Revitalizing Commercial Streets in Historical District:
Evaluating a Case in Fuzhou, China

By

Yang Liu

Master of Engineering in Urban Planning and Design, Tsinghua University, 2008
Bachelor of Architecture, Tsinghua University, 2005

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Author

Department of Urban Studies and Planning
June 4th 2010

Certified by

Professor Tunney Lee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Professor Joseph Ferreira
Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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Abstract

This thesis sets out to examine the case of commercial street revitalization in Fuzhou, China. In modern China the focus of revitalization models has evolved from poverty and environmental quality in 1980s to economic revival and social policy in 2000’s. Due to the lack of empowerment of local community, the prevailing models—Clearance, Xiantiandi and Fake historical—all take a large-scale approach that is favored and undertaken by either government or developer. Compared with a small-scale approach, the large-scale approach usually faces problems such as financial uncertainty, preservation degradation, and loss of diversity and scale continuity. Fuzhou Nanhou Street revitalization project is a government oriented large-scale project that attempts to tackle conservation and economic revitalization issues.

With respect to the challenges faced by large-scale approach, an assessment index is developed to include conservation, diversity, connectivity, economy and equity. In general, the Nanhou street revitalization plan was well prepared in and implemented in 2009. It has employed effective design strategies in managing physical conservation, upgrading and promoting urban vitality. However, there was insufficient concern over real estate management and social equity issues, which became an obstacle to a sustainable revitalization. For example, the uniform rent and over-scale store design prevent some century-old stores from re-opening after revitalization.

In this thesis, I argue revitalization should put equal emphasis on the software as on the hardware. The lack of knowledge in marketing and management can undermine a sustainable revitalization in China in spite of a sensible physical conservation. Three recommendations are made to inform future practices: 1) coordinate with tourism and creative industry development; 2) introduce retail business management; 3) incorporate public participation into the planning process.

Thesis Supervisor: Tunney Lee

Title: Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies and Planning, Emeritus
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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 4

CHAPTER 2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK 7
2.1 REVITALIZATION MODELS IN EVOLUTION 7
2.2 THREE MODELS OF DIFFERENT PLAYERS 11
2.3 TWO APPROACHES OF DIFFERENT SCALES 15
2.3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF LARGE-SCALE APPROACH 15
2.3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL-SCALE APPROACH 17
2.3.3 APPROACHES IN COMPARISON 19
2.4 ASSESSMENT INDEX 19

CHAPTER 3 PROJECT CONTEXT 22
3.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT 22
3.2 URBAN CONTEXT 27
3.3 PLANNING CONTEXT 28

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND THE PLAN 31
4.1 CONSERVATION 31
4.2 DIVERSITY 37
4.3 CONNECTIVITY 45
4.4 ECONOMY 49
4.5 EQUITY 52

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS 55
5.1 REVISIT LARGE-SCALE REVITALIZATION MODEL 55
5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS 57
5.2.1 COORDINATE WITH TOURISM AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY 57
5.2.2 INTRODUCE RETAIL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT 60
5.2.3 INCORPORATE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION INTO THE PLANNING PROCESS 63
5.3 CHALLENGES 65
Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

Revitalizing commercial streets in historical districts has been given high priority in Chinese cities' political agenda in the past decades. Between 2005 and 2007 I was involved in preparing the Nanhou street revitalization plan which is a pilot project in Fuzhou Sanfang Qixiang historical district in China. As a planner, I worked with local government officials, planners and architects. With strong political supports from local government, the project has been implemented with minimum delay. In 2009 the project has been implemented with observable impacts. When I went back to Fuzhou to visit the project again in winter 2010, I was able to speak with planners, local merchants and residents to understand more about the planning outcome.

The revitalization project in Fuzhou is representative of the numerous planning efforts to revitalize commercial streets in historical district in China during the past decades. While typically these streets faced challenges of both physical and financial obsolescence, the cultural value embedded in old urban fabric provides an opportunity for tourist development. Government officials and planners see these projects—if properly implemented—as appropriate urban interventions to facilitate city marketing and to boost local economy and property market. Therefore such projects were given high priority in cities' political agenda.

A lot of revitalization projects were carried out in commercial streets or districts within historical cities such as Beijing, Chengdu, Hangzhou and Shanghai. However, the planning outcomes are diverse. Some projects succeed in an economic sense but not in conservation. Some succeed in a conservation sense but does not fulfill its broader political objective. Compared with western research, there are few post-evaluations conducted to help reflect the lessons from past practices in China. Therefore the evaluation of such a plan or a project implementation is of interest to government officials, city planners and designers.
Research Question

The research purpose is to answer the following questions:

1), what was planned in the 2007 Nanhou Street revitalization plan, and what has been realized in 2009?

2), is the revitalization plan effective regarding the difference between the plan and the implementation?

3), what are the main impacts of the project so far, what we can learn from the Fuzhou case?

Methodology

The investigation will combine a qualitative and a quantitative approach. The methods involve analyzing project data, reviewing planning documents and articles, conducting semi-structured interviews with key participants in the project. The persons interviewed by the author include the planner who is participating in the 2007 plan, the local government official who is in charge of the revitalization project, local residents and merchants. Recommendations will be made regarding the principles in revitalizing commercial streets in historical district in China.

Thesis Outline

Chapter One introduces the research background, research question, methodology and the outline of the research.
Chapter Two provides a general background of traditional commercial streets revitalization in China. It summarizes basically three prevailing models—1) the dominance and ambivalence of The Clearance Model, 2) the success and replication of The Shanghai Xintiandi Model, 3) the popularity and insufficiency of The Fake historical Model. Government Oriented, Developer Oriented and Self-Organized are identified as the key role player in the planning process. Their pros and cons in revitalization are analyzed and compared. It further compares two approaches of different scales, and summarizes the main problems with each approach. An assessment index is developed in order to analyze the Fuzhou project. The assessment index has five categories: 1) Conservation, 2) Diversity, 3) Connectivity, 4) Economy and 5) Equity.

Chapter Three introduces the historical, urban and planning context of Fuzhou project. Chapter Four analyses the project by using an assessment index developed in Chapter Two. Chapter Five concludes with recommendations regarding future practices in traditional commercial street revitalization in China.
Chapter 2 Analytical Framework

2.1 Revitalization Models in Evolution

During the past decades the commercial street revitalization has evolved from a focus on poverty and environmental hazards in 1980s to an emphasis on local economic development and social policy in 2000’s. Several international trends in preservation and conservation ideology are also observed in China:

1), the scale shifts from individual building usually a neighborhood or a district scale to include overall surroundings of important buildings;

2), the strategy shifts from passive preservation to multi-dimensional revitalization including economical, social and environmental concerns.

Various revitalization models have been employed in historical district in China. The prevailing models include: Clearance, Xiantiandi and Fake historical. The way a particular model is chosen and practiced is largely affected by decision maker’s view about urban conservation at that time.

Dominance and Ambivalence of The Clearance Model

In 1994 the reform of taxation system took place, which endorsed the municipal government’s control of the land sale or resale gain in urban redevelopment. The reform has built in the incentive mechanism for municipal government to initialize and carry out various revitalization projects in historical districts. The revenue from land leasing became the driving force for local governments’ intervention on revitalization and it goes into the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) calculation—a key measurement of local governors’ political performance. At that time, the conservation and preservation of historical buildings were simply too costly to be treated seriously.
In 1990s the “Clearance” model was very popular with its little respect for preservation and conservation. The model destroyed what exists completely except the national monuments that were protected by law, and replaced with non-historical and mostly high-density development to maximize the land value. The model was severely criticized by academic because of the lost historical characteristics and identities in Chinese cities as a large number of historical districts were simply replaced with modern towers and slab buildings. Needless to say, given the limited amount of urban land available for construction, the clearance model has been one of the most cost-effective ways to carry out Chinese urbanization.

*Success and Replication of The Xintiandi Model*

In 2000s the Shanghai Xintiandi opened a new chapter in historical preservation in China. Its great real estate success demonstrated that historical preservation has significant and ongoing external economic effects. The surrounding land value was greatly increased because of the commercial development in Xintiandi district. In fact the Xintiandi project has only a few historical structures conserved, and the majority of the buildings are newly designed and constructed with modern interpretation of traditional Chinese architectural elements. The model was replicated in many Chinese cities such as Nanjing, Hangzhou and Ningbo. Good architectural design, retail management, marketing and real estate strategies all contribute to the success of Shanghai Xintiandi.
Municipal governments began to see the economic value of cultural heritage within the historical districts. While typically these streets face with challenges of both physical and financial obsolescence, the cultural value embedded in old urban fabric provides an opportunity for recreational and tourist development. Government officials and planners see these projects—if properly implemented—as appropriate urban interventions to facilitate city marketing and to boost local economy and property market. Therefore such projects were given high priority in cities’ political agenda.
The “Fake historical” model gained its popularity because of its intention of restoring or recreating the historical atmosphere. The “Fake historical” model destroys what exists and build new construction with an attempt to rebuild authentic historical structures. The “Fake historical” model's success in terms of conservation depends largely on the physical design. If implemented poorly, the “Fake historical” model can cause historical district to lose characteristics and lively public realm: improper facade refurbishment led to illegibility, traditional grids were transformed into super blocks with informal street activity diminishing. Beijing Liulichang and Chengdu Jinli fall into the “Fake historical” model. In the case of Chengdu Jinli, the “ancient” street was built upon an alley with no historical information at all.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 2-5 Tianjin ancient cultural street  
Figure 2-6 Chengdu Wenshufang ancient street

There is increasing recognition that good design and generous funding are necessary yet not sufficient to guarantee revitalization success. For example, while Shanghai Xintiandi model and Chengdu Jinli achieved great economic success, many other cities failed to replicate these models. Even with government funding, there are remaining questions about government’s role and management of cultural heritage and small businesses. For example, streamlined rents may eliminate existing and potential small businesses in revitalization. Given these questions unsolved, the attempts to replicate models nationwide can be a waste of efforts and resources.
To summarize, the “Clearance Model” still takes a dominant role in shaping urban landscape in China as the rapid urbanization goes on and the city has to redevelop as a way to accommodate the new urban population. The Xintiandi and “Fake historical” models are providing great lessons for planners regarding its economic aspect. However, there is little conservation value in these models and there is a great demand for a new model that takes both conservation and economic revival into concern.

2.2 Three Different Players

In terms of major play’s role in commercial street revitalization projects, there are basically three types of players: 1) Government Oriented, 2) Developer Oriented, 3) Self-Organized.

Government Oriented—Fiscal Balance & Political Signature

Economic revival has been a major concern in government—oriented revitalization. For a long time preservation and conservation have been presented as expenditure or debts on government’s fiscal budget.

From local government’s perspective, to revive traditional commercial streets in an economic sense and physical sense are both meaningful to its political goals. Economic revival enables fiscal balance on preservation. Traditionally historical preservation is passive in China and it requires long-term continuous capital expenditure with limited profit turnover. If the economic revival succeeds, local government can capitalize on the success—for example on real estate value appreciation—and balance its budget in some way. This becomes an important concern especially after the tax reform in 1994 that stated revenue from land leasing all belonged to local government and thus became an important resource for municipal finance.
Traditional commercial streets located at the old city center where the potential of redevelopment is huge, and potential capitalization of the real estate value appreciation is great. The revenue from land leasing can be used to balance the expenditure on historical preservation and infrastructure improvement. For example, in Shanghai between 1992 and 2000 there were 2275 land leasing deals covering an area of 114 square km. Between 1991 and 1995 the revenue from land leasing deals was 8.5 billion USD, or 11.06 billion RMB, with demolition of 2.5 million square meters by floor area, and more than 40% of them were in poor structural condition. According to the policy, 15% of the revenue went to local government, 85% of the revenue was used for infrastructure and relocation. According to a rough estimation, about 30% of the land leasing revenue is actually used to finance the infrastructure expenditure.

The physical upgrade of a traditional commercial street is one of the most tangible signature achievements local government would be interested in. It is also instrumental to city marketing and inter-city competition for investment. Revitalization occurs with changes in the physical environment. For government officials, the more significant the change scales are, the sooner the changes can be seen, the more incentives they would have to give it priority on the political agenda. For example, in one city, government officials required a revitalization plan to be finished in one month, and to be implemented within three months in order to open and showcase the project before a national day celebration.

*Developer Oriented—Land Use/Density Optimization & Economy of Scale*

Developer’s approach follows profit under the market rule. The market mechanism helps 1) to decide land use for a particular piece of land among competitive land use rents, and 2) to optimize the land use intensity or development density.
According to the Bid Rent Theory, under the competitive land market, different land use can afford different land rent for the same piece of land. The land use is determined by the highest rent in the market. In a typical modern city, commercial land uses are willing to pay a higher rent for easy accessibility to urban center. Residential and industrial land uses are less competitive in CBD land market. This is also valid in China according to an empirical research on Beijing’s land use change in 1998 (Ding, 2007). In addition, no matter what the land use is, the land value in general decreases as it becomes further away from the CBD. Traditional commercial streets located in the urban center where retailing and other commercial uses usually are the best land use from a market perspective.

The land price fostered by market can optimize the land use intensity or development density that is typically measured by a simplified FAR (Floor Area Ratio) number. To land developer, the capital inputs on land and other factors such as building construction are interchangeable. That means, if the land price increases, the developer will put a larger proportion of investment on non-land factors. The land in urban center has a higher value thus the development tend to be with higher density—higher and denser buildings.

Economy of scale is also reflected in the land development process. The average cost falls as the development scale increases. This is because the existence of a fixed or quasi-fixed cost in spite of development scale, such as transaction fee, planning and design consulting fee, general administration expenditure and etc. Therefore, other things being equal, developers favor projects of larger scale.

*Self-Organized— Rights to Housing & Improved Living Quality*
One precondition for self-organized revitalization is clearly defined and well-protected property rights. In China the government owns the land and a large portion of the housing units for historical reasons. During the past decades the government for the sake of public good can easily acquire public or even private properties, which provides a great obstacle for self-organized revitalization. Without a cleared defined and protected property rights, residents having the ability to finance revitalization—whether for public or private owned properties—are less likely to take action because they are unsure about whether they could really benefit from their effort.

Interestingly, self-organized construction may take place quickly when residents anticipate government-oriented development will occur soon. They build or add more space so later on when the government take over the whole project and redevelop the whole area they can get a better compensation for the space they occupied at the moment. This self-organized construction can hardly be called “revitalization” because neither the construction quality nor the aim of construction can be related to improving living quality.

Another precondition for self-organized revitalization is widely available credit. Residents in the historical neighborhood are mostly elderly people with limited income, most of them can hardly self-finance any renovation of the properties they are living in. Therefore successful self-organized revitalization was rarely seen in China.
The motivation for self-organized revitalization comes from the desire for improving living quality. The living quality can be further subdivided into several categories including unit layout, space per person, privacy, public space, building density (FAR), safety, structural durability, ventilation, natural lighting and etc. According to a survey conducted in Beijing historical districts, residents care more about unit layout and space per person than other factors. Unlike planners and developers taking an outsiders’ perspective, residents as insiders actually care less about the building density (FAR) than space per person in their concern for living quality. That is, residents would choose living in a high-rise towers outside the urban center at the cost of being relocated with an appropriate compensation. If the desires of residents cannot be realized in self-organized revitalization, we assume they can only get expressed in compensation terms in case of relocation.

2.3 Two Approaches of Different Scales

In terms of project’s physical scale, there are 1) large-scale approach that entails reconstruction throughout the entire site within a relatively short time period, and 2) small-scale approach that refurbishes and redevelops individual buildings gradually. Large-scale approach is usually associated with a top-down decision-making method while small-scale approach is usually associated with a bottom-up method. The choice of a particular approach is determined by a combination of factors such as political goals, site sensitivity, planning goals and restrictions. The characteristics of each approach regarding its impact on urban revitalization are summarized as below.

2.3.1 Characteristics of Large-scale Approach

Financial Uncertainty
Financial uncertainties brought up by large-scale revitalization projects come from its large capital, long timeline and uncertainty in residents’ relocation. First, large-scale projects incur relatively large-scale long-term capital investment and thus decrease financial stability. For example, the Asian financial crisis in 1998 brought a halt to a large number of urban revitalization projects in Shanghai simply because many real estate firms financed by foreign capital were in short of cash and credits on their balance sheets. Secondly, residents’ relocation and site clearance in historical districts can be extremely difficult and time consuming because of high living density and the existence of many historical monuments and buildings. Project delays because of “nail households”1 were not uncommon in China. These are all causing financial uncertainties perceived by developers and government officials in urban revitalization.

Preservation Degradation

Large-scale renewal, when planned and designed without careful context consideration, can easily become a threat to the historical preservation and “place” atmosphere. First, modern design philosophy usually associated with large-scale projects are completely different from the way historical districts originated and evolved. This difference can jeopardize the historical atmosphere by introducing inappropriate building heights, volumes, colors and scales. Moreover, large-scale projects are always associated with relatively tight project schedules. If the large-scale projects are initiated and coordinated by either government or developer, they usually have a fairly tight project schedule that reflects political and economical concerns. Under such a tight schedule, designers or planners might not be able to work out a careful design scheme suitable for the historical context.

Loss of Diversity

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1 Persons or households who refuse to move due to compensation disagreement when the land is requisitioned for a construction project.
Large-scale projects can often decrease urban diversity. Large-scale projects are associated with large-scale functional changes, replacement and urban re-integration. If led by a single developer and driven by a single market force, projects and properties of a particular type may become dominant because of insufficient market analysis or biases thus reduce urban diversity. For example, Beijing Longfusi Street has been redeveloped into a commercial street with only large-scale retail. The large-scale retailing without diversity has become one of the reasons for the declining shoppers and consumers in Longfusi Street.

Scale discontinuity

Large-scale projects with new scale introduction can often cause scale discontinuity in the urban context. First, the large-scale projects occur beyond one single property or land parcel, therefore making the reconfiguration of the road system possible. Planning considerations on introducing vehicular traffic and lowering the cost on road construction and maintenance validate a wider and smaller road system after redevelopment. The "scaled up" road system allows for mono-functional urban block, mega architectural structure at the cost of a less permeable pedestrian network. The "scaled up" road section can be inhuman to pedestrians. Secondly, in large-scale projects planners and designers usually have a tighter schedule to meet, which prevent thoughtful planning and contextual design. In China, some street revitalization projects simply replicate one unit to fill up an entire street, or replicate a stylish design from similar street in another city.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Small-scale Approach

Financial diversity
Small-scale projects enjoy financial flexibility. For any single project, the relocation cost is low and to implement a project without delay is much more possible. Because of the lowered “threshold” in terms of financial and legal requirements in small-scale revitalization, many more enterprises of different kind and industries can directly participate in the revitalization process. Because the lowered “threshold”, original residents may also get involved in more depth in the planning decision-making with considerable social benefits.

**Preservation promotion**

Small-scale projects have minimal intrusions and interventions on the historical context therefore are beneficial to historical preservation. For small-scale projects, a larger proportion of the capital investment is for upgrading the physical environment rather than relocation. Rather than led by a single developer or government official, small-scale projects are carried out by different decision-makers at different times under different design philosophies, therefore the process are much more close to the organic pattern by which the historical districts evolved. On the other hand, for the same reason small-scale projects have to be coordinated under certain conservation rules in order to achieve a harmonious relationship with the context.

**Low Efficiency**

First, small-scale projects are implemented within a longer time frame than large-scale projects. It cannot enjoy the advantage of economies of scale in revitalization. The economic and physical impacts are therefore less prominent and effective for an immediate outcome, thus it hardly gains political popularity. Secondly, from a real estate investment perspective, small-scale approach with less investment on infrastructure and real estate property base cannot achieve a tipping point for property value increase in the entire district. Finally, small-scale approach has less capacity in financial balancing cross-projects or alleviating high living density in historical neighborhood.
2.4 Analytical Framework

There is no perfect approach that fits all the revitalization situations. Different approaches may be applicable to different conditions due to their advantages and disadvantages. From a political perspective, the scale and implementation efficiency are important. Large-scale approach helps achieve a greater effect sooner therefore is quite popular among politicians.

From financial perspective, large-scale approach is instrumental to private capital involvement and inner-project financial balance. For a project, for-profit and non-profit parts can offset each other and increase the feasibility of the project. For example, according to an estimation of projects in Chengdu, a non-profit to for-profit land use proportion of 4:6 to 5:5 can be economically feasible for development. The Xintiandi project in Shanghai is a successful case for inter-project financial balance. The commercial land of 2 hectare that is not profitable in it has helped real estate appreciation of the surrounding development of 56 hectares.

From a land market perspective, changes in land uses usually are easily implemented in large-scale projects. Traditional buildings in the historical districts may not be able to accommodate the new land use and economic activities associated with revitalization even with minor renovation. In a historical district where the land price will be high after revitalization and the existing buildings are already too dense, demolishing the old buildings in a bunch and rebuilding higher structures can achieve a higher density. This is more easily conducted through a large-scale approach.
Table 2-1 Summary of impacts of different models and players' choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Clearance</th>
<th>Xintiandi</th>
<th>Fake Historical</th>
<th>Goal of Fuzhou</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large-scale</td>
<td>Insensible to the conservation context.</td>
<td>Economic success, positive effects on the surrounding property value with little conservation value.</td>
<td>Questionable conservation with authenticity issue, loss of diversity.</td>
<td>Sensible conservation, promote urban diversity and connectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Financial Uncertainty</td>
<td>Loss of diversity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preservation Degradation</td>
<td>Loss of urban connectivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Loss of Diversity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Scale Discountinuity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-scale</td>
<td>Craving for instant success and infrastructure improvement requirements lead to the abandonment of small-scale approach</td>
<td>Market principles lead to the abandonment of small-scale approach.</td>
<td>Market principles lead to the abandonment of small-scale approach.</td>
<td>Craving for instant success, reducing population density and improving urban infrastructure lead to abandonment of small-scale approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Financial Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Preservation Promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Low Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Oriented</td>
<td>Produce revenue with higher development density and a signature project with dramatic changes</td>
<td>Produce revenue with property appreciation and a signature project with a district brand</td>
<td>Produce revenue with tourism development and a signature project with a street brand</td>
<td>Produce revenue with tourism development and a signature project with a street brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fiscal Balance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Political Signature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developer Oriented</td>
<td>Developer is in favor of this approach with densification.</td>
<td>This requires commercial real estate management skills in order to achieve tourism and economic success.</td>
<td>This requires commercial real estate management skills in order to achieve tourism and economic success.</td>
<td>Developers are unreliable in conservation sensitive district in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Landuse/ Density Optimization</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Economy of Scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Rights to Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Living Quality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Because of the intrinsic difference in driving forces in the development, these models can pose different challenges and problems thus have different impacts on the planning outcome as summarized in the table above. The three previous models are insufficient and inadequate in promotion of conservation, diversity, connectivity, economic revival and social equity. The Fuzhou project is no different in that it also takes a large-scale approach. However, the Fuzhou Nanhou street project is an attempt to better emphasize on these problems caused by large-scale approach in the revitalization process. In order to examine the various impacts of these revitalization models on urban environment, the paper develops an analytical framework as below.
### Table 2-2 Analytical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Main Questions</th>
<th>Sub-Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conservation    | Does the plan emphasize sufficiently and appropriately on protection and conservation of traditional architectural heritage and historical urban features? | Urban Structure  
                  Streetscape  
                  Architectural  
                  Historical Structure and Cultural Spaces |
| Diversity       | Does the plan help promote urban diversity and prevent monotony?               | Renewal Strategies  
                  Land Uses and Subdivision  
                  Contextual design |
| Connectivity    | Does the plan enhance urban connectivity and infrastructure and hence the quality of life? | Pedestrian network  
                  Green space |
| Economy         | Does the plan maximize economic potential of the site?                        | Economic Revival  
                  Real Estate Management |
| Equity          | Are the planning outcomes fair, and the planning process inclusionary of all the stakeholders? | Community Interests  
                  Relocation |
Chapter 3 Project Context

3.1 Historical Context

City of Fuzhou and Sanfang Qixiang Historical District

Fuzhou is a National Level Historical and Cultural City with over 2200 years’ history. Fuzhou is the capital of Fujian province in southeast China and it has been the political center of Fujian since the Qin Dynasty and was the temporary capital of China at the end of the Song and the Ming dynasties. In ancient times, Fuzhou was already a major gateway to the outside world. It has also been an international port with foreign trade since Han Dynasty and was a ship making centre during the Song Dynasty. The coastal location made it one of the first batches of cities in China to benefit from the opening and reform policy. Today over 2.5 million overseas Chinese trace their roots back to Fuzhou, followed by their investment in local properties. Sanfang-Qixiang (SFQX), namely three lanes and seven alleys, located in the heart of downtown Fuzhou, covers approximately 39 hectare. The three lanes are Yijin Lane, Wenru (Scholar) Lane and Guanglu Lane. The seven alleys are Yangqiao (Yang Bridge) Alley, Langguan (Officer) Alley, Ta (Tower) Alley, Huang (Yellow) Alley, Anmin (Reassure the public) Alley, Gong (Palace) Alley and Jibi (Good Luck) Alley.
There are three hills in Fuzhou namely Yu Hill, Wu Hill and Ping Hill, and two pagodas that stand at the foot of Yu Hill and Wu Hill. Three Hills (Yu Hill, Wu Hill and Ping Hill), Two Pagodas (White Pagoda and Black Pagoda) and Two Blocks (Sanfang-Qixiang and Zhuzi Lane District) has been a precise summary of the key historical features in Fuzhou City.

Architects, urbanists and academic community of city planning appreciate sanfang-Qixiang’s great merits in architecture, planning, culture and history. SFQX has been given the title “Museum of architecture in the Ming & Qing Dynasties” because it has 9 national monuments, 8 provincial monuments and 159 ancient buildings mostly built in Ming and Qing Dynasties. It covers 64.7% of the historical district area. Such a large-scale congregation of intact ancient architectures is a rarity in Chinese cities today.
Figure 3-3 Aerial photo of Sangfangqixiang District
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)
The physical environment is a living fossil of ancient Chinese urban planning and management because the layout of the whole district reflects the Chinese traditional planning philosophy. The layout of the lanes and alleys was formed early back in Tang dynasties 1000 years ago. The district also witnessed Chinese revolution in early 1900s. It used to be the upscale neighborhood of Fuzhou during that time. It nurtured many eminent scholars and politicians of the Chinese contemporary history, such as Mr. Yanfu, who first introduced modern western thoughts of democracy and Darwin’s evolutionist theory into China and Mr. Lin zexu, a leading Chinese scholar and official of the Qing dynasty, accepted as a national hero for his stance against the British before the Anglo-Chinese Opium War.

Culturally the local residents have their roots deeply set in this community. A variety of cultural activity such as local opera performance, local snacks and crafts production are still available within the district.

Figure 3-4 A bird view of Sanfang Qixiang historical district. Large-scale modern constructions block the view to Wu hill, and have been a threat to historical preservation. Nanhou Street in yellow dash line.
Nanhou Street

Nanhou Street locates in the center of Sanfang-Qixiang area and serves as a main spine that connects three lanes with seven alleys. Along the street stands a unique type of wooden shophouse, also known as CHAILANCUO in local Fuzhou area. The current planning problems in Nanhou street include architectural and functional decline. The wooden structures in Nanhou Street are in extremely poor condition due to lack of proper maintenance.

In 2007 the main commercial businesses in Nanhou Street included lantern, furniture, low-end garments, funeral flower wreaths and clothes. The funeral business was an obstacle to revitalization because of its negative effect on other businesses—few businesses want to locate near funeral business. Chinese culture perceived funeral business a sign of bad luck and Chinese businessmen were greatly influenced by this culture.

Figure 3-5 Architectural quality survey of Nanhou street, 56% in poor quality. (Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

Figure 3-6 Street view of Nanhou street. Lantern, funeral appliance, and low-end cloth shops
The industrial and administration buildings have been a great threat to the historical cultural landscape. There is great need to improve the urban infrastructure such as road pavement, drainage system, telecommunication and fire protection arrangement which is extremely crucial to such intense concentration of wooden structures. There is 1.7 hectare of industrial land use occupied by several factories along Nanhou Street and Wenru Lane. These factories stopped operations and were used as storage and dormitories.

3.2 Urban Context

Demands for Commercial Real Estate

As the capital of Fujian province, the city of Fuzhou has enjoyed economic prosperity ever since the economic reform in 1978. In 2005, the GDP per capita in Fuzhou is around 2788 US dollars. In 2004 GDP in the tertiary industry has increased by 11.2% compared with last year, out of which revenue from wholesales and retailing sector has increased by 19.7%, and revenue from restaurant sector has increased by 18.8%. In 2007 the housing sales price increased by 6.8%, indicating a good investment environment for real estate in general.

Increased disposable income of Fuzhou citizens has ensured the increased purchasing power of consumers. In 2004 there was a 13% increase in citizens’ disposable income, or an 8.1% increase adjusted after inflation. Within the consumption structure, the consumption on tourism and cultural activities occupied 24.9%, which expanded relative to other expenses.

The Sanfang Qixiang district is located in the center of old Fuzhou City, its location value in land is highlighted by its good accessibility. It is within Dong Jiekou (East Street Corner) commercial cluster—one of the three urban commercial centers in Fuzhou City.

Large-Scale Government Oriented Approach

2 The other two commercial centers are in Tai River and Wuyi districts.
Large-scale government oriented approach was chosen for Nanhou Street revitalization project for several reasons. First, a small-scale approach cannot effectively help reduce the pressure of population density for conservation purposes. The existing population density is 375 persons per hectare, or 150 persons per acre, which is extremely high for such a low-rise (1-3 floors) area. For comparison, a typical suburban neighborhood with comparable building density and FAR ratio will have a density of 30 persons per acre.

Second, government owns 60% of the properties along Nanhou Street. For the public-owned properties, residents are renters and they have less incentive to invest in the properties. In general, residents in this district are elderly people with limited investment capacity so the private owned properties are not well catered for as well.

Third, private developers can hardly become politically legitimate for such conservation-sensitive project at that time. In 1993 Hong Kong private real estate developer was designated for the Yijin Lane conservation project. The result was high-rise residential development with little conservation consideration. The project itself became a threat to historical preservation of the district and had been severely criticized by the academics and the public. Because of the incautious project one lane and one alley were destroyed and replaced with high-rise developments. Due to the project significance and sensitivity, the government was the only necessary and legitimate organizer and initiator for the Nanhou Street Revitalization Project.

3.3 Planning Context

Planning Goals and Objectives

The planning area of Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan covers approximately 5.9ha along 600m long and 9-12m wide NanHou Street. Nanhou street was designated as a cultural and historical street with public uses.

The plan was prepared to fulfill mainly three goals: monetary, political and academic.
First, on the public side, the plan was to help facilitate fund-raising from Cultural Relic Bureaus of different levels. Without the approval of a set of conservation and implementation plans, including this plan, Sanfang Qixiang Conservation and Management Committee could not obtain funds from cultural relic bureaus. On the private side, the plan subdivided the whole project and was to help attract and legitimate private investments into the project. Earlier revitalization failure in 1990s due to full delegation of project operation to private developer suggested that government “ownership” of urban conservation project should be assured and private developer could only participate in a later implementation stage.

Second, the plan was to create a political signature project. On the local municipal level, the mayor’s expectations included the beautification of the whole old district, boosting local economy, and the creation of a new city image. On the national level, Qixiang Shan, director of National Cultural Relic Bureau, attached great importance to this project, and hoped it could set up an example for similar projects in other cities.

Third, the plan was also called for by professionals, including planners, designers, and cultural preservationists at both local and national levels. Under the context of extremely rapid urbanization in China, many traditional architecture in historic culture cities are severely destroyed. With no exception Fuzhou is entering into a critical stage and facing the challenges from redevelopment in old city areas. The academic interests were how to incorporate theories into practice, how to balance preservation with development to improve the actual outcomes of conservation projects.

*Planning Methodology and Process*

With Shan’s strong recommendation, Professor Jie Zhang and his planning team from Tsinghua University obtained the commission for creating this plan. The core planning team consisted of professional planners and planning students at Tsinghua University, Beijing. Consultants included local planners, public officials, preservationists and residents.
Since most of the data available was not updated and hence could not be used for a plan with implementation purpose. In order to collect on-site data, during August 2006 to March 2007, the planning team conducted 7 field trips to Fuzhou. The on-site investigation included land survey, door-to-door investigation of housing and demographic conditions, current micro-level land use, survey of trees, old wells and other historical features, and interviews with local citizens.

The planning team had presented their planning productions respectively to national cultural relic bureau and mayor of Fuzhou. Feedbacks from those agencies were partially reflected in the final planning materials.

Figure 3-7 Lead planner Prof. Jie ZHANG visiting a courtyard at Nanhou street.

Figure 3-8 Planning team measuring street dimension on site.
Chapter 4 Analysis and Plan

4.1 Conservation

_Urban Structure — Reinforcing Connections between Hills, Canal and District_

_Figure 4-1 Linking Nanhou Street with other historical urban elements (Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)_
Nanhou street is part of Sanfang Qixiang district which is an essential element of the urban structures of Fuzhou. In the 2007 plan, the existing urban spatial characteristics of Fuzhou were summarized as “three hills (Yu, Wu and Ping), two towers (White and Black), a canal, a lake, one axis (Nan Street), two districts (Sanfang Qixiang and Zhuzifang).

Physically and visually, the plan protects the existing visual corridor between Sanfang Qixiang district, the canal and Wu hill by setting up height limits and building set-back. Functionally, the introduction of cultural and economic functions in Nanhou Street in the plan aims at activating Nanhou Street as a linear urban linkage connecting those urban nodes and elements.
Streetscape—Protecting Spatial Characteristics of Alley Space

The alley space has been a unique character of traditional neighborhood in Southeast China. It provides a transitional space or so-called semi-public space from noisy public streets to tranquil private courtyard. The alley space is narrow and deep therefore it provides shaded outdoor space for inhabitants during the daytime against the extremely strong sunshine in the summer under a subtropical climate. Therefore, the protection of alley space in historical district is an essential part of the 2007 Plan.

Unlike architectural preservation and conservation, the preservation of alley space focuses on the “void” space rather than the “solid” structures. However, this concept is not new in planning history in China. The concept of protecting alley space is a continuation of the long tradition rather than an innovation of the 2007 Plan. In ancient times the public use and clearance of alley space were strictly protected against illegal extension or construction by social regulation carved on a stele in this district.

Two ratios are important in alley space preservation regarding the spatial characteristics: height-to-width ratio and void-to-solid ratio (openings to walls). In order to protect alley space, the 2007 plan sets guidelines to height-to-width ratio (2:1 to 5:1), the skyline, building set back limits, and pays particular attention to void-to-solid ratio, color, materials and continuous façade. Unlike a street façade, alley façade has few openings such as windows or doors. Most of the shophouses along the street are 2 floors and this helps ensure a continuous street-facade without intrusions and interruptions on the street facade. This also helps maintain the historical view from alley into Nanhou street.

Architectural—Protecting Architecture as well as Traditional Craftwork

Well-off people such as officials built most of the houses or businessmen at that time. Therefore the exquisite woodcarvings, stone carvings, and opulent details that testify to the past glory are rare in ancient architecture in other part of China.

The plan sets strict rules to protect the national monuments and historical buildings. The plan sets guidelines and encourages using traditional craftworks in building restoration. Introduction of modern materials such as aluminum is prohibited.
The use of craftworks should be strictly according to traditions. For example, there are basically four ways of laying out brick or stone foundations under different circumstances reflecting the street hierarchy—from public streets to alleys and private courtyards. Similarly surface pavements vary according to spatial hierarchy.

*Figure 4-4 Ancient walls in this area are made of earth and seashells*

*Figure 4-5 Four different types of architectural foundations*
Historical Structure and Cultural Spaces

The continuation and restoration of historical festival events are considered in the plan. According to the plan, media, exhibitions and internet technology should all be employed to make the district more accessible to citizens and tourists. Other historical features such as bridges, lane gates are to be strictly protected and restored if necessary. Old wells, old walls, old trees are identified and protected to the most in the plan. One main challenge in historical preservation is that new discoveries often occurs along with construction. For example, when construction workers attempted to repaint the old wall in one of the courtyard, they discovered a mural of historical significance. Planners and craftsmen had to spend more time studying the old mural and tried to restore it.

Figure 4-6 Alley Gate in 2006
Figure 4-7 Alley Gate reconstructed in 2010
Figure 4-8 Courtyard entrance protected and showcased on street
Figure 4.9 Nanhou Street Revitalization Masterplan
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)
4.2 Diversity

Renewal Strategies

Based on differences in historical significance, architectural quality and adaptability, six renovation strategies are employed in the plan in order to protect and enhance diverse historical information. These six strategies include:

1). Preservation—buildings designated as cultural relics at national, provincial and municipal levels. These buildings should be strictly protected with functional changes from private to public.

2). Retention—buildings with good architectural quality and in harmonious relationship with historical environment.

3). Restoration—traditional shophouses selected to be restored to original status via traditional craftworks, with cultural protection, educational and exhibition purposes.

4). Renovation—traditional shophouses in poor architectural quality. These buildings are to be renovated through new construction technology and materials.

5). Demolition-Reconstruction—buildings that are not in harmonious relationship with historical environment. They are redeveloped to accommodate new functions serving the neighborhood.

6). Façade renovation—buildings, especially large-scale structures that are not in harmonious relationship with historical environment yet cannot be redeveloped in the short-run. Façade renovation is suggested as an expedient solution.
Figure 4-10 Building Conservation Plan  
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

Figure 4-11 Land Use Plan  
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

Figure 4-12 Building conservation strategies shown in elevation  
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)
When the plan was implemented, this diversification strategy was not carried out strictly. One reason is for the sake of easy construction work, most of the buildings under Category “Retention” and “Renovation” may be destroyed to make room for new construction. Buildings in “Restoration” category are not restored according to their previous condition, but rather rebuilt based on new design. The result is Nanhou Street seems brand new after revitalization and some historical information imbedded in the façade design is missing.

*Land Uses and Subdivision*

The land use plan determines a variety of land parcels in terms of shape, size and accessibility. The subdivision of available land was based on the historical land division, with the purpose of maintaining historical information in the new urban redevelopment. According to the current condition in 2007, the plan has three land parcel categories of different depths and sizes: small (5-15m in depth), medium (15-30m) and large (30 and above). Small land parcels can have one or two store frontages along the street. They are suitable for almost all kinds of retail businesses. They can be affordable to businesses with lower profits. Medium land parcels are suitable for mixed-use development. While the land along the street has the potential for retailing, the land behind can be residential with privacy. Large land parcels come from the redevelopment of modern high-rise buildings. These land parcels were planned for redevelopment in the future phrase and hence are untouched in 2010.

The diversity in land subdivision has formed a basis for accommodating different functional needs. The plan has explored the possibility of mixed-use in traditional urban morphology. However, in 2010 these mixed use strategies fails to work because these properties are reconstructed and rented out to one tenant, which discouraged multiple uses by different tenants.
Figure 4-13 Mix-use proposals in the 2007 plan
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

Figure 4-14 Vertical and horizontal mix-use proposals in section
(Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)
Contextual Design—Scale Breakdown

The architectural design criterion examines how planners and designers read and abstract the codes in the urban context, and embed these codes in proposed physical layouts. These codes include scale coherence, logics in architectural expression, and logics in spatial arrangement.

In order to achieve scale coherence with the historical context, any new large-scale development should break down the scale of architectural volume to fit with the microenvironment. There is length limit for the diagonal of the roof. The slope and shape of the roof will be kept in line with those built in SanFang QiXiang area in the past. The shape and scale of courtyards will also be designed according to traditional counterparts. For existing large-scale development that cannot be redeveloped due to budget constraints, the plan seeks a landscape solution. Proposed landscape elements help to restore the original scales of the streets, and to create a transitional area between the traditional streets and the modern commercial structure. Besides, the proposed semi-outdoor space maintains existing retail activity and building linkage between retail space and the pedestrian flow in the street.

![Figure 4-15 Existing street section in 2006](Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

![Figure 4-16 Proposed street section in 2007 plan](Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)
Contextual Design—Protection of tectonic logic and “vertical lines” in façade design

One design challenge is to provide a more endurable, stable and safe structure with modern tectonic logic while maintain the “wooden” streetscape. To avoid “fakey” expression of architectural structure—using concrete material to imitate wooden detail—the plan comes up with a structure that combines both concrete structural and wooden decorations. The concrete plus wooden structure responds creatively to both utilitarian and aesthetic needs. The advanced concrete structure meets the requirements for fire proofing, heat insulation and structural stability while the wooden extension fulfills the authentic representation of traditional wooden facade.

Architectural elements such as wooden columns, tiles, windows and eaves are designed in a way that the characteristics of the materials are reflected and expressed. Using excessive archaized elements such as concrete as a substitute for wood in decorative carving should be avoided. Authentic traditional techniques are encouraged in the detail design process.
Urban surface usually has several layers of texture information. For example, brick has its own surface texture and the way bricks are laid out has conveyed another layer of texture. When these different layers of texture are not perpendicular to the eye they help tell the depth of the space. Therefore these texture information layers are crucial to human spatial perception and recognition. “Vertical lines” in the traditional commercial street –as part of the texture layer—has played an important role in people’s perception of the street. Small-scale store frontage means there are many “vertical lines” in the facade of a traditional commercial street. The facade design in the revitalization plan avoids changing “vertical lines” into “horizontal lines” when introducing large-scale redevelopment. The structure and decoration emphasize vertical lines so as to maintain the original rhythm in the facade.
Contextual Design — Logics in spatial arrangement

In order to design architectural typologies that are authentic to the particular historical context, the plan summaries the existing courtyard typologies in a pattern guide. New designs will select architectural typologies from this pattern pool. There are length, width and height limits for any single architectural unit.

In architectural composition the different volumes and heights of architectural units reflect the functions and intrinsic hierarchy in traditional spatial arrangement.

Figure 4-21 A study on traditional spatial arrangements in the plan
(Source: Nanhui Street Revitalization Plan)

Figure 4-22 Courtyards reconstructed after revitalization in aerial photo
4.3 Connectivity

Pedestrian network — Increase permeability without destroying traditional spatial scale.

Figure 4-23 New alleys (in red) and green spaces (in green) planned in Sanfang Qixiang district (Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan)

Human activities at pedestrian level rely on an inter-connected pedestrian network. Traditional urban districts are based on pedestrian scale. The pedestrian network is formulated to maximize the street facades therefore to increase the accessibility and economic value of each land parcel. The landowners also have optional value of utilizing their land parcels.
Sanfang Qixiang historical district has developed a complex pedestrian network in history. The hierarchical network includes streets, lanes, alleys, and hidden alleys that connect lanes through a series of courtyards. The network is permeable and convenient. It provides different possibilities for pedestrians. Within the hierarchical structure, connections of different scales provide different degrees of privacy.

In order to protect the traditional alley layout and the hierarchical pedestrian network, the plan focuses on increasing urban block permeability without destroying the scale of traditional alleys. The current pedestrian network in 2007 needed repair because the privatization of the courtyards undermined the. Therefore a number of the land parcels became less accessible and hence the economic value attached to the land parcels decreased. Within the Sanfang Qixiang district, the 2007 plan proposed total approximately 2000 meters of new alleys in length, including both additions and extensions of existing dead-end alleys. New alleys have adopted the traditional scale, with a width of 2 to 5 meters which is slightly narrower than the famous those of 3 lanes and 7 alleys. In 2010 these proposed connecting and service alleys are partially realized and they are serving as both a separation and a connection of public and private land uses. After revitalization Nanhou street is a daytime pedestrian street.

Green Space—Locate small Scale, well-connected green spaces

4000 square meters of green spaces are provided in the plan. Each one of the green spaces is limited to 300 square meters, with a 15 meters length limit adjacent to alleys. Like the traditional courtyard, green spaces cannot be too “open” to the streets or alleys.

A simple comparison of two aerials—one before and one after revitalization—demonstrates most of the trees along Nanhou Street were removed without comparable replacement. Although the 2007 plan states trees above certain size should be protected, due to the construction work of road and buildings these trees can hardly survive untouched.
Figure 4-24 Aerial photo of Nanhou street before 2006

Figure 4-25 Aerial photo of Nanhou street after 2009
On-site interviews with merchants show that they are extremely concerned with the lack of trees after revitalization. Because Fuzhou usually has a long summer season during which people cannot bear to be exposed to the strong sunshine. Historically trees provide shaded space and foster humane microenvironment on the street. Due to the lack of trees in Nanhou Street after revitalization, people stay shorter on the street therefore the retailing businesses suffer from fewer pedestrian movements. The development corporation noticed the impact of trees on the street vitality. The plan was adjusted to have new trees planted although it may take some time for them to mature and to develop big canopies that provide shades.
4.4 Economy

*Finance and Economic Revival*

The National Cultural Relics Bureau provides funding for architectural conservation. The provincial and municipal governments provide funding for infrastructure improvement. Special loans are available from banks for current homeowners who want to invest on the housing property. The total investment for revitalization project is around 4 billion RMB.

The revitalization aims at exploiting and capitalizing the shadow price—unrealized potential value imbedded in the land within the historical district. At Dongjiékou corner in 2007, the commercial real estate sale price is 70,000 YMB to 100,000 YMB per square meter. The monthly rent is 800 YMB to 1000 YMB per square meter. Surrounding area is 400 to 500 YMB per square meter. At that time monthly rent in Nanhou Street before revitalization is lower than 100 YMB per square meter.

Figure 4-28 Lantern festival night at Nanhou Street
(Source: Jianyong Chen)

Figure 4-29 Lantern festival decorations at Nanhou street
(Source: Jianyong Chen)
The revitalization plan has brought new urban functions such as tourism, recreation, retail and community service center to replace obsolete land-uses such as industries. The total number of proposed retail stores along the street is about 80 and the redeveloped space is around 20,000 sqm. The functional change from low-quality housing or obsolete industrial to high-end commercial and housing can generate great economic profits, which can further finance the project. Many potential retail investors have contacted planners and public officials during the planning process, showing their strong investment interests and optimistic prospects of revitalization.

The revitalization has boosted local tourism development. During the spring festival Sanfangqixiang historical district has attracted 0.38 million visitors and this number ranks top 1 in Fujian province. Nanhou street has become a strong candidate for Top 10 National Cultural and Historical Street. Bilingual language signage and menus were developed after revitalization. Understandably the prices for local snacks almost doubled.

Figure 4-30 Bilingual tourism information panel developed after revitalization

Figure 4-31 Bilingual snack menu developed after revitalization
Failure of Uniform Rent and Overscale Store

After implementation, the original target rent is 200 RMB per sqm and it is a uniform rent. For comparison, the monthly retail rents along Jintai road is about 500 per sqm. In the actual rental policy for Nanhou Street, there are different rents associated with ground floor and upper floor because of their different retail values. The monthly rent for ground floor is 80 RMB per sqm. For second floor is 40 RMB per sqm. The lease policy requires that for any individual building, the first floor and second floor be rented out as a package. Therefore the average rent is about 60 RMB per sqm. Generally the second floor is not well utilized. Some retailers may use the upper floor for storage while others may not even need much storage space. If the second floor is wasted, then the implied average rent is 120 RMB per sqm.

Figure 4-32 Lantern shops on Nanhou street before revitalization
Figure 4-33 Lantern making in courtyard with no lantern shops on street after revitalization
The average store size at Nanhou street is 60-80 sqm (including the upper floor area), which can be too big and expensive to rent for small retailers. The biggest single property space is around 1960 sqm. The uniform rent and overscale store design actually prevent some businesses from opening in Nanhou Street. Unfortunately among these businesses are traditional craftsmen. Traditional craftsmen and century-old stores are supposed to be the “anchor stores” for the whole commercial street. According to modern shopping center management theory, stores of different types have different contributions to the whole shopping center. As “anchor stores”, they are consumer attractors and hence they should enjoy discount in their rents or other beneficial terms. Traditional craftsmen with moderate profits in their business activities simply cannot survive under such a high uniform rent.

Most of the stores are owned by Sanfang Qixiang Development Corporation and only for rent to business operators. However, there are a few stores sold to century-old store owners. These stores are usually small in size so the total sale price can be more affordable to owners. The sales price are discount prices so as to encourage the presence of century-old stores in Nanhou Street. For example, a 10 sqm retail store is sold to traditional retails at a discounted price 1080,000 YMB, indicating a sales price at 108,000 per sqm.

The plan is cautious about the scale and composition of proposed commercial facilities. The total retail area was approximately 20,000 square meters. Retail shopping-to-restaurants-to-recreation is 3:1:1. (According to previous study in the planning report, the ratio 4:3:3 or 5:3:2 is close to a main shopping street. However, restaurants are less interested due to lack of parking and strict fire protection requirements in this historical district)

4.5 Equity

*External & Internal Interests*
For the sake of architectural conservation, one of the main objectives of the plan is to mitigate the overcrowded living condition. The existing population density is 375 persons per hectare, that is, **150 persons per acre**. In the revitalization plan all the residential uses along Nanhou street were changed into commercial and cultural uses. Therefore the plan maintained the building density (FAR) while reducing the population density dramatically. The revitalization plan is implemented by Sanfangqixiang Preservation & Conservation Committee. The committee members are all from different departments of the municipal government including land bureau, planning bureau, cultural heritage bureau and etc. They are representatives of the external interests rather than the internal interests.

For local residents, their main concern is to improve their living standard. The dilemma is that, given the building density constraints, the improvement of living standard cannot be achieved without moving a fraction of people out of the historical district. After revitalization, many private residential uses are converted into public uses and the housing price skyrocketed, leaving very few former residents back along the street.

Figure 4-34 Peaceful life in courtyard housing before revitalization

Figure 4-35 Protest against relocation forced by local government
Relocation and Compensation Policy — Carrot and Stick

The relocation and resettlement of residents have always been controversial. The revitalization plan developed a few housing projects in urban outskirt to accommodate the relocated residents. Fuzhou government provides carrot plus stick policy—the early movers will get more compensation as a reward for compliance, and they have better choices if they relocate earlier. People will have two compensation options: either cash or housing voucher. The “nail” stakeholders who refuse to move will not get the reward, but face uncertainty, possibly lawsuit or government mediation.

This policy works quite effectively for at least two reasons. First, for most of the people, especially middle age and younger residents, if they are economically better off, they are indifferent to locations. They care less about the social capital loss than living quality. Second, municipal government owns 60% of the housing properties. Therefore, a majority of the current residents are renters. They would not invest in the current public property, and they would like to become homeowners through the urban redevelopment. According to a survey in 2005, 60% of the residents would like to move out of the district if they are offered housing units elsewhere with reasonable prices and compensations.

During the planning process, planners conduct informal interviews with local residents to know their main concerns about the redevelopment. However, the involvement and input of local citizens are at most sympathetic and passive. Residents are supposed to respond and react to the policy rather than to actively influence the policy making. The planning decision-making process is not open to public participation. Local residents are informed only after the decisions are made, and solutions are provided.
Chapter 5 Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Revisit Large-scale Revitalization Model

There is no perfect model that fits all the revitalization circumstances. Although these commercial streets in historical districts have superficial similarities, each case may have its own political agenda, financial resources and social priorities. Therefore they may require different approaches. Chinese Scholar Wu Liangyong who lead the renewal of Ju’er hutong in Beijing once said, “Urban revitalization requires a scale effect that can hardly be achieved by piece-meal development. However, there should be limits for the project scale and appropriate implementation speed”.

The table is a summary of the assessment of the Nanhou Project. In general, the Nanhou Street revitalization plan in 2007 is well considered and well implemented with respect to its historical urban context. It has employed effective design strategies in managing physical upgrading and promoting urban vitality. The plan not only provides substantial protection over the various elements within the Nanhou Street that constitute the scenic features including historical buildings, urban structure, street and alley scales, environmental landscape, but also continues to maintain the historical and cultural environment in infill development, and meets the overall need of urban redevelopment, improve regional functions and promote the qualities as a whole. The government-led large-scale approach is effective in reallocating land-uses and improving urban infrastructure thus increasing the capability of serving new urban functions. Immediate and large capital input and property appreciation were observed in the revitalization.
Table 5-1 Assessment of Nanhou Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Main Questions &amp; Evaluations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>Question: Does the plan emphasize sufficiently and appropriately on protection and conservation of traditional urban features?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer: The conservation is systematic, and it safeguards and makes use of the historic resources ranging from urban corridor to streetscape, from architecture to landscape and cultural spaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Question: Does the plan help promote urban diversity and prevent monotony?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Answer: Diverse renovation strategies, land subdivision, and mixed use guidelines. Scale coherence is a primary concern in this construction sensitive area. The design improves the quality of wooden shophouse and enhances this unique structure as an identity of NanHou Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>Question: Does the plan enhance urban connectivity and infrastructure and hence the quality of life?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Answer: The plan improved permeability and introduced green spaces without losing streetscape scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Question: Does the plan maximize economic potential of the site so as to make the plan economically feasible?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Answer: The plan has boosted certain degree of cultural tourism development. However, there is still a lack of marketing and promotional organizations. The combination of uniform rental policy and overscale store design can be an obstacle to revitalizing small retail businesses along the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>Question: Are the planning outcomes fair, and the planning process inclusionary of all the stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer: The plan is made and carried out through a typical top-down planning approach. It is effective yet exclusionary to all stakeholders.</td>
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Regarding implementation, the plan goes further in many respects compared with plans of similar kind in developed countries in the west. In the west, due to the confinements in terms of land ownerships and property rights, quite a number of advanced concepts in the planning theories have met impediments in the actual implementation. In China, as the land ownership belongs to the state and a significant proportion of the properties belong to the local government in China, it is easier to allocate resources on a unified basis. The revitalization plan was implemented so efficiently within two years in order to meet the political agenda. For example, several phases of the plan have to be completed to host several events such as National Day, Spring festival, Lantern festival and etc. However, by the same token the plan pays little attention to real estate management and social equity, which questions the procedural validity of the planning process.

5.2 Recommendations for the Nanhou Project

5.2.1 Coordinate with Tourism and Creative Industry

As a traditional commercial street, Nanhou street is distinctive and interesting due to its unique culture and ambiance. While conservation of physical environment and effective place-making urban design strategies can help maintain the ambiance, the cultural component can and should continue through promoting cultural and economic activities. After revitalization in 2010, traditional cultural activities such as paper mounting and lantern making disappeared from the street due to various reasons. There is no question these live cultural activities could have been a huge tourist attraction. Without the continuation of such cultural activities, tourists can only interact with the final products. The tourist involvement is passive, one dimensional and less interesting. Even worse, the lack of cultural products degrades the tourist experience at Nanhou street. For example, one post office is introduced into Nanhou street after revitalization. Many tourists coming for souvenirs are disappointed that very few tourist products have been developed for sale at the post office.

*Build Strong “Street” Image and Integrate Creative Industry*
The revitalization should set up a promotion committee, which takes over the responsibility of organizing promotional events and “street” marketing. For local community, the presence of a promotional committee can help organize bottom-up community events and activities. And more importantly, the committee also makes sure these activities are in line with the marketing strategies of the entire commercial street or district. For developers and local government, such a committee is the best tool for coordinating interests and tasks.

The Nanhou street and SFQX district should be marketed as a brand. Branding has the benefit of building awareness by communicating a consistent image and associating the area with unique identity. The signage design, souvenirs and other visual messages should be consistent with the brand. “Street” marketer should work with media in order to deliver a strong image to citizens and potential market. Media should cover the recent news, background information on the street and district, photographs and videos. Websites should be developed for advertising and public relations.

As manufacturing declines in Nanhou street, the question is what kind of business can replace manufacturing in the historical district. Physical upgrade and revitalization provides a good opportunity for creative industry\(^3\). A photographer who lives in SFQX district expressed her interest in an exhibition of her artworks, including some historical photos of SFQX district. Nanhou street should provide place for such cultural and community activities. The revitalization plan does not address business restructuring, business upgrading and job creation sufficiently. For example, the retail business has not been integrated with upstream in the industry chain—marketing and design. Usually such a culture-led revitalization requires a flourishing creative industry. Creative industries as such can play an important role in building a unique street image and reinforce the special quality of products and services on the commercial street. There is no reason to come to Nanou street if the products and services in Nanhou street are no different than other modern commercial streets in Fuzhou city.

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\(^3\) Creative industries are defined as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” in
Case Study—Boston Faneuil Hall Marketplace

A special committee should organize promotional activities consistently and systematically. The role of such a special committee is well demonstrated in the Boston Faneuil Hall marketplace. Located in the downtown of Boston, the historical Faneuil Hall has been renovated in 1976 with the whole area around Faneuil Hall transformed into a modern marketplace consisting of restaurants, shops and foodstalls. Boston Faneuil hall marketplace has set up a marketing department in charge of publicity, marketing and management. It has developed a symbol for advertisement purpose. It has a quality control of the street performances. Street performers will need to send their audition package for review before they can play in the marketplace. Such products or service quality control is instrumental to building a consistent and strong image of the whole area.

Figure 5-1 Logo developed for Faneuil Hall Marketplace
(Source: www.faneuilhallmarketplace.com)

Figure 5-2 Street performance on Faneuil Hall Marketplace

Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001. They usually include advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, fashion, film and photography, publishing, television and etc.
5.2.2 Introduce Retail Business Management

Traditional commercial streets in China were formed through an incremental and self-organized process in a bottom-up approach. However, in modern society their economic functions are no different than an urban shopping mall operated and managed by a single entity in a top-down approach. To some extent commercial streets and malls are competing for consumers in the same way, therefore they both should respect similar principles and rules in the market economy. It is necessary to introduce modern retail business knowledge into the revitalization process.

Achieve Creative Rental Policy and Retail Mix

The current uniform rental policy for all stores in Nanhou street is neither scientific in theory nor effective in practice. One drawback of uniform rent policy is that tenants and landlords do not share the market risks and rewards. Even worse, in a long-term lease scenario tenants and landlords may be on the opposite side of the deal. If the market goes up, the landlord will suffer from the loss of a potential higher rent. If the market goes down, a landlord may charge a tenant too much rent upfront, which may result in relocating or closing of stores. In either case, the landlord has no incentive to improve the situation because they do not benefit from such an intervention.
One common observation in modern shopping centers is that stores of different kinds pay different rents to landlord are. Rent discrimination distinguishes stores with different externalities and different contributions to the shopping center as a whole. For example, department store with special quality can attract shoppers into the mall at the first place and hence pay less. Retail kiosks benefit from the crowds but cannot be an attraction at all and hence pay more. To be more specific, many shopping centers practice a combination rent policy—the combination of a base rent and a percentage rent related to sales performance. When the tenants pay a percentage of the gross sales to the landlord, the landlord’s goal is to maximize the performances of all the stores. The landlord will have incentive to take more planning, management and marketing responsibilities for all the stores on the whole street. Such a creative rental policy will keep the landowners’ interest aligned with the tenants’. The rent discrimination is also instrumental to achieving a better store mix. For example, rents can be set lower for stores with positive externalities and higher for stores with zero or negative externalities.

Store mix is another major concern in shopping center management. The successful store mix should provide a variety of product choices in terms of types and prices tailored to meet consumers of different tastes and income. For Nanhou street, the stores should gather in a historical location not to compete on cost but on product differentiation. Products from different stores can be related so as to have a single consistent branding theme and message. However, they should be distinguishable with special quality or design from one another. Many antique streets in China fail to attract consumers because there are too many stores selling identical products that are substitutable.

The introduction of modern management knowledge in revitalization will be beneficial to local merchants and developer. As a result of successful economic revival, the local government can achieve its political and economic goals.
Case Study—Chengdu Jinli Traditional Commercial Street

Jinli commercial street in Chengdu is a good example of applying modern shopping center management knowledge in revitalization. During 2001 and 2004 Jinli street was transformed from a residential alley into a commercial street with traditional characteristics. It attracted thousands of visitors to that area and achieved great economic success.

The owner and manager of Jinli street attributed its economic success to management. All the stores in Jinli street are only for rent so the owner can have a strong control over the tenants, which helps build a strong image of the commercial street. The retail mix is reasonable and similar to modern shopping centers. Out of all the stores, the retail occupies 56%, restaurant 16%, entertainment 18% and others 10%. Jinli street has set up a strict criteria for tenants selection. Rent discounts and similar beneficial terms are provided for anchor stores that draw visitors to the street. Each store is ensured to have some products and services with special quality and contributions to the whole commercial street therefore the internal competition among different tenants are avoided.

The rent in Jinli street is not set only proportional to store area, but also according to store types. The street has an evaluation mechanism for the services each store performs. The evaluation results are related to the rental terms each store can obtain. For example, stores that perform badly with poor services will be punished by additional rent penalty or even driven out of the street. On the other hand, the good stores can enjoy discounts on rents.

Figure 5-3 Bars and teahouses at Jinli street
Figure 5-4 Crafts shown at Jinli street
5.2.3 Incorporate Public Participation into the Planning Process

Figure 5-5 Housing renovated by individual residents before revitalization in SFQX district, Fuzhou (A)

Figure 5-6 Housing renovated by individual residents before revitalization in SFQX district, Fuzhou (B)
The top-down planning approach completely wipes out the potential inputs from residents and merchants who will use and interact with the planning outcome eventually. Many policy and design problems with the plan—such as the uniform rent, overscale store design and lack of plantation—can be potentially avoided or improved by public participation. More importantly, participation stimulates creativity from individuals and entrepreneurs. Before the revitalization there were a few renovation and construction works by individual property owners in SFQX district. These were built by using the same material and the timber construction method.

They were in harmony with the historical context. However, creativity of individual property owners was actually discouraged by the 2007 plan and disappeared after revitalization. A successful revitalization requires a partnership between public sector, business sector and community residents. The partnership structure should allow their inputs in the decision making process, which can potentially alleviate the conflicting interests between different stakeholders.

*Achieve a Fair Planning Process through Tax Policy Reform*

The lack of community involvement in the planning process creates systemic social inequity. However, this problem cannot be solved without first understanding the picture of municipal finance in China. The absence of an effective property tax system has completely influenced the structure of municipal financial, and it has fundamentally determined the government intervention approach. Without an effective property tax system, the local government can hardly capture the property value appreciation caused by public expenditure. Then the question arises who should benefit from the public investment in revitalization process. It is arguable that tenants and landlords in the historical district enjoy the benefits from public investment because the land and the majority of the property belong to the government or the public, and the local residents have little contribution to the property appreciation in revitalization.
Under such political and fiscal context, the easiest and current way to deal with this issue is that government will relocate all the residents at its own expenses, redevelop the whole area, and keep most of the uses public as a way to make it "fair". Many problems arise with this seemingly "fair" approach.

1) First, it tends to over-demolish buildings than to renovate buildings, which causes a great waste of architectural resources. In order to justify the relocation, planners tend to designate a building as structurally unsafe so as to relocate the residents. Otherwise, renovation cannot be a good reason to move people out of their houses permanently.

2) Second, it tends to over-plan public uses than residential uses. Privatization of land uses and properties are politically controversial. Therefore in order to justify the relocation and redevelopment, the revitalization project will keep most of the redeveloped area as public uses, which can be irrational in some cases. Because of less residential uses, the government will have to rely on the revenue from retail business—almost the only public use that generates revenue. The government will have to set a higher price or rent to compensate for the loss of other revenue generating uses. The higher initial price or rent will be a great obstacle to retail business revitalization.

To sum up, without introducing an effective and creative tax mechanism that help capitalize on the public investment, the conflicts between government and local community can hardly be resolved but only distorted towards a revitalization failure. Incorporating public participation certainly empowers local community. With the effective tax reform, the local government will have better alternatives in revitalization and redevelopment projects, and reduce the political risk in carrying on large-scale relocation.

5.3 Challenges
The main challenges of implementing the above recommendations should be acknowledged as the following. First of all, the lack of entrepreneurship spirit, knowledge and expertise become an obstacle to applying market rules to tourism development, creative industry development and retail business management. China has been ruled under a planned economy for such a long period. Even after the economic reform in 1978 the government economy has played a great influence on the society and the market has not yet fully developed across industries all over the country. There is a lack of market consciousness in government related activities. By the same token there is a lack of experts and labors in entrepreneurship development.

Second, the centralized political system has been set that the accountability of local government for local community is not present in the system, which is an obstacle to public participation. The political power is centralized in central government and each tier of government reports to the next tier above it. Local citizens have not been empowered to influence the action of local government. It might take a long time to change the current situation because there is no tradition of public participation in China. Moreover, the lack of enforcement of laws and regulations further exacerbated the situation.
Appendix A Interview Outline

Interviewees were asked to discuss:

1. How did they get involved and how did they contribute to the planning and implementation processes?
2. How did the street revitalization plan address the concerns of various stakeholders?
3. What are the general impacts of the project so far, and what are the problems (if any)?
4. To what degree the plan was realized and why are some factors missing in the implementation (if any)?
5. What could have been improved regarding the plan and implementation?
Table Index

Table 2-1 Summary of impacts of different models and players’ choice .................. 20
Table 2-2 Analytical Framework .............................................................................................................. 21
Table 5-1 Assessment of Nanhou Project ................................................................................................ 56

Figure Index

Photographs were taken by the author except those are specified with other sources

Figure 2-1 Bird view of Shanghai Xintiandi ................................................................................. 9
Figure 2-2 Shanghai Xintiandi Shikumen alley ............................................................................ 9
Figure 2-3 Hangzhou Xintiandi ........................................................................................................... 9
Figure 2-4 Nanjing 1912 district ........................................................................................................ 9
Figure 2-5 Tianjin ancient cultural street ......................................................................................... 10
Figure 2-6 Chengdu Wenshufang ancient street .......................................................................... 10
Figure 3-1 Location of Fuzhou city in China .............................................................................. 23
Figure 3-2 Sanfang Qixiang district in Old Fuzhou City ................................................................... 23
Figure 3-3 Aerial photo of SangfangqixiangDistrict ...................................................................... 24
Figure 3-4 A bird view of Sanfang Qixiang historical district. Large-scale modern constructions block the view to Wu hill, and have been a threat to historical preservation. Nanhou Street in yellow dash line ............................................................................... 25
Figure 3-5 Architectural quality survey of Nanhou street, 56% in poor quality ......... 26
Figure 3-6 Street view of Nanhou street. Lantern, funeral appliance, and low-end cloth shops ........................................................................................................................................ 26
Figure 3-7 Lead planner Prof. Jie ZHANG visiting a courtyard at Nanhou street. .... 30
Figure 3-8 Planning team measuring street dimension on site ................................................. 30
Figure 4-1 Linking Nanhou Street with other historical urban elements ................................. 31
Figure 4-2 Bird view of streetscape in 2006 ............................................................................... 32
Figure 4-3 Bird view of streetscape in 2010 ............................................................................... 32
Figure 4-4 Ancient walls in this area are made of earth and seashells .................... 34
Figure 4-5 Four different types of architectural foundations ........................................ 34
Figure 4-6 Alley Gate in 2006 ........................................................................................................ 35
Figure 4-7 Alley Gate reconstructed in 2010 ............................................................................. 35
Figure 4-8 Courtyard entrance protected and showcased on street ........................................ 35
Figure 4-9 Nanhou Street Revitalization Masterplan .................................................................. 36
Figure 4-10 Building Conservation Plan ................................................................................. 38
Figure 4-11 Land Use Plan ........................................................................................................... 38
Figure 4-12 Building conservation strategies shown in elevation ............................................. 38
Figure 4-13 Mix-use proposals in the 2007 plan ......................................................................... 40
Figure 4-14 Vertical and horizontal mix-use proposals in section ............................................... 40
Figure 4-15 Existing street section in 2006 ............................................................................. 41
Figure 4-16 Proposed street section in 2007 plan ..................................................................... 41
Figure 4-17 Nanhou streetscape in 2006 ................................................................................. 42
Figure 4-18 Streetscape in 2010 ................................................................................................ 42
Figure 4-19 Combination of concrete structure and timber decorations (Source: Nanhou Street Revitalization Plan) .................................................................................................................. 43
Figure 4-20 New timber façade design ..................................................................................... 43
Figure 4-21 A study on traditional spatial arrangements in the plan .......................................... 44
Figure 4-22 Courtyards reconstructed after revitalization in aerial photo .................................. 44
Figure 4-23 New alleys (in red) and green spaces (in green) planned in Sanfang Qixiang district ............................................................................................................................................... 45
Figure 4-24 Aerial photo of Nanhou street before 2006 ............................................................. 47
Figure 4-25 Aerial photo of Nanhou street after 2009 ............................................................... 47
Figure 4-26 Trees in Nanhou Street before revitalization ............................................................ 48
Figure 4-27 Recently planted trees in Nanhou Street after revitalization ................................... 48
Figure 4-28 Lantern festival night at Nanhou Street ................................................................ 49
Figure 4-29 Lantern festival decorations at Nanhou street ......................................................... 49
Figure 4-30 Bilingual tourism information panel developed after revitalization .... 50
Figure 4-31 Bilingual snack menu developed after revitalization ......................... 50
Figure 4-32 Lantern shops on Nanhou street before revitalization ...................... 51
Figure 4-33 Lantern making in courtyard with no lantern shops on street after revitalization ........................................................................................................... 51
Figure 4-34 Peaceful life in courtyard housing before revitalization .................. 53
Figure 4-35 Protest against relocation forced by local government ..................... 53
Figure 5-1 Logo developed for Faneuil Hall Marketplace ..................................... 59
Figure 5-2 Street performance on Faneuil Hall Marketplace .............................. 59
Figure 5-3 Bars and teahouses at Jinli street Figure 5-4 Crafts shown at Jinli street ............................................................................................................................................... 62
Figure 5-5 Housing renovated by individual residents before revitalization in SFQX district, Fuzhou (A) ..................................................................................................................... 63
Figure 5-6 Housing renovated by individual residents before revitalization in SFQX district, Fuzhou (B) .................................................................................................................... 63
References