

Article

Research on the Conservation Methods of Qu Street's Living Heritage from the Perspective of Life Continuity

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Abstract: In the current context of urban development transformation and the gradual decline of historic and cultural districts, new demands have been raised for the preservation of such districts. The question of how to effectively safeguard historically and culturally significant districts, imbued with the vibrant essence of indigenous life, has become a topic worthy of contemplation. This paper takes the historical and cultural district of Leizhou Qu Street as a case study, using the concept of continuity of life as its focal point. Employing methods such as on-site observation, questionnaire surveys, and case studies, this paper investigates and evaluates the core community through identification and collaboration, and proposes corresponding preservation strategies and subsequent maintenance approaches. In doing so, the paper aims to achieve community identity, cultural heritage transmission, and the continuity of life. The findings reveal that the method of protecting the living heritage through continuity of life is applicable to historically and culturally significant districts that still thrive with the vibrancy of daily life, and this method can be effectively implemented. This research deepens our understanding of the concept of living heritage preservation in historic and cultural districts, further substantiating and implementing the principle of continuity of life in their preservation. The study also aims to provide valuable insights and references for the preservation of similar heritage sites.



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Keywords: life continuity; historical and cultural neighborhoods; living heritage; conservation; core community; Qu Street in Leizhou Ancient City

1. Introduction

The modern concept of cultural heritage protection has been developed since the early 20th century and gradually developed into an ideological system of cultural relics protection based on the real existence of material remains [1]. Authenticity and integrity have become very important principles in cultural heritage protection [2]. The initial protection of cultural heritage focused on the overall protection of heritage, focusing on the preservation of materials and structures [3]. At the end of the 20th century, cultural diversity was proposed, and the original form and style were no longer the only considerations [4]. The inheritance of culture and spirit was also of great significance [5]. Understanding the value of cultural heritage became the key to judging authenticity [6]. However, in practice, the focus of heritage protection is still on material, and the use of adaptive use [7]. This kind of protection method focuses more on the protection of static heritage, and the focus is not on the continuation of the vitality of heritage, which has led to the phenomenon of low community recognition, and the separation of the past and future of heritage in the protection, renewal and utilization of many heritages [8]. With the introduction of the concept of living heritage, a method of protecting living heritage that emphasizes continuity has gradually been constructed, as shown in Figure 1. The distinguishing feature of this

study lies in its exploration of the preservation methods for historic and cultural districts as living heritage, from the perspective of sustaining the vitality of cultural heritage. The paper begins by elucidating the theoretical framework and methodologies of the continuity-based preservation of living heritage. Subsequently, it presents a empirical case study of the preservation of Leizhou Qu Street as an exemplification of the research. The findings of the study demonstrate that the concept of continuity of life in living heritage preservation is applicable to the protection of historic and cultural districts, and the preservation methods derived from this concept are operationally feasible. This method of heritage protection pays more attention to the use function of heritage and the connection between heritage and community, providing different ideas for solving the protection and development issues of heritage, and becoming a supplement to previous protection methods [9].

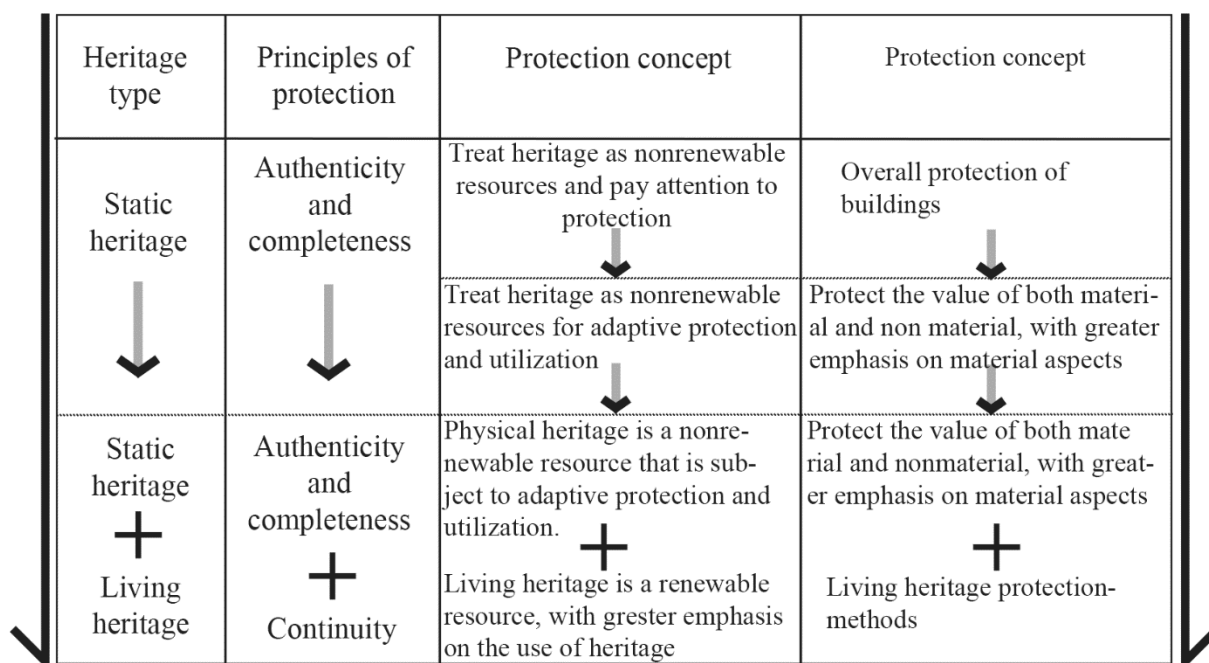


Figure 1. Evolution of living heritage protection methods.

Before understanding living heritage, it is necessary to make a conceptual distinction from “static heritage”, which refers to heritage that has lost its original and historical functions; “Living heritage” refers to heritage that still retains its original or historical use functions [10]. In the context of Chinese cultural heritage protection, the term “historical and cultural district” refers to an area with a certain scale that has been approved and announced by the people’s government of a province, autonomous region, or municipality directly under the central government, and has a rich collection of preserved cultural relics, concentrated historical buildings, and can fully and truly reflect the traditional historical pattern and style [11]. In fact, the conservation practices of historical and cultural blocks emerged in Europe. In 1987, the “Washington Charter” included historic towns and urban areas within the scope of heritage conservation, expanding the protection to encompass both tangible and intangible aspects that indicate the character of the neighborhoods.

Leizhou City has been recognized as a national famous historical and cultural city in 1994, it is currently the only county-level historical and cultural city in Guangdong Province, following the completion of the “Historical and Cultural City Protection Plan of Leizhou City” in 2018 and the recognition of Qu Street as a historical and cultural neighborhood in Guangdong Province in 2021. In September 2021, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the “Opinions on Strengthening the Protection and Inheritance of Historical and Cultural Heritage in Urban and Rural Construction”. The “Opinions” emphasize the significance of “protecting, utilizing, and inheriting historical

and cultural heritage” in maintaining historical continuity, promoting high-quality urban and rural development, strengthening cultural confidence, and building a culturally strong socialist country. It elevated the protection and revitalization of cultural heritage, including historical and cultural neighborhoods, to the national cultural strategic level. In 2022, the Protection Plan of Qujie Provincial Historical and Cultural Block in Leizhou City was completed, and the rejuvenation and transformation of Qu Street are eagerly anticipated.

2. Literature Review

International attention to “living heritage” began in the 1980s [12]. In 1982, the concept of approximate living heritage first appeared in the Florence Charter adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and historic gardens are known as “living monuments [13]”. In 2003, the International Center for the Protection and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) proposed the concept of living heritage as an independent heritage type, and began to launch the Living Heritage Sites Program (IHSP) to explore protection methods for this unique form of heritage [14]. In 2009, ICCROM first defined living heritage in the Living Heritage Approach Handbook as “heritage, traditions, and practices created and still used by different authors in history, or heritage sites with core communities located in or near them” [15]. Since 2011, ICCROM has renamed the living heritage project “People-Centered Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage”, and has gradually established a framework for the methodology of living heritage [16]. In 2015, ICCROM attempted to describe the characteristics of living architectural heritage, namely, “heritage characterized by the continuity of its original function or originally established purpose. Such heritage maintains the continuity of community ties, continues to evolve in tangible and intangible manifestations, and is protected through traditional or established methods” [12], accurately highlighting the connotation of living heritage, as shown in Figure 2. In foreign countries, the International Center for the Restoration and Protection of Cultural Property (ICCROM) launched the “Living Heritage Sites Program” (LHSP) in 2003, aiming to explore the living attributes behind heritage and improve understanding of the concept of living heritage in the field of heritage protection and management. In 2009, ICCROM first proposed the concept of living heritage in the “Handbook of Protection Methods for Living Heritage” and actively promoted research and practice in this area, gradually exploring relevant protection methods [17]. In China, regarding the protection of living heritage, Wang Lei summarized four protection principles: authenticity, integrity, continuity, people-oriented principle, and three major protection contents: human, material, and intangible elements [18]. In the live heritage site project initiated by ICCROM in 2003, it was also mentioned that “continuity is the key to describing the characteristics of live heritage”, and it was proposed that “protection should continue cultural significance through the continuation of heritage functions and spaces”. This viewpoint was also reconfirmed in the Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted in the same year. The continuity of original functions has become an important feature in the protection of living heritage [19]. The three major principles for the protection of Chinese historical and cultural blocks include authenticity, integrity, and the continuity of local social life [20]. Among them, authenticity and integrity are the universal principles for the protection of cultural heritage internationally. The concept of continuity of life is a living heritage protection concept with Chinese characteristics proposed by Chinese scholars. It first appeared in seminars on the protection of historical and cultural reserves and historical blocks in the late 20th century, and gradually became fixed with the establishment of the legal concept of historical and cultural blocks. The practical cases of the continuity of life in historical and cultural neighborhoods in China include Chen Yue and others who evaluated the Renfengli, Nanhexia, and Dongguan neighborhoods in Yangzhou from the perspective of continuity of life, and proposed renewal strategies oriented towards continuity of life from three scales: city, neighborhood, and residents [21].

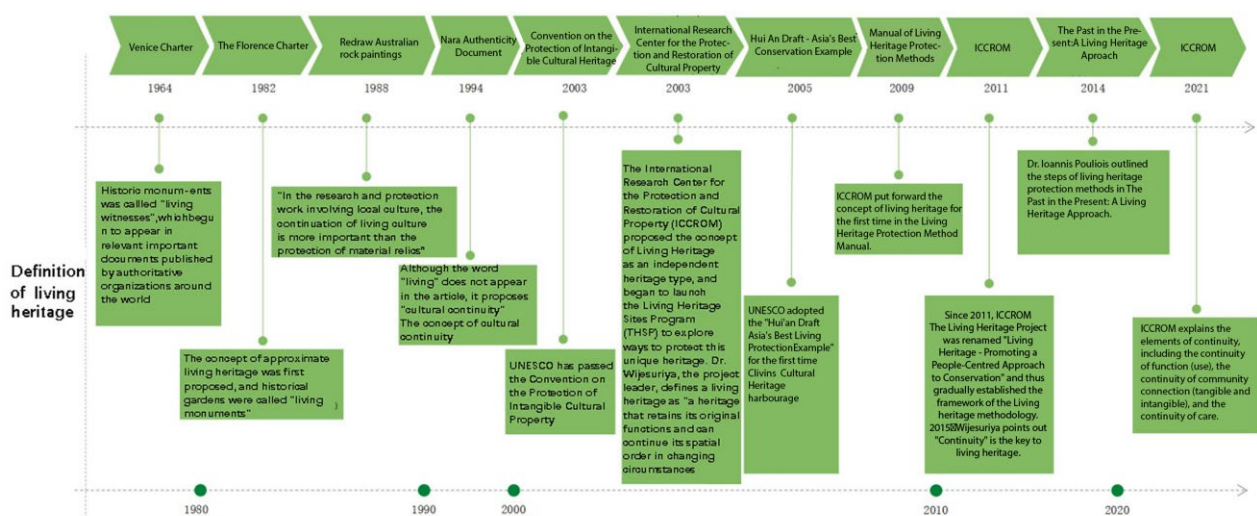


Figure 2. Development history of living heritage protection methods.

The research on the protection of historical and cultural blocks after the 21st century has shifted from simple architectural protection to the protection of the entire block. Internationally, the protection and renewal of historical and cultural streets have gone through a process from single protection to overall care, from material protection to intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing the combination of protection and cultural development of historical and cultural streets [22]. In the context of Chinese cultural heritage protection, historical and cultural blocks belong to one of the three basic levels of protection for historical and cultural cities [23]. In 1993, China's drafted "Regulations on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Cities" introduced the concept of historical and cultural protection areas. This concept was further developed in the "Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics" promulgated in 2002, establishing a three-tier protection management framework consisting of immovable cultural relics, historical and cultural neighborhoods, and historical and cultural cities. In 2006, the "Regulations on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns, and Villages" defined historical and cultural neighborhoods as regions that are "approved and announced by the people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government, and have a particularly rich collection of preserved cultural relics, concentrated historical buildings, can reflect the traditional layout and historical features in a relatively complete and authentic manner, and have a certain scale." It emphasized the principles of "maintaining and continuing the traditional layout and historical features" and preserving the "authenticity and integrity" of the neighborhood. Historical buildings within the core protection area of historical and cultural neighborhoods should maintain their original height, volume, external appearance, and colors. As valuable urban heritage that bears witness to the historical development of a region and the continuity of urban life, the conservation process of historical and cultural neighborhoods can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage focused on the protection of individual buildings and relics within the designated conservation area. In the second stage, the scope of conservation expanded from individual buildings to the entire neighborhood, with a shift in focus from merely preserving the external appearance of the neighborhood to its revitalization and development. As conservation research deepened, the third stage incorporated the conservation of historical and cultural neighborhoods into the consideration of overall urban development. Many scholars began exploring conservation methods for historical and cultural neighborhoods from multidisciplinary perspectives. As an organic component of the city, the preservation of historical and cultural neighborhoods requires the collective participation of various stakeholders, including the government, the public, and businesses, to achieve better conservation outcomes. Historical and cultural neighborhoods include ancient urban areas, cultural heritage neighborhoods,

folk neighborhoods, art districts, and other types. At present, the protection methods for historical and cultural blocks include legal protection, maintenance and restoration, planning and management, community participation, education and publicity, reasonable development, and international cooperation and exchange. Living historical blocks with continuity of life characteristics are more suitable for the protection of historical and cultural blocks with core communities as the main participants. By protecting in this way, the protection and sustainable development of historical and cultural blocks can be achieved, making them important components of urban culture.

3. Methods and Cases

The so-called living heritage protection refers to a bottom-up approach to heritage management based on the heritage community, with the primary goal of maintaining the continuity of the core community and heritage connections [24]. The continuity of heritage includes two aspects, the connection between function and space, and the continuity of traditional care and community participation, which together ensure the continuity of cultural values of heritage [25]. Living heritage is considered as a “renewable resource”, and “continuity” is the key to expressing the characteristics of living heritage [16]. The object of living heritage protection is a cultural entity that encompasses tangible space and intangible traditions [14]. It focuses on the relationship between people and heritage, and affirms the subjective value of those who use heritage [26]. The process of protecting living heritage emphasizes community participation [27], and relevant researchers divide communities into “core community” and “broader community” [28]. Core communities and continuity are at the core of the living heritage conservation approach [24]. The core community is an integral part of the heritage, which is significantly different from the community groups (peripheral communities) that participate in heritage life [29]. The protection and renewal process of living heritage is based on the recognition and acceptance of the core community, seeking an appropriate balance between heritage use (community use) and heritage protection (conducted by protection professionals) [28]. The core community plays a major role in heritage protection. As a supplement to contemporary heritage management methods, living heritage protection methods cannot completely replace the principles of authenticity and integrity of heritage protection, but they pay more attention to maintaining the continuity of heritage values and maintaining the original connection between core communities and heritage [30]. Some scholars believe that the focus of the protection method for living heritage is no longer on protecting (tangible) materials, but on maintaining the (intangible) connection between communities and heritage, even if these materials may be damaged [31].

3.1. Protection Method

In 2014, Dr. Prius outlined the steps of a living heritage protection method in his book “The Past in the Presentation: A Living Heritage Approach”. The workflow can be divided into several steps, such as identification, establishment of cooperation, heritage investigation and evaluation, decision-making and implementation of actions, and later maintenance and management [28], as shown in Figure 3. Four fundamental principles underlie the identification of living heritage. Continuity of function: The utilization or original purpose becomes an essential constituent of heritage, fostering a profound bond and linkage between individuals and heritage. Continuity of community connectivity: The core community sustains an inherent connection with the heritage and possesses a greater entitlement to modify it. Cultural continuity (tangible and intangible): While preserving the functional continuity, tangible alterations may encompass new constructions, expansions, or renovations of edifices to enhance utility and vitality. Continuity of care: The enduring maintenance and management by the core community [9]. The core community is a cultural group living in the heritage space, which has a direct and continuous connection with the heritage. The heritage has a special significance for them [32]. They are an integral part of the heritage and play an important role in the cultural interpretation

of the heritage [33]. Establish cooperation with the core community, with the goal of establishing a core community cooperation model and creating common protection goals and expectations [34].

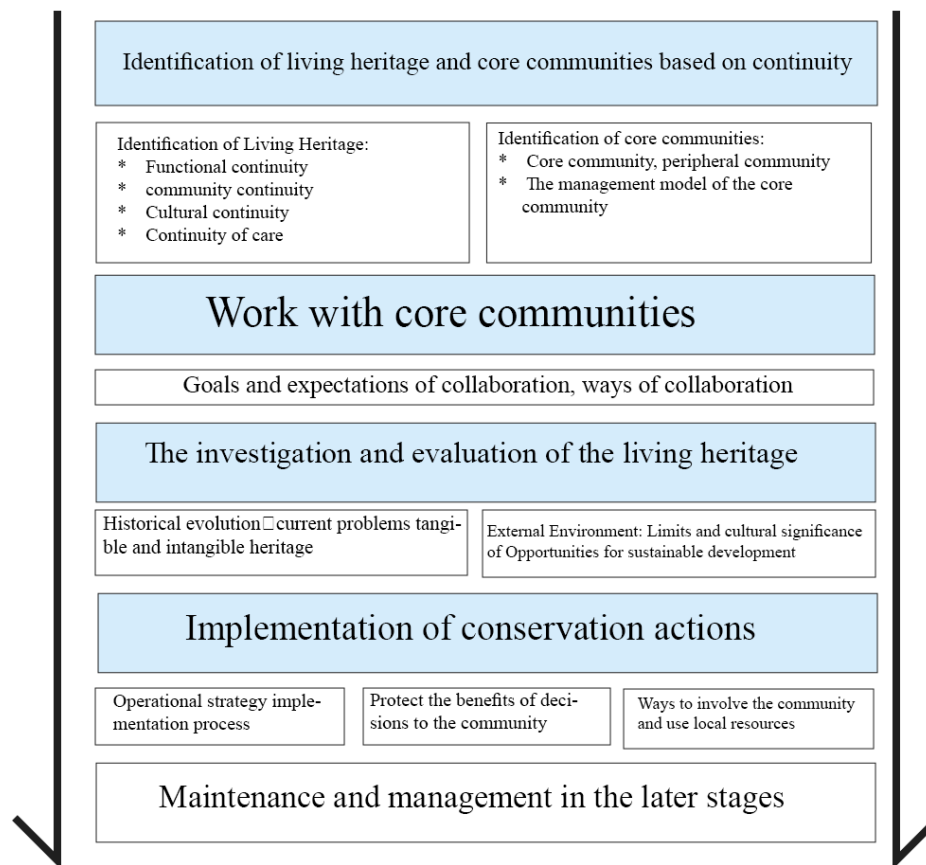


Figure 3. Workflow of living heritage protection.

3.2. Case Background

Leizhou City is a county-level city of Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province. The ancient city of Leizhou is located in the middle part of the Leizhou Peninsula, as illustrated in Figure 4. From the Western Han Dynasty (111 BC) until the early years of the Republic of China (1913 AD), Leizhou City perpetually served as the political, economic, and cultural hub of the Leizhou Peninsula. Thus far, Leizhou still retains the typical square city, the historical city site of the cross street and the ancient city pattern of the city extension box. The ancient city is not only intact, but also rich in intangible cultural heritage. The Qujie Historical and Cultural Block is located in the ancient city unit in the city center of Leizhou. Difficulties and challenges in the protection of Qujie historical and cultural district: maintaining the continuity of the district; and making rational use of the material and intangible cultural heritage in sustainable protection and development. In 2021, the Leizhou Development and Reform Bureau approved the Feasibility Study Report on the Infrastructure Renovation Project of Old Residential Areas in the City Center of Leizhou. The reconstruction of the demonstration section of Qu Street Historical and Cultural Block in Leizhou City has a total investment of CNY 146,812,500, mainly including the protection and repair of the buildings in the block in Qu Street demonstration section, the upgrading and improvement of the block style, to protect and inherit the history and culture of Leizhou Qu Street, and build a famous historical and cultural city of Leizhou City.

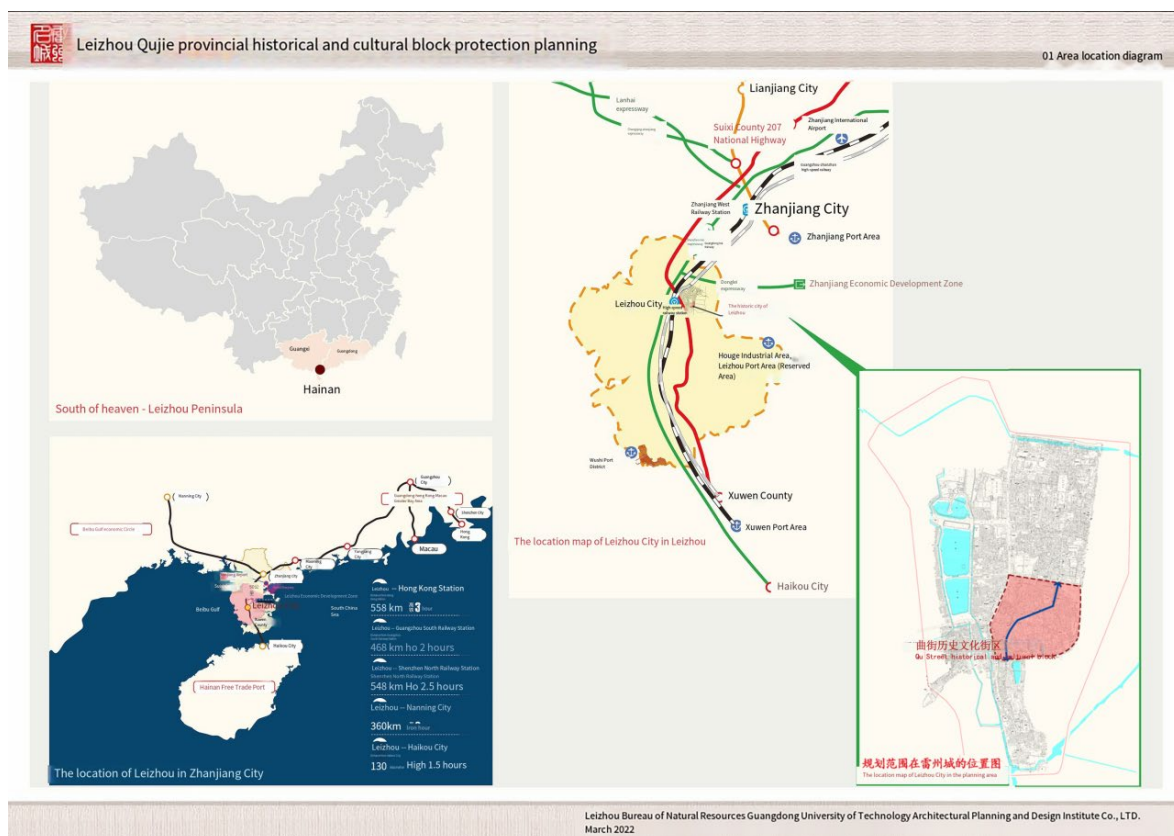


Figure 4. Map of Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District.

3.3. Current Situation

Leiqian Qu Street is a historical and cultural block integrating folk custom blocks and the ancient urban area, covering 38.16 hectares. It is located in the ancient urban area south of the center of Leiqian City, as shown in Figure 4. It preserves the ancient buildings and modern arcade buildings with history, culture, art, science and social values, showing the historical evolution and unique architectural style of Leiqian City, in addition to the native life of the neighborhood, preserving the traditional lifestyle, handicrafts and folk culture. Qu Street, an arcade commercial street, spans approximately 842 m in length, with a width ranging from 4 to 6 m. The architectural facades encompass diverse styles, including Chinese traditional residential aesthetics, a fusion of European-Asian Renaissance elements, and a distinct amalgamation of Chinese and Western characteristics, encapsulating the “Leiqian Southeast Asia” style. The block is further subdivided into several alleys, adhering to a traditional layout of square-shaped houses. However, as urban development shifted focus elsewhere, the progression of the ancient city came to a standstill, resulting in the deterioration and collapse of structures. The advent of unauthorized and modern constructions has inflicted certain levels of damage upon the authentic neighborhood ambiance, necessitating urgent systematic preservation and revitalization efforts. Presently, the Qujie Historical and Cultural District is home to four provincial-level cultural relics, six county-level cultural relics, and twenty-one historical buildings. Additionally, Leiqian City boasts an exceptional abundance of intangible cultural heritage, comprising a total of 183 items and 13 categories, including three national intangible heritage items, as shown in Figure 5.

Cultural Preservation Units and Historic Buildings in Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District			
Protection Level		Quantity	Content
Cultural Security Unit	Provincial	4	ZhenWu Hall, Fu Bo Temple, Three Yuan Palace
	Zhanjiang Municipal	3	Observer Di, Six Ancestral Hall, Ling Gang Temple
	Leizhou County Level	3	Xian Cheng Guild Hall, Chang Ming Tower, Ma Pao Quan
Historical Buildings		21	Zansi Di, Pan Zuo Di, Deji, Tripod/Tsinghua, Xianglan Dwelling house, Xiuji Xuan, Chu Jun Fast, Ancient Folk Housesin Song Zhai Lane, Ningxi, Youna, Shanbao, Fengde, Former Residence of Wen Zhaoxiang, Lingshan Li Ancient House, Chengxing Library, Wu Hua's Former Residence, Xiaolian Di, Xifu/Xichun, Wujia, Tree De, Lingshan Ancient House

(a)

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Leizhou City		
Protection	Quantity	Content
National Level	3	Leizhou Stone Dog, Leizhou Song, Leizhou Opera
Provincial Level	10	Leizhou Music, Girls' Song, Leizhou Stone Dog Belief, Leizhou Kite Festival, Leizhou Pu Weaving Technique, Wushi Centipede Dance, Leizu Worship, Shentang People's Dragon Dance, Leizhou Grey Sculpture, Leizhou South Gate Stilt Dragon Dance
Zhanjiang Municipal Level	8	Crossing the Fire Sea, Thorn Bed, Wearing Lings, Quicksand Pearl Making Techniques, Leizhou Dialect, Dragon Boat Custom on the Wushi Sea, Leizhou Ridge Ginger Dumpling Making Techniques, Leizhou Nanxing Tour Lantern
Leizhou County Level	162	The Story of Kou Zhun, the Legend of Su Dongpo, the Legend of Mazu, the Legend of Lei Zu, the Fresco of Lei Zhou, the Wood Carving of Lei Zhou, the Wood Carving of Lei Zhou, the Stone Carving of Lei Zhou, the Grey Sculpture of Lei Zhou, the Customs of Lei Zhou, Li Drama, the Lion Awakening in Lei Zhou, etc

(b)

Figure 5. (a). Cultural preservation units and historic buildings in Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District and (b) intangible cultural heritage in Leizhou City.

4. Case Analysis

This paper presents an examination of the protection practices utilized in Qujie historical and cultural district. By employing the method of living heritage protection, we delve into the processes of identifying and collaborating with the core community, as well as evaluating the current heritage conditions. This enables us to establish protection and renewal strategies that uphold community identity, cultural inheritance, and continuity in living heritage protection. Figure 6 illustrates the implementation and continuous management of these strategies.

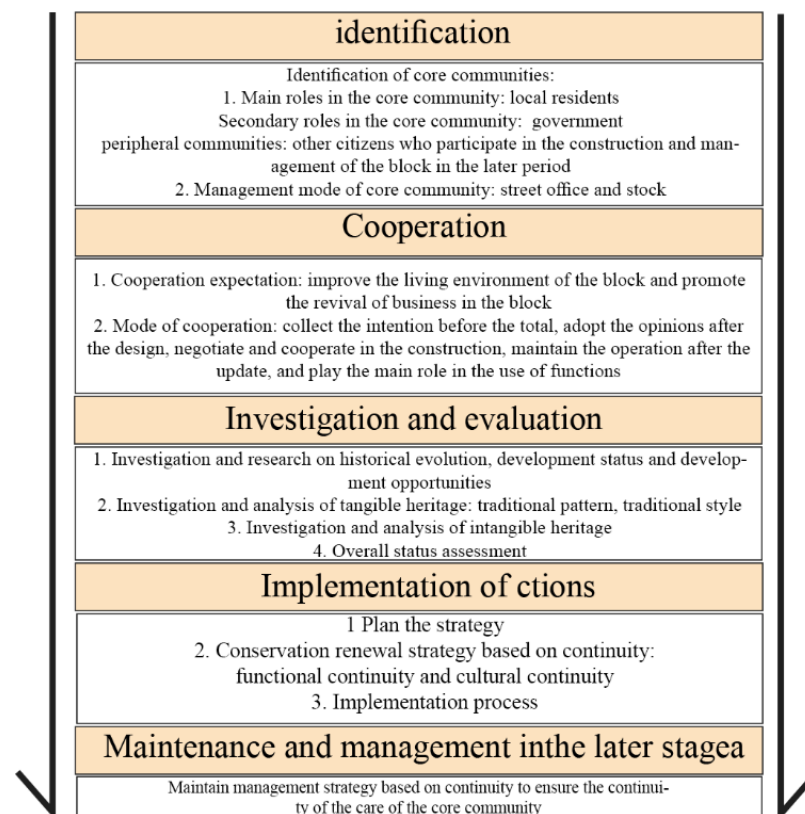


Figure 6. Workflow of living heritage protection method based on life.

4.1. Identification

4.1.1. Identification of Living Heritage

The Qujie Historical and Cultural District is a spontaneously formed commercial and residential area that has evolved since the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912AD) and the Republic of China (1912–1949AD), situated outside the ancient city of Leizhou. During the Early Ming Dynasty (1368–1435AD), the business district of Leizhou was located within the city. During the Kangxi period (1662–1722AD), customs offices were established near Guanbu Street, causing the commercial street to gradually shift southward to Nanting Street and Erqiao Street. As Qu Street was the only entryway for docks into the city, guild halls and inns gradually congregated in this area. In the late Qing and early Republic of China (1900–1912AD), industry and commerce flourished, and Southeast Asia-style arcade dwellings were erected on Qu Street. Nonetheless, the street remains primarily dominated by residences and commerce, with some long-standing brands and traditional retail businesses still operating. According to the identification criteria for living heritage, the Qujie Historical and Cultural District retains its original functions and sustains a relationship with the aboriginal community, thereby meeting the prerequisites for being designated a living heritage site.

4.1.2. Identification of the Core Communities

For the purpose of quantitative research, we selected a representative area of Qu Street's historical and cultural district. It is called a demonstration section, covering approximately 1.84 hectares, including Longhe Street, Nanting Street, and the southern section of Qu Street. According to statistics, there are 45 houses with collective property rights (hereinafter referred to as public houses) and 86 other private property houses (hereinafter referred to as private houses), a total of 131, as shown in Figure 7. The core community is identified based on the property owner of the house. Indigenous people who continue to reside in the house are the core community of the heritage. In addition, as a part of the government property rights, the owner not only has the responsibility of management and guardianship, but also has the right to use the public housing, which can be considered as a secondary role of the core community. Peripheral communities refer to other citizens who participate in the construction and operation of the block during the later stages. Experts and design teams with expertise in cultural heritage protection provide professional technical support to the core community and coordinate conflicts of interest in the protection work.

Upon identifying the core community, it is crucial to comprehend the working mechanism of the core community. The government, as the property owner of public housing, proposes protection and renewal viewpoints. The mechanism of residents' participation is reflected in the three communities in the demonstration section; namely, Xiahe Community, Sulou Community and Guanbu Community; which are under the management of the Ruicheng Street Office. In the community, the chief of the community manages the daily affairs, and the chief is usually held by the respected elders of the clan around the community. The management mechanisms at different levels ensure that residents in the block can participate in the affairs of the block while ensuring the voice of the core community in this protection and update.

4.1.3. Collaboration with Core Communities

The collaboration with the core community can be categorized into two distinct approaches. The first approach entails the steward directly providing preservation and renovation recommendations, primarily focusing on public spaces. The second approach involves the steward utilizing their influence to assist designers in gathering aspirations, primarily targeting private spaces.

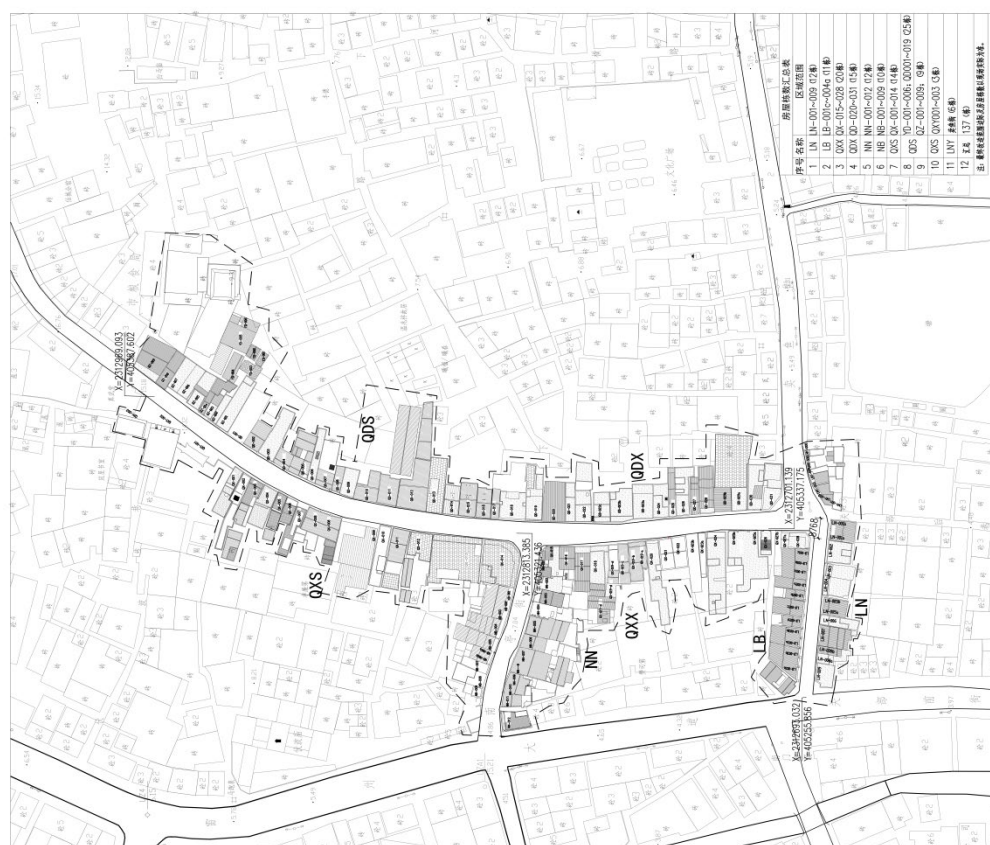
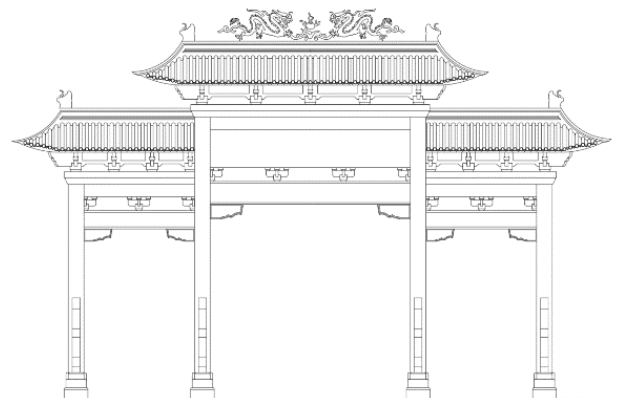


Figure 7. Overall situation of houses in the demonstration section of Qujie Historical and Cultural District.

The first approach is particularly exemplified in the restoration and renovation of the Fubo Temple entrance arch and the Zhenwu Opera stage. Initially, the steward organizes a gathering of resident representatives from the core community, inviting relevant stakeholders to participate in discussions regarding restoration plans, budget allocation, and implementation strategies. Core community residents are given the opportunity to express their perspectives on the restoration of the archway, offering specific suggestions and requirements. Additionally, the steward convenes a tea reception for elderly community members, predominantly aged between 65 and 85, where collective memories of the environmental ambience from the Fubo Temple main gate to the South Pavilion Street are recollected. Through the detailed descriptions provided by multiple elders, the design for the restored archway is determined as a four-pillared, three-bay, three-story structure crowned with a double-dragon-playing-pearl Xuanwu stone plaque (crafted from local stone in Leizhou) as shown in Figure 8a. Incorporating this information, the landscape at the entrance of the Fubo Temple is restored, encompassing features such as a land temple, ancient well, archway, and alleyways, ultimately culminating in a finalized plan after multiple iterations. Regarding the transformation of the Zhenwu opera stage and the creation of recreational spaces, the core community responsible for the Zhenwu Hall adopts the following mechanisms: the steward of Zhenwu Hall invites core community residents and other relevant stakeholders to participate. Community residents are encouraged to present their ideas for the renovation of the opera stage and the development of the courtyard space, including considerations for spatial arrangement, aesthetics, and supporting facilities. Through repeated feedback, a consensus is reached on a solution that satisfies the majority as shown in Figure 8b. Furthermore, the steward designates certain resident representatives as community liaisons, responsible for communication and negotiation with government departments, non-governmental organizations, as well as the project implementation team comprising design firms, construction companies, and

supervisory units. These liaisons are tasked with conveying the perspectives and demands of the core community, seeking cooperation and mutually agreeable solutions to transform and develop the opera stage and courtyard space, fulfilling the community's needs. The aforementioned examples highlight the mechanisms through which the core community actively engages in the decision-making process of preserving and revitalizing the living heritage of historical neighborhoods, ensuring their voices are heard and valued. This contributes to ensuring that preservation projects align with the expectations of the core community and motivates relevant stakeholders to take action in safeguarding essential public amenities within the historic and cultural neighborhood.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8. (a) Reconstruction design of the entrance archway of Fubo Temple based on collective memories of the elderly and (b) the scheme for the Xiwutang theater stage and courtyard at Zhenwu Hall, jointly negotiated by the government, the street office, the shareholders of the core community, and community representatives.

The second approach is primarily manifested through extensive surveys conducted to gather residents' opinions on the renovation. Prior to the planning of the protection and revitalization of the Qu Street historical and cultural block, a large-scale survey was conducted to determine residents' willingness and enthusiasm to participate in the renovation. During this survey process, the neighborhood office and steward leveraged their influence to assist in distributing questionnaires. Out of the 217 questionnaires collected from permanent residents of Leizhou Ancient City, the results revealed that when asked about their preferred living arrangements, 44% of residents expressed a preference for residing in new residences, 26% preferred newly constructed housing within the old city area, while only 25% expressed a willingness to continue living in their existing homes in the old city. Regarding opinions on the renovation of the ancient city, 36% of residents favored preserving the historic architecture with partial renovations, 23% supported preserving a limited number of distinctive buildings while updating the majority of the structures, and 21% were in favor of demolishing the ancient buildings. Only 12% of residents chose complete preservation of the ancient structures. It is evident that the majority of residents are dissatisfied with the current living conditions and the living environment, and they support the renovation and revitalization of the ancient city. In 2021, residents of the Xiahe Community within the Qu Street historical and cultural block spontaneously organized and completed the renovation of some community residences, indicating the residents' urgent desire to improve their current living conditions, as depicted in Figure 9.

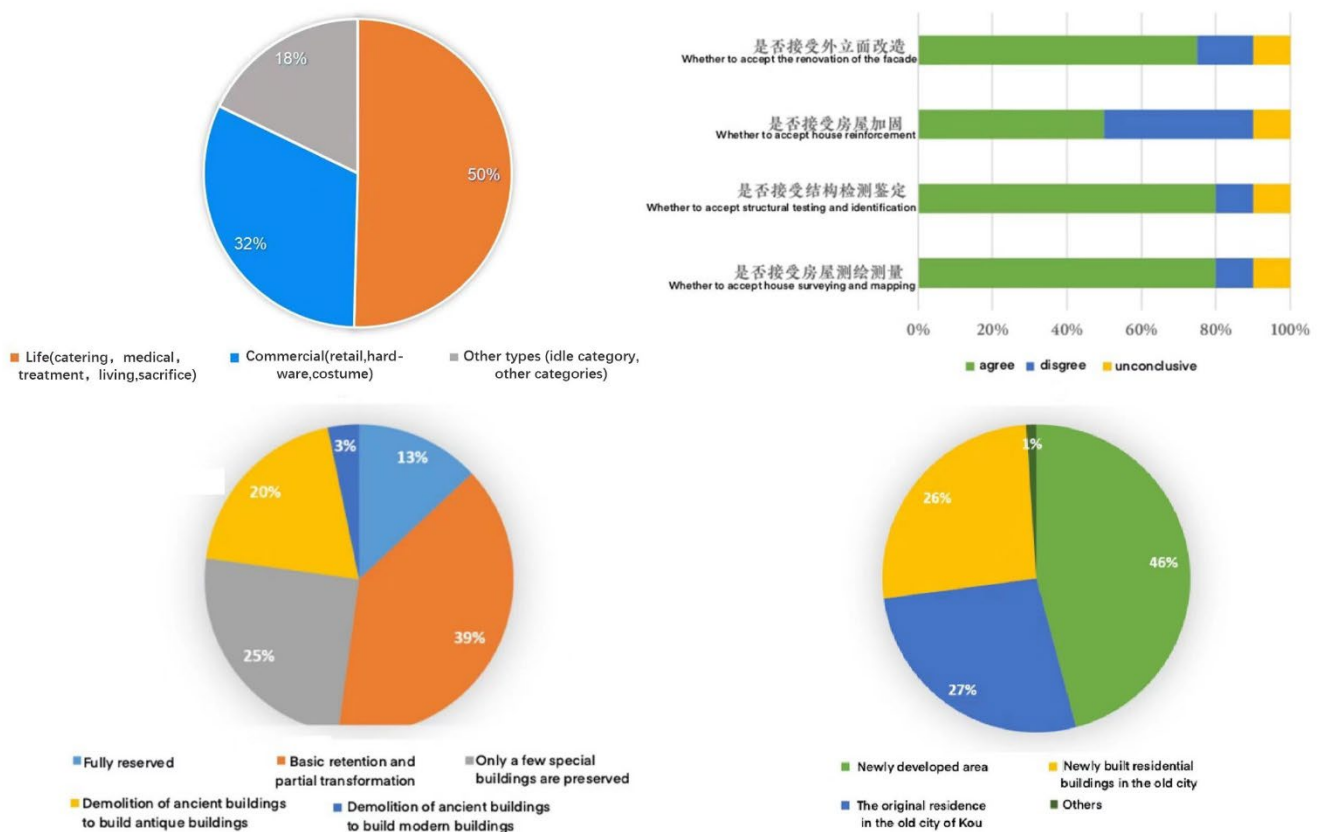


Figure 9. Qu Street demonstration section of living business status statistics and questionnaires.

After reaching an agreement with the residents' wishes, the Leizhou municipal government began overall planning for the protection and renewal of the block. After reaching a strategic development agreement with a third-party platform, they conducted preliminary investigations to understand the current situation information in the block and further determine the feasibility of the renewal and development, and reported the results to the government. The government will provide start-up funding after receiving a positive response. Afterwards, investigations, surveying, structural safety diagnosis, and the development of repair and reinforcement plans were carried out. Subsequently, experts and designers with knowledge of heritage protection intervened to adjust the design plan and develop conservation and renewal strategies based on government expectations and core community demands. In the process of conducting research and formulating plans in various stages, assistance is provided by the street office, community, and section chief. After listening to the opinions of residents, the design team develops a "one household, one file" renovation and update strategy and solicits the consent of the property owner. After reaching a consensus, entrust the construction unit and the supervision unit to supervise the construction (Figure 10). During this period, relevant publicity and mobilization work should also be carried out through the establishment of museums, exhibitions, and other means. Firstly, it is necessary to enhance everyone's awareness of the protection of local historical and cultural heritage, promote protection methods, and secondly, enhance everyone's confidence in the future development of the neighborhood, allowing everyone to support and consciously participate in the protection of heritage.

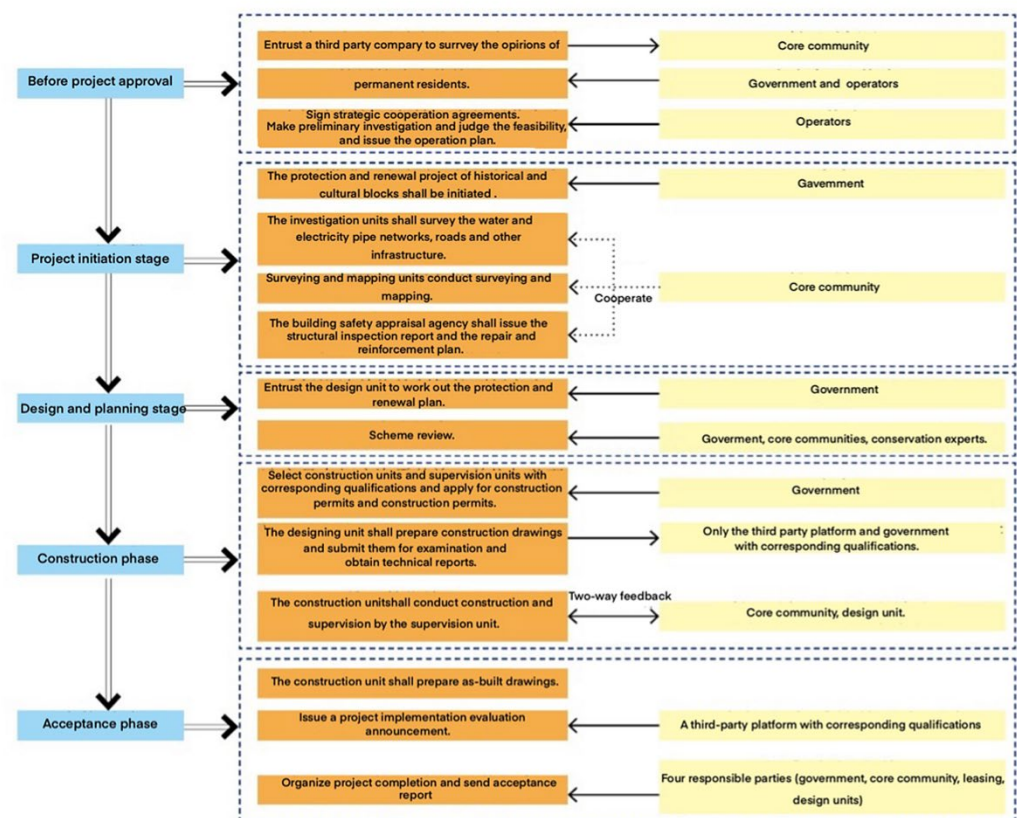


Figure 10. Implementation flow chart of Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District protection.

4.2. Investigation and Evaluation

4.2.1. Investigation and Analysis of Tangible Cultural Heritage

(1) Investigation and Analysis of Traditional Patterns

The Qu Street Historical and Cultural District, being the outer city area of the ancient city, follows a traditional layout comprising Qujie as the main axis, accompanied by several alleys on either side. The overall layout has been predominantly preserved. However, due to the high population density within the block, several typical issues persist: 1. The narrow streets and lanes, along with numerous dilapidated roads and disjointed road levels, hinder daily traffic and firefighting efforts. 2. The green space is limited, and there is a lack of public recreational areas. 3. The community services offered are insufficient in variety. 4. The living facilities are inadequate, such as an incomplete water and drainage network, an insufficient electricity and gas supply, and a deficiency in necessary sanitation facilities. The outdated state of the neighborhood infrastructure significantly impacts residents' quality of life, necessitating urgent improvement.

(2) Investigation and analysis of traditional styles and features of Qujie Street

The block houses a multitude of cultural protection units and historical buildings. Along Qujie Street, one can find a significant number of Southeast Asia arcade streets, characterized by a fusion of European and Southeast Asian architectural styles. This includes a blend of Chinese and Western Leizhou Southeast Asian styles, as well as a combination of European and Asian Renaissance styles. Traditional Chinese residential styles are also prevalent. However, certain issues persist in the block. Firstly, the preservation condition is poor. Many traditional architectural finishes are damaged and peeling off, while storefront signage is disorganized, detracting from the overall façade. Furthermore, numerous building structures pose significant safety hazards. Secondly, the styles and features of the new and old buildings are not harmonized. For instance, newly constructed and partially reconstructed buildings predominantly feature face bricks and metal windows and anti-

theft nets, whereas traditional buildings primarily showcase plastered and painted facades, along with wooden doors and windows.

4.2.2. Investigation and Analysis of Intangible Heritage

The Qujie Historical and Cultural Block boasts a wealth of diverse intangible cultural heritage resources, exemplified by various annual festivities such as the Yuanxiao Festival Temple Fair, the Dragon Boat Festival's "kite race", and the God's Birthday Fair in the community, as depicted in Figure 11. This block also embraces unique folk beliefs, including the "Stone Dog" culture, "Thunder God" culture, Mazu culture, and Human God culture, which have gained international recognition and appeal. The region is renowned for its traditional craftsmanship, such as the Leizhou Kiln, Nanzhu (bamboo crafts), and Gebu (pottery), all of which are deeply rooted in local traditions. Moreover, the block showcases distinctive forms of local opera, food culture, anecdotes of prominent figures, customs, and the vibrant market life. Despite the rapid progress of urban renewal, these intangible cultural heritages have not faded away; instead, they have been passed down from generation to generation and have persevered to this day. In fact, some have seamlessly integrated into contemporary life, radiating newfound brilliance and standing as the most invaluable legacies bequeathed by the ancestors of this land.



Figure 11. (a) The festival of wandering gods being held in front of Zhenwu Temple. (b) Qujie Street held the Lantern Festival Mazu cultural activities.

4.2.3. Evaluation of the Block

Presently, while the commercial and residential functions are still present within the block, the decline of low-end businesses poses a challenge to the economic development of Qujie Street. Not only does the block face issues such as deteriorating businesses and a poor living environment, but it also grapples with concerns regarding damaged architectural style, an imbalanced population structure, and unsustainable growth. Qujie Historical and Cultural District bears witness to the ancient city's development and embodies the collective memory of the people of Leizhou. Therefore, the preservation of Qujie holds immense cultural significance. Capitalizing on the state's emphasis on heritage protection and utilization, the thriving tourism industry in Zhanjiang City, and the urban development of Leizhou, Qujie is presented with an opportunity to rejuvenate its commercial vitality. With external prospects aligning with internal needs, both the government and residents express a shared commitment not only to preserving Qujie but also to fostering its prosperity and advancement. The block's historical resources offer the potential for the commercial revitalization of the rejuvenated area.

4.3. Implementation

4.3.1. Planning the Strategy

In order to enhance the living conditions of the block and leverage its advantageous resources to cultivate a favorable business environment, a spatial framework is devised based on the concept of “one belt, one ring road, two cores, three parks, and multiple nodes”. This entails creating a pedestrian arcade street that exudes a distinct regional culture. The “one ring road” involves organizing the buildings in the block to form a circular roadway, connecting cultural heritage sites and historical buildings into a cohesive line that weaves together the block’s fabric. The concept of “two cores” entails utilizing existing resources to establish two cultural focal points, thereby enriching the spatial hierarchy of the block. “Three parks” involves reorganizing buildings in a dilapidated state and introducing three themed Lingnan gardens to enhance the residential landscape. Finally, “multiple nodes” aims to create activity hubs by integrating historically significant buildings into pocket parks, as shown in Figure 12.

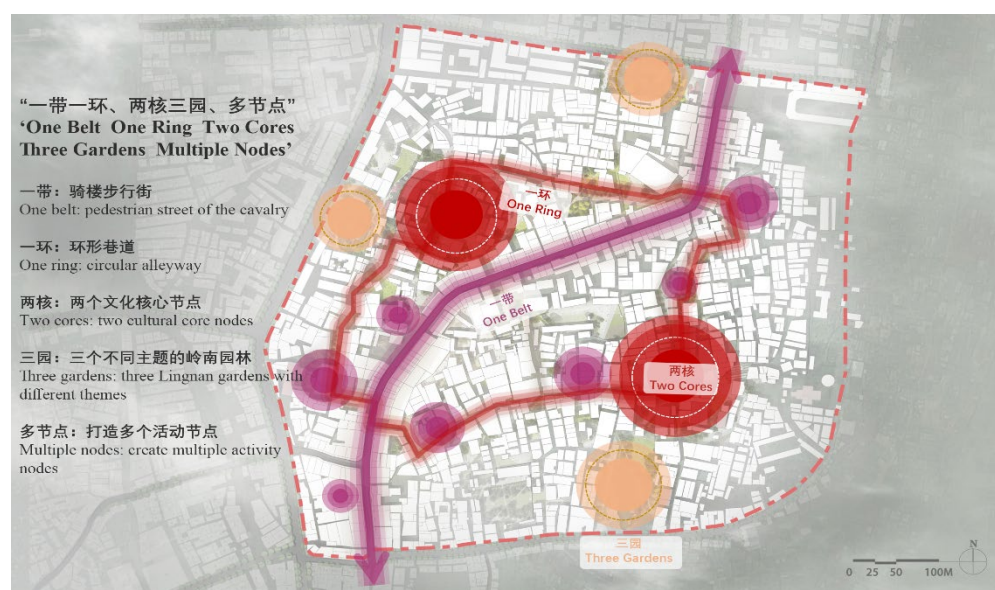


Figure 12. Planning structure diagram of Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District protection.

4.3.2. Protection Strategy

(1) Ensuring Functional Continuity

Building upon the neighborhood’s unique geographical location and rich cultural heritage, the district preserves its original functions of commerce and residence, evolving into a cultural emblem of Leizhou City and a window for showcasing the cultural essence of Leizhou to the outside world. This strategic development aims to promote the commercial trade functions within the neighborhood, as shown in Figure 13. To revitalize and diversify the industrial landscape within the block, investment promotion initiatives will be implemented following the internal renovation of public housing. Private sector involvement will be based on voluntary participation, encouraging active engagement in the neighborhood’s restoration efforts. The focus of investment attraction will primarily be on traditional crafts, local delicacies, and other distinctive businesses, with the aim of establishing a culturally vibrant arcade pedestrian street and developing public service amenities for residents. The residential function within the lanes will be preserved, while leveraging the distinctive residential buildings, cultural building relics, and historical structures to create a culturally immersive walking route. Residents will be encouraged to autonomously undertake renovations, develop complementary businesses such as homestays, and enhance economic opportunities.

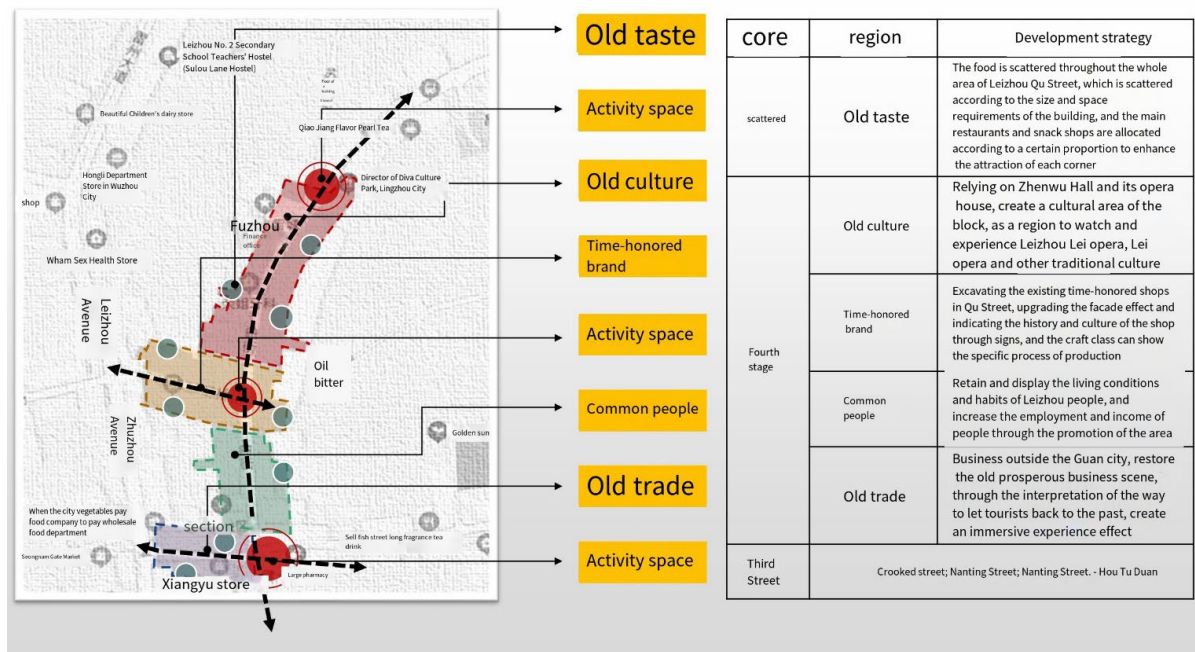


Figure 13. Qujie Street function layout planning.

(2) Ensure cultural continuity

Ensure the continuity of tangible heritage. 1. Maintain the traditional pattern. Sort out traditional streets and alleys, maintain the original road width and direction, demolish illegal buildings, and clear broken roads. Continuing the secondary traffic road function of Qu Street, set up time limited pedestrian isolation columns to ensure the safety of the street during high pedestrian flow, and utilize the original idle area to allocate responding number of parking lots. Protect historical environmental elements such as ancient wells, trees, and stone dogs in the neighborhood. 2. Continuing the historical style, we will carry out graded and classified renovations of historical buildings on both sides of the street, such as repairing key buildings, renovating general buildings with coordinated styles, and renovating buildings that conflict with traditional styles, as shown in Figure 14a. 3. Conduct special design for protected buildings. Conduct safety hazard investigations on buildings in the block and develop reinforcement and repair strategies, as shown in Figure 14b. 4. Improvement and upgrading of the landscape and environment. Increase green belts and public activity spaces to provide diverse shared spaces. Renovate and upgrade the road paving along the street, adding signage systems, urban furniture, and street greening, and design lighting for the streets (Figures 15–17).



Figure 14. Qujie Street demonstration section: (a) distribution diagram for classified renovation; (b) distribution diagram for reinforcement of public housing structure.

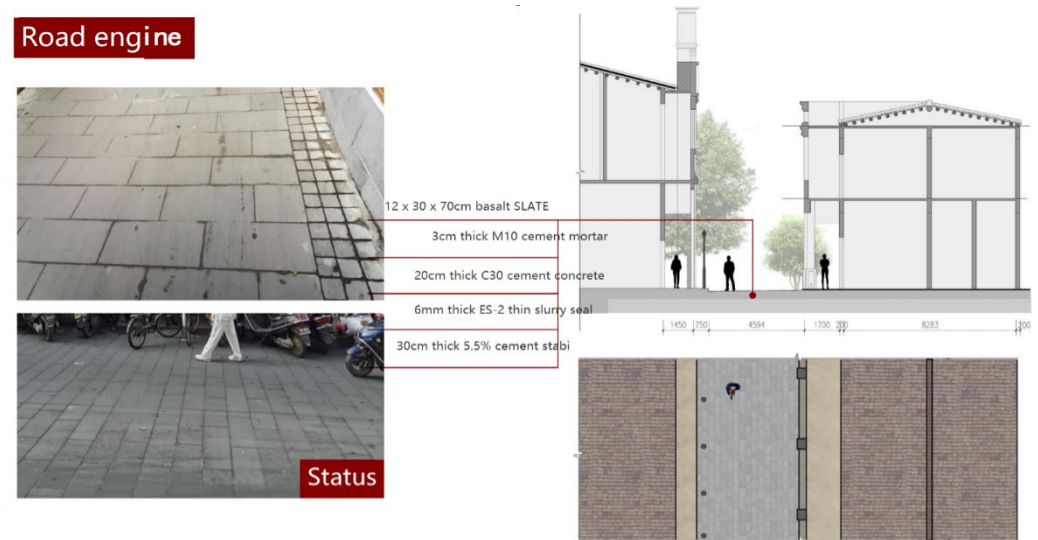


Figure 15. Road paving design.

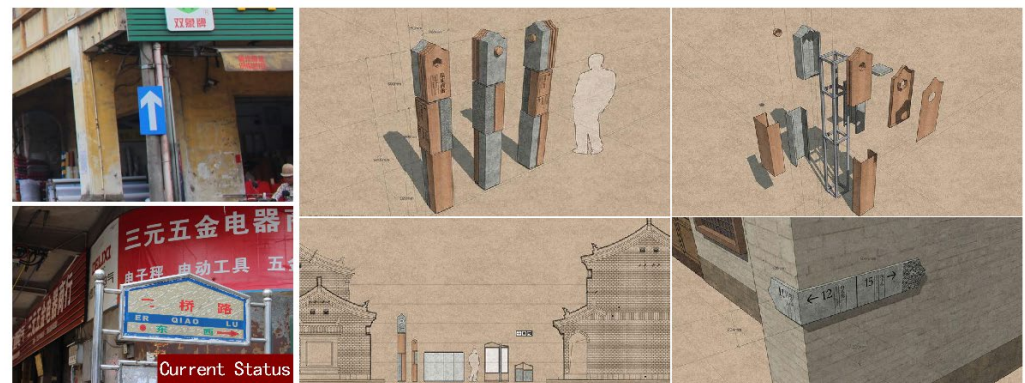


Figure 16. Logo system design.

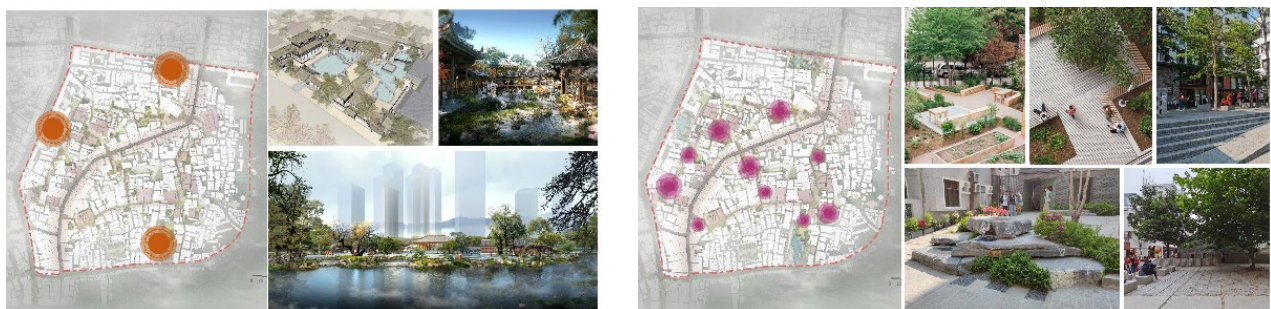


Figure 17. Public space system design.

Ensure the continuity of intangible heritage. In practical operation, on the one hand, it is necessary to continue the folk activities and beliefs within the neighborhood, such as attaching importance to the annual God Fairs, God Birthday Fairs, Kite Festivals and other folk activities, and increasing publicity; encourage residents to attach importance to the innovation of stone dog carving and the cultivation of inheritors, and strengthen the research and development and production of stone-dog-related cultural and creative products (Figure 18). On the other hand, it can rely on the cultural resources of the block to showcase the commercial culture and market life of the block. For example, introducing Leizhou specialty catering and promoting food culture; excavating the existing time-honored brand culture of Qujie, promoting and showcasing the brand; and establishing

an intangible cultural heritage inheritance base, showcasing local skills, and conducting commercial promotion (Figure 19).



Figure 18. From left to right are Leizhou opera, Leizhou stone dog, quicksand bead making skills, Leizhou weaving skills.



Figure 19. Traditional craft shops and snack establishments adopting the signage style of time-honored brands, creating a vibrant neighborhood ambiance.

Integrating intangible heritage with tangible design for better continuity. In the design of pocket park, “stone dog culture” and “Leizhou drum changing” were taken as the inspiration source and design theme. The Leizhou stone dog is a national intangible cultural heritage and one of the ancient Chinese folk beliefs. As the guardian deity of one side, it was placed in the necessary places where people often go in and out. The working people of Leizhou, who advocate etiquette, created an artistic sculpture of the image of the stone dog, with its head raised and mouth grinning, and a smile showing kindness. From then on, the stone dog was also known as the “ceremonial god”. In pocket parks, stone dogs are displayed as welcoming sculptures and reliefs, continuing the intangible heritage culture, as shown in Figure 20a. Leizhou Peninsula has been full of thunder since ancient times. The worship of thunder is the nature worship of the ancient people in Leizhou. The ancient ancestors believed that there was rain only when there was thunder, and the sound of thunder could herald a good year. At the same time, the ancestors believed that thunder was a heavenly drum, and if they wanted to invite the thunder god to sound the thunder, they needed to worship the thunder god every year to worship the thunder drum. The “Leizhou Drum Exchange” originated from the activities of the ancestors of Leizhou, such as seeking thunder, hoping for thunder, esteem thunder and offering sacrifices to thunder. “Leizhou Drum Replacement” comes from the life of the ancestors. In order to inherit and continue the intangible cultural heritage of Qujie Street in Leizhou, the design team

implanted the “Lei Drum” culture into the protection of the Qujie Historical and Cultural Block, and used the idle space as the “Lei Drum Cultural Park”, as shown in Figure 20b. In addition, the original Zhenwu Temple Theater will be transformed into the “Zhenwu Cultural Park”, which can not only endow the spirit of the intangible cultural heritage site to hold intangible cultural heritage activities, but also provide the cultural pocket park with green landscape for the block and leisure and entertainment places for the local people, as shown in Figure 21.

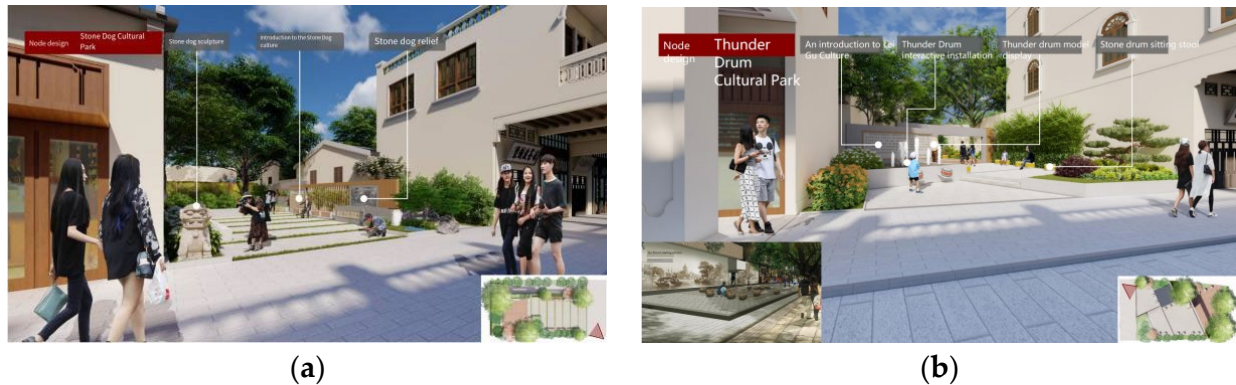


Figure 20. Integrating intangible heritage with tangible design: (a) Stone Dog Cultural Park and (b) Stone Drum Cultural Park.



Figure 21. (a) Zhenwu Temple stage courtyard and the surrounding environment. (b) Zhenwu Temple stage courtyard status quo. (c) Zhenwu Temple stage park design renderings.

When inheriting and developing intangible cultural heritage within the block as a carrier, we have paid attention to the following points: 1. Emphasizing inheritance. In Leizhou, the main body of inheritance is the older generation represented by the stock chief, reflecting the profound clan culture behind it. We must respect local culture and living habits. 2. Emphasize innovation, actively introduce inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, establish research centers and inheritance bases for intangible cultural heritage, and regularly hold seminars and exhibitions. 3. Focus on development. Increase publicity for various activities and exhibitions, attract tourists, increase income generation, and form a virtuous cycle to drive the protection and inheritance of local intangible cultural heritage in the opposite direction.

4.3.3. Protection Methods

The specific protection methods of the Qujie Street Historical and Cultural Block are divided into three parts: streets and alleys, buildings, and landscapes. The protection methods and contents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Methods of protecting streets, alleys, buildings, and landscapes.

Project and Protection Methods		Protect Content	
Streets and Lanes	Longshe Street	Five underground pipelines: Strong electricity pipelines, weak point pipelines, water supply pipes, rainwater pipes, and sewage pipes are buried underground and led to each household. Maintain the scale of the streets and alleys by uniformly laying the soil, cement, and asphalt pavement of the original streets and alleys onto a 12 cm thick basalt slab ground.	77.5 m
	Guanbu Back Lane		20 m
	Qujie street		313.67 m
	Bengcheng Lane		28 m
	Nanting Street	The arcade floor is uniformly laid with 8 cm thick basalt (Leizhou local stone).	93 m
Building	Overall protection and repair	Repair category: Key buildings are repaired using cultural relic building standards.	NB-001-009, NN-001~012, LB-001~004, QX-028, QX-011~019, Zhenwutang Stage Annex Building (Building 38)
		Improvement category: Traditional style architecture, using traditional elements to improve architectural historical information.	QX-001~010, QZ-001~009, QD017-031 (Building 34)
		Renovation category: General buildings with coordinated style and features, decorated in traditional styles.	LN-001-008, QX-020-027, QD001-016 (Building 32)
		Restoration category: Damaged buildings, coordinated with historical style, moderately adopting modern design style, injecting contemporary fashion atmosphere into the historical district.	QD-003, LN-009 (Building 2)
	Street facade renovation	Renovation: Buildings that conflict with traditional style should be coordinated with historical style in terms of scale, volume, color, and material.	LN-002, Printing Factory South District Building, LNY (South Extension of Longhe Street—Maiyu Street) along the street, QXY (West Extension of Qu Street—Street Office) along the street (Building 12)
landscape		Stone Dog Cultural Park: Showcases the local stone dog cultural information column in Leizhou, as well as the display of stone dog statues with different images, providing a small space for leisure.	The location (QX-009) is in a leisure state, covering an area of approximately 253 square meters.
	Street and Lane Cultural Park	Leigu Cultural Park: Shows the best drums in the world, and presents the information of the cultural landscape and natural landscape to everyone’s small street park.	The location (QD-020) is covering an area of approximately 325 square meters.
		Zhenwu Cultural Park: The layout consists of traditional buildings on both sides, a Zhenwu Stage in the middle, and a theater in front. The main inheritance is the traditional ethnic customs of Leizhou, as well as inviting local opera troupes to perform for the gods.	Covering an area of approximately 1800 square meters.

Table 1. Cont.

Project and Protection Methods	Protect Content
Memorial archway at street entrance	Memorial archway at the entrance of Longxie Street: four pillars and three memorial archways. Covering an area of approximately 23.1 square meters.
	Memorial archway at the entrance of Guanbu Back Street: memorial archway on the third floor of four pillars. Covering an area of approximately 31.2 square meters.
	Memorial archway at the entrance of Bengcheng Lane: two columns and one room memorial archway. Covering an area of approximately 1.75 square meters.
	Fubo Temple memorial archway: four column three room memorial archway Covering an area of approximately 2.30 square meters.
Landscape lighting	Adding a lighting system to the exterior facade of the arcade along the street. 1 item
Municipal furniture	Including trash cans, signage, seats, landscape tree pools, etc. 1 item

4.3.4. Implementation Process

The objective of this renovation encompasses government-owned housing and private ownership housing, with the demonstration section taken as the first section of the protection and transformation of the Qujie Historical and Cultural Block (Figure 22). Throughout the renovation process, the principle of micro-renovation is adhered to, ensuring a planned, phased, and gradual approach that minimizes disruption to the residents' normal lives. The shared aspiration of both residents and the government is to enhance the living environment and stimulate the revitalization of Qujie Street. Achieving these desires necessitates a foundation of protection and renewal. Nevertheless, there are instances where certain residents exhibit low enthusiasm, limited foresight for the future, and a lack of initiative. In such cases, local residents can be motivated to participate through various means, including public campaigns, exhibitions, and calls for action. Guided by the demonstrative section, the enhancement of streets and alleys through facade reconstruction serves to instill confidence among the local populace, as depicted in Figures 23 and 24. The integration of block renewal within the broader context of city development constitutes a crucial step. By means of strategic collaboration between the government and operational entities, comprehensive development plans and business models for the district can be formulated from a macro perspective. This approach optimizes the block's abundant resources, seeks differentiated positioning, facilitates dual progress for both the block and the city. Simultaneously, it is essential to safeguard the core community's rights of usage and prioritize their management of the block, thereby strengthening cooperation with peripheral communities.

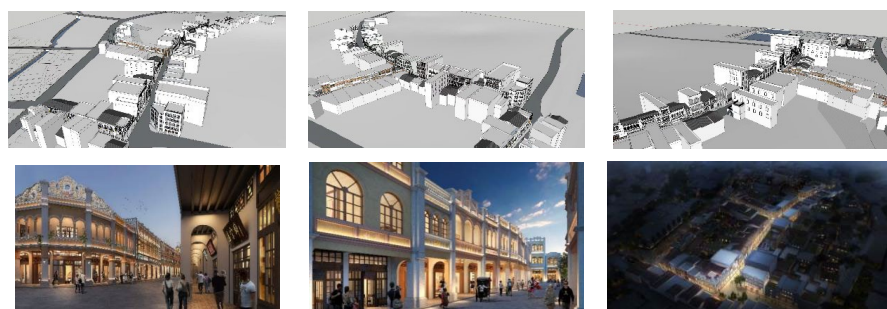


Figure 22. Overall planning of Qujie Street Historical and Cultural District.



Figure 23. Renderings of the protection and renewal exhibition hall of Qujie Historical and Cultural Block.



Figure 24. Comparison between before protection and in the implementation of protection of Nanting Street arcade street.

4.4. Later Maintenance and Management

Historic and cultural blocks represent an ever-evolving living heritage, and upon the completion of infrastructure renovation, the core community retains the authority for block management and maintenance. To prevent disorderly development in terms of operation and business formats within the block, the government assumes a regulatory role in overseeing block development. Specifically, the government exercises control over public housing operations, while also investing in and entrusting enterprises to leverage business resources, determine the types and proportions of businesses, and provide certain incentives to encourage their participation.

The private sector, on the other hand, offers property owners options and provides corresponding recommendations. During block operation, a joint protection and management committee is established, consisting of representatives from the government, neighborhood offices, and core community members, with the purpose of effectively managing and maintaining the block. On one hand, it is imperative to establish management measures that encompass daily supervision of the preservation and layout of historical and cultural blocks, public facilities, and commercial operations. This includes the implementation of a list of recommended practices and discouraged practices, as well as the formulation of rewards and penalties to ensure standardized and institutionalized management. On the other hand, it guarantees the smooth functioning of the neighborhood by providing security, logistics, and coordination services, while also recruiting neighborhood volunteers to actively participate in the management and maintenance processes.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper attempts to explore the conservation methods of living heritage based on life continuity, using the protection of Qu Street's historical and cultural neighborhood in Leizhou as a practical case study. Through empirical analysis, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- (1) Qu Street in Leizhou is a historical and cultural neighborhood that combines folk neighborhoods and ancient city areas. It is renowned for its traditional architectural style, unique street layout, vibrant commercial activities, cultural heritage, festive

events, culinary culture, arts and crafts, and community atmosphere. It is not only an important tourist attraction, but also a crucial component of local residents' life and cultural traditions.

- (2) Close collaboration with the street office, core community, community leaders, and community representatives is one of the key elements in the implementation of projects related to the conservation of living heritage in historical and cultural neighborhoods. The presence and participation of the street office, core community, community leaders, and community representatives provide multiple benefits and support for the implementation of projects focused on the life continuity of historical and cultural neighborhoods. Their involvement ensures the feasibility and rationality of conservation measures while respecting the rights and needs of the local community. Furthermore, their professional knowledge, resources, and experience in cultural heritage preservation provide crucial support for the successful implementation of the projects.
- (3) This type of living heritage conservation follows a systematic approach. In practice, the identification of the core community and their involvement in various stages of conservation and renewal ensure the connection between heritage and community. Through specific conservation and renewal strategies, the continuity of the heritage's original functions and cultural expressions are achieved. Additionally, the continued involvement of the core community in the management and maintenance of the heritage site ensures a caring approach. Case-based research validates the feasibility of applying the conservation methods of living heritage (as Figure 24).
- (4) This study enriches the methods of heritage conservation by proposing the concept of life continuity, which views living heritage as a renewable resource that promotes heritage utilization. However, this research still has some limitations. Due to the ongoing nature of the project, the information obtained is not yet comprehensive, and the satisfaction regarding the conservation of the historical and cultural neighborhood and the creation of the community has not been fully collected. The application of the living heritage conservation methods based on life continuity still requires validation in future practices. Furthermore, there exists a delicate balance between the conservation of living heritage and the sustainable development of the neighborhood. Achieving both the protection of living heritage and the socio-economic sustainability of the neighborhood remains a challenge. Future researchers can continue to explore these aspects.

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