

Community governance and Urban Design in an Historic Preservation District:
The Case of Pingjiang Historic Block in Suzhou, China

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Abstract

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Community governance in planning is an emergent topic in China, where urban planning generally has not included community planning as a local participatory practice. This thesis focuses on Suzhou's old communities in the Pingjiang Historic Block, an essential part of the city's unique urban memory. Suzhou's preservation planning is mainly based on state-driven professional practices that conventionally are only weakly coordinated with community-level self-governance practice. The research is largely descriptive, based on the study of publicly available documents. The thesis includes an urban design section discussing the physical context in the Pingjiang Historic Block, and a review of policy implementations and governance methods used in the historic block. The thesis interprets how community governance operates in the historic block as an element of the city's governmental administration, with potentially useful but still-unrealized interconnections with preservation planning and urban design. The thesis concludes with some tentative recommendations for community governance in this context.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As one of the most developed cities in East China, Suzhou is having quick urban developments and regenerations, involving large-scale demolition, dense construction, and loss of historic urban forms. The urban planning in China hasn't really involved community planning in local practices and Suzhou's preservation planning is mainly based on the state-related professional practices. The focus of the thesis is Suzhou's old communities in the Pingjiang Historic Block, an essential part of the city's unique urban memory. The community study in planning is an emergent topic in China and the particular cultural and political context in China requires more mature theories for it. The research is generally descriptive due to the scarcity of quantitative data and the difficulty to gather. This chapter will explore the community governance and introduce the planning information relevant to this thesis.

1.1 Background

Suzhou City, having more than two thousand years of history, is an important city in East China (figure 1), which is ranked second by GDP after Shanghai. Suzhou is a prefecture level city in Jiangsu Province, one of the important central cities in the Yangtze River Delta approved by the State Council, a national high-tech industrial base and a scenic tourism city. The city has five districts and four county-level cities under its administration, with the total area of 8657.32 square kilometers, the built-up area of 461.65 square kilometers, the permanent population of 10.7217 million. Suzhou is located in Southeast Jiangsu, East China, and the middle of the Yangtze River Delta (figure2). It is an important part of the “Yangtze River conurbation (city

group)” (Zhang & Ning, 2011). It borders Shanghai in the East, Jiaxing in the south, Tai Lake in the West and the Yangtze River in the north.



Figure 1: Map showing the location of Suzhou City in China, made by author. Base map sources: <https://www.amap.com/>

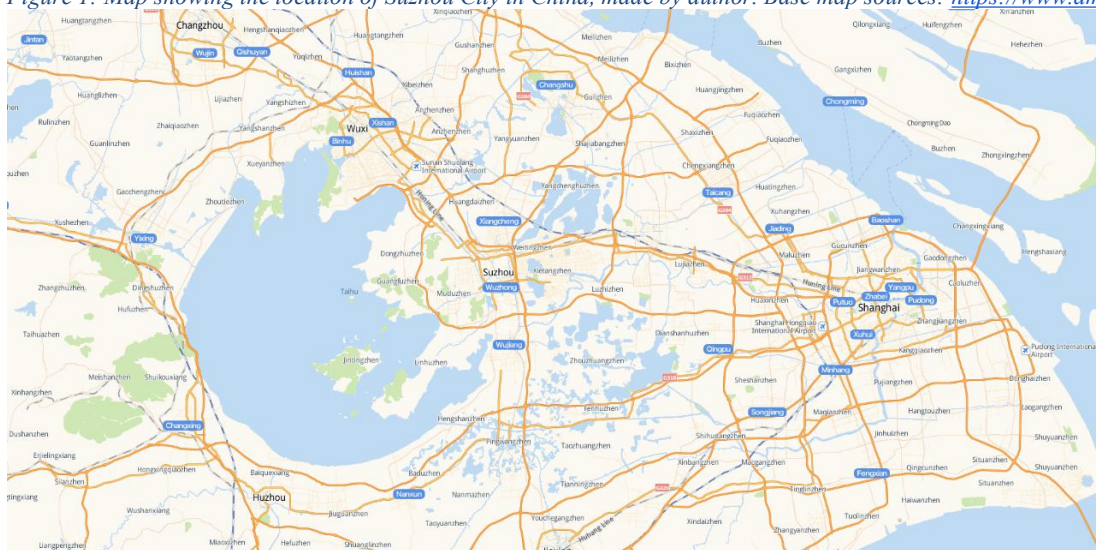


Figure 2: Map showing Suzhou in the Yangtze River Delta. Source: <https://www.amap.com/>

Suzhou is one of the first national historical and cultural cities in China, with a history of nearly 2500 years. It is one of the birthplaces of Wu culture, one of the "four gatherings of the world" in the Qing Dynasty. Suzhou classical gardens, the most famous examples of Chinese private gardens, and the Suzhou section of the Grand Canal are listed as world cultural heritage by UNESCO.

In the 5 districts governed by the Suzhou City, the Gusu District is the one completely covering the Suzhou ancient city. A non-government agency, Suzhou national historic and cultural preservation district, which has the same boundary with Gusu District, is set to help with the preservation. Located at the Northeast corner of the Suzhou ancient city, the Pingjiang Historic Block is the largest and well-preserved historic block in Suzhou. Designated a preservation district in the 1986 Suzhou comprehensive plan, the Pingjiang Historic Block preserved the historic Suzhou urban form, a water city, in the 288 acres area.

Implementing the historic preservation planning and policies, the community governance in Pingjiang Historic Block is led by the Shequ Party Committee and Shequ residential committee, containing both the top-down government system and local self-governance association. Having three Shequ, Daru Alley Shequ, Niujia Alley Shequ and Historic Block Shequ, the policies and planning actions are implemented by the three Shequ, guided by the upper level government, Pingjiang Jiedao.

1.2 Thesis overview

Relying much on the support and guidance from the upper level government, the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance usually is fitting in the top-down policy system while the local level practice adopts many experimental programs and exercises in the local implementation and creative Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work (Shieh, 2011). The policy relying on the local experimentation can be viewed as “the culmination of bottom-up initiatives.” Suzhou is the important city in the economy, favoring the experimental practice in the new policymaking and implementations. As one of the first group cities awarded the historic and cultural famous city and the only city having national historic preservation District, Suzhou have tried preservation policies and implementations generally before other historic cities in China, involving the academic research and official support early. The study on the recent policies and implementation methods used in the historic block in Suzhou would be valuable for comprehending the new Neighborhood Community (Shequ) preservation practice in China. In the planning procedure and policy implementation, the interesting aspect for this research is the descriptive study on the local community governance methods in the Pingjiang Historic Block. In the top-down planning system, the plans and policy implementation in the community governance scale might not well reflect the local ideas so in the local Neighborhood Community (Shequ) implantation it might take extra work or special facilitation to sustain the community governing. To better understand the policy implementation and the governance methods for urban management on a local scale like the similar historic blocks in China, the understanding of current Suzhou Pingjiang community governance is an important part.

The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work and policy implementation are important in the urban planning work and increasingly in demand for planning research. The planning in China needs more learning from the local Neighborhood Community (Shequ) environment and the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance study would be significant in supporting the planning implementations.

In the literature of historic block preservation and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance in China, the preservation methods and modes review as well as the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance transition and renovation are mostly researched. Some literature has researched urban governance and community or Neighborhood Community (Shequ) construction and planning in China, focusing more on the general governance and community planning, while the connection between policy implementation and community governance in historic blocks and the recent Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance methods and work are less studied in the literature. The purpose of this study is to learn about the comprehensive current Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance methods and policy implementations from a planning perspective for the local community governance in the historic block by a case study on the Pingjiang Historic Block based on document research. Suzhou has long been a successful model for historic city and preservation implementation. The study on the community governance in the historic block in Suzhou can be helpful on the policy implementation and conducting similar governance progress in other historic blocks.

After the introduction chapter for general site background, thesis topic and methodology, this thesis will review the literature about the community governance and historic preservation. The

community governance literature has research about the general community concept and governance mode in China, the community construction and planning practice in China, and community governance study relevant to Suzhou and historic areas. The historic preservation literature has the research about the preservation practice in China and specific study in the Pingjiang Historic Block. In chapter 3 the thesis will talk about the urban designs and architecture characters in the historic block forming the specific context of communities. Then in the Chapter 4 the thesis will discuss the community governance methods and self-governance practice in the Pingjiang Historic Block based on the descriptive and interpretative document study. In the Chapter 5 I will conclude the research of community governance in Pingjiang Historic Block and propose some considerations for the community governance and possible future research.

1.3 Methodology

My thesis asks how community governance operates in the historic block with the urban design. I review the community governance with urban design in the case of the Pingjiang Historic Block in Suzhou, China. The review is based on the governmental system and self-governance association, mainly focusing on the governance process and methods, as they appear from a study of documents and field trip observations. The document study reviews official documents; plans at different levels and in different aspects; news media; articles and reports; and other online information. In the urban planning and social science study literature researching similar topics, the common research methods are field observations, documents study, and interviews.

Current travel difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic limits the possibility of conducting interviews in person and interviewing officials or Residents Committee members is difficult without the approval from the upper level government or director of the Neighborhood Community that the interviewees are hesitating to give information to the researcher (Shieh, 2011) and it might get a similar answer with the interviews in the official news because of the local propaganda. Thus, the research will use the data about the historic block sourced mainly from documents and partly from field observations.

In the document data gathering, the study is focusing on collecting information in the community governance policies, preservation implementation and other city management methods in the historic block governing. The subjects, in this case study, are the Pingjiang Historic Block, three Neighborhood Communities (Shequ) in it and Pingjiang Road. The online researching is used to identify the information by searching the keywords in different platforms. The first document resource is the official government website of Gusu District¹. In its planning section, the master plan of the Suzhou national historic and cultural city preservation as well as Pingjiang Historic Block preservation plan and policies from the municipal government are identified to understand the plans and governmental works in the preservation district. The preservation district (Gusu District) and Pingjiang Historic Block level governance methods and policies are identified, like the governmental supervision, area-planner system and grid management system. Activities and publicity relevant to Pingjiang Historic Block are identified from the local news like public participation in preservation and volunteer activities. The documents in the government website mainly provide the data for the plans, actions and policies in the recent 4 years in Jiedao and

¹ The information release of Pingjiang Jiedao on the Gusu District official website, http://www.gusu.gov.cn/gsq/qzfxgkml/xxgk_list.shtml?deptcode=014149746&category=2&dept_id=3bb5d5cfa2c84683ba8240dff63d49ac#!true=1

Historic Block level. The other important data collection resource is the WeChat platform, a social application by which public accounts can share information with users, where all Neighborhood Community (Shequ), Jiedao government, news media, scholars and we media post articles, announcements, news, interviews or reports. With the keywords searching, the planning analysis and news, Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level policies and actions, preservation planning activities, community history and public interviews are identified for the data collection. The resource provides quite a lot of information relevant to the topic and the further process is narrowing the document data. Other resources contain websites like the Pingjiang Historic Block protection and renovation company², 2D and 3D bird-view maps³ and Suzhou planning information system⁴. The history of urban governance transition and renovation as well as the community level governance methods adapting can be sourced from the literature of community governance in Suzhou⁵.

The strategy I will use to analyze the data is processing the data in different levels of governance. The descriptive analysis of the community governance needs to indicate what policies and implementations are derived from the upper level top-down governance and what policies and implementations are uniquely adopted by the local community governance. The study will use the relevant literature to generally indicate the transition and renovation of the community governance mode and methods in the historic block, which might be relevant to other cases in Suzhou or other cities. From the different local implementations, activities and governing actions, the description of the community governance will be interpreted based on the data collected. The

² <http://www.pj-road.com/>

³ <https://map.baidu.com>

⁴ <http://zrzy.jiangsu.gov.cn/sz/ghcgy/>; <http://218.4.157.242/ghgs/Project/ghpublic/index.aspx>

⁵ Shen, Zhao and Hu (2008); Zhao (2009); Zhao W. and Zhao M. (2002)

result will relate to the preservation policies to help describe how community governance in the historic block works with the implementation governmental policies.

The limitations of this approach are the inadequacy of data resources, propaganda effects, and limitation of perspective. The data from the documents is sufficient in understanding the general information about the specific actions and policy implementations, but the details and relevant background of the governance process might be hard to source from the documents. Currently most official documents in Suzhou, local news, governmental actions and policy implantations are posted and available online but there can be some which are hard to archive then limit the interpretative study. The propaganda influence is that the official announcements and news might be subject to the government propaganda and release only the pros or good points of the actions and implementations or embellish the process. This limitation exists in both document study and interviews in the Suzhou case, which can be reduced by more adequate data collections. The limitation of perspective is that I only study the phenomenon at the current time from my perspective as a student of urban planning. The phenomenon interpretation without adequate local experience might oversee the local difficulty and possible sociological factors influence the governance process.

1.4 Preservation plans in Suzhou

The thesis case study area is located at the ancient city of Suzhou City, whose plans and urban designs are subject to the city level preservation plans. The Pingjiang area which contains the case study historic block is one of the significant preserving areas in the city level preservation plans.

The Suzhou Historic and Cultural Famous City Preservation Plan (2013-2030) is the latest comprehensive preservation plan of Suzhou City, which is the master plan guiding the plans in the Pingjiang Historic Block. Revised four times, the focus of the famous city preservation plan is to protect the historic city image and cultural heritage, strengthen the renovation of facilities in ancient city and actively develop new districts (Xiang, 2013). The guiding idea indicated by the plan is using a comprehensive view of the famous cities protection -- protection, utilization and development, which are coordinated and complementary to each other, to make the protection and utilization of history and culture a sustainable way of development. The leading principles are as follow:

1. Comprehensive protection and professional protection
2. Rational utilization
3. Characteristic development and coordinated development

The preservation plan is quite general which indicates little about the evaluation of future developments while focuses more on defining the preservation subjects. The preservation target of the historic city (Gusu District) is to strengthen the protection and inheritance of historical

culture, promote the transformation and development, improve the livable environment, optimize the traffic organization and management, coordinate the relationship between protection and development, and achieve the protection and demonstration objectives of "national historical and cultural city protection demonstration district". In the historic city district, the protected objects include the overall pattern and style of "water-land chessboard pattern", traditional districts, traditional residences, cultural relics and historic sites, and traditional building materials and technology. The pink area in the preservation plan map shows all the historic blocks in Suzhou historic city.

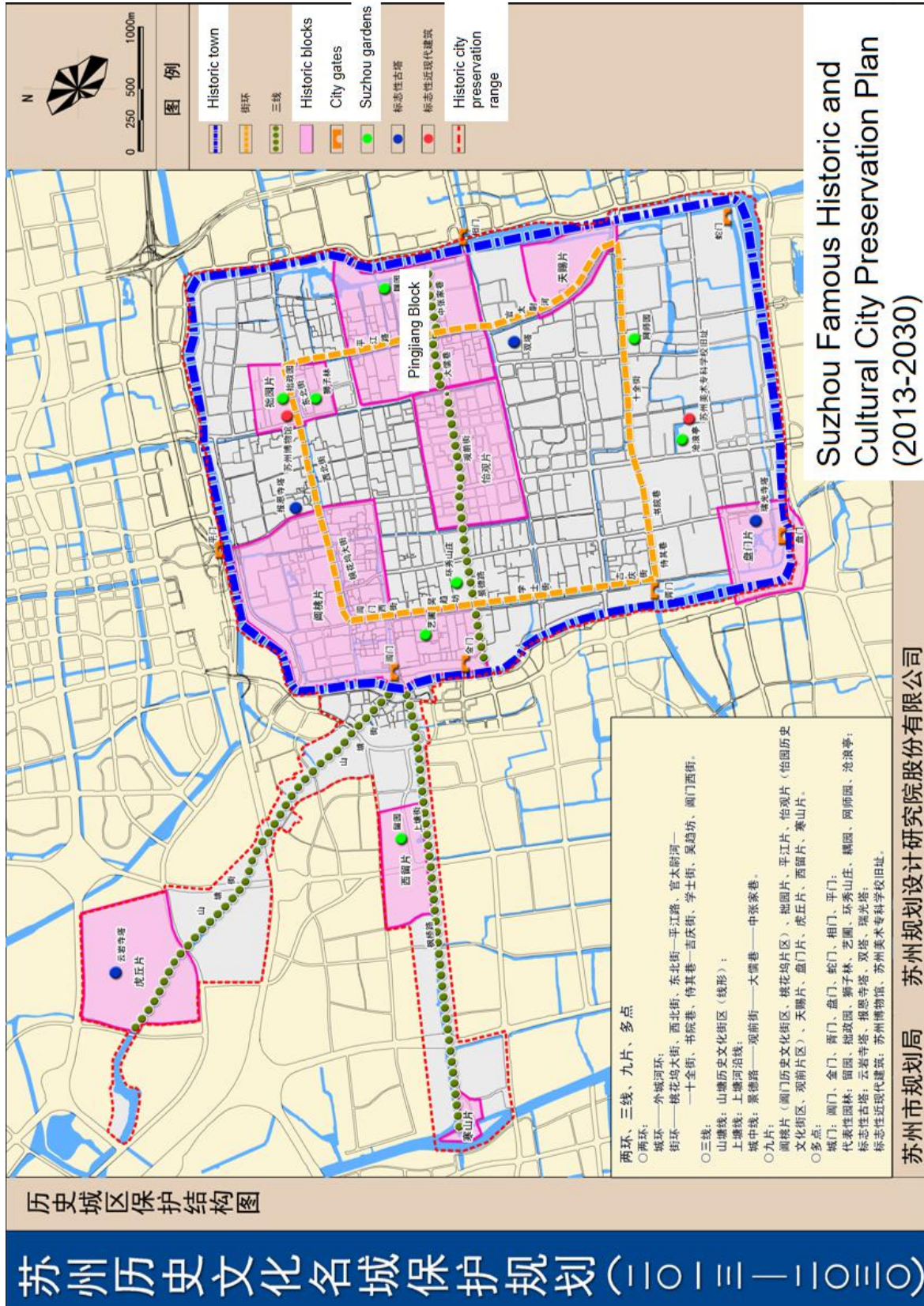


Figure 4: Suzhou Famous Historic and Cultural City Preservation Plan (2013-2030), translated by author. Source: http://zrzy.jiangsu.gov.cn/sz/ghcgy/201904/t20190402_769074.htm

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Historic Preservation and Community Governance in China and Suzhou

2.1 Neighborhood Community (Shequ)

The Shequ is the basic level of urban governance in China, involving the local self-governance. Shequ in Chinese is the term similar to the neighborhood community in English while slightly different with the “community”. Shieh in *Shequ Construction: Policy Implementation, Community Building, and Urban Governance in China* states:

“The Chinese word shequ (pronounced shè qū) is commonly translated into English as “community.” The term is composed from the characters for “social” (she) and “district” (qu), referring to a collective identity in a defined space. ...The administrative area under the jurisdiction of a residents’ committee is referred to as shequ, or “neighbourhood community” in official parlance.

...The term shequ is a modern construct that has been appropriated into the reform policy discourse. Behind it lie strong traditions of associational life as well as the state’s long standing concerns with maintaining social stability and control over its population. Elements of self-help, mobilization, and constructing governable units have continuously shaped the Chinese concept of neighbourhood community.”

The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) self-governance, the Residents Committee⁶ is legitimated in the People's Republic of China Constitution as "mass organizations of self-management at the grassroots level" (Article 111). The 1989 Organic Law defines the Residents Committee the self-manage, self-educate, and self-service organization (Article 2). A Residents Committee generally has 5 to 9 members, having a director and a vice-director, elected by the residents living in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ). The Residents Committee is not part of the state government, but the Organic Law requires the residents' committee to be responsible for the possible request and guidance from the state bureau (Article 20). Based on the local residential neighborhood, the residents' committee reports to the resident meeting (Article 10). The Resident Meeting must have the attendance of all residents, or resident representatives by household, or representatives selected by each resident group (Article 9). The Constitution and Organic Law give limited self-governance space for the local Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residents' committee, which is guided by the next level of government above it, the Jiedao, or Street Committee, also sometimes translated as Sub-district.

The Party Committee in Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level is the committee managing the Party branches in the Neighborhood Community. In the *Memorandum from the Ministry of Civil Affairs on Promoting Urban Shequ Construction throughout the Nation* (2000), the Neighborhood Community Party Committee is required to support and ensure the self-governance of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) Residents Committee and its responsibility performing. The memorandum indicates that the Neighborhood Community

⁶ The term "Residents Committee" is same with the term "Residents' Committee" or "Residential Committee" in literature.

(Shequ) Residents Committee is essentially a self-governance association led by the Party for self-management, self-education, self-service and self-supervision. Elected by the Party members in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ), the Neighborhood Community Party Committee has similar personnel with the Residents Committee while is guided by the Jiedao Party Committee, which together with the guidance from Jiedao government might limit the self-governance in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residential committee.

In the top-down bureaucratic system of formal urban governance, the Jiedao is the lowest level of full-time government, immediately superior to the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residents' committee, and just below the upper District government. The chart (Figure 5) shows the hierarchy of the governmental administration system in mainland China. The Residents Committee is the only self-governance level in urban governance.

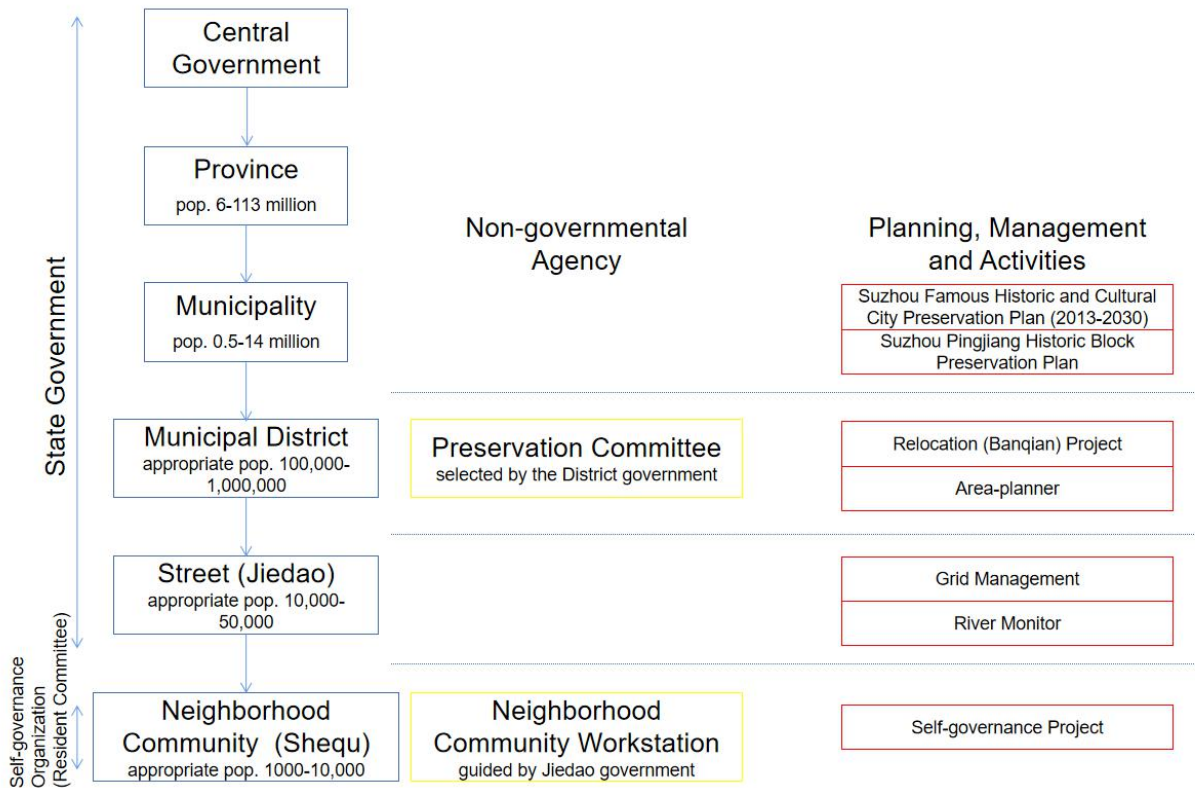


Figure 5: The common hierarchy of territory administration in province like Jiangsu Province and the agencies, plans, management and activities mentioned in this thesis, connected to their corresponding (responsible) level of government, made by author.

In the top-down system, as indicated by Abramson (2006), the local leaders are mainly evaluated by the officials above them rather than by the people in their jurisdictions. In the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level, while the residents' committee is elected by the local residents, the evaluation of their work is largely managed by the next higher level government, the Jiedao, and the in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ). The local policy implementations are usually sourced from the guidance by Jiedao or upper level government, which can be seen in the later chapters. Thus, the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) has the limited part of the local governance and is restricted in the implementation of policies from upper level government. Shieh and Friedmann (2008) state that “Shequ is not understood as an all-encompassing, all-purpose grass roots institution, a panacea for all sorts of local issues... (Shequ Committees) may

be seen as one among several neighbourhood-level institutions, which pose the more realistic question of what SQ Committees can accomplish on their own, and where resources and responsibilities will have to be shared.”

Parallel with the administration system, the planning system is hierarchical relying much on the official planning agencies and universities. The upper and comprehensive level plans are made by upper level agencies and small-scale plans are made by local level agencies generally. The plans are approved by the State Council at the corresponding level government and their implementations are monitored by the corresponding management committee or planning bureau.

2.2 Community construction and governance structure

Community construction is the word used in China for the general development of community and local governance. The community government structure is unique in China and has been in the transition in the last tens of years. Bray (2006) discusses the community concept and the history of “community” in urban China. The article mentions the community in China combines two aspects, local and economic self-governance and the moral “quality” element. The community term in China is specifically defined by government decisions, “administrative role” and “territorial space”. The ethical element in the community in current days is based on models to promote the “spiritual civilization”. The article concludes that “in governing their benighted neighbours, as well as themselves, citizens of ‘quality’ relieve China’s governmental authorities of a considerable burden.” The Residents Committee and party branch particularly give the community a definite “institutional identity”. Bray indicates that the community in China can

resemble a new level of local governance, presenting a combination of governmental intervention, voluntary service and moral improvement commitment. If the community building is successful to some extent, it will reduce the future costs and help keep the legitimacy of government. Similarly, Shieh and Friedmann (2008) research community construction in China and indicate the policy forming process, pressure of the existing governance system and future objectives. The self-governance is formulated by the central government to reduce the burden of local government and has the top-down nature. By the interviews of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) directors, the paper concludes that the current community construction is only translating the national policy objectives into local guidelines and measures and is evaluated by the standards. The paper can be the reference for urban governance in China and provide a perspective on the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) structure and its real accomplishment in self-governance. Abramson (2006) demonstrates the institution structure and values related to urban planning in China. Abramson (2007) mentions the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level planning structure. The historical central government mode's administrative hierarchy remains in the planning today, in which the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) or Residents Committee is under the Jiedao (street) government. In the "top-down and policy-driven" system, Neighborhood Community (Shequ) has funds for local improvements and planners gradually work more with the local people rather than working only for upper level government.

With the topics about community governance and implementation, Shieh (2011) researched the implementation of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) construction and its impact on the neighborhoods. The research focuses on the implication and the interaction between central mandate and local policies based on Nanjing fieldworks to examine how the policies are

interpreted in the local implementation and how Neighborhood Community (Shequ) policy influences other policies. The paper indicates the four aspects of community construction in China that are public services reform and decentralization, suburban redevelopment, social services by nonprofit sectors, and homeowner associations. Shieh indicates that the observation of policy interactions and context is essential and necessary to understand state objectives and accomplishments.

2.3 Community governance and planning in Suzhou

The Pingjiang Historic Block has three Neighborhood Communities (Shequ) (Figure 6) which implement the policies from top-down system. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) system and its renovation have been discussed in several articles.

Shen, Zhao and Hu (2008) and Zhao (2009) research the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) system renovation in Pingjiang District, which is the former district containing Pingjiang Historic Block. The Residents Committee should be a self-governance association according to the constitution but in former modes, the resident committee's work is almost arranged and promoted by the government. The community is in top-down mode and lacks co-governance from Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residents. They indicate the Pingjiang District's exploration and practice of community governance renovation are in 4 aspects: first a coordinating committee is set to help promote the system transition; second the Residents Committee is returned to self-governance, removing the government work; third a new NGO,

called Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workstation, is set to manage some administration affairs through the market system; fourth the resident service station is expanded, which consists of service workers and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) volunteers. Pingjiang District's Neighborhood Community (Shequ) renovation reduces the influence from the government and attracts the participation of social organizations and residents, which can promote the government system revolution and active citizen society. The Pingjiang mode can be an example for community governance renovation but still it needs more progress to the final co-governance.

Zhao W. and Zhao M. (2002) discuss the progress and issues of community planning in China. The urban planning in China has not really involved community planning, except in a limited, primarily physical-architectural way at the scale of new residential district planning. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) system restricted the community planning practice. Zhao and Zhao (2002) indicate some considerations for the community planning practice in China: coordinating the multiple powers from the government, market and residents, defining the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) type, holding community member participation activity and researching population demand before planning. The community planning now is not in the urban planning legal system, which is not required and supported by law or regulation and has little attention from the planning professionals.

Chang, Lau and Calogero (2019) research participatory governance, the community self-governance supported by the government in China, the participatory initiatives and the NGO's impact on self-governance promoting in the Suzhou Industrial Park based on data from a NGO project fieldwork and interviews. One weakness with community planning in Suzhou is that the

government's evaluation and budget limit for NGOs reduce the capacity of self-governance led by NGOs. The research is focusing more on the process of community planning leadership and resident's involvement. The local self-governance is increasingly supported and promoted by the upper level government and the Party and in the case, the Party-led process, in which the role of Party is minimized, gets more participation and inclusion than the NGO-led process. The paper indicates that "the deliberative approach may also be hampered by the misuse of power of other key actors, ..., particularly when the partnership and collaboration between different stakeholders is informal, and statutory power is absent."

Some social science studies focus on the community (Shequ) governance and volunteers in the community governance in Suzhou. Wu (2010) researches the full-time community workers' "team construction" in Suzhou ancient city. The study finds some issues of community workers teams like few professionals in the team, indefinite positions, high work burden and low work efficiency. Some advice like educating system improvement and incentives are indicated. After 10 years, the community workers team in Suzhou ancient city might have been improved in the aspects mentioned by Wu while the related research is very little. Li (2015) studies how to improve the volunteer work organization in the community governance perspective based on the experience from Singapore volunteer mode. The research indicates that with 2-6 volunteer organizations in each community, many volunteer activities are random and temporary, commonly dependent on the resident committees. To reduce the governmental impact on the volunteer work, the innovation of coordination between government and social organization and more self-governance are needed. Promoting volunteers to participate in the system construction in community governance and incentives for volunteers are the main considerations for the

volunteer work improvement in community governance. Wang (2018) mentions the training and appraisal system in volunteer work organization, using both residents and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) feedback rather than the top-down mode. Zuo (2016) examining the community volunteer service in Gusu District, which contains the Pingjiang Historic Block, indicates the insufficiency in volunteer service supply and lack of volunteer management. The duality of both governmental and non-government position in funding and organization, and volunteer service's reliance on the government are two of the reasons and the volunteer organization should be the governance of a third party. These articles, focusing on the community governance systems, have well researched the progress and existing shortages of community governance in Suzhou while in the literature. Community governance in a planning perspective can be the study topic based on research history.

2.4 Historic preservation planning

In the context of urbanization in China, UNESCO suggests that “Heritage constitutes a source of identity and cohesion for communities disrupted by bewildering change” while many famous historic regenerated projects in China are mainly designed for tourists by transforming the urban fabric into commercial space and the main intent is to redevelop for the economic gain and political achievement of local government (Xie and Heath, 2016). In China, historic blocks are set to help regulate the preservation, renewal and regeneration of historic urban areas, led by the state government (Ruan and Gu, 2004).

Yisan Ruan is a national authority on historic preservation who has directed many historic preservation projects in China. Ruan and Gu (2004) have indicated the historic blocks are not to preserve the history statically and should ensure the coherent development of historic space, preserving the authenticity of social structure and local life. A historic block regeneration mode based on community participation needs to be formed, involving residents in communications with planning professionals. Ruan (2001) states that the historic block preservation should be objective based on the site condition and use the same materials to repair the architecture appearance, conforming to the local characteristic appearance.

Yisan Ruan has been involved in and has a major influence on the Pingjiang Historic Block planning since the designation of the Pingjiang Historic Block. The preservation implantation and local governance policies in the Pingjiang Historic Block are guided and influenced by the comprehensive preservation plans in the last decades.

Ruan and Liu (1999) indicate that the main target of the historic preservation planning in the Pingjiang Historic Block is to achieve a virtuous circle in the district based on improving the living environment for residents. Besides the preservation, the district needs to be the space for living and activities. As a residential district, the district was planned by three preservation levels to balance the preservation and development in a sustainable way. They also indicate the importance of public participation advocating that firstly the cooperation of public and private investment can work better economically and secondly the plan can have real citizen basis and help strengthen neighborhood connections and thirdly the residences were designed by citizens historically. The article also mentions the policies work is as much as important as the technical

work in the district. The guiding principles of planning in the district in the paper can help the policies and governance study in the research.

Lin and Ruan (2006) talks about new ideas and methods in the preservation planning and practice for Pingjiang Historic Block. They mention the importance of planning implementing feedback for promptly improving the plan making. For the new implement practice, they indicate that preservation is non-profit action and government should be the main responsible for the historic preservation. The government bureaus of each level are responsible for specific preservation and management work according to their own responsibilities. Government founded project company for the implementation of preparing, land transferring, planning design, construction, investment attraction and financial management. For the public side, they indicate that the planning has listened to the residents in the “planning compiling phase” especially in the historical cultural resources collection, and the “relocation” (Banqian) project methods in the implementation received residents’ support. They conclude the preservation of historic blocks would be a long process and needs sustainable implementation. Besides, the preservation guidance in the paper can help review the governance policies in the district.

Chapter3: Urban Planning and the Built Environment of Pingjiang Historic Block

3.1 District administration and plan

The Pingjiang Historic Block is located at Gusu District (Figure 3), which covers the whole Suzhou old town and was set in 2012. The Pingjiang Historic Block was under the governance of Pingjiang District before 2012, which was combined into the Gusu District in 2012. Suzhou was designated a National Famous Historic and Cultural City by the State Council in 1982. During the decades since then, the ancient city preservation plan continued to be updated and the latest one is the Suzhou historic and cultural famous city preservation plan (2013-2020) which, at the municipal government level, is the master plan containing the Pingjiang Historic Block. The latest Pingjiang Historic Block preservation plan was released in 2014. A non-government agency, Suzhou National Famous Historic and Cultural City Preservation District⁷, which has the same boundary with Gusu District, was established in 2012 and is the only National Famous Historic and Cultural City Preservation District in China(Jiangnan Forum, 2018). The Pingjiang Historic Block consists of three Neighborhood Community (Shequ), Niujia Alley Shequ, Daru Alley Shequ and Historic Block Shequ (figure 6), and its upper level government is Pingjiang Jiedao, which was named Pingjiang Road Jiedao before 2012. In the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level, the community governance is conducted by the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) Party committee and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residents committee which is the

⁷ The term is difficult to be translated into English as indicated by Abramson (1997): The “famous city” is to stress the city’s reputation traditionally.

community level self-governance association elected by the residents. The three Neighborhood Communities (Shequ) have 6080, 9586 and 6479 residents respectively, and there are two hundred more volunteers working for one Neighborhood Community (Shequ). The Pingjiang Road, the main road in the Pingjiang Historic Block and documented on the Song Dynasty Suzhou City map “Pingjiang Map” (figure 7), well preserves the historic Suzhou urban form.

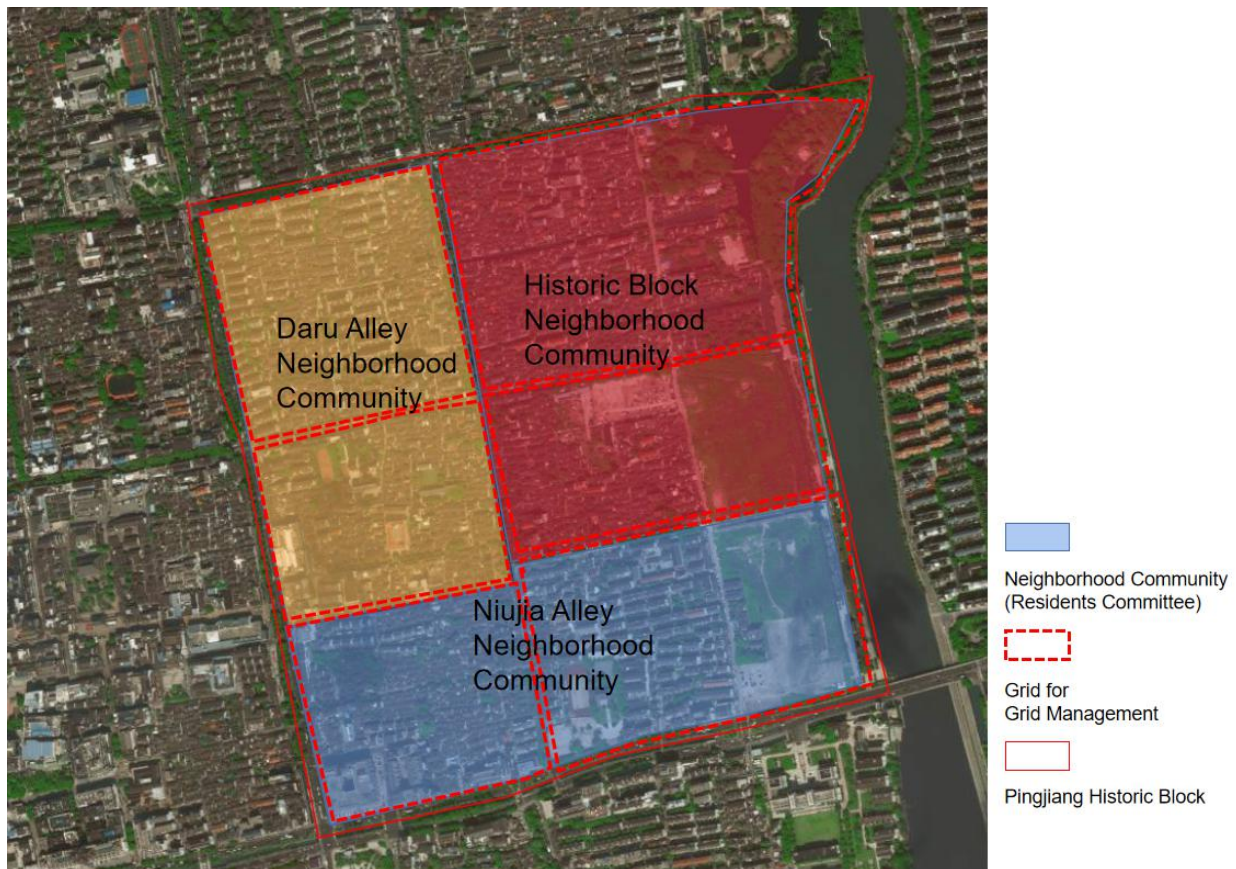


Figure 6: Map showing the three Neighborhood Communities in the Pingjiang Historic Block, made by author. Based on 2017 grid management information, source: https://www.sohu.com/a/129974112_349673.

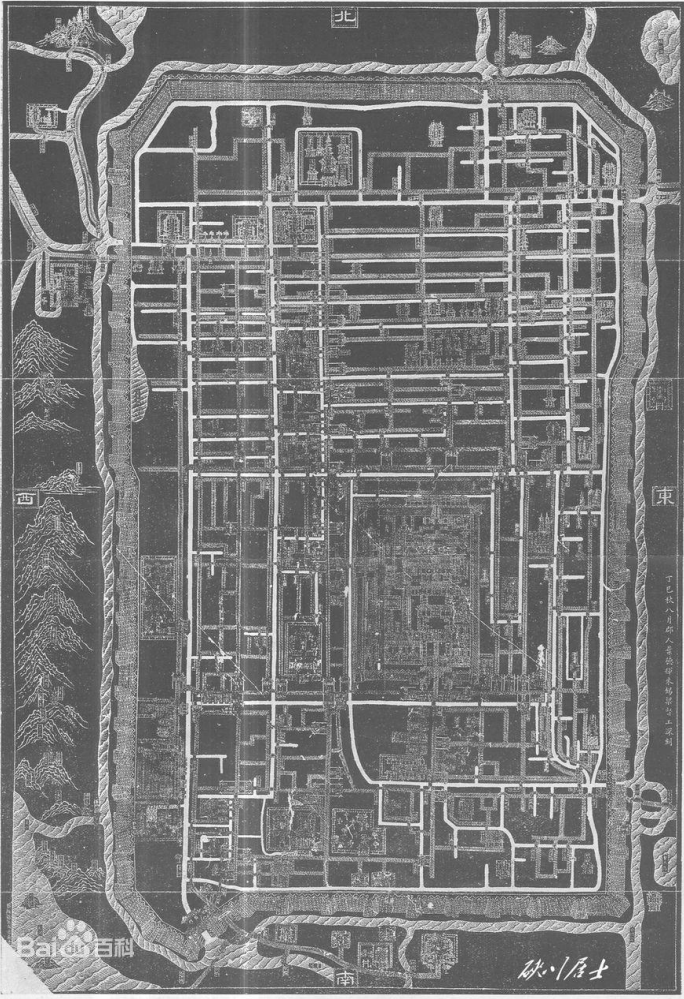


Figure 7: Pingjiang Map, made by Shouming Li, 1229, retrieved from <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B9%B3%E6%B1%9F%E5%9B%BE/8116745?fr=aladdin>

The comprehensive preservation planning in Suzhou and Pingjiang Historic Block are led by the local government and made by the local planning institute. The Pingjiang Historic Block preservation plan was revised in 2014 by Suzhou Planning Bureau and Suzhou Planning Institute. The plans are announced at the official government website and available for feedback after the planning compiling. The announced Pingjiang Historic Block preservation plan presents the summarized key descriptions with the planning maps of preservation range, heritage utilization and land use, which are the basis regulating new projects and planning in the block.

In the 2014 Pingjiang historic preservation plan (figure 8), the guiding principle of the preservation is indicated, that is preserving the layout and features of the historic block comprehensively to protect and utilize the historic culture in a sustainable development mode. For the intangible cultural heritage, the plan indicates that the preservation should take industrializing development mode, provide performance space for performing arts heritage and set public activity space to show the traditional Suzhou lifestyle. For the tangible cultural heritage, the necessary repairing and proper utilization are encouraged based on the preservation with the principle of proper use, sustainability and protective exhibition.

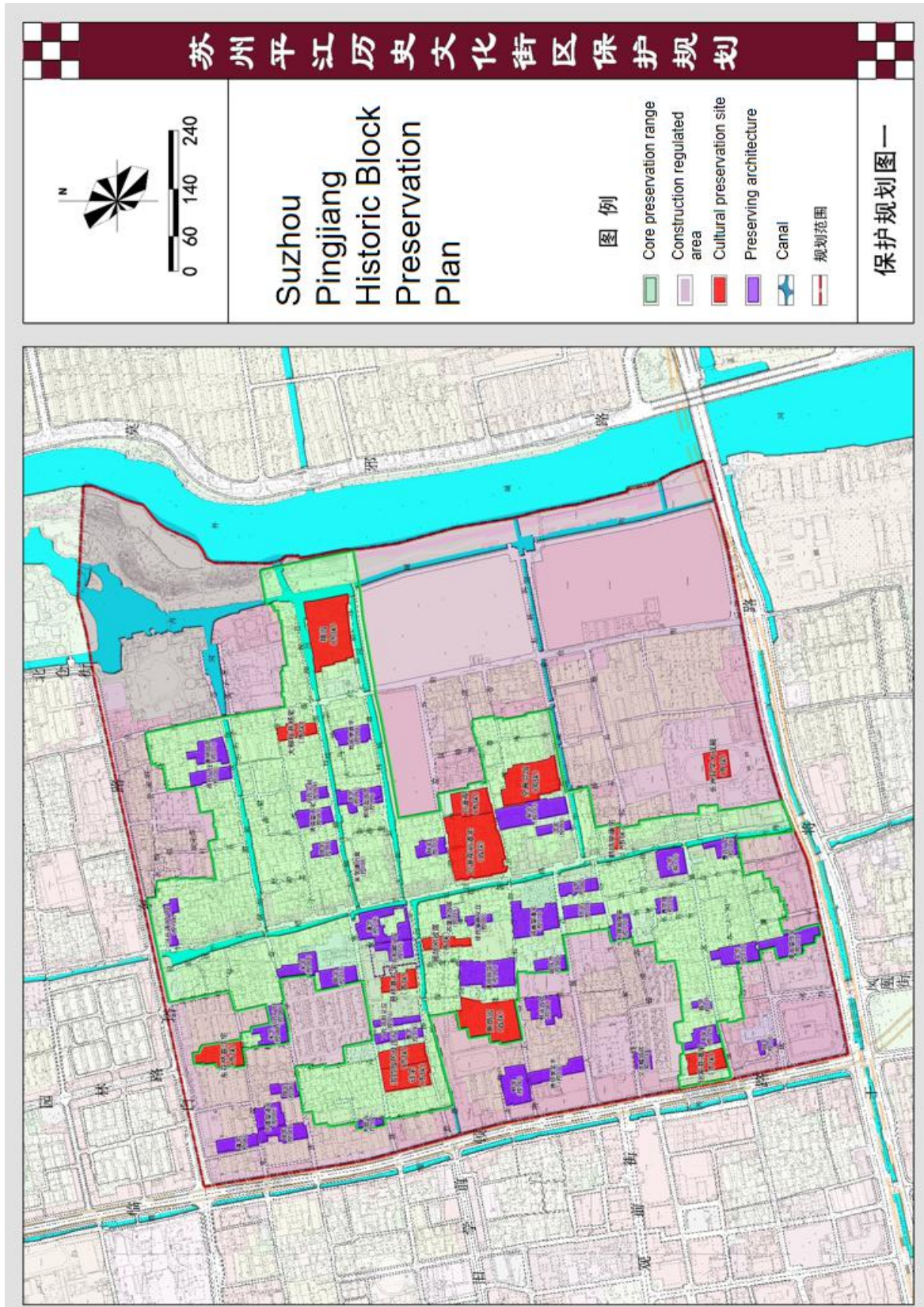


Figure 8: Suzhou Pingjiang Historic Block Plan, translated by author. Source: http://zrzy.jiangsu.gov.cn/sz/ghcgy/201904/t20190402_769060.htm

Suzhou Municipal People's Government in the report (2019) mentions that the Pingjiang district area is set as the model district for the ancient city preservation and regeneration. The pilot project is guided by the strategy of "rejuvenation of the ancient city" and adheres to "overall protection and organic renewal, feature forming and quality improvement, environmental improvement and facilities supporting, people's livelihood improvement and social harmony, industry transformation and cultural prosperity", in accordance with the "Suzhou style residence". The district, historical buildings and old residences are linked together to form a "grand scenic area". The urban design of the area uses the concept of "micro renewal" and the mode of "microcirculation and gradual organic renewal", which are the terms used by the government and planners in China. The "micro renewal" and "microcirculation and gradual organic renewal" are to improve the old buildings by small-scale incremental projects and bottom-up processes instead of demolition and construction (Liu, 2006). Pingjiang Historic Block is built into a test field and a model district for the experimental preservation projects.

3.2 Historic environment and local urban form and architectural style

Suzhou is a typical historic "water city" of the lower Yangtze River Delta region, and Pingjiang Historic Block has preserved the main distinctive images of the historic Suzhou city form. The street and alley system of Suzhou historic blocks follows the pattern of Tang and Song Dynasties, forming a high-density, all-around land and water transportation network, where major streets are parallel with rivers and canals restricted by masonry (Wang, Zhou, & Niu, 2016).

Accommodating the layout characteristics and orientation requirements of traditional residential

buildings, the historic city streets and alleys system is mainly composed of East-West long alleys, including water alleys, with a general spacing of 80-100m. The layout of building yards is compact, and the interface between streets and alleys is coherent, forming the compact and dense spatial texture of the historic city. According to the different combinations of river course, streets and buildings, the streets and alleys of the historic city have formed spatial forms as “two streets surrounding one river”, “street along the river”, “street without river” (houses surrounding one river) and “street parallel with river” (Figure 9). They reflect the traditional life scene of residents neighboring water and shape the traditional street landscape of "small bridge, flowing water and residences"⁸ in the Pingjiang Historic Block.

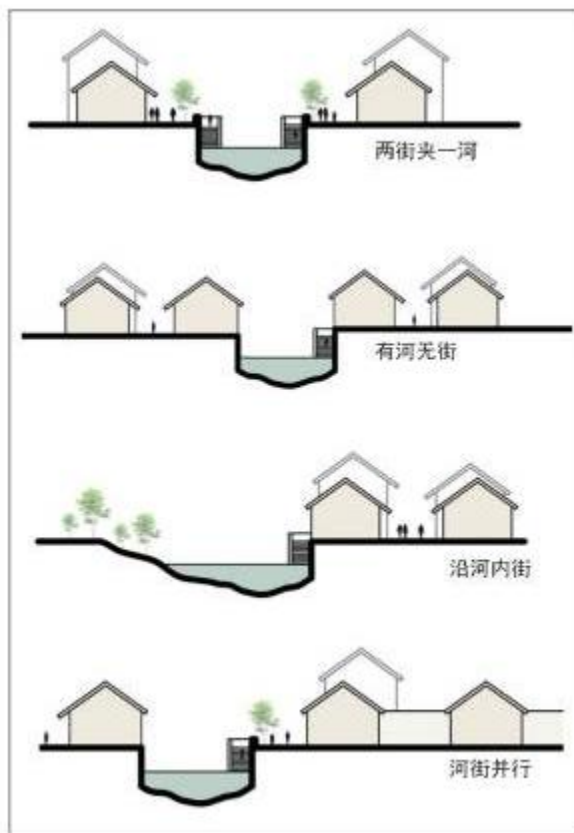


Figure 9, Spatial form in Pingjiang Historic Block. Source: Wang, Zhou, & Niu, 2016

⁸ A famous poem by Yuan Scholar Ma Zhiyuan. (Ma, Z. Y. 1964. [Yuan] “Tianjinsha-qiusi.” In *Quan Yuan Sanqu* [Sanqu from the Yuan Dynasty], edited by Yu Shusen, 242. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.)

The streets and alleys in the historic block have three grades: street (*Jie*, about 6m wide), alley (*Xiang*, 3 to 4 m wide) and *Long* (1.5 to 2m wide). The buildings along the river have similar building volume and height, forming compact street space. As the main body of the Suzhou traditional pattern, the streets and alleys in the historic block are mostly named by cultural relics, historic figures, local customs and industries, conserving the local history. The two major streets in the Pingjiang Historic Block are the Pingjiang Road, which is the largest pedestrian way in the district with commerce, and the “historic city landscape belt street”, which is at the East edge of the district, adjacent to the City River. The two major alleys in the district are the Daru-Zhangjia Alley having cultural exhibitions and museums and Xuanqiao-Xinqiao Alley along with traditional residences and river.

With majorly the traditional Suzhou residences in residential areas of the historic block, the district has some Soviet style Residential Neighborhood (*Xiaoqu*) built in the late 19th Century. Similar to the Zhujiajiao water town in Shanghai (Chow, 2015), close to the preserved historic area, 5 or 6 stories buildings are built based on the Soviet model of residential planning. Chow indicates that while the residential life in water town is hidden from visitors, the combination of residential life and visiting gives “vitality and authenticity” to the historic center, which is lacking in re-constructed villages. The Pingjiang Historic Block is similar in that the combination makes the site vital and representative rather than a simple tourist site. Xie and Heath (2017) states that “it is admirable to see the effort to recognize the importance of and to preserve local living patterns in the Pingjiang district.” While on the other hand, the residents might be restrained to improve the residences to modern living standards.

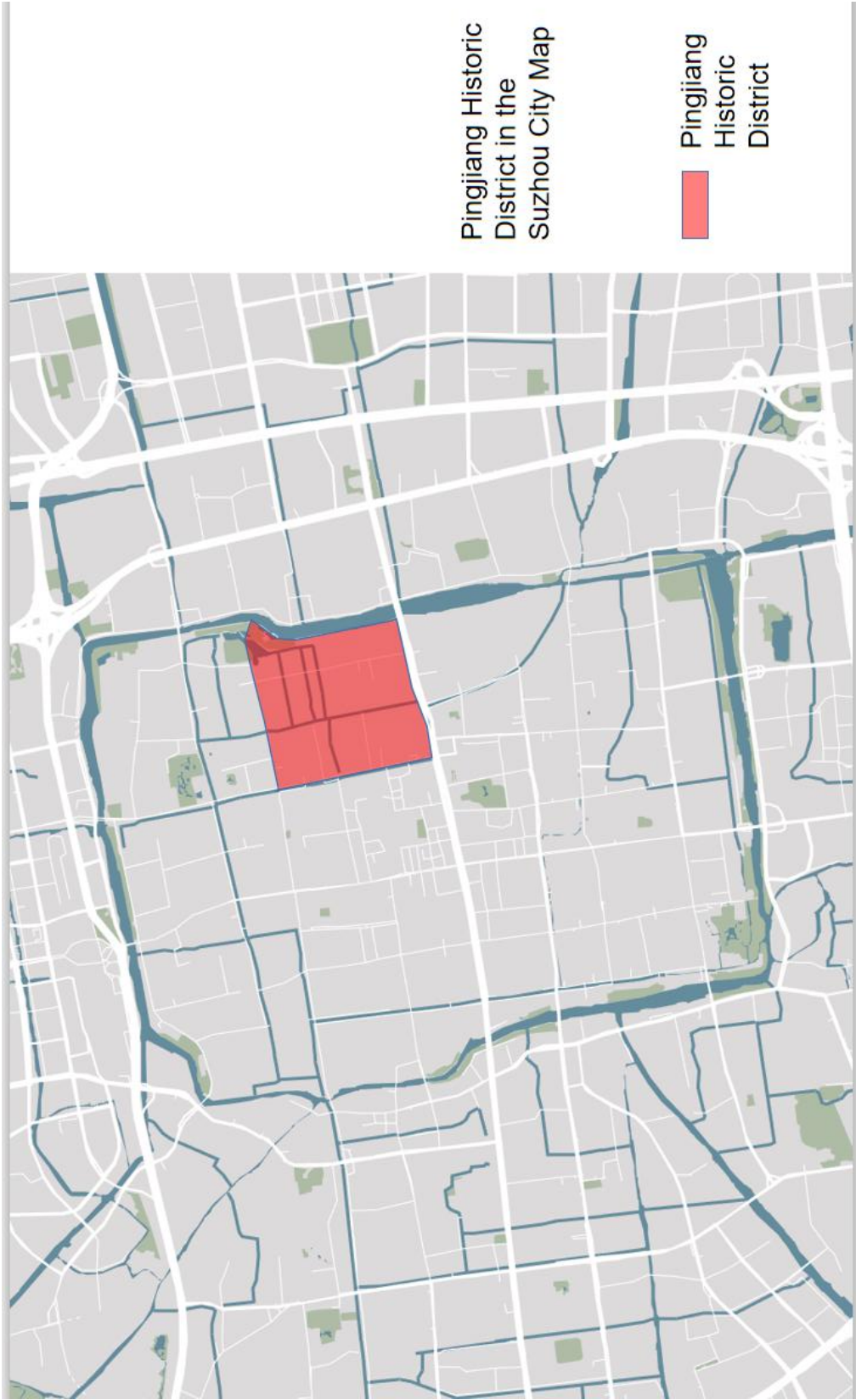


Figure 10, Map showing Pingjiang Historic Block in Suzhou, made by author. Base map source: amap.com



Figure 11, Map showing architecture in the Pingjiang Historic Block, made by author. Base map source: amap.com

3.3 Urban design in the historic block

The urban design in the case study site is in the preservation mode of traditional urban form and unique in the modern urban areas. The site keeps the traditional architecture design like small store space, limited entrances (figure 12) and one- or two-story building with wooden decorations. The commercial use and residential use of the site area requires the balance between the urban development strategies of conservation and development. The connections between different components within the site is important to the local efficiency, reflecting on the existing local urban form.

The early developments in the site like commercial malls (figure 14) are designed mainly based on the usage in regulations and have few connections with the other areas in the historic block. The Pingjiang Road area (figure 11), newly planned, has tried to design for multiple activities efficiently but the buildings out of the project area are merely connected with it.

The historic block largely preserves the historic urban pattern different with the modern urban design area's while some more recently built multi-story residences also locates in the historic block (figure 20).

Mark Francis (2010) in *Mixed-life Places* suggests the mixed-life places created in urban design to better provide diverse public spaces for multiple activities and usages. The mixed life in the site area of commercial, public and residential uses is considered in the urban design while similar challenges might be in the area that some public space developments lack ingredients to

be accessible to various usages and then lack access and publicness. The local life itself is importantly a part of the historic culture, by which the preservation can better sustain the historic image and project distinction in the site area. The urban design which focuses mainly on commerce would influence the project's accessibility of mixed-life space.

On the Pingjiang Road, where is majorly used by visitors, more designs are utilized by the preservation plan and urban design projects. The streetlights in the Pingjiang Road is an example of combining design of historic element with facilities, reducing the impact of modern facilities on the street view. The historic water wells (figure 16) are preserved and protected by fence. They are not used by residents now but are demonstrating the historic local street life and the preserved urban design. The Pingjiang Road is narrow, and people can see the surrounding buildings immediately when walking on the pedestrian-only road. While parallel with the Pingjiang River, the Pingjiang Road has majorly clothes, art stores and food stores. Some stores are using the traditional doors, so they need to lean the doors on the walls (figure 17) when open. Some stores have the similar entrance with the local resistances (figure 12; figure 13) where has narrow entrance and multiple properties inside one entrance. Generally, the Pingjiang Road is preserved for the traditional urban view, the life with water, and the decorations are based on the historic architecture design. On the transactions with alleys and some wider space on the road, small plaza and garden are designed for people to have a rest during the walk on the road. The Pingjiang Road is the center of the historic district where the street space is the most used, connecting with the surrounding environment by alleys and design features.



Figure 12, an entrance of store, photo by author



Figure 13, an entrance of residence group, photo by author



Figure 14, a commercial mall at the corner of the Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 15, the wall at the North boundary of the Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 16, preserved water wells in Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 17, traditional doors leaning on the wall, Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 18, coherent wall of residential buildings in Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by



author
Figure 19, one alley along with canal in the Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 20, a modern residential neighborhood (xiaoqu) in Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author



Figure 21, one alley in the historic residential neighborhood, Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author

The architectural features, the traditional Suzhou residential architectural design, are single residence with closed yard surrounded by wall, one-or-two story brick building having a roof with slope. The multiple residences would use a same entrance and have a semi-public space in the center of the residence group. The land area occupied by different residences is various and multiple small alleys are used to connect buildings and main roads (figure 19; figure 21). The Pingjiang Road project area has mainly commercial stores and the neighboring areas are mainly residential buildings. The commercial malls and multi-story residences (Soviet style neighborhood) are adjacent to the historic residences, having more concrete architectural designs with their own entrances and walls.

Most people pass the district by the Pingjiang Road and residents and some visitors use the small paths to go out of the district or to the museums and gardens. The edges are mostly created by walls (figure 15) and transition of architectural design like commercial mall, school and new constructions. The properties like malls, new construction and primary school have their own walls as the edge of the properties. The landmark in the large area is the city walls and tower close to the river. The historic city walls and tower are the highest in the historic district, which is the only structure manifest to the people out of the district but is not very manifest to the people in the project area because it is usually covered by the roofs of buildings along the Pingjiang Road. The nodes are the main spots capturing the attention of visitors or residents and space forming the project area' urban image, which are the entrance of the Pingjiang Road with an exhibition of historic Pingjiang Map, suggesting the entering of the historic road and emphasizing the cultural history of the area, the bridge close to a visitor center, and a small plaza with resting space for both residents and visitors. The entrance gate of the traditional garden

remarks the transition from residential neighborhood to the garden. In the site area, people can hardly see the outside modern buildings, which strengthen the imageability of the area by forming a completely different urban image with space outside the historic district.

In the site the historic road is the major road through the project area affecting the activities in the project area. The road is pedestrian-only in most of the time and provides generous space for walking. Vehicles are not allowed on the street and bicycles are allowed only at early morning and late night (with physical design at the entrances), which affects individual moving activities in the area. The road pavement and seats along the river would suggest people to move slowly or have a rest near the river, talking or looking at the historic views. Fewer trees are on the road than the other traffic roads but there are some small gardens and street vegetation maintained by commercial stores and residents, which would provide space for people to have a rest and some small social activities. The pavement and physical design of accesses along the road would encourage visitors to move along the road until the exit of the historic block. The buildings adjacent to the river have continuous street walls (figure 18) and few gaps between the residences which encourage people to move along the river and pay less attention to the residences. The buildings on the other side, the commercial stores and residences, have fewer street walls and more gaps between the buildings. The historic and traditional design of building facades would affect the perception of the public space to be a historic preservation attraction for visitors. These would affect the new stores in the decoration style and demonstrations of the products. The similar design between some stores and residences would make public space less distinguished from the semi-private space of the residences and might influence the extension of private activities around the residences. Most stores have transparent facades but the views are

shallow, only store rooms, and the narrow entrances of residences provide limited view of buildings behind the stores and walls, which would encourage people to move along the street rather than walking in the other areas of the district.

The urban design in the site has limited public process for the urban design intervention. The site area might have the challenges in design review similar to the endemic problems indicated by Scheer (1994). The design review in the site area is mainly processed by professionals and is open to the public only before the planning starts and after the professional design is accomplished. The authority and rules can be the challenge to the design review in the area, with the difficult authentic considerations and superficial process. Currently the public design review section is more on the collection of feedback and resident's opinions about the project, having limited influence on the professional decisions in the close-door planning work. The site area currently doesn't have official design guidelines in the block level but it might be a challenge that the site area is maintained by the protection and renovation company, independent with the local residential communities and commerce community and the historic preservation value of the district is accessed by all citizens, larger than the local communities.

The site has some designed space for public usage like relaxing and small cultural activities while the design of the public space is not from the process of public discussion. The neighborhood space usage in the residential area can be determined by the residential meeting but the space in the commercial area is designed and maintained by the protection and renovation company, which would focus more on the usage of the space for stores and visitors. The planning project would have an idea collection phase before the professional work and an

opinion collection phase after the release of plans while the collection is mainly used by the government and planning professionals and hard to be sourced by the public.

Chapter 4 Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance in Pingjiang Historic Block

With the hierarchical planning system, the urban plans in China consist of the most conceptual plans for large regions and detailed plans prepared at smaller scales which are usually closely integrated with the development process, the implementation phase of planning (Abramson, 2006). One weakness of the planning in China is that the regions have many plans but they are often general, conceptual and have many overlap contents, which focus more on the ideal blueprints for the future than possible implementation methods for the planning in recent future (Wu and Wu, 2003). With urban planning focusing more on the large-scale development than the small-scale building, the community level planning then gains little attention from the planning implementations other than the project-specific planning. The policy implementations in community are often experimental and ambitious based on the policy formulation process with limited access. Shieh (2011) states that "shequ (Neighborhood Community) reform is better conceptualized as a series of interbureaucratic memoranda generated through local experiments, negotiations between agencies, and responses to contingencies".

4.1 Governance modes and block management methods

4.1.1 Management modes, area-planner and River Monitor

The preservation plans, Suzhou Historic and Cultural Famous City Preservation Plan and Pingjiang Historic Block Preservation Plan, mainly focus on the historic preservation of physical elements and cultural heritage while sustainable development is one important section in the preservation plans. The preservation plans are to regulate the architecture appearance, renovation projects and constructions in the historic area. The city management work, basically an administration on the public urban space, is guided by the preservation district (Gusu District) City Image and City Facilities Management Bureau(*shirongshizheng guanliju*; which was renamed City Management Bureau in 2019) and Historic Block Scenic Spot Bureau. The historic block urban management work means the management of urban “image”(Shirong), cleanliness and order. In 2017, the bureau released the announcement of the updates of the “overseen system” (Pingjiang Jiedao, 2017), indicating a grid management system and combination of supervision methods which contains regular inspections, random inspections, public and secret investigations. Besides the governmental official management, the historic preservation committee, which is a non-governmental agency selected by the Suzhou municipal government, have organized a public “area-planner” system in 2018. The area-planners consist of voluntary planning professionals, academic scholars and local officers, focusing on the pre-project study and supervision on the policy implementation to facilitate the public participation in the preservation projects (Preservation Committee, 2018). According to the historic preservation committee, the responsibilities of the area-planner contain the participation of preservation-related design

projects' construction supervision and the organization of field study about cultural and historic resources and local geography with planning consultations for the general public and training of preservation and management personnel (Preservation Committee, 2018; Yinlibo, 2019). The other methods used by the preservation committee for the management of the historic block is the *Hezhang* (River Monitor) system. Starting in 2017, the River Monitor (*Hezhang*) system requires several people to be responsible for the management of one river. People holding the title of River Monitor (*Hezhang*) will be listed on bulletin boards close to the river (figure 22). In the Pingjiang Historic Block, the local life with river and the water urban form are preserved. The major river in the Pingjiang Historic Block, the Pingjiang River, is parallel to the Pingjiang Road and constitutes the main tourist site image in the district. The major purpose of the River Monitor (*Hezhang*) system is to better supervise the water environment and improve the water quality in the rivers. Through the year, the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level River Monitor (*Hezhang*) has inspected the rivers 3892 times (Preservation Committee, 2018 May), which in the official announcement is trying to demonstrate that the River Monitors (*Hezhang*) have fulfilled their responsibility on a regular basis. The rivers in the Pingjiang Historic Block are mainly influenced by the restaurants and residences along the river, which might discharge wastewater to the rivers and adversely impact (degrade) the water quality in the rivers. The wastewater discharging to the canal is resulted from the traditional residential design which connects the house drains to the neighboring canal. The houses are refurbished to stop the wastewater discharging to canals by changing the drains in the buildings to connect with the city's sewerage system. Another water quality management task is the dredging of sediment. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) helps neighboring residents move out when canal repair is taking place and the old buildings might be in danger due to the reduction of water pressure

which balances the pressure in the masonry sustaining the buildings above (Preservation Committee, 2018 May). The water quality improvement involves multiple bureaus' cooperation in the historic block. After March 2018, the Suzhou National Famous Historic and Cultural City Preservation Regulation came into force and the local government put more effort on the preservation that requires people to remove the unauthorized architecture structures and stacking items on the water bank.



Figure 22, Information about the responsible River Monitor (Hezhang) on bulletin boards, photo by author

Despite that some area-planners and River Monitors are residents in the historic block or working in the Neighborhood Communities, the positions are set mainly to facilitate the state administration, directed by the preservation committee, rather than being directed by the community level self-governance association, the Residential Committee. Implementing the policy from the state government, the management has rare engagement with the community initiatives.

4.1.2 Grid management system

The grid management is a city management mode which was first created in Beijing. The grid management system is to locate the city management issues or requests like pollution and public facility repairing on the digital platform, which has largely increased the efficiency of problem solving in city management (Yan, 2006). By the system, the residents also have access to report problems to or request help from the city managed agencies. While implemented from the central government rather than initiating from local government, some articles have suggested that the grid management is not very successful, overlapping the Residential Committee's grassroots work and having little engagement with multiple stakeholders in the neighborhood (Liu 2014; He 2016).

Initiated from the state government, the grid management is essentially an administration-oriented management which extends the governmental administration in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level and reduce the ability of community self-governance in spite of the significant improvement on efficiency of city management (Zhu and Wu, 2014; Tian, 2012). The

relationship between self-governance and governmental administration needs to be further explained to reduce the adverse impact on community level self-governance, as the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) has long been the coordinator between the state government and residents (Tian, 2012).

Some cities have practiced other grid management modes involving bottom-up process and one example is the practice in Zhoushan City. The Zhoushan mode focuses more on the community services than the administration, collecting popular wills and ensuring the public engagement in community management, which connects the bottom initiatives with the services conducted by state government (Zhu, 2012). The co-governance of administrations, community residents and social associations could be a possibly better mode for the community governance in the recent future.

The Pingjiang Jiedao has adopted the grid management system in recent years and the system structure is based on the existing administration hierarchy, the Jiedao and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) system. The grid management work is led by the Party Worker Committee and Jiedao government. Jiedao and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) are the first and second level of grid management. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workstation is the third level, which is a non-governmental association helping and supporting community resident to get governmental and welfare services⁹. The resident group is the fourth level, which is set by the Residential Committee, usually 15 to 40 households. By the local announcement, the grid management setting and responsible personnel are apparent to the residents. The personnel

⁹ By law the Residents Committee is self-governance organization that cannot provide governmental services and the Neighborhood Community is not administered by state government. The workstation is the association to provide services that cannot be provided by Residents Committee in the Neighborhood Community level.

responsible for the grid management and the contact information are shown on the bulletin boards in the residential neighborhoods, with a map showing the grid range (figure 2).



Figure 23, boards showing responsible person for the grid management, photo by author

The Pingjiang Historic Block is divided by six grids for grid management, generally set by major alleys in the district, and every Neighborhood Community (Shequ) has two grids. Based on the experimental governance practice, the Pingjiang area is the first area in Gusu District utilizing grid management. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workstation in every Neighborhood Community (Shequ) manages grids. The target of the grid management in the tourist site area, indicated by the local government, is to help with the local precise city management and solve

problems in the grids. Basically, the grid management in the historic block is to improve the existing city management work in the area, combining local governance resources. The major work in the public space is the “city image”(Fengmao) improvement and traffic management. Generally, the grid management system is to divide the responsibilities of local governance and management by grids and increase the precision of local management work, which is intending to improve the implementation for top-down policies. In 2019, the Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community (Shequ) in the Pingjiang Historic Block, tried the pilot project of a new digital management system to digitize all the events and items in the grid. One example is to connect the fire alarm system with the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) grid manager's device to reduce possibility of fire danger. A customized recorder has been equipped by the grid managers to record and upload resident’s opinions and report hidden dangers to management system (Pingjiang Jiedao, 2019).

The grid management in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work is utilized via the local connections between community workers and residents. For the new policy announcement, the publicity methods like bulletin boards and slogans are used in the neighborhoods to increase the residents' awareness of grid management and maintain the “atmosphere” to promote the engagement of residents. Apart from the bulletin boards showing the name, contact information and responsibilities of grid managers, the communication in person or by phone and information card handing out are used to help with the connection between grid managers and residents. The communications and services are provided by the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) grid managers regularly and ordinarily to collect the popular wills from residents and help or coordinate with the problem resolving reflected by residents.

The grid management in the Pingjiang Historic Block is close to the Zhoushan mode indicated by Zhu (2012), which focuses more on the service function than the governmental administration. The grid management is initially a city management policy required by the central government to strengthen the administration of urban area while the later local practice like practice in the Pingjiang Historic Block can utilize the grid management more on collecting popular wills from residents and providing community services. The grid management system itself would reduce the ability of community self-governance but the transparency responsibility of Residents Committee in the area might improve the communication and the resident's awareness of self-governance. The Residents Committee is elected by residents in the Neighborhood Community while in the past the residents are not familiar with the residential members before the election. By the grid management system, the Residents Committee members and workers employed by the community need to have more communications with the residents in grid, possibly helping the residents get familiar with the Residents Committee members or candidates and supervise their works, which might support the community level self-governance.

4.2 Residents Committee and election

Aligned with the urban governance system in China, the Pingjiang Historic Block is managed by three Neighborhood Communities (Shequ), which are self-governed by the Residential Committees. The Residents Committee is elected by the local residents and the candidates must live in the Neighborhood Communities (Shequ) area. In the Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community (Shequ), Yinyin Zhang is the elected director of the Residential Committee, who

started the work in Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community in 2008 as a hired Neighborhood Community worker by public employment (Suzhou Daily, 2015). To the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) Residents Committee election in the Gusu District in 2016, 154 Neighborhood Communities of the total 159 Neighborhood Communities used the direct election and 62.1% of the elected are Party members (Suzhou Daily, 2016). The Residents Committee election is an important process in the performing of self-governance in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ), which is significant to the local grassroot work. The Neighborhood Community work is to encourage and help the residents to participate in the election by setting multiple election points and informing the election information through phone calls or social platforms (Suzhou Daily, 2016). For the residents who cannot walk to the election point, mobile election boxes are used to collect the votes inside of the residences. One change of the election is the introduction and publicity of candidates. In the past residents in the Gusu District were not aware of the candidate's information before the election. In the recent election (2016). The candidates would come to the residences, introducing their ideas to the local residents and answering questions, which ensures the residents' knowledge about the candidate before election and sustains the residents' ability to show their own willingness to self-governance. The Neighborhood Community is spending more effort than the past to support the performance of self-governance, helping more residents to use their election right rather than holding the procedure without facilitating residents' ability and acknowledgement of election.

4.3 Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work and self-governance

The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance is the basic level in the governance, involving resident self-governance and many Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers. In Chang, Lau, & Calogero (2019)'s case in Suzhou, the self-governance practice is indicated that is often promoted and supported by the local and upper level government. Every Neighborhood Community (Shequ) in the historic block has hired Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers and volunteers for the local actions and self-governance activities. One example is the Liuzhenyuan residences in the historic block Neighborhood Community (Shequ). In October 2019, the Pingjiang Jiedao cooperated with the construction company to renovate the Liuzhenyuan residences. Before the project construction, Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers went to the Liuzhenyuan residences to collect the opinions of the residents (figure 24), which is called participating service. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers helped the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) collect the advice and opinions about the renovation from the local residents to improve the renovation plan. The process was in the relative top-down mode that was funded by Jiedao and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) and started at the Jiedao. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers are significant in contacting and communicating with residents in their houses to get the resident participation in the project. The feedback collection for the maintenance is also collected by the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) officers. Apart from the individual interviews, the resident meeting is also used in the opinion collection after the renovation project (figure 25). The meeting encourages self-governance on the project maintenance by signing commitment on the long-term maintenance. The volunteer is the other important group in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) works. In 2016, the Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community (Shequ) formed a historic water well volunteer group for the preservation of the historic water wells in

the Neighborhood Community (Shequ). The volunteers cooperated with the professional construction group to clean and repair the historic water wells, practicing the co-governance between the local residents and the Neighborhood Community (Shequ). Firstly, residents submitted the water well improvement needs to the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) and then after Neighborhood Community (Shequ) discussion, review, announcement and feedback, 28 water wells in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) were determined to be restored in the project. The co-governance is an example of the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) practice on preservation focusing more on the residences and public services. The changing from the focus on the physical design preservation to the residential and ordinary protection and improvement is based on the involvement of co-governance.



Figure 24, Neighborhood Community (Shequ) worker collecting resident opinions in the neighborhood, photo from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/UabI83EjeyhG62KG1bkhHQ>



Figure 25, residential meeting in the Liuzhenyuan residences project, photo from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Uabl83EjeyhG62KG1bkhHQ>

The publicity board in the Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community (Shequ) records the “resident self-governance” project in 2016 (figure 27). In Fengchi Alley, the clothes hanging was a problem in the local residential neighborhood and in June 2016 the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) Party committee helped organize the resident self-governance project. The residents living along the Fengchi Alley told the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) their need for clothes space renovation and then after the self-governance process the renovation project was conducted by a property management company. The self-governance project is led by a co-governance group which collects residents’ needs and ideas and coordinates the project with residents. After discussions and group meetings, possible renovation options are presented in an open resident meeting for voting. By the voting result, the renovation project is determined according to the option agreed by the most. An agreement of clothes hanging is used for future maintenance and residential supervision after the completion of renovation. Residents make

agreements on the future usage and maintenance of the public clothes hanging space and then sign the agreement. The project is a new practice of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) self-governance in Niujia Alley Neighborhood Community (Shequ) and it still relies on the guidance of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) managers which form the meetings officially while the decision-making is largely based on the wills of residents and the project process is open and from bottom initiative. The documents of self-governance projects are scarce that the similar self-governance process is probably not commonly used in community projects in a regular base, which would let the self-governance project be more a project for publicity.



Figure 26, publicity board showing photos of self-governance project in Fengchi Alley, Pingjiang Historic Block, photo by author

4.4 Participation in historic preservation

4.4.1 Commerce and stores

The historic cultural heritage is important in the historic preservation, which is indicated in the Pingjiang Historic Block preservation plan. On the Pingjiang Road, stores participate in the preservation by volunteering in the visitor services. Located in the historic preservation community, some commercial stores themselves are protecting the intangible cultural heritage. Their participation in the publicity can help with the protection of traditional cultural heritage as well as the spreading of preservation ideas in the historic block. The volunteer work is guided and recommended by the Pingjiang Road Protection and Renovation company, the non-government sector working for the preservation constructions and projects. Apart from the participation of stores, the general public is involved in the historic preservation by the idea collection activity, called “what can I do for the historic city”, giving feedback to bureaus and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) with the incentive of 50 Yuan if adopted (Preservation Committee, 2018).

With the city image management system, the Jiedao government cooperates with the Pingjiang Road Company and Pingjiang Road Chamber of Commerce to organize the environment management alignment by which the stores promise to be responsible to maintain the neighboring “city environment” and the orderly parking of cars, trucks, scooters, and bicycles (Pingjiang Jiedao, 2018). Based on the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) management workstations, Neighborhood Community (Shequ) volunteers also participated in the restoration

activities. Coordinating with the multiple resources, the city environment management have involved the participation of volunteers from government and residents, private commerce and the Pingjiang management company.

4.4.2 Community education and study group

The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) in the historic block holds the position in the education of intangible cultural heritage based on the resources in the historic block. At Yisan Ruan preservation workstation and historic block Neighborhood Community (Shequ), the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage are invited to teach residents and visitors about the traditional Suzhou cultural heritage. The Pingjiang Jiedao has organized a “travel study” program for Neighborhood Community (Shequ) education in the historic block to provide education opportunities for families, which is based on the museums and libraries in the historic block(Pingjiang Jiedao, 2019).

The residents and local associations, supported by the Jiedao as community construction projects and guided by the local libraries, participate in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) education. The Zhaoxia study group in the historic block Neighborhood Community (Shequ) has written several books about Pingjiang history and local cultural preservation, which are free for the residents, students and visitors (Pingjiang Jiedao, 2019; Suzhou Wenming, 2015). Apart from the writing, the study group also volunteers in guiding visitors for local history and heritage.

4.4.3 Project management in historic preservation

The preservation projects and restoration constructions are handled by the Pingjiang Historic Block Protection and Restoration Company, which was formed in 2002. The company covers the repairing and maintaining of history buildings, preservation investments and constructions, preservation development and management and cultural projects managing. The announcement of historic preservation projects is available on the company's website, which contains the environment influence report of the project. The Pingjiang Historic Block Protection and Restoration company is the practicing role of the historic preservation plan implementation and works for the maintenance of the spotlight, transmitting the preservation responsibility to the private side from local government. For the maintenance of the historic block, the company tries to discover the special resources in the district and local traditional culture to organize characteristic activities attracting visitors. For the store management, the company promotes the formation of the Pingjiang Chamber of Commerce for a new mode combining the chamber self-governance and professional realty management. The company management constitutes the Pingjiang mode in which historic preservation projects are economy-sustainable via private companies.

4.5 Transportation management methods in historic block

The historic block is generally a pedestrian focused district with preserved urban design. The preserved major road, the Pingjiang Road at the center of the district, is designed for non-

automobile transportation. In November 2019, the Suzhou traffic police decided to put a Pingjiang Road temporary traffic management measures into practice. Non-auto vehicles, like bicycles and electric bicycles, are not allowed to pass through the Pingjiang Road during 8 : 30am to 9 : 30pm. Temporary fences and physical structures are used at road entrances to prevent bicycles going into the Pingjiang Road (figure 3), managed by people on duty. The local residents need to detour or be guided to park their bicycles at the designed area. The new regulation on the transportation in Pingjiang Road, is managed by people in duty but still needs people's voluntary cooperation on it. The community governance method is to guide people to leave the Pingjiang Road a pedestrian-only road, with supervision at entrances. The regulation is not very strict and solid, by which the managing people can decide whether to allow one to ride into the road by the situation. Residents can ride with their bicycles to park closer to their properties. The regulation is released on the official WeChat account and people can share their opinions or questions on it (Shendu Suzhou, 2019).



Figure 27, Fence for the transportation regulation in Pingjiang Road, source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fXW0hefoE5Fl8edmae3BBQ>

4.6 Information release and publicity

The information update and release is one important section in the governance and preservation management. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) in Pingjiang Historic Block have used multiple ways to release or announce the governance and residential information and documents to local residents and the general public. WeChat account is the most commonly used platform by Neighborhood Community (Shequ), Jiedao and companies. In the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) and Jiedao WeChat account, the basic Neighborhood Community (Shequ) information, community services and volunteer activities are presented (Daru Alley Shequ, 2019). The local activity announcement and feedback collection are also available on the WeChat accounts. The preservation plans, regulations, annual preservation reports and local urban design plans are released at the Jiedao government official planning website, having detailed plan maps for download. The new plan announcing feedback and advice would show on the official announcement website and then move to the official planning website. The plans and projects are merely announced at WeChat officially, but the media would report the possible and confirmed plans in the WeChat accounts, where it is more common for residents to get information about the plan updates. For the construction projects in the historic block, the announcement will be on the Pingjiang Historic Block Preservation and Restoration Company website, with a detailed environmental impact report. The general governance information is also released on the bulletin boards and walls in the residential neighborhood and commercial area (figure 6).



Figure 28, governance information and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) updates shown on the wall, photo by author

The starting ceremony is another policy publicity method used in the local governing. The grid management system, for example, was started in March 2017 and the ceremony for it was held at the Pingjiang Historic Block. With a large board showing the slogan (promoting six constructions and improving old city environment) and project name (comprehensive grid management in Pingjiang area), a large stage was set for officers and volunteers to give a speech to the residents and public media. Holding officially, the ceremony is organized by the Pingjiang Jiedao worker committee, Pingjiang Jiedao service bureau and Pingjiang area city comprehensive management office, which indicates the program is organized from the top-down policy making, by the Jiedao level government, not from the local governance (historic block).

The basic function of the ceremony in governance is to increase the publicity of the new policies and governance work rather than communicating with residents. The ceremony pictures and main points will be reported in the local news, by newspaper, television program and website. Generally, the reporting in multiple platforms would use the similar or same words the ceremony uses to support the publicity.



Figure 29, The ceremony of “the starting of Pingjiang area city comprehensive grid management”. Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/129974112_349673

4.7 Relocation management in Neighborhood Community (Shequ)

The Pingjiang Historic Block is mostly a residential neighborhood in the past (Ruan, 1999) and currently a large part of the historic buildings are residences. One adverse impact of historic preservation in historic urban areas like the Pingjiang area is the preservation will reduce the

residents' opportunity to improve their residences to meet with the modern living standards (Xie and Heath, 2017) and “relocation” (*Banqian*) is one method of policy implementation used in the historic block to “purchase” the residences by governmental funding and then refurbish the buildings, which is intending to preserve the residence buildings. In 2019 the Gusu District government started the first essential relocation (*Banqian*) project in the historic block. The relocation (*Banqian*) is still in process and in my field trip, the relocation (*Banqian*) project was in the ongoing close-out phrase. The purpose of the relocation (*Banqian*) project is to purchase the houses and preserve the historic buildings with restoration led by the government. The essential historic residences are mostly in danger and hard to be repaired by residents. For the historic buildings in the preservation plan and traditional residences, the Gusu District government will acquire the ownership of the properties after signing agreements with residents. The policy is that residents selling their old residence to the government can exchange it for a residence of twice the living area, or can buy an even larger residence at a discounted price, in the designated modern residential neighborhoods (*xiaoqu*), usually outside the historic center. The historic buildings will be repaired and restored by the Gusu historic construction company and some buildings then will be leased or used for commercial use to get funds for long-term preservation. The relocation (*Banqian*) project is basically voluntary, and the Neighborhood Community (*Shequ*) work is to persuade residents to accept the agreement. The project is led by the special Neighborhood Community (*Shequ*) working team focusing on the preservation “relocation”, renting the house space to communicate with residents (figure 7). The publicity of historic preservation on walls is the main methods the team uses to persuade residents (figure 8) other than the individual meetings. As of November 2019, about 60% of residents in the project

area have signed the agreement (Pingjiang Jiedao, 2019 November). The house having the agreement will be sealed by paper strip (figure 9) after the residents move to the new house.



Figure 30, the office of the relocation project team with contact information, photo by author



Figure 31, publicity of historic preservation in the residential neighborhood, saying "thanks residents for the understanding and supporting to the historic preservation work", photo by author



Figure 32, houses sealed by paper strip in the preservation project, photo by author

In the relocation (Banqian) project, the residents can choose dwellings from three Residential Xiaoqu in Suzhou Pingjiang new district. The available dwellings are in high-rise buildings, having dwellings size of 60, 70 and 90 square meters. Located not far from the Pingjiang Historic Block, out of the Gusu District, the available dwellings for the project are designed for the project. The dwelling choosing procedure is conducted at the former District government building in the Pingjiang Historic Block. The residents signing the agreement early can choose the dwellings early.

Indicated by some scholars and news (e.g. Lin & Ruan, 2006), many residents are willing to sign the relocation project and cooperate with the government to preserve the residences. One reason the resident is willing to exchange for a relocated dwelling might be that the historic residences

are usually small and not in good condition, hard to meet with the modern living standards. Qu, Jin, and Feng (1990) indicate one model project for the renovation of historic residences in Suzhou which redesigns the room space and add private access for the dwelling units. However, the project is not well maintained and recently deteriorated (Xie & Heath, 2017). The difficulty of historic preservation is in the maintenance of the buildings and thus the government plans to purchase the residences and maintain the historic architecture. Despite that the relocation project is voluntary and the government provides incentive for the project, the project or the relocation plan does not plan much for the residents who want to stay in the historic block which limits the choice of the residents. Advocated by scholars (Ruan and Sun, 2001; Ruan and Gu, 2004), the historic preservation project should involve more community participation in the planning process but currently the design process is not really involving community engagement.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and reflection

5.1 Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance methods and implementation

The recent methods and policy implementations in the Pingjiang Historic Block have revealed some self-governance practice in the local residential life and commerce while the process of policy making is based on the top-down system and the city management for administration would reduce the ability of community self-governance. With the residents' increasing willingness to take part in the community governing, the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work has involved practices on open decision-making and community meetings but the process has not been in a regular basis. Apart from the physical preservation of residences, the residential culture is protected and promoted by the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work like the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) education and cultural preservation program in the residential neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) negotiation in ordinary residential life is conducted through the residents' participation like the resident meeting for the usage and regulation of the public space in the residential neighborhoods while the planning process has little interaction with the local residents and commerce. The idea collection phase before the planning design gives an opportunity for the general public to submit the creative designs and opinions to the planning agency or committee but in the later actual planning work, the collection is not ensured to be used or be in the first group of considerations. The feedback and opinion collection phase after the planning work, in the announcing phase, does not release

the power of evaluation to the general public. The plan work, in the Pingjiang Historic Block, is still evaluated by the state council and preservation committee.

In the preservation implementation, the self-governance has been practiced by the resident community and commerce community. In the past, the regulations and publicity of preservation are the main methods used in historic preservation. The new practice in the Pingjiang Historic Block involves voluntary community participation in the preservation by commercial stores and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) residents.

The information release methods have strengthened the openness of Neighborhood Community (Shequ) work. The new management methods like the grid management system is intending to improve the local administration efficiency while by local practice the system can help with the services for residents and the popular will collection. The new technology and open information have provided more opportunities for the grassroots work. The communication between the residents and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) workers or Residents Committee members is more time-efficient and easy by the information release and the grassroots work, which might help with the election process and self-governance practice.

The Neighborhood Community (Shequ) level participation can be improved for the planning process. The residents are taking part in the daily life management and maintenance of the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) while the planning process is far from the residents. One difficulty for the future possible community participation in planning is by the relocation projects the residents gradually move out of the historic block. The preservation planning review process

would be harder to involve the general public in the design process. The future development of the historic block requires improved or new Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governance methods and policy implementation methods for the sustainable historic preservation. The Neighborhood Community can provide more public space for the community participation in planning and community governance, involving more community engagement in the preservation projects. The city management in administration should leave more space for the self-governance practice with decision making from the community level initiatives. The policy implementation should give more opportunities for residents to engage in, balancing the city level governmental administration and community level self-governance.

The community design projects in the Pingjiang Historic District reflect two modes of community engagement in design process, community participation in design project from Jiedao government decision and from bottom-up initiative. The community design project guided by Jiedao government involves residents in the design process by residents' wills and opinions collection while the self-governance project from bottom-up initiative can provide residents more opportunities to engage in the design like open design meeting and design voting. The self-governance process is significant in ensuring the community engagement in the design project and sustaining the design to reflect the popular wills of residents in community governance. Advocated by scholars for years, the community participation in planning process is still limited and scarce. The self-governance project and community engagement in planning should be widely implemented in the community level, especially in historic preservation areas where local lifestyle is important to the preservation of cultural heritage and should be reflected in designs and projects like relocation (Banqian) project. The Neighborhood Community self-governance is

increasingly promoted by the state government while the new government administration methods like grid management reduce the ability of local self-governance, by which the local self-governance practice is complex. With the funding and support from state government, the self-governance project can promote the community engagement in design process and bottom-up initiative while coordination between resident's self-governance and administration would be essential in community governance. More of the management and administration in Neighborhood Community level should be transited to the self-governance Residents Committee and community associations. The services and residents' wills collection supported by administration and management focusing more on residents can be an opportunity to support the community governance.

5.2 Resources gathering and limitation

The resources of the official planning documents have some limitations but the resources available for the public is much more compared with one decade ago. The availability of official information resources for the Pingjiang Jiedao and the historic block is one of the best among the Chinese cities that the plan maps, plan descriptions, projects announcement, official information release and policies updates can be resourced on the government website¹⁰ but still some documents and projects are not available on the platform. The plans are generally available on the platform while some plans and projects like the urban design of historic areas are hard to source from the official platform or update late. Some of them are released and reported by local media to the citizens while the information might be incomplete. Forming an official resource

¹⁰ Gusu District government website, <http://www.gusu.gov.cn/gsq/index.shtml>

platform for the projects information and urban design updates could benefit local people and researchers.

The study is mainly descriptive based on the document research in the Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governing. Further research based more on the field studies and interviews asking how the governance methods influence the residents' self-governance practice and engagement in preservation design can help with the future Neighborhood Community (Shequ) development in the Pingjiang Historic Block. The life experience of local communities is the most important part in the planning and Neighborhood Community (Shequ) governing. How to preserve the historic heritage with the improvements of life experience would be a difficult aspect of sustainable development in the historic block. A more open platform releasing the plans and urban design projects would be helpful for both the residents and the scholars.

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