Look from Ningbo Laowaitan Block of Renovation and City Design of Modern History Block in Ningbo

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Keywords: Ningbo Laowaitan Block, Modern History Block, Urban Design

Abstract. Ningbo Laowaitan block was one of the most famous modern history blocks in Ningbo city. The regeneration and renovation of Ningbo Laowaitan block had important effect to Ningbo city construction. Under the double pressures of city history preservation and high cost commerce operation, the urban designs has been applied a lot of methods, such as style of protection and rehabilitation, style of implantation and collage during the regeneration and renovation of such historical block. A multiple city space has been made by a series of contradictions and opposition.

Introduction

Ningbo is a historical and cultural city with millennium civilization accumulation. It has rich historic relics, as shown in the urban construction, that is, the modern historical block which we see today. As the material testimony of "Five Trade" and "the semi-feudal and semi-colonial" period, Ningbo Laowaitan block was paid more attention during the regeneration and renovation process stage of Ningbo modern history blocks.

History and current situation of Ningbo Laowaitan block

The historical significance of Ningbo Laowaitan historic block was very important. The Laowaitan block adjoined to city center which was named “Sanjiang Estuarine”. It faced Yong River on the east, Yongjiang Bridge on the south, Renmin Road on the west and the steamer piers on the north(figure 1). Along Yong River, there laied Catholic Church, foreign consulates, banks, steamer piers, etc. It almost recorded the whole history of Ningbo as one of opening ports in China. From the beginning of the 20th century, it gave birth to the earliest shipping company in China, the first foreign-owned bank... And a great many of people go to Hong Kong, Shanghai, or other cities from here, forming the brilliant "Ningbo gangs".

However, the historic buildings of western and commercial flavor were considered as "capitalist" and were deserted over a long period. A new round of socialist urban redevelopment also broke up the urban space and memory more or less. The Laowaitan block became a living area with obsolete infrastructure construction, dense buildings and bad environmental quality. Facing this embarrassed situation, Ningbo municipal government decided to carry out regeneration and renovation of Laowaitan block thorough from 2002.

After regenerating and renovating, the Laowaitan block was formally opened in 2005. It has become the place with numerous businessmen, foreign chambers of commerce or offices gather. There were exotic restaurants, famous international coffee chains, fashion bars which synchronized with Shanghai city. And many industries, such as catering, household, entertainment, wedding photography, jewelry, education training, were also concentrated here. It became one of business cards of Ningbo city with the most fashionable glamour.
Renovation and reformation characteristic of Ningbo Laowaitan block

If you have gone to Shanghai Xintiandi, you could feel that style of Ningbo Laowaitan block look very familiar. Undeniable, the style of Ningbo Laowaitan block had similarities with that of Shanghai xintiandi in many ways, as following: both were renovation projects of modern historic blocks and positioned for commercial land for land properties, both were a kind of high cost of commercial operation, and more important, both tried to save the basis styles of historical architecture based on mixture of new structure materials. Even in Ningbo's foreign propaganda, Ningbo Laowaitan block was consciously fashioned as the image of "Ningbo Xintiandi". However, Ningbo city was not equal with Shanghai city, and Ningbo Laowaitan block was also not equal with Shanghai xintiandi, either. Ningbo had its own history and culture. We could find the countless connection contexts between Ningbo Laowaitan block and Ningbo city cultural.

Ningbo Laowaitan block and Tianyi Square were known as the binary stars of Ningbo city. The Tianyi Square, which was opened in 2002, was one of the core business blocks in Ningbo. Its name, "Tianyi", was named from Tianyige, the famous ancient library in Ningbo. Tianyi Square was also historic block of the reconstruction project. It has applied great quantities of design technique with integrating traditional styles and modern styles. Extensive uses of facade materials such as wood shutter finishes, color glass were matched with Yaohuang Temple which was built in HangXi 47 of Qing emperor and Gothic Catholic church. These design styles were also reflected in Ningbo Laowaitan block, and more intense, brighter. From Tianyige to Tianyi Square, and to Ningbo Laowaitan block, the connected and linked urban image strengthened the whole traditional visual image of Ningbo modern city.

Urban design of Ningbo Laowaitan historic block

After analyzing the design technique of regeneration and renovation project of Ningbo Laowaitan historic block, we could find it include not only the protection and rehabilitation, but also implant and collage. It was a series of contradictions and opposing which had finally made multiple urban spaces.

In the block, the only building without disguise was Ningbo city exhibition hall on the north. This was an old Soviet-style warehouse building. It was endowed with a layer of colored glass epidermis during the regeneration and renovation process. In addition, we could see some buildings with old appearance and some old buildings remaining incomplete facade. But more, we could can a lot of building with new combination of modern elements. Admittedly, in this regeneration and renovation process, the unique Chinese and western architectural styles of modern historical block has been respected. The main adornment materials of the whole block were simple but elegant blue. Some new built parts used steel, glass and wood. So, traditional and modern were contrast strongly but safely (figure 2).
The building elevation was paid attention to both segmentation and the detailed division of vertical and horizontal. The abound illuminative baluster components such as doors and windows brought exquisite smooth shadow change, thus further weakening the scale feeling of buildings, letting people which were accustomed to modern high-rise city feel very kind. The proportion of new buildings in Ningbo Laowaitan block was some quite high. In these new-built buildings, the elevation was with abound level besides the structure details of metal, glass and wood to avoid the straightest glass curtain wall in this traditional block.

From the satellite map, it was very easy to find the position of Ningbo Laowaitan block. This was because here located crowded buildings and narrow alleyways. The buildings were mostly three-storey and the alleyways were small scale but pleasant. This was the traditional layout characteristics of southern city. On the ground we could see small beautiful pattern pieces of stone materials and exquisite textures of thin blue sea. The linear of tortuous streets could also bring rich space changes. Especially in the Zhongma Road, with both sides of the street twisting slightly, the building elevation was slowly presented in front of our eyes and it was very like slowly opening the scroll (figure 3). In Ningbo Laowaitan block, there were few places for people to see anything. Small squares often appeared before the street suddenly, or maybe cafe seats or fountain pools, etc.

Yong River is very importance to Ningbo city. Ningbo Laowaitan block became one of the most prosperous places of Ningbo city after being open port, mainly relying on the water transport condition of Yong River. Today, the port function of Yong River has been greatly weakened, but the attachment and emotional between Ningbo Laowaitan and Yong River was still not given up. During this renovation and reformation process, the narrow green space and landscape sketch beside Yong River appeared outstandingly. Long wooden sightseeing platform was also taken on the Waima Road outside Yong River. The platform extended the water and provided people with the possibility of reaching water (figure 4). Looking eastwardly from the sightseeing platform, it was early industrial cluster areas of Ningbo city in the other bank of Yong River. The ZheDong knitting factory, Tai Feng mill factory, HeFeng cotton factory, etc which had created the modem industrial brilliant achievements of Ningbo city were located there. Today, the idle workshops were planned to being creative culture industry and shore leisure bases, together with Ningbo Laowaitan block, composing the new city culture and development bases of Ningbo city.

**Fig. 3 Sceneries of Ningbo Laowaitan**

**Fig. 4 Sightseeing platform along Yong River**

**Questions and Suggestions**

The renovation and reformation project of Ningbo Laowaitan block was a successful transformation and update case of modern historical blocks in Ningbo city, but there were still some shortcomings in its urban design.

Admittedly, the main body of Ningbo Laowaitan block was regarded as business functions. But in such a great important historical block, the business atmosphere should respect the integral style requirements of historic block. Today, some design scales of commercial stores in Ningbo Laowaitan...
block were some quite large and the commercial publicity was really outstanding, thus making the whole block of landscape integrity weak and business atmosphere too strong. In some parts, the atmosphere created by commercial displays could even fully occupy people's perspective. In fact, it was contradiction between subordinating to the urban design requirements of business image and the purpose of commercial advertising. For example, the famous McDonald's "M" symbol had also given up using yellow in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées Paris city. So, in the urban designs, the business atmosphere should satisfy business requirement, and more important and maintain the overall coordination style of the historical block.

In order to coordinate with the protection of historic block and city development, the direct blocks adjacent to the historical block should be credited to building control areas according to the general requirements of urban designs. The height, style, color, etc of the direct blocks should be mated with the historical block of traditional styles to ensure the overall harmonious of blocks environment. In the north of Ningbo Laowaitan block, it has already built Ningbo art gallery and the facade extensive has used lumber, steel and stone which were closely linked with the style of Ningbo Laowaitan historical block. However, there were huge constructions on the Renmin Road and the style of those buildings have ignored of the historical block. This, of course, might exist the problems of construction sequence. But, it was really against the status of "urban business card" of Ningbo Laowaitan historical block at present. So, construction work should be gradually taken on to improve the building elevation style and scale of the Renmin Road to produce positive interaction echo relationship with important boundary of Ningbo Laowaitan block in the future.

Ningbo was a cultural city with rich history. In order to be adapted to the development of modern society, these changes in the historical block might be faced with form or function of renovation and reformation in the future. It was essential to solve the relationship between good protection and sustainable utilization. Some experiences and problems have been exposed during the renovation and reformation process of Ningbo Laowaitan block, those could apply important reference to design development work of other similar projects.

Acknowledgements

This work was financially supported by Protection and Development Researches on Village Cultural Ecological Environment during New Countryside Planning Construction, the 2010th Zhejiang Province Key Research Base Project of Social Sciences (10JDLG02YB).

References