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Research on Micro-renovation Design of Historical Blocks Based on Art Aesthetic Psychology: Taking Chengdu Dongmen Market as an example

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Abstract

"Appreciate the beauty of each other and share the beauty of all" is the purpose and spirit. The update design of historical blocks, as a part of public environment landscape, attaches importance to its own historical value and aesthetic education value to the contemporary public aesthetics. Historical blocks are the symbols of city history and culture, and also the main content of sustainable development of urban landscape in the new era. They reflect the development trajectory of a city in different historical periods and condense the historical memory of several generations of a city. The renovation of historical blocks should not only focus on spatial form, but also pay attention to socio-economic and cultural factors. Urban micro-update can be regarded as a way to improve and enhance the quality of human life. The focus is mainly on small-scale transformation of existing sites and buildings to meet new functional and aesthetic needs, characterized by small investment, good benefits, and high quality. The East Gate Market in Jinjiang District, Chengdu, is a "small and exquisite" block landscape known for its old Chengdu market cultural experience, backed by the famous writer Li Jieren's former residence. It has typical local characteristics and cultural accumulation. This article takes Chengdu East Gate Market as the research object, adopts both qualitative and quantitative research methods, uses the micro-updating of urban historical blocks as the entry point, conducts field research, summarizes the micro-updating practice experience of Chengdu East Gate Market from the aspects of spatial structure, material space, and cultural landscape, with a view to injecting new vitality into the updating practice of the same type of urban historical blocks and meeting the higher demands of contemporary people for spiritual and cultural life.

Keywords: Aesthetic Psychology; Historical Block; Small Micro-Transformation; Update Practice

1. Overview

The East Gate Market, a historical block near the old east gate of Chengdu, is an historical cultural block with leisure business characteristics built around the former residence of Li Jieren. It is one of the most characteristic historical cultural blocks in Chengdu, integrating traditional culture, catering, leisure, shopping and other formats. As an important element of the historic cultural blocks of Jinjiang District in Chengdu, the East Gate Market is also one key area of the "Three Streets and Two Alleys" historic cultural blocks initiative of Jinjiang District. Its preservation and micro-updates practices are representative. The overall spatial pattern, street space texture, architectural characteristics, and infrastructure construction of the historical district of Dongmen Market have a strong typicality. Analyzing and unraveling them can allow future generations to re-understand it from a professional perspective and draw wisdom and transformation experience from it, accumulating experience for subsequent learning and transformation practice.

2. Background

Mr. Li Jieren is a renowned writer. His works often depict the humanities, customs, and history of old Chengdu. Dongmen Market is a manifestation of the Old Chengdu in Li Jieren's writing. The East Gate Market was established next to Li Jieren's former residence, located at 9 LingKe Road, Jinjiang District, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, near the Lion Mountain Station of Subway Line 7. It used to be the children's school of the People's Liberation Army 7436 Factory, officially opened in 2019, the East Gate Market covers an area of more than 40 acres. During the Second World War, Chengdu was bombed by Japanese planes many times. Worried that books, paintings, and cultural relics in his home would be damaged, Li Jieren built a house for evacuation in Shahepu on the outskirts of Chengdu in July 1938. Because it was located by the water caltrop dam, and the original water chestnut nest was relatively simple, Mr. Li Jieren named it water caltrop nest. Later, Xie Wuliang, a famous Chinese scholar, poet, and calligrapher, wrote the two characters of "water caltrop nest" and hung them on the lintel. Mr. Li Jieren lived there until his death in 1962. The East Gate Market mainly features old Chengdu snacks, such as old Chengdu dam tea, handicraft shops, and traditional cultural experience shops as the main business types. The market landscape space mainly reproduces the market life scene of old Chengdu through rich and vivid landscape spaces such as mansion building groups, Sichuan western style relief walls, old-fashioned tea shops, sunken markets, pavilions and waterside pavilions. Inside the market, there are many old Chengdu brands and famous shops, such as various snack shops, teahouses, barber shops, ear-picking shops, etc. on the streets, these are all cultural symbols of old Chengdu. It can be said that the East Gate Market presents the traditional market culture and historical block style of old Chengdu in a holistic and complete way, it is a unique scenery line in Chengdu, comparable to the landscape style of the old Chengdu East Street in the late Qing Dynasty recorded in "China Travel Diary" by German geographer Richthofen.

3. The Concept of Micro-updating in Historic Block

When it comes to historic blocks, the public will have a certain degree of gestalt construct in their minds, which varies due to their experiences and personalities. Micro-updating of historic blocks refers to the subtle adjustments and innovations made to better adapt to the needs of modern urban development and enhance its attractiveness and vitality, based on preserving the cultural heritage of historic blocks. Compared to traditional urban updating, micro-updating focuses more on protecting the integrity and authenticity of historical and cultural heritage, and emphasizes on refining and promoting the cultural characteristics of historic blocks. The core concept of micro-updating is "protection, inheritance, innovation". It aims to protect the cultural heritage of the historic block, inherit its historical culture and spirit, and innovate its business model, cultural activities, etc., to better meet the requirements and development of modern cities, enhancing the attractiveness and vitality of the historic block. Specific measures include: repairing historical buildings, restoring their original appearance; improving the transportation and infrastructure of the historic block, enhancing tourists' experience; promoting the development of cultural and creative industries, exploring historical and cultural resources; holding cultural activities and festivals to strengthen the cultural atmosphere and vitality of the historic block. "Micro-updating" is a concept relative to "major updating", which has a certain standard in the public's heart. "Major updating" refers to large-scale, wide-ranging, one-time urban renovation actions, which often involve the destruction of block textures, demolition of existing buildings, and re-layout for the historic block. Whereas "micro-updating" adopts small-scale, gradual strategies, and protects architectural style and traditional culture to some extent during the renovation process. However, "micro-updating" does not equal to "small-scale" or "gradual", but refers to adopting appropriate strategies and methods during the update process, emphasizing the protection of traditional culture, spatial texture and other material factors. In practice, it is necessary to adopt corresponding strategies and methods according to the problems in the historic block. This paper will elaborate with the example of East Gate Market.

4. Image Characteristics

4.1 Layout of Block

Historic blocks in modern cities carry traces of age, and the public attaches different meanings to them. This significance is both historical and cultural. From the morphology layout of block layout and the external space form, the concrete form constituted by block elements and the combination are the specific activities and actual reactions of observer-object interaction. East Gate Market retains the traditional market characteristic of Chengdu, with distinct functional zoning, generally in east-west and north-south orientation, easily recognizable. There are four entrances to East Gate Market, three of which are from Jieren Road and one from Jieren Park. Next to the entrance of Jieren Park is a fiberglass sculpture and a dry fountain, connected to water well street, on both sides of which are street food shops with classical west Sichuan folk houses. Upon entering from the main entrance is Huangchengba, with a three-story L-shaped little building with French Republic style, in front of which is an open area filled with tables and chairs, surrounded mostly by pubs and late-night snacks, rather quiet in the daytime and dominated by the nightlife of young people. Behind the

main building is a terrace-style two-story building cluster with landscape effects, and in the middle of the block behind the building cluster is a sunken square named Tianhuizhen. The square mainly serves Damadam Tea, surrounded by special product pavilions, rouge shops, Hahah Quyi clubs, etc. Damadam Tea is a common social phenomenon in Chengdu area, pretty renowned at home and abroad. Its existence mainly attributes to the lack of indoor tea houses or cafes in many old communities in Chengdu city. Residents could only gather to drink tea and chat at the entrance of residential areas or open spaces in the community, thus forming the culture of Damadam Tea in Chengdu. In addition, the climate characteristics of Chengdu also contribute to the formation of Damadam Tea culture. Chengdu has a typical Sichuan basin climate, with hot and rainy summers. It's hard to cool down indoors through air conditioning, while outdoor Damadam Tea allows people to enjoy the cool air and fresh tea aroma. Therefore, the phenomenon of outdoor Damadam Tea in Chengdu gradually formed and developed, becoming one of Chengdu's cultural features. To the east, there is a restaurant serving century-old market Sichuan cuisine, named after "Xiaoya Restaurant" run by Mr. Li Jieren during his lifetime. To the west is his former residence "Lingke", mainly divided into three courtyards: front, middle, and back. The front yard is the main gate of the former residence, in front of which is a small courtyard with flowers and trees planted. Entering the gate, facing a three-story building, with a living room on the right and a study on the left. The living room is furnished with ancient furniture and cultural relics, and the study is filled with books, calligraphy, painting and other cultural relics of Mr. Li Jieren. The middle yard is the main activity area of the former residence, including the main hall, side halls, rear hall, and rooms on both sides. The main hall is the main reception room of the former residence, with a big mahogany round table and a pair of mahogany armchairs in the middle. The side hall is the family's reception room, with a bedroom on the left and a study on the right. The backyard is the private living area of the former residence, including the master bedroom, kitchen, and two bedrooms. The master bedroom is furnished with ancient furniture and cultural relics, with a bedroom to the left, and a kitchen and another bedroom to the right. The layout and space arrangement of the entire courtyard fully demonstrate the traditional architectural style and cultural characteristics of Sichuan province, as well as the life and cultural background of Mr. Li Jieren. To the east of the block, there is also a small promenade, on the wall of which are featured relief murals depicting the past life scenes of old Chengdu such as barbershops, ear-cleaning shops, shoe polishing, and Chengdu sugar painting—all traditional local crafts. On the whole, the layout of Dongmen market presents a typical "cross" shape, with streets and alleys interwoven, forming a very unique block pattern. This layout not only facilitates travel for residents and visitors, but also helps preserve and pass down the culture and history of the old Chengdu market.

4.2 Architectural Form

4.2.1 Architecture of Dongmen Market in Chengdu

The architectural style of Dongmen Market in Chengdu embodies both the characteristics of residences in western Sichuan and the architectural traits of the Republican Period. The architectural style of residences in western Sichuan is one of the traditional architectural styles



Figure 1. Plan Guide Map of Dongmen Market Source: Taken by the Author



Figure 2. Panoramic Guide Map of Li Jieren's Former Residence Source: Taken by the Author

in southwest China, mainly distributed in provinces such as Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. It often adopts planar symmetry, intersecting diagonals, central symmetry, and other layout forms to form a complete spatial structure. Different areas within the architecture are segmented according to different functions, resulting in a rational layout with comprehensive functions. Its construction materials mainly utilize abundant local natural resources, such as wood, stone, etc., which after careful processing and treatment, yield a strong durability and stability. For instance, the hard-top buildings in western Sichuan use stone slabs for coverage, which are waterproof, fireproof, earthquake-resistant, and highly durable. The Republican period (1912-1949) was a unique time in modern Chinese history. There were significant changes in politics, economics, culture, and there was also some degree of change in architectural style. The influence of foreign architectural cultures and aesthetics due to events like the Westernization Movement during the Qing Dynasty and the semi-feudal, semi-colonial backdrop had an important impact on the design innovation of local Chinese architecture. Li Jieren, who studied in France when he was young, inevitably would

have been influenced by Western history, culture, and philosophical thought to varying extents. Especially given Western society's admiration for masculine beauty, the concept that "architecture is frozen music" could better reflect the fundamental thinking of the public. Accordingly, it can be argued that the diversity, inclusivity, and timeliness of the architectural style during the Republican period, which incorporated both the integration of traditional culture and modern architecture and the influence of Western architectural style, was a multifaceted, open, and innovative architectural era. The renovation design and construction of Dongmen Market in Chengdu is a good representation of this heritage and protection, embodying its diverse, open, and inclusive characteristics. This also aligns with the spiritual character and lifestyle of Chengdu in the new era.



Figure 3. Relief Wall of Dongmen Market Source: Taken by the Author

4.2.2 Architectural Form of Li Jieren's Former Residence

The Li Jieren Memorial House is a comprehensive building that integrates display, research, communication, and office functions. In architectural functions, the museum is based on "Li Jieren's Former Residence" and retains the original functions of the "residence", while adding a large number of collections of cultural relics and academic exchanges. The spatial design of the memorial has multiple attributes, which should not only meet the architectural



Figure 4. Command Street of Dongmen Market Source: Taken by the Author

requirements of Li Jieren's Former Residence Memorial, but also meet the audience's visit experience to the memorial. The Li Jieren Memorial House is divided into four exhibition areas: Celebrity Life Exhibition, Manuscript Exhibition Room, Red Memory Exhibition, and Creative Journey Exhibition. In terms of spatial layout, it rationally arranges the area and exhibition line length of each exhibition hall, meets the visit requirements of each exhibition area, and maintains the connection between each exhibition area, so that they are connected and mutually independent. From the perspective of visiting experience, different exhibition rooms have their own characteristics and functions. As a singly architectural entity, the Li Jieren Memorial House is an important historical and cultural heritage in Chengdu, with high cultural value and historical significance. Its architectural design is vastly different from traditional gardens and city parks, and its unique "semi-enclosed" architectural design creates a relatively quiet and private space environment for the memorial. Its architectural functions mainly include exhibition halls, offices, and reception, and the building materials primarily adopt the structural form of traditional Sichuan folk houses, with simple and generous architectural modeling that harmonizes well with the surrounding environment. The Li Jieren Memorial House retains the typical characteristics of traditional Sichuan architecture, absorbs the characteristics of modern architecture, and has certain cultural connotations and



Figure 5

artistic value. Its design provides a reference for the construction of modern memorials and has certain reference significance for the construction of modern memorials.

4.3 Architectural Decoration

4.3.1 Blue Brick

Blue brick is a traditional building material, with the excellent properties of waterproof, sound insulation, and heat preservation. It also has high compressive strength and durability, which can provide good protection for the buildings. Blue bricks are also laid on the streets and lanes of Dongmen Market, this type of blue brick is somewhat different from traditional clay bricks. The blue bricks used in Dongmen Market have retained the aesthetic imagery of blue brick, and when making the brick blanks, clay is replaced with shale, whose strength and water permeability are superior to the traditional clay-burned blue bricks. A variety of patterns are created through various sizes and paving methods, and its unique texture and color add an ancient charm to the architecture. These blue brick-paved grounds are not only beautiful and wear-resistant but also have functions of anti-slip, dust prevention, and noise reduction.



Figure 6. Former Residence of Li Jieren Source: Taken by the Author



Figure 7. Former Residence of Li Jieren Source: Taken by the Author

4.3.2 *Blue Tile*

Blue tiles, also known as small blue tiles in the Chengdu Plain, are mainly made of clay. The specifications of blue tiles are the same as wall bricks and can be customized according to needs and production volume. Generally, the coverage of a blue tile is a quarter of the circumference. Many buildings in Dongmen Market have adopted blue tiles as roof coverings and wall decoration materials. Owing to the excellent properties of waterproof, heat preservation, heat insulation, and high durability, blue tiles are often combined into various patterns and designs in Dongmen Shijing according to the rules of formal aesthetic, and resonate with steel structures, adding a breath of art and epoch symphony. It is not only a practical building material but also a cultural symbol.



Figure 8. The use of green bricks in decoration Source: Taken by the Author



Figure 9. The use of green bricks in decoration Source: Taken by the Author

4.3.3 *Millstone*

The millstone is a common decorative element in traditional architectural culture, usually used in the gates, walls, ceilings, and other parts of buildings. In Dongmen Market, the application of millstone elements is also very widespread. Millstones are typically made of stone, their shapes are disc-shaped or hemispherical, with patterns or carvings on the surface. The forms of the millstones are diverse, some are single millstones, some are combinations of multiple millstones, and some millstones are connected by slender pillars, forming a unique decorative effect. It not only has a decorative effect but also carries beautiful implications of "reunion" and "harmony", playing an important role in the architectural decoration of



Figure 10. The use of green tiles in decoration Source: Taken by the Author



Figure 11. The use of green tiles in decoration Source: Taken by the Author

Dongmen Market.

4.3.4 Sculpture

Sculptures typically serve as the finishing touch, which is inseparable from the spirituality and symbolism inherent in the sculpture itself. Many sculptures representing local folk culture and lifestyle scenes are used in Dongmen Market, such as character statues performing Sichuan opera, vendor statues selling hot pots, etc. The materials of the sculptures also vary. These sculptures not only have artistic value, but also enable people to better understand the local culture and living habits.

5. Insights and Discussion



Figure 12. The use of grinding stones in decoration Source: Taken by the Author

5.1 Coexistence of History and Reality

The origin of Chengdu's marketplace culture can be traced back to the Tang and Song Dynasties. At that time, Chengdu was a thriving commercial city where many merchants, craftsmen, and artists gathered in the markets located in the city center for trading, showcasing, and communication. This filled the markets with vitality and creativity, making them an important place for the daily life and cultural exchanges of Chengdu citizens. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chengdu's marketplace culture became even more prosperous. Chengdu's markets were spread across various corners of the city, forming many unique cultural landscapes, such as Qingyang Palace Street, Wenshu Monastery Street, Wide and Narrow Alley, etc. These markets housed many shops, tea houses, restaurants, theaters, etc., becoming the center of commerce and cultural exchange in Chengdu. Meanwhile, Chengdu's marketplace culture also gave rise to many folk arts and cultures, such as Sichuan opera, hot pot, Dragon Head Raising Festival, etc., which flourished in the markets. The development of Chengdu's Dongmen market involves the intertwining of history and reality. In spatial terms, it features both the former residence of Li Jieren and traditional Western Sichuan residential architecture, while in terms of content, traditional culture is injected in fresh ways.

5.2 Coexistence of Singularity and Diversity

Dongmen market houses traditional residences from Western Sichuan, buildings from the Republican period, and bas-reliefs depicting living scenes from the late Ming and early



Figure 13. The use of grinding stones in decoration Source: Taken by the Author

Qing dynasties. Due to the diverse climate, fluctuating terrain, and complex topography of Western Sichuan, the architectural style and forms of residences are closely related to the natural environment like terrain, climate, soil and water, fully embodying regional characteristics. Historically, the residents of Western Sichuan relied on agriculture for their livelihood, thus the design and construction of their residences were made to accommodate agricultural production needs. The main building materials for these residences are local wood, stone, and mud bricks, and their structures are reasonable, adapting to local geological conditions. Simultaneously, the design and decoration of the residences also reflect the culture and lifestyle of local residents, such as living habits, storage, protection, festival celebrations, etc. Dongmen market, based on traditional West Sichuan residences, infuses elements of the Republican era and the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, adding a touch of retro color to the monotonous yet colorful modern life.

(III) Unity of Form and Function

Architecture is not only an aesthetically pleasing artifact but also carries functionality. The unity of form and function in the Dongmen market is mainly reflected in the building design that considers the requirements of commercial functions and consumer visual experience while conforming to local culture and environment. The architectural design is led by the commercial atmosphere, employing a design method that integrates modern elements with traditional cultural elements, thus making the entire area more commercially attractive. Furthermore, traditional cultural elements such as Sichuan opera and red lanterns are integrated into the architecture and commercial planning of Chengdu's



Figure 14. Sculpture in Dongmen Market Source: Taken by the Author

Dongmen market, giving the commercial district a stronger local character and cultural charm. Overall, Chengdu's Dongmen market fully considers the unity of form and function in its architectural design and commercial planning, satisfying the needs of merchants and consumers, and becoming one of Chengdu's successful commercial districts.

5.3 Practice of Inheritance and Innovation

One of the reasons for the success of Dongmen market is its commitment to the practice of inheritance and innovation. Chengdu's Dongmen market inherits traditional local culture, like Sichuan opera and folk culture which are continued and promoted in Dongmen market. Meanwhile, it also focuses on inheriting local culture, such as Sichuan cuisine and handicrafts, which endow Dongmen market with unique characteristics and cultural charm. It also continuously innovates and evolves to meet the needs of modern commerce. The innovation of business models, such as introducing e-commerce platforms and promoting the integration of online and offline business models, is a crucial part. Moreover, Chengdu's Dongmen market consistently experiments with innovative elements in architectural design and commercial planning. The combination of inheritance and innovation provide more creativity and room for imagination for the commercial development of Chengdu's Dong-



Figure 15. Sculpture in Dongmen Market Source: Taken by the Author

men market. Generally speaking, the practice of Chengdu's Dongmen market in inheritance and innovation provides more momentum and vitality for its commercial development. Simultaneously, it also offers other districts exemplar successful experiences to learn from.

6. Conclusion

Historical districts are the carriers of urban culture and the inheritors of the urban context. The aesthetic psychology of art is not only a specific response to objective existence but also a kind of memory, experience, and outlook on historical existence. The renovation of historical districts can not only repair their physical environment but also protect their spiritual cultural connotations. Starting from the current situation of Dongmen Market, based on field research, this article summarizes the problems faced by Dongmen Market in the process of renovation, proposes corresponding transformation strategies, and also puts forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions for the problems it will face in the future development process. At present, our country is in a critical period of urban transformation and urban development transformation. During this period, the challenges and problems faced by historical districts have certain representativeness and universality. It is hoped that this study on the renovation practice of Dongmen Market can provide



Figure 16. Daytime Market Source: Taken by the Author



Figure 17. Night Market Source: Taken by the Author

references for other urban historical districts.

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