

Creative Transformation of Local Industrial Heritage under the Background of Urban Renewal — A Case Study of “Baomian 1958”

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Abstract: Against the dual background of the transformation of old industrial bases and urban renewal, the protection and utilization of industrial heritage have become an important task for preserving the cultural identity of cities and activating the value of existing stock space. As one of the second batch of national pilot cities for urban renewal, Baotou has revitalized the industrial remains of the former Baotou Cotton Textile Mill by developing the *Baomian 1958* Themed Cultural Block, successfully turning the “industrial rust belt” into a “cultural show belt.” Taking this project as a research sample, this paper deconstructs its practical paths of creative transformation, analyzes its transformation effects and practical dilemmas, and puts forward feasible optimization strategies and extensible experience and enlightenment.

Keywords: Urban renewal; Industrial heritage; Creative transformation; Baomian 1958

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1. Introduction

At present, China's urbanization has entered a critical stage of high-quality development. The urban development model has gradually shifted from incremental expansion to organic renewal, focusing on stock quality improvement, and enhancing the connotation of urban space has become a core proposition of urban development in the new era. As the material carrier of the evolution of urban industrial civilization, industrial heritage is not only a physical witness of technological achievements in specific historical periods, but also carries the unique cultural character and spiritual core of a city. Value assessment, regeneration, and revitalization of industrial architectural remains are important topics in urban renewal construction ^[1].

During his inspection of Yangpu Riverside in Shanghai, the President of the CCP highly recognized the local practice of transforming the “industrial rust belt” into a “life show belt”, which has also pointed out the direction for the revitalization and utilization of industrial heritage across the country ^[2]. As a key old industrial base built during the First Five-Year Plan period, Baotou is facing the dual test of protecting and

reusing a large number of industrial remains bearing urban memories in the process of industrial structure transformation and upgrading. How to revitalize these industrial heritages in urban renewal has become an urgent issue for Baotou.

In 2025, the *Measures for the Administration of Industrial Heritage of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region* were officially issued, marking that the protection of industrial culture in Inner Mongolia has entered a new stage of standardization and normalization. In the same year, Baotou was selected for the list of urban renewal actions supported by the central government, providing an important guarantee for Baotou's urban renewal work. Baotou Cotton Textile Mill once filled the gap in the textile industry of Inner Mongolia. After bankruptcy, the factory area was left idle for a long time, and its remains and memories were at risk of loss. The "Baomian 1958" Themed Cultural Block is a successful attempt to revitalize idle industrial remains. Therefore, this paper takes this block as a sample to systematically and thoroughly analyze its transformation path, existing achievements, and current bottlenecks, and also provides theoretical reference and practical experience for the protection and utilization of industrial heritage in old industrial cities in northern China.

2. Historical Evolution and Transformation Drivers of "Baomian 1958"

Baotou Cotton Textile Mill was founded in 1958. By the 1980s, it had grown into a large integrated enterprise combining textile, printing, and dyeing businesses. In 1981, its total output value exceeded 100 million yuan, products were well sold both at home and abroad, and the number of employees reached 13,000.

Affected by intensified industrial competition and rising production costs in the 1990s, the enterprise was restructured and went bankrupt in 1998. Since then, the factory compound had been idle for a long time, and its buildings, equipment, and industrial cultural memories gradually decayed. In 2011, the factory buildings of Baotou Cotton Textile Mill, after years of ups and downs, were gradually demolished, leaving only one Bauhaus-style printing and dyeing workshop as a witness to history^[3].

In terms of transformation drivers, the implementation of the "Baomian 1958" Themed Cultural Block project is essentially the result of the integration of policy drivers, market demand, and cultural inheritance. At the national level, policies, including the *Implementation Plan for Promoting the Protection and Utilization of Industrial Heritage in Old Industrial Cities* and the *Measures for the Administration of National Industrial Heritage*, have been issued successively. At the local level, industrial heritage areas have been formally included in the key scope of urban renewal, with substantial support in funding, approval, and infrastructure construction.

In response, Baotou's cultural tourism market has long been short of industrial-culture-themed products. The superposition of consumption upgrading demand and urban memory inheritance demand directly led to the launch of the "Baomian 1958" project.

3. Practical path of creative transformation of "Baomian 1958"

The "Baomian 1958" Themed Cultural Block (project) officially operated in January 2025 after it began in 2024. According to the main idea of idle asset revitalize and advance operation plan, this project made a comprehensive value assessment based on the protection of the originality and integrity of the industrial heritage. On the basis of the narrative aesthetics theory of industrial heritage, it implemented a thorough spatial reconstruction of the former Baotou Cotton Textile Mill, and achieved the integration of cultural

inheritance, creative space, and modern function.

A number of different cultural elements (i.e., artifacts, equipment, photographs) have been integrated into the architectural restoration, environmental improvement, and interior design ^[4]. Hence, besides conserving the original historic identity of the site, this practice has successfully restored the site's functionality in the present day.

The commercial structure of the entire site was also changed, since this project generated a large-scale systematic integration of industry culture exhibition + themed commerce + leisure experience. By establishing the Industrial Memory Museum as the main body of the project, the project involved local food, cultural/creative products, and handcrafted items as basic business models, while thematic activities and immersive performances were major elements. Consequently, because the two kinds of value were mutually stimulating and complementary to one another, the project was able to accomplish a perfect fusion of both cultural value and economic value ^[5].

This project used industrial memory as a cultural representation theme and constructed a whole hierarchy and rich storytelling system using physical exhibits, restored scenes, and a collection of oral histories. Thus, it effectively conveyed a vivid and detailed account of the history of Baomian's development and its unique textile techniques, and at the same time added emotional warmth to the industrial heritage.

Finally, to ensure that the project would be able to proceed in a smooth manner, it introduced a brand-new multi-actor collaborative model: governmental guidance, enterprise operations, and social participation. Government agencies provided strategic direction and funding; enterprises employed innovative operation methods based on their own professional knowledge; universities contributed to the direct implementation of research projects. In doing so, the various stakeholders collaborated to create an alliance to promote the revitalization of industrial heritage.

4. Achievements of the Creative Transformation of “Baomian 1958”

By focusing on the reuse of unutilized property as a starting point, the “Baomian 1958” Themed Cultural Zone has reused the 2620 m² printing & dyeing workshops, renovated all of the infrastructure that existed previously for an intended use, and transformed former industrial sites into first-class cultural tourism resources ^[6].

From April 2026 until now, approximately 300,000 tourists have visited the area. These tourists have generated over RMB 3 million in consumption and created over 120 jobs. Directly driving the growth of the regional cultural tourism industry. Pipes that were once rusty were converted into light and shade art installations; textile workshops became theaters; printing and dyeing workshops became leisure teahouses ^[7]. Idle spaces were transformed into high-quality public cultural spaces.

This measure improved regional supporting facilities and living environment, satisfied the spiritual and cultural needs of different groups, and enhanced citizens' sense of belonging and identity to the city. Culturally, the project inherits and promotes the industrial culture and urban spirit of Baotou Cotton Textile Mill, making it a new landmark of Baotou's industrial culture. It has enriched the urban cultural connotation, upgraded the urban brand image, and achieved in-depth integration of industrial heritage resources with tourism, study tours, and public cultural services.

5. Optimization strategies for the creative transformation of “Baomian 1958”

In view of the problems and challenges in the creative transformation of the “Baomian 1958” Themed Cultural Block, combined with the policy requirements for industrial heritage protection and utilization in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the development trend of the cultural tourism industry, targeted optimization strategies should be formulated from the following dimensions to promote high-quality development of the project.

First, business format innovation. Develop experiential business formats based on the characteristics of the textile industry to evoke nostalgia, memories, and resonance, forming a unique emotional connection^[8].

Second, operation improvement. Build a dynamic optimization system to continuously cultivate high-quality shops, while orderly phasing out unpopular business formats.

Third, in-depth cultural exploration. Systematically sort out historical archives and craft materials, actively collect oral history materials, and construct a complete cultural narrative system.

Fourth, system construction. Rely on overall policy coordination to break down coordination barriers, and focus on promoting the inclusion of the “Baomian 1958” heritage itself into high-level heritage lists.

6. Experience and enlightenment from the creative transformation of local industrial heritage

The revitalization of industrial heritage is essentially a systematic project featuring the high integration of value recognition, protection, and inheritance, business operation, mechanism guarantee, and other elements. The practice of “Baomian 1958” provides certain demonstration significance for similar projects.

Firstly, science-based recognition should be given to industrial heritage preservation. To overcome limitations such as merely concentrating upon aesthetic aspects of architecture alone, all possible historical, technical/craftsmanship, and social value should be thoroughly identified in order to lead protection actions via value classification and prevent confusion regarding emphasis being placed on appearance rather than connotation or commercialism rather than tradition.

Secondly, the revitalization of industrial heritage spaces must strictly follow the baseline rule of preserving historical textures and follow the principle of minimal interference while restoring what was originally there. Modern uses may be inserted into spaces where the factory layout, manufacturing processes, etc., are preserved to achieve a true connection between past historical spaces and contemporary lifestyles.

Thirdly, sustainability depends upon integrating diverse formats of business models into deep layers. Only when public benefit attributes of culture and logical operations of markets are balanced, and a system of business formats involving cultural displays, commercial consumption, and tourist experiences is established, can a virtuous cycle be formed to promote protection through utilization.

Lastly, industrial heritage preservation must be integrated into the overall urban renewal plan in conjunction with urban planning, cultural construction, service to improve people’s lives, industrial upgrades, and other related factors, upgraded from a single project to become an urban functional carrier to ultimately realize maximum comprehensive value.

Finally, the most fundamental competitive advantage of industrial heritage comes from its regional characteristics and local genes. Therefore, only by taking root in local industrial history, urban memory, and national culture, and avoiding the traps of model copying and homogeneous business formats, can people form an irreproducible cultural charm and enable industrial heritage to thrive and pass on in contemporary society.

7. Conclusion

Under the backdrop of urban renewal and old industrial bases' transformation, the creative transformation of industrial heritage represents a direct way to activate the stock space and inherit urban culture.

“Baomian 1958” has successfully converted from being idle ruins to a cultural tourism landmark due to spatial reconstruction, business format combination, cultural narration, mechanism innovation, and other measures. This is one example of excellent industrial heritage revitalization in northern China. And at last, it is able to obtain the unity of historical value, economic value, and social value.

However, currently utilized business models are facing similar issues, including homogenization, very high operational pressure, and a lack of sufficient cultural excavation. Therefore, to develop to a higher level, innovations of business models, betterment of operations, excavations of deeper implications, and further coordination will need to be employed.

In future periods, it will be required to systemically analyze laws of local industrial heritage revitalizations, strengthen value recognition, and make it possible to achieve greater industrial heritage rejuvenations within urban renewals, so as to provide long-term stimulation to transformations of old industrial cities' cultures.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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