

Public Space Renewal Strategies in Old Communities Based on Collective Memory Theory: A Case Study of Baihuazhou Area in Nanchang City

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Abstract Under the framework of high-quality development and strategic stock planning, the revitalization of public spaces within old communities should extend beyond mere enhancements to the physical environment. It is imperative to engage with the historical context of these communities to preserve the collective memory of residents, thereby fostering a stronger sense of identity and belonging among them. This study utilizes the theory of collective memory to examine the challenges associated with the development of public spaces in old communities, specifically focusing on the Nanchang Baihuazhou area as a case study. Through an analysis of the three dimensions of spatial function, living activities, and cultural value, this study seeks to construct and perpetuate collective memory while reshaping public spaces within the community. Our objective is to invigorate the residents of the old community and to enhance the cultural connotation of the area.

Keywords Collective memory, Old community, Public space, Baihuazhou

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Since 2019, China has consistently emphasized the importance of transforming older communities and has been actively advancing related initiatives with considerable vigor. Currently, the urban construction in China has transitioned from a phase of rapid growth to one focused on high-quality development. Significant advancements have been made in the study of residential construction, and urban renewal has entered a stage characterized by stock development. In this context, the revitalization of old communities has emerged as a critical area of focus for optimizing urban renewal stock. Public spaces in old communities serve as vital venues for the preservation, manifestation, and transmission of collective memories. These spaces facilitate improved social interactions among residents, foster a stronger sense of identity and belonging, and enhance individuals' willingness to engage in community development and governance^[1]. Although China has employed policy and planning methods to enhance the physical space of old communities, there has been a notable lack of emphasis on the collective memory of residents. Consequently, the necessity for development at the spiritual level has been relatively overlooked in the context of renovation planning. This study focuses on the central line of collective memory, providing a thorough analysis of the selected area. By constructing specific scenes, collective memory is concretized within the physical space, while simultaneously integrating the cultural essence of the area to facilitate its revitalization. This approach aims to enhance residents' sense of identity and belonging, as well as to offer

insights for the reconfiguration of public spaces within the old community.

1 Conceptual definition

1.1 Collective memory

Foreign scholars have demonstrated a more advanced understanding of the theory of collective memory. This concept was initially introduced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925. In *Collective Memory*, Halbwachs critiques the psychological approach to memory that prioritizes individual experiences while neglecting the influence of social groups^[2]. This concept highlights the elements or objects that are collectively shared, transmitted, and constructed by individuals within a group or contemporary society, thereby fostering organizational cohesion and enhancing members' sense of belonging^[3]. The majority of research on collective memory is focused on historic districts at the urban scale, as well as public spaces and public buildings. Research conducted by Chinese scholars on collective memory offers both theoretical and practical insights. Wang Qingyi^[4] utilizes collective memory as a central theme to examine its persistence within traditional communities. Lu Min et al.^[5] utilized the cognitive mapping method to investigate the collective memory of residents in the Qingguo Lane historic district. Collective memory pertains to the elements or objects that are collectively shared, transmitted, and constructed by individuals within a group or contemporary society. It represents a memory system that is rooted in individual memory but is collectively shared and perpetuated by the group.

1.2 Community public space scene

The awakening of collective memory among the old communities in the city is fundamentally connected to the establishment of community scenes. Furthermore, the development of community public space scenes constitutes a significant aspect of scene theory research. The community public space scene serves as an open venue for residents to engage in public interactions, leisure activities, and entertainment, as well as to host a variety of events^[6]. This space is a significant manifestation of the residents' collective needs. Furthermore, these areas not only offer a platform for interaction, entertainment, and information access but also fulfill essential functions in fostering community cohesion, enhancing residents' quality of life, and promoting the development of community culture.

2 Analysis of the current situation of Baihuazhou area

2.1 Overview of the area

Baihuazhou area is situated in the Donghu District of Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province. This region is delineated by Dieshan Road, Xiangshan North Road, Ruzi Road, and Supu Road, extending to the Ganjiang River in the west and the Jiangxi Provincial Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial Hall in the east. The area features three lakes—North Lake, South Lake, and East Lake—which collectively form the primary scenic attractions of the region (Fig.1).

2.2 Historical and cultural background

The East Lake, located in Jiangxi Province, has been recognized as a prominent scenic area

since the Tang Dynasty, with Baihuazhou serving as its most notable feature. During the Song and Ming Dynasties, the island was characterized by an abundance of architectural structures and picturesque landscapes. In the Southern Song Dynasty, Zhang Cheng established a military academy to enhance the martial character of the region. During the Ming Dynasty, numerous poems were composed that extolled the beauty of Baihuazhou. Although its prominence diminished following the Qing Dynasty, the region possesses a rich cultural heritage. During the Qianlong period, Peng Jiaping authored 'Baihuazhou' and subsequently engraved it onto a stone tablet. Currently, the government has repurposed this site into a leisure resort.

The Baihuazhou area is home to numerous significant attractions, including the Xinghua Tower, the Chiang Kai-shek Nanchang Barracks, the Bayi Park, the former site of the Ye Ting Command Headquarters, the Supu Garden, the Youmin Temple, the Ruzi Pavilion, and the Nanchang Art Museum. These sites collectively form the primary public activity space in the region and serve as a crucial focal point for revitalizing the collective memory of the community's residents. In the context of stock planning and high-quality development, the essential factor in revitalizing old communities is the equilibrium between the preservation of cultural heritage and distinctive characteristics, and the fulfillment of the evolving needs of residents. This balance represents a significant objective in the field of community development.

3 Excavation of problems

The renewal and transformation of the old community are inextricably linked to the community's excavation of its current circumstances. This process involves analyzing the present situation, uncovering the residents' collective memories, and developing spatial scenarios that leverage existing resources. Such initiatives enable residents to reminisce about both the past and the present, while simultaneously encouraging reflection on historical experiences and the reconstruction of collective memory. Ultimately, these efforts aim to strengthen residents' sense of identity with the local culture. The contemporary development of public spaces within the old community presents numerous complexities, resulting in a diminished sense of cultural identity among residents regarding these spaces. Key contributing factors include environmental elements such as spatial interfaces, landscaping, and greenery, as well as

infrastructural aspects at the functional level of public spaces. Additionally, elements related to daily life, including the content and characteristics of collective activities at the level of living places, play a significant role. Furthermore, the cultural identity is affected by the levels of cultural connotation, cultural value, and exploration of local culture, all of which contribute to the residents' insufficient sense of cultural identity.

3.1 Spatial functional level

3.1.1 Blurred spatial interfaces in community public spaces. The overall color scheme of the community buildings lacks coordination. The buildings themselves are aged, and their facades are inconsistent and cluttered. Additionally, the internal infrastructure is outdated, which not only detracts from the community's image but also presents potential safety hazards. The presence of dilapidated and aging building facades, along with deteriorating infrastructures, hinders the establishment of an effective public space interface. This, in turn, diminishes the utilization rate and overall vitality of public spaces within the community. The deteriorating conditions of the environment, the prevalence of private occupation, the existence of illegal structures, and various other issues within old communities have contributed to a diminished sense of public awareness among residents. This situation has resulted in the alienation of neighborhoods, which, in turn, has further dissuaded community managers from engaging in the management of public affairs (Fig.2).



Fig.1 Location of the area

3.1.2 Insufficient parking space and mixing of people and vehicles. The community is experiencing a shortage of parking spaces, leading to a phenomenon of cluttered mixed parking for non-motorized vehicles. Additionally, the internal roads within the community are excessively narrow, resulting in random parking along the streets, which creates a hazardous environment for both pedestrians and vehicles. Furthermore, there is inadequate security within the community, coupled with a lack of bicycle storage facilities and charging stations. The area near Zhuangyuan Bridge is also facing significant waterlogging issues, and there has been no provision made for fire escape routes.

3.1.3 Constricted open spaces and insufficient landscaped green areas. There exists a deficiency of open space within the community, which is accompanied by an inadequate provision of areas designated for cultural activities, leisure and recreation, sports, and community deliberations among residents. The majority of entrance spaces within the community are heavily utilized yet lack distinctive memory points, indicating a need for enhancement. Regarding landscaping, the current design is characterized by a lack of interactivity, a homogenous selection of vegetation, inadequate green spaces within residential areas, and an absence of flowering plants.

3.1.4 Single type of facilities and low vitality of public space. Common issues concerning public service facilities encompass the insufficient availability of seating areas, inadequate street lighting, and poorly organized or outdated informational boards. The community faces several personalized challenges, including outdated entrance facilities and an inadequate signage system. Additionally, there is a deficiency in barrier-free access and sports facilities. The aging community lacks age-appropriate equipment, and the designated space for waste separation requires reorganization and enhancement.

3.2 Life activity level

3.2.1 Lack of content in the organization of community group activities and lack of distinctiveness of activities. Community public space represents a form of openness that is collectively utilized by residents. It encompasses both tangible and intangible attributes, including functions related to sports, social interaction, leisure, and other activities^[7]. In the context of the rapid development of contemporary society, community public spaces frequently experience marginalization. Factors such as ambiguous property rights and inadequate management

have resulted in the uneven utilization of these spaces, particularly in old communities. In these areas, complex and poorly defined property rights, coupled with insufficient management and a propensity for privatization, have diminished the public characteristics of these spaces and subsequently reduced residents' motivation to engage in community activities. A number of elderly individuals engage in square dancing and various fitness activities within the restricted public spaces adjacent to South Lake and within the community. However, the limitations imposed by the venue conditions result in a lack of diversity and distinctive features in these activities.

3.2.2 Weak public awareness and alienation of neighbors in the community. In recent years, the ongoing efforts to renew and transform old communities have led to an escalation of conflicts and disputes among community residents, neighbors, and property management companies. The challenges associated with the renovation of these old communities are becoming increasingly complex, which hinders the resolution of various issues related to public spaces within the community. Consequently,

residents are increasingly opting to remain at home and isolate themselves rather than engage in or organize collective community activities. This trend has resulted in a decline in public awareness among community residents, a growing alienation among neighbors, and a diminished willingness among community administrators to manage public affairs effectively.

3.3 Cultural value level

The extent of the excavation of cultural values is inadequate, and cultural elements have not been effectively incorporated into the spatial context.

The Baihuazhou area is home to three lakes—North Lake, South Lake, and East Lake—each designated as national 3A level scenic spots. These lakes have a historical significance that dates back to the early Tang dynasty. The region is home to significant attractions that embody profound historical and cultural symbolism, including the Xinghua Tower, the former site of the Ye Ting Command Headquarters, and the Ruzi Pavilion. Despite possessing a rich historical and cultural heritage, the area has not sufficiently leveraged its cultural

value, which has led to underutilization of large-scale public buildings such as the Youmin Temple. Furthermore, the integration of cultural elements within the community's smaller public spaces is limited, and there is a notable absence of cultural events and symbols that could foster the spiritual well-being of the community's residents. Consequently, the potential of the area's deep historical and cultural heritage to enhance community cohesion remains untapped, and the collective memory of the community has not been effectively revitalized.

4 Scene creation strategies for old communities based on collective memory

4.1 Enhancing the functionality of the space and restoring it to its original condition

To ensure the quality of public spaces within the community and to address the residents' needs for public interaction, leisure, recreation, and other collective activities, it is essential for public spaces in old communities to implement appropriate renewal and renovation strategies.

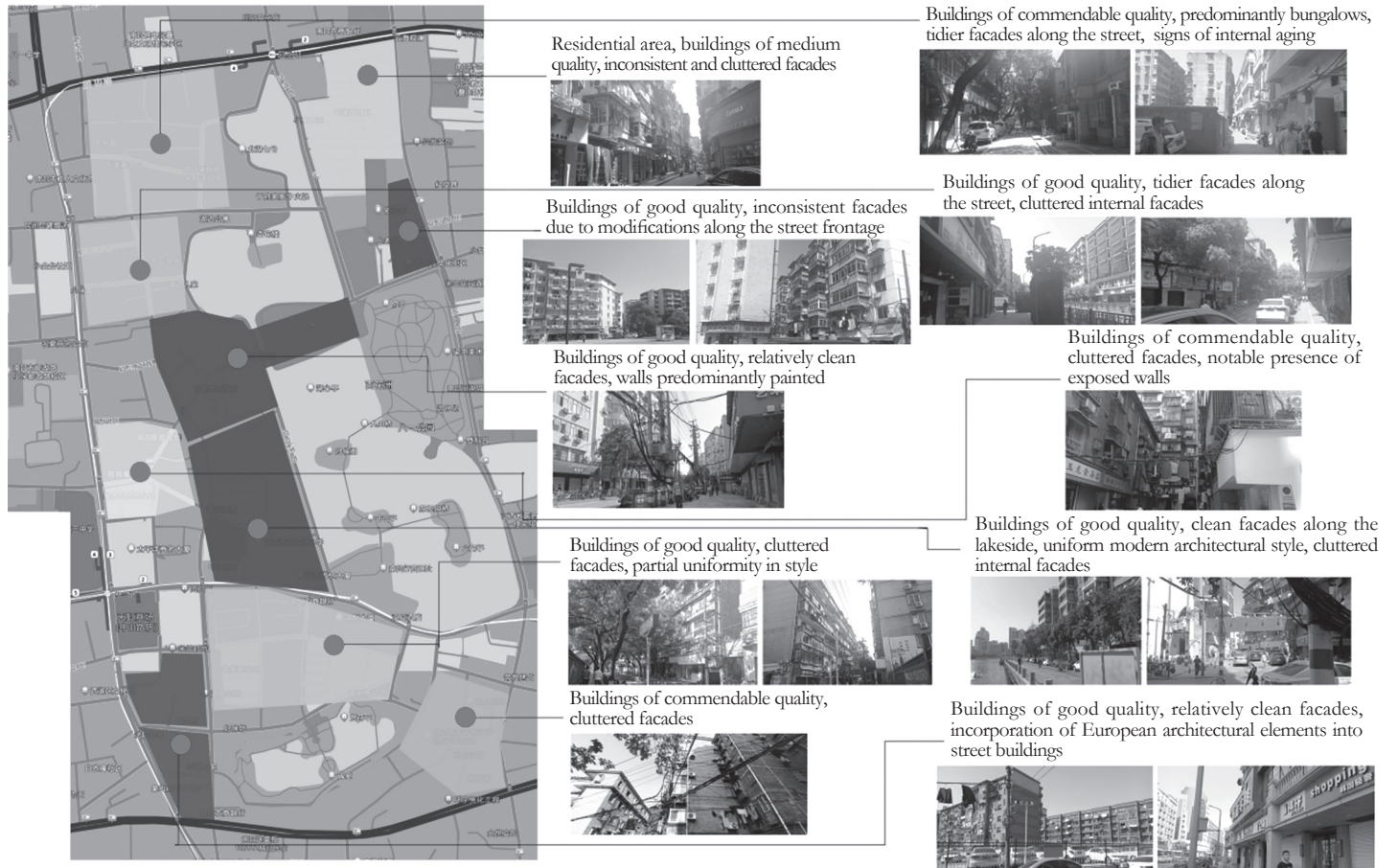


Fig.2 Condition of the building body

Firstly, to address the issue of the unclear interface of internal public spaces in the Baihuazhou area, it is essential to remove unauthorized internal structures in order to create suitable areas for community public use.

Secondly, regarding the community parking issue, the expansive open plaza surrounding the Youmin Temple could be utilized to establish a centralized parking area. In contrast, on-street parking should be avoided on the narrower streets and roads within the older residential neighborhoods to ensure sufficient space for vehicular access.

Thirdly, to address the issue of inadequate open space within the community, it is essential to adhere to the principle of intensive land use. This can be achieved through systematic planning of public spaces and the integrated design of smaller, localized public areas. A centralized public space should be established around the Youmin Temple, complemented by several smaller spaces distributed throughout the surrounding area. This approach will facilitate the development of a public space configuration characterized by a layout of “one centre and multiple points”. At the intersection of various structures, ancillary buildings such as pavilions, terraces, and galleries, along with landscaped vegetation and water features, can be integrated harmoniously. This design approach will create a communal space for leisure activities, thereby significantly contributing to the overall satisfaction of residents within the district^[8]. The initiative will also augment vegetation coverage, improve green roofs, and revitalize community green spaces, green belts, squares, and other facilities.

Finally, in addressing the current state of public space facilities, it is imperative to replace the aging infrastructure within the community with modern alternatives. Concurrently, the design of barrier-free facilities and amenities for the elderly should be incorporated. Additionally, it is recommended to install leisure seating equipped with backrests and armrests along the lakeside promenade. From an epidemic prevention standpoint, it is essential to establish designated entrances for residential buildings to mitigate health risks. This approach emphasizes the importance of meticulous design in public spaces, thereby enhancing the community's commitment to humanistic care.

4.2 Organizing life events to foster community cohesion within neighborhoods

The old community functions as a shared living environment, wherein the significance of

memory is encapsulated in the collective memory of its inhabitants. This collective memory must be articulated through the medium of public spaces. These spaces, while material in nature, serve as conduits for expressing collective memory, which can also manifest through non-material life events, including cultural activities, customs, and traditions. Following the establishment of the scene, it is imperative to enhance the development of life events to optimize the evocation of the collective memory among residents and to foster emotional cohesion within the neighborhood. The material carriers within the Baihuazhou area encompass public spaces within the community, including notable sites such as the Xinhua Tower (Shuiguanyin Pavilion), the Youmin Temple (designated as a provincial key cultural relics protection unit), and the Ruzi Pavilion (erected in honor of Xu Ruzi, a distinguished scholar from the late Eastern Han Dynasty). These locations serve as repositories of collective memory for the residents.

The essence of emphasizing neighborhood relations is not rooted in the physical environment itself, but rather in the social interactions and events that are established within that environment. It is imperative to fully utilize underutilized areas within the community to develop multifunctional open spaces that accommodate diverse groups of individuals. This approach will enhance opportunities for residents to engage in communication, partake in various activities, and find areas for relaxation. Bayi Park can be segmented into distinct activity areas catering to the elderly, young adults, and children by utilizing the internal public space. This design can incorporate a comfortable and secure resting area for the elderly, as well as a patterned pavement that facilitates children's recreational activities, such as hopscotch and maze walking. This approach aims to address the diverse leisure, communication, and fitness needs of the community's residents.

4.3 Tapping into the cultural lineage and awakening collective memory

The deep historical and cultural heritage of the Baihuazhou area is fully utilized by integrating cultural elements into public spaces, thereby evoking the collective memory of the residents. The historical and cultural significance of the area warrants comprehensive exploration. Utilizing underutilized community walls to establish a community cultural wall can enhance residents' sense of cultural identity while simultaneously showcasing the community's unique cultural characteristics. A distinctive

cultural belt themed “bookish culture” has been established along the community wall on the northern side of the Xinhua Tower. This initiative focuses on showcasing the community's history, development, and narratives related to the humanities. The objective is to enrich the spiritual lives of residents and elevate the standards of cultural development within the community. Conversely, the distinctive cultural elements of the community can be identified and incorporated into public spaces. This can be achieved by utilizing the art museum and the “scrolls” of Gongyuanjing as design components to enhance the environment. For instance, the cultural wall could be designed in the form of a scroll to evoke a literary atmosphere, while also establishing a unique entrance space. In this manner, the scrolls would serve as a cultural symbol, simultaneously designating the community as a “bookish” enclave. The process of deconstructing historical narratives and integrating collective cultural elements serves to awaken the shared memory of the community's residents.

5 Conclusions

This study employs the theory of collective memory, using the Nanchang Baihuazhou area as a case study, to analyze issues related to spatial function, living activities, and cultural value. By focusing on the current challenges faced by the community and the residents' collective memory, we aim to reconstruct the spatial scene of the old community. The initiative has effectively promoted the exchange of resources and the complementary nature of benefits, revitalized public community spaces by engaging the collective memory of residents, stimulated the vitality of community governance, and provided innovative strategies for the construction and management of aging communities.

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Table 1 Current situation of some guilds around the Sanlihe River system

| Name | Architectural attribution | Current status | Future status | Address |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Changchun Villa | Guild hall | Office | Exhibition center | No.33 Changxiang Toutiaoroad |
| Jiangxi Xinjian Guild Hall | Guild hall | Unoccupied (compound occupied by many households) | Unknown | No.35 Changxiang Toutiaoroad |
| Anhui Jiangxian Guild Hall | Guild hall | Unoccupied (newly-built) | Unknown | No.60 Changxiang Toutiaoroad |
| Fujian Tingzhou South Guild Hall | Guild hall | Unoccupied (newly-built) | Unknown | No.62 Changxiang Toutiaoroad |
| Fengcheng Guild Hall | Guild hall | Unoccupied (newly-built) | Unknown | No.62 Changxiang Toutiaoroad |

achieve organic renewal of functions under the premise of protecting residential functions.

4 Summary and reflection

The renewal practice of Xianyukou District provides valuable experiences and inspiration, revealing how to seek a balance between historical protection and modern development.

Firstly, the renewal should adhere to integrity and systematicity, organically combining factors such as material space, social structure, economic activities, cultural heritage, to achieve coordinated development between the district and surrounding areas, as well as the city as a whole. Only by taking a holistic perspective can the comprehensive rejuvenation be achieved.

Secondly, the dynamic balance between protection and development is key. Historical preservation should not just “freeze” traditions, but inject new functions and vitality through organic renewal, while preserving historical features, to adapt to modern needs. Taking Caochang Hutong as an example, the project retains the traditional courtyard layout while improving infrastructure, achieving the integration of tradition and modernity. Community participation is the core of successful renewal. Residents are not only residents of the neighborhood, but also the main body of renewal. An effective participation mechanism can enable residents to influence decision-making, enhance community belonging, and maintain renewed vitality.

In addition, improving resident’ community management capabilities and encouraging their

active participation in daily management and cultural development can help maintain the sustained vitality of the neighborhood. In terms of cultural inheritance and innovation, renewal should not only protect tangible heritage, but also attach importance to the inheritance of intangible culture, organically combining traditional culture with modern life, and making the neighborhood a living cultural carrier. At the same time, guided by sustainable development, the renewal project should take into account the ecological, economic, and social needs, explore innovative economic models and management mechanisms, and ensure long-term development. The introduction of multifunctionality is crucial. The renewal practice of Xianyukou shows that a single commercial function can lead to imbalanced development. Therefore, future renewal projects should focus on diversifying functions, adding elements such as culture, education, and community services, and restoring the comprehensive living space of the neighborhood. Long-term management mechanisms are equally important, including community autonomy and intelligent management, to ensure the long-term vitality of the district.

In summary, the renewal practice of Xianyukou demonstrates the complexity and potential path of historical district renewal. It is expected to find a balance between historical preservation and modern needs through scientific planning, meticulous management, and resident participation, which can make historic districts a link between the past, present, and future, injecting lasting urban vitality.

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