

How May Traditional Business District and Cultural Pedestrian Street Be Regenerated—Taking Guangzhou Beijing Road Cultural Tourist Zone as an Example

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Abstract: City regeneration has been a popular topic in recent days, where people discuss the combination of cultural elements and modern style, especially in a city with far-reaching history and a large traditional district in downtown area. In Guangzhou, there is a pedestrian street called Beijing Road that has shown problems that need to be solved to bring the great attractiveness and high business value back. Instead of giving some suggestions on the regeneration of specific buildings or areas, this article will suggest unifying the operation of the entire area to manage the firms that enter the area and increase cultural elements in firms' operation, creating a unique environment for customers and higher businesses value.

Keywords: City Regeneration; Traditional Business District; Local Culture; District Operation

1. The background of business district and pedestrian street, and some important facts about Beijing Road

1.1 Definition part

When talking about a business district, basically, it means an area that contains lots of businesses and holds lots of commercial activities. As we further look at the central business district, it is an area located in the central area of the city, facing customers from the surrounding areas, the whole city, and even the entire country and even the international consumer groups, to meet the diversified consumer needs of high-quality shopping, cultural tourism, catering, leisure and entertainment, finance and commerce.

1.2 Why traditional business district needs to be regenerated:

China has rapidly developed for more than ten years, and lots of things have changed. People on one hand don't have enough patience to travel throughout the area, not to say spending half a day on the trip across the city to that street. On the other hand, even with the most number of stores, traditional pedestrian streets can never cover the huge difference in the needs of different customers.

At the same time, the shopping experience on pedestrian streets can never reach that of modern shopping centers. The traditional business district is mostly located in the old town, and supporting facilities are not perfect. The lack of parking lot, the impact of weather, and the relatively worse hygiene status are all natural weaknesses of the traditional business district.

2. Some problems that specifically Beijing Road is showing

2.1 Objective information

Beijing Road is located in Yuexiu District, the smallest, but the most densely populated district in Guangzhou. It is also one of the four oldest districts of Guangzhou.

As the most popular attraction in Guangzhou, stores in Beijing Road district mainly are retail commerce, selling clothing, snacks, and books, and providing entertainment services. Customers can travel to Beijing Road district by metro, there are two metro stations in the area, one of them is the interchange station for line 1 and line 2. However, the lack of parking space and relatively narrow road, also limit the experience, resulting in some traffic problems.

2.2 Problems showed under observation:

Unlike the unified operation of modern shopping centers, traditional pedestrian streets have lots of property rights problems. The regulations and contracts are also not professional or not perfectly legitimate, which leads to the fear of large companies entering.

Without a unified operation, there shows no clear divisions of product types or regional allocation. On one hand, cheap sellers have no patience for cultural elements. At the same time, those who only focus on fast-moving products instead of the local culture are willing to pay for the high rent. On the other hand, there is no limitation for brands that enter the district, making that there are lots of stores selling similar products, or none of a single region has specific product types.

Generally, Beijing Road mainly shows several types of problems. The brands are cheap, the area is not well planned, and the cultural elements are lost. Specifically, the lack of innovation in brand types, clear regional instructions, and planned traveling routes, are making Beijing Road less competitive than those modern shopping centers.

2.3 Why these problems need to be solved:

As an area that holds far-reaching history, Beijing Road needs to have cultural elements. Throughout the article, we have discussed the important cultural status of Beijing Road to Guangzhou many times. Under the name “thousand year’s business center”, Guangzhou now does not have an exact area to demonstrate the cultural elements. These include traditional handicrafts, old buildings, traditional businesses, and so on. Unfortunately, there is the same style of cheap products, nearly none of the shops are fully used as its traditional way, and seldom of the products reflect the rich cultural value and historical status. But when people today actually enter the area, the traditional Qilou buildings are abandoned for their upper space, the products selling are fast-moving products, and even catering businesses are nonlocal food like Sichuan Cuisine or tea. Most importantly, cultural elements are common memory of local people, it is the way that young can understand the history and spirit of the city.

It is unacceptable if Beijing Road no longer demonstrates its high historical status and strong cultural value.

3. The successful experience from other pedestrian streets, and the comparison

3.1 Successful experience 1: Fuzimiao, Nanjing

Fuzimiao business district is located in the city southern center of Nanjing. In 2012, when another regeneration project in Fuzimiao area was being discussed, local citizens had pointed out the disorder of the spatial planning and commercial activities here. The business atmosphere was so strong, and the retail spatial structure was not well designed. Local cultural elements were lost due to modern fast-moving products substituting those traditional shops, like historical handicrafts, and local food. If the uniqueness no longer exists, the area would not be attractive and profitable in the long term.

So, the government and local administration shouldered the responsibility. A new cultural company was founded by a government-run company and private business. Its main goal is to lead the operation of the area, focusing on demonstrating cultural elements and historical value.

The regeneration of Fuzimiao was successful, it controlled the construction of cultural atmosphere, prevented over-commercialization, and protected many of the disappearing cultural elements.

3.2 Successful experience 2: Sino-ocean Taikoo Li and Chunxi Road, Chengdu

Chunxi Road pedestrian street is located in the center of Chengdu, with the name “hundred-year business street”. The entire area is still the best business district in Chengdu, the cultural value contributes a critical part. During the regeneration, local cultural elements were required to be kept, making the Taikoo Li a totally different area compared to other business district in other cities. The designer creates a public space with a cityscape full of outdoor rooms, and relies on preserved old buildings to create a distinctive public space atmosphere. Also extend the original double U-shaped customer moving path, making the architectural style of the entire area still based on the traditional western Sichuan architectural style. Inside those seemingly old buildings, are top brands and shops. Apple, Gucci, and other primary international brands that want to enter, are all required to follow the original structure of the building. Some of them are even the first store of the brand in China. The design let the new building and the old building perfectly integrated, and makes the entire Chunxi Road district unique and attractive.

The regeneration of Chunxi Road area is not limited, the actual traditional pedestrian street still consists of weaknesses. But with the help of some nearby special cultural areas like Taikoo Li, the entire business district expands and expands, making the Chunxi Road area as a whole the image of the city of Chengdu.

3.3 Some comparisons and conclusions of successful experience

In Fuzimiao area, the local government takes the responsibility to regulate the operation and business activities, holding the entire area to show its strong cultural value. In Chengdu, with the help of modern design, the traditional town is preserved, and top brands could enter, continuously increasing its commercial value.

4. Some possible changes that may help Beijing Road be regenerated.

4.1 unified operation to manage the firms that enter the district and plan the area

Recall that, many shops in Beijing Road pedestrian street are quite cheap, and the business value of the area is not increasing, the overall impression of the area is being damaged. However, the major part of the problem is that there is no limitation or lack of unified operation.

Under this operation, the brands that do not meet the requirements for cultural value or consumption levels should be regulated, and those that have high-quality products or strong cultural elements should be helped to enter, preventing the monopoly of some shop owners or intermediary agents. The traditional pedestrian street can now be managed similarly to a modern shopping center, with a clear investment inviting strategy, controlling the entry of brands.

4.2 Increase cultural elements from shops decoration to daily operation

As mentioned, Beijing Road district needs more cultural elements, and not only from the general operation, but more importantly, from specific shops. Consider the advantages in Chengdu. The two areas all preserve the traditional building, and take advantage of them. The shops entering Taikoo Li are required to follow the structure of the old buildings, and fully use the space to demonstrate different characteristics. In Hackesche Hofe, the stores are hidden inside the original buildings after the renovations. The entire area has set some romantic atmosphere which becomes an exceptional attraction.

Similarly, Beijing Road area also has the potential to be better decorated. As mentioned, some spaces are not fully employed, which produces enough space to fill in more cultural elements, such as on the second floor of the Qilou building, there can be some cultural exhibitions or shows for local handicrafts. The outside of the buildings and the street itself, now it is occupied by non-local features, can be gradually transferred into local cultural elements.

5. Conclusion

Traditional business districts and pedestrian streets have faced some problems over the recent years, due to the increasing popularity of modern shopping centers and online shopping. However, the street located at the center of the city still plays an indispensable part. Many districts have far-reaching history, are cultural representative, or are simply the main city center. None of us should leave those streets to gradually disappear.

After all, with higher quality products, and stronger cultural elements, there will be a growth in both cultural and business value, which certainly helps the Beijing Road area to be more unique, beautiful, and attractive.

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