Upgrading Existing Strategy

① Legacy of historical features: To historic legacy keep hutongs and architectural image on its original site, add modern elements of life, the historical and modern fusion, to develop and continue dashilan context, with cultural symbols represent characteristics, including manual experience in aspects of intangible cultural heritage and display, etc., Add old Beijing life brand, show the characteristics of Dashilan block.

② Add to the history: Increase the historical deposits some shops use loudspeaker propaganda, reduce the historical deposits and cultural texture in dashilar blocks, and most of the low-end business in tourist blocks tend to be consistent. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce high-quality commercial activities, increase the cultural taste of the block, reduce the use of radio, speakers and other shops to create a mixed sound environment. Increase the transmission of high-quality sound, play the cries or folk songs with the characteristics of old Beijing, fully reflect the local historical characteristics, close to the characteristic culture of historical blocks.

③ Enrich historical space: Rich historical Space. The small hutongs of buildings in the block are narrow and lack of public space for people to stay and rest. Therefore, some courtyards and interior Spaces can be added to create public rest and urban meeting rooms to promote the vitality and regeneration of the block. With the ancient teahouse as the prototype, inheriting the charm of old Beijing from hutongs to courtyards. It can also combine modern technology to show historical images of block space, hutongs and buildings through VR, AR and other new technological means, so as to increase

the entertainment and cultural display of space. Create a more youthful, modern and profound space.

④ Clear culture context: The number of hutongs in Dashilan block is large and interlaced, and the street routes are complicated. Therefore, according to the needs of tourists and the public, it is necessary to connect the main cultural nodes and Spaces inside the block, connect the cultural context, and create clear and distinctive walking routes. Describe the culture of the club, business and residence that can be experienced and let the public choose for themselves. While displaying the rich history and culture in Dashilar, it also allows the public to feel the inner charm in a comfortable and leisurely playing atmosphere.

## 4 Status and Problems

### 4.1 Basic Situation of Dashilan Commercial District

Until 50 years ago, the 600-year-old Dashilan was still Beijing's well-deserved CBD and the most prosperous commercial downtown in Beijing; it was named the first "Chinese Time-honored Brand Gathering Area" in the country, and Ruifuxiang, Qianxiangyi, the facade of Xiangyihao, Quanyechang and other four national cultural relics protection units, as well as a large number of temples, guild halls, silver shops, hotels, jewelry markets, and food shops; they are also officials of cultural centers, entertainment centers, and Liulichang. People culture and Bada Hutong Liyuan are well-known. Back then, Lu Xun and Shen Congwen came here to visit the World Bookstore when they had free time. "The Beijing News" and "Beijing Women's News" were all founded here... The fragments have built up the rich urban memory and historical context of Dashilan, and therefore attract a large number of tourists every day [3]. At this time, Dashilan also had a very powerful cultural function.

But now Dashilan is no longer the prosperous cultural scene of the past. Now when you walk into the block, the shops on both sides have become the theme of the block. The shops with clearly marked prices are sold at discounts everywhere. The cultural color here was once, With the development of the times, it is submerged in changes. With the development and changes of the times, the commercial function of this block is gradually prospering, and the function of culture and historical continuity is gradually fading the color of the past grand occasion. Today's Dashilan is a place of contradiction where stagnation and vitality coexist, decay and prosperity coexist, "dead knot" and possibility. On the one hand, the contradiction between the large-scale development of real estate in the 1990s and the protection of Beijing's old city has been plagued by the activation and rejuvenation of the Dashilan area: increasingly high demolition and relocation compensation costs, The low-density control planning in the historical preservation area makes it difficult to implement and profit from the demolition of old buildings and the leveling of the land for new construction. This makes it difficult for government departments to drive the renewal and construction of infrastructure through real estate development; on the other hand, the aborigines who are psychologically waiting to retire lack the initiative to maintain and build communities, and the already backward life in the region Conditions, social and economic conditions continued to

deteriorate, and finally transformed into a gathering place for low-income groups and migrant workers in Beijing.

The Dashilar Renewal Plan was launched in 2011. Under the guidance of the Beijing Cultural and Historical Reserve Policy and the support of the Xicheng District Government, Beijing Dashilar Investment Co., Ltd. is the main body of implementation of regional protection and rejuvenation, and the innovative practice is led by the government [4]. Market-oriented operation of the old city organic renewal plan based on micro-circulation transformation; at the same time, an open work platform-Dashilar Cross-Border Center was established, as a docking platform between the government and the market, through cooperation with urban planners, architects, Artists, designers, and businessmen collaborate to explore and practice a new model of organic renewal in historical and cultural districts. In the whole process of the renovation, he conducted in-depth research and analysis on the commercial cultural context and urban texture, and analyzed and summarized the problems left over from the renovation of Shanghai Tianzifang and Beijing Nanluoguxiang, and proposed the renovation of urban curatorial exhibitions. According to the plan, due to the high price of land in the Dashilan area, the work of demolition and retreat has been slow. This is why we abandon the large-scale demolition and large-scale construction model in the traditional development thinking, and instead use the scattered assets acquired by developers over the years. Make the transformation one by one. The work of planning and adjusting the organization of urban functions according to this point-based transformation is called “urban curation.” The “street economy” such as Tianzifang in Shanghai and Nanluoguxiang developed earlier in Beijing have been regarded as representative cases of commercial streets in the old city for a long time. However, in the end, due to the imperfect mechanism of merchants entering the market, the ecology of the commercial area was caused. Unbalance, the entire plot is over-commercialized, and its original historical and cultural attributes have been lost.

## 4.2 Benefits of Dashilan After the Transformation

Now I go to the renovated Dashilan. The buildings lined on both sides have been renovated to look like antique buildings. The appearance of the whole block is completely new. The cultural dregs of the past have also been cleaned up, and the functions are chaotic. Be contained. The overall renovation of the main street environment of the Dashilan Commercial District has been relatively successful [9]. Among them, all kinds of Chinese time-honored commercial shops have been decorated and renovated in the style of antique architecture, which vaguely reveals the prosperous scene of the historical and cultural district of Dashilan (Fig. 2).

The introduced modern commercial snack street has also joined the itimage brand of the business district of the Dashilan area (Fig. 1), and has been integrated, which is in line with the positioning of the historical and cultural district; the residents are faced with problems such as narrow hutongs, poor security, and the gradual improvement of living infrastructure. The living standards of residents have been improved, and the development of commercial blocks has also brought many employment opportunities to local residents. On the South Street and North Street on both sides of the main commercial street, many local residents use their own houses to make commercial profits, such as





Fig. 1. The stores in Dashilan



Fig. 2. The entrance of Dashilan commercial old districts



the rental of homestays, accommodations, and the business of restaurants, in exchange for an income for themselves, and an additional source of income for local residents.

### 4.3 Loss of Dashilan After Transformation (Problems at This Stage) and Strategies

Although the reconstructed Dashilan Commercial Street has improved the problems left over from history to a certain extent, with the gradual commercialization of traditional cultural industries, the historical and cultural context of the block has been destroyed to a certain extent, and the historical and cultural features have been weakened [10]. The process of protection and renovation of the Dashilan block is also a microcosm of my country's vigorous protection and reconstruction of historical and cultural blocks. This process is closely related to China's social and economic development and the positioning of cultural continuity in social development. The existing problems after the transformation are generally summarized as the following points:

#### ① Inconsistent design eras of commercial shops in commercial blocks

In the renovation and reconstruction of the Dashilan block, the simple emphasis is on the restoration and transformation of the appearance of these time-honored Chinese brands, and is positioned for antique construction, through the restoration of historical buildings, in order to restore the style and features of the Dashilan block in history at that time. This has indeed achieved a certain effect. The appearance of some Chinese time-honored brands such as Tongrentang and Ruifuxiang has indeed been improved to a large extent. The exquisite antique appearance has also attracted many people to stop and take pictures. In terms of the integrity of the whole block, let's take the picture 3 below as an example. The style of the shop on the left is a Chinese-style antique wooden red-toned building. The overall architectural style is compared to the one on the left. The gray stone in the front of the row has a more western-style architectural style with great differences and differences. There are many new shops, such as a letter of love, and the overall architectural style is more modern, without traces of ancient buildings. Affected the consistency and integrity of the entire historical and cultural block in terms of the appearance of its historical age positioning, which looks rather chaotic. The coping strategies to be carried out mainly include integrating the appearance, positioning the age, and updating and consistent the overall appearance (Fig. 3).

#### ② Excessive emphasis on commercial functions, ignoring other functions such as residential residence and cultural continuity

The architectural forms of Dashilan Street are diverse, including not only shops, theaters, but also exhibitions and residential buildings. Therefore, there are not only commercial functions, but also other functions such as residence and exhibition. However, in the process of remediation, the government emphasized the restoration of its commercial functions. Although it is also emphasizing the improvement of the residents' living environment, the local residential function does not seem to have been improved to a large extent, and there is still living space. Narrowness, narrow hutongs, and inadequate cleanliness have not continued or expanded the functional form of the block, thus restricting the development of the block. The entire main commercial block of Dashilan runs from east to west, and there are more than 70 shops. According to field survey statistics, the



**Fig. 3.** The view of Dashilan commercial district

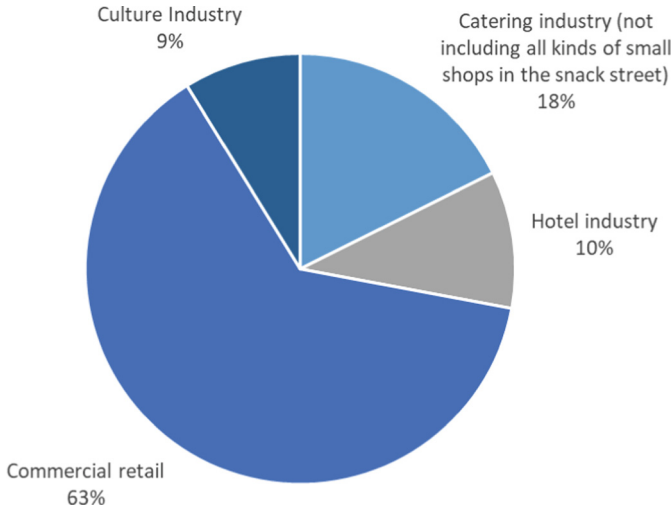
distribution of Dashilan shops in the commercial street is shown in Fig. 4. It can be seen that the commercial retail industry in the commercial street accounts for a large proportion, while the cultural industries such as theaters and exhibitions are not very optimistic. The only remaining cultural industry has two theaters (Sanqing Garden of Deyun Society and Zhonghe Theater on South Street, among which Zhonghe Theater is closed); Liubiju and Tongrentang two exhibition halls, but the flow of people is relative to the commercial type. Compared with the shops in Daguanyou Theater, the theaters screened in the theater are not optimistic. Comparing the intensity of the transformation of these cultural industries with the commercial industry, it can be concluded that the role of soft power and the effect of cultural continuation in this historical block in the transformation of hard power are minimal.

Blocks should actively promote the diversification of historical and cultural blocks, with multiple functions coexisting, and delimit functional zones for blocks, such as building commercial districts, art industrial districts, residential areas, etc., so as to enhance block functions and inject vitality into the block.

### ③ Stores overlap too high

In this entire commercial block, there are three time-honored commercial shops in Ruidaxiang, two in Wang Mazi Scissors, and a full six in Daoxiang Village. From a macro perspective of the types of commercial blocks, the repeatability of shops is too high, which is also a kind of tour fatigue for tourists who come to visit, and it is not conducive to healthy development and healthy competition between businesses. The response strategy is mainly to organize these redundant stores, carry out overall transformation, and merge these stores into large stores. Can more increase passenger flow and influence.

Although there were a series of problems in the Dashilan block after the renovation, the overall renovation was successful. The subsequent problems that existed concentratedly reflected that in the process of renovation of the Dashilan block, the renovation is not complete, and the positioning of some functions is not clear, which caused the chaos of the functional structure to affect the final positioning.



**Fig. 4.** Distribution of types of shops in Dashilan Commercial Street

## 5 Conclusion

The core of the renewal of historical districts is that to realize the sustainability of cultural inheritance and preservation of historical buildings on the basis of the original unique cultural characteristics. In addition, it is also important that to realize how to find the cultural authenticity and inheritance of historical districts. What's more, from the perspective of the government, policy-making will directly determine the final trend of the renewal of historical districts. Because the dependency that historical districts in accordance with policies that government made, cultural characteristics are ignored and eventually causes closed protection. Although the main behavior objects of historical districts renewal are the government, citizens and tourists, the government, as the main factor that directly leading the transformation, should have more precise social responsibilities. The government should set up a public management organization or department that is more complete, and implement the renewal plan of historical districts. That means, we should not let these policies and clauses become a dead letter. More specific, the government should recognize and be aware of both short-term and long-term benefits, and should not sacrifice the original sustainable development of historical districts. Citizens and tourists, as the most beneficiaries of the renewal of historical districts, they should actively cooperate with governments during the process of renewal. What's more, they need to show respect to the innovative changes and improve their awareness of protecting traditional cultures and buildings, cultural confidence and national pride. In conclusion, this research believes that historical and cultural districts like Beijing's Dashilan can accompany the development of the city to witness more history, and provide references for the future renewal of historical districts.

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