



"RE-DEFINING"
SMALL WILD GOOSE PAGODA

DIALOGUE BETWEEN EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE SACRED

IFLA AAPME AWARDS 2023

ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CATEGORY

"Re-Defining" Small Wild Goose Pagoda: Dialogue between Everyday Life and the Sacred

Beilin District, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China

Project Statement

This urban renewal project located in the historical and cultural area of Small Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, uses low intervention means for " Re-Defining " the spatial order and reconstructing the relationship between historical blocks and cultural relics, city, nature and people.

In terms of cultural relics, it has established a broader connection in terms of overall style, landscape sequence and details with innovative methods; In the aspect of city, combining different functional interfaces to optimize the walking experience; For nature, the project protects existing historical trees and adds new local plant species to continue the historical and cultural memory and sacred feeling of the site with the inspiration from ancient painting; For humanities, the place realized the transformation from a cultural scenic spot to a living place, welcoming local communities.

In the collaborative dialogue between everyday life and the sacred, it has successfully resolved the contradiction between the urban organic renewal and protection of the historic districts, providing forward-looking and exemplary experience for the practice of organic renewal of historical area.

Project Narrative

PROJECT LOCATION AND CONTEXT INVESTIGATION

The Small Wild Goose Pagoda, built in the Jinglong period of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) witnessed how Buddhism was introduced to China and records the cultural memory of Xi'an in northwest China, formerly known as Chang'an. The Pagoda is located one kilometer south of the historic walled city in the gardens of Jianfu Temple, Shaanxi Province, China.

Over the last few decades, rapid urbanization changed the urban fabric with parts of the historic block infilled with uncontrolled development. The ancient city grid disappeared, and Illegal shanties encroached the site blocking the traditional south gate, forcing visitors to the north. Visual and physical connections between the pagoda and surrounding context had been lost, worsened by a wall around the site.

SCOPE

The scope included a framework plan for a 42.61-hectare research area and detailed design for the south plaza and streetscape surrounding the site, covering some 3.55-hectares.

DESIGN INTENT

The objective was to resolve the contradiction between urban organic renewal and protection of cultural and landscape heritage. Place regeneration redefined the interface between the historic and surrounding context and restores the splendor of the South Gate.

DESIGN STRATEGIES: RE-DEFINING IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

Strategy 1: Re-Defining the relationship with historical relics

The innovation of the design is opening the original closed wall, so that the cultural relics are no longer in a framed state, the sacred and beautiful main entrance of Jianfu Temple is opened to public. At the same time, the materials, colors and plantings are extracted from the site, and the overall style of the historical and cultural area is controlled from the above three aspects. In south Plaza of the Small Wild Goose Pagoda, a progressive, open and closed landscape space sequence is organized from south to north.

The prototype of space creation is the Small Wild Goose Pagoda and pagoda shadow, the entire south plaza and Pagoda Shadow Swaying area are used to interpret the large and small pagoda shadow, which is the extension of the cultural heritage memory in the new era and interpretation of the cultural connotation of the pagoda. Meanwhile, sightlines are restored between the pagoda and surrounding context, establishing a memorable connection between ancient and modern time and space. A gentle ramp runs through the South Square axis, inspired by the pagoda shadow and profile, this is graded seamlessly with green space to address the site's 3.8m north to south drop, creating an inclusive and contemplative arrival experience. Last, inspiration from the Small Wild Goose Pagoda came from the multi-eaves made of overlapping bricks and the overall tapering form and perfect proportions. This influenced unique spatial details and the craftsmanship of site elements. Tang Dynasty Tri-Color Glazed Ceramics housed in the Xi'an Museum and Gardens inspire seating elements in the South Plaza. Local materials, heritage colours and locally sourced plants draw reference from the character of Chang'an ancient scrolls.

Strategy 2: Re-Defining the relationship with the city

Streetscape regeneration improves visual amenity by screening utilities and burying high-voltage cables underground. Multiple stakeholder considerations are addressed, including surrounding communities, the primary school, and the Xi'an Museum. The design broadens the original 1.5-meter-wide sidewalk to 3 meters, integrating lush seasonal planting and seating to create social interaction spaces for parents waiting outside the school gates.

Strategy 3: Re-Defining the relationship with nature

The Chinese Honey Locust veteran tree group (*Gleditsia sinensis*) which has witnessed the historical changes of the area, presented another key challenge during implementation as the urban planning and capacity demands pushed the plaza into the tree root protection zone advocated by the landscape architect. To keep the trees the landscape architect collaborated with engineers and artists to create innovative sculptural tree frame supports to sustain pre-existing soil depths through a range of landforms and raised planters integrating seating.

The design retains 704 existing trees and adds 1101 trees, so that the carbon sequestration of the site is calculated to reach 444 tons per year. While creating a sacred mood, the environmental benefits of the plants are maximized through the selection of local characteristic plants, and by reducing urban heat island effects.

Strategy 4: Re-Defining the relationship with people

To create a 14,849-square-meter multifunctional space to meet the demands of tourists and residents for anticipated daily and seasonal activities including Tai Chi, weekend markets, holiday celebrations and festivals.

COLLABORATION WITH THE CLIENT AND OTHER DESIGNERS

Challenging the grand vision of the influential Xi'an architect, the greatest value added considering all users, professionalism and sustainability was the protection of the 160m long row of veteran trees lining the east edge of the south plaza. This was strongly supported by the client and local community and ensures resilience to climate change for people, place and nature.

Working closely with the client, city planners and local stakeholders, the landscape architect established a long-term vision and placemaking strategies to promote legibility, accessibility, and visual corridors to the pagoda for the research area surrounding the site.

SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA

Environmental Impact Concerns

Committed to a nature and climate positive design, the landscape architects approach led to the retention of 704 existing trees, whilst planting an additional 1101 trees. The planting creates a sacred and authentic mood through selection of local characteristic species inspired by Tang Dynasty scrolls. The environmental benefits through urban heat island reduction, habitat creation, storm water management and carbon sequestration, calculated to reach 444 tons per year. * (based on analysis using the i-tree and National Tree Benefits Calculator).

Cultural sustainability Concerns

The Small Wild Goose Pagoda is one of two famous Buddhist pagodas in Xi'an built to store Buddhist scriptures (the other being the Large Wild Goose Pagoda). As the site was inscribed in 2014 on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor World Heritage Site, the project sought to mitigate environmental and visual intrusions to strengthen the integrity in the face of pressure from urban development, infrastructure and tourism. New interventions such as screening to utilities, fence walls and gates do not confuse the archaeological record and strengthen on-going management, site surveillance, conservation, environment protection and tourism management. With respect to international best practice and criteria for maintaining site integrity given the pagoda's UNESCO World Heritage Listing, the design pushes back on urban pressures to strengthen conservation and visitor management. Thorough historic and cultural research into the archaeology and heritage is presented through the celebration of 108 Fang (or blocks) in Tang Dynasty Chang'an and preservation of ancient wheel rut markings within the plaza. These consider materiality, colour, night lighting, robustness and maintenance.

VALUE CRITERIA

The place regeneration re-defines the relationship with people. Local citizens enjoy morning exercise under the shade of trees, practice Tai Chi beside the lake and meditate on the comfortable benches with visual connection to the pagoda and temple. The design has redefined the Small Wild Goose Pagoda's relationship to the city and people by transforming a cultural scenic spot into a cultural civic and community space.

The professional advice and close working relationship with the client ensured a high-quality service across all stages of the landscape lifecycle from design and implementation to maintenance and post-occupancy evaluations. Repeat commissions have arisen to other place regeneration sites of Xi'an and consultation from developers bidding for the urban regeneration of the district have been received. The project was recognised by the American Institute of Architects (Shanghai), winning a merit award for urban design in 2021 and has been published on archdaily and Chinese social media.

The project provides a broader vision for the modernization and renewal of historical blocks. In the collaborative dialogue between the new and the old, it has realized the modern reconstruction and revitalization of the traditional historical blocks, and provided a forward-looking and exemplary experience for the practice of organic renewal of historical area. By embracing local communities and fostering social inclusion, the Small Wild Goose Pagoda returns to everyday life whilst remaining sacred.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

AFTER



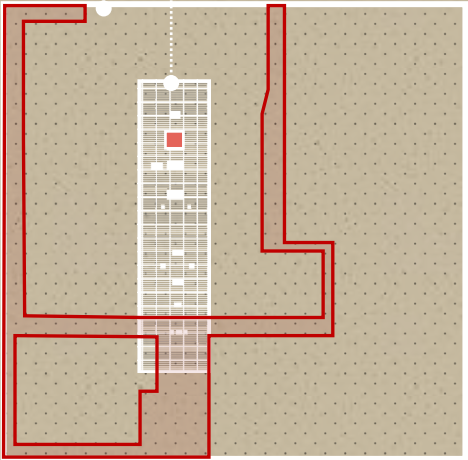
BEFORE



Small Wild
Goose Pagoda

RESEARCH AREA

KEY PROTECTED AREA



RESEARCH AREA (42.75ha)



KEY PROTECTED AREA



SMALL WILD GOOSE
PAGODA



DESIGN SCOPE (3.55ha)

The site located in the historical and cultural area of Small Wild Goose Pagoda. As a world cultural heritage, Small Wild Goose Pagoda with its related remains have witnessed historical changes of Chang'an City in Tang Dynasty.

SITE CHALLENGES AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

Four Dimensions

**CULTURAL RELICS**



CULTURAL RELICS: Surrounded by wall, lack of interaction with people.

1

**NATURE**



NATURE: Root balls of existing trees were exposed. Trees were suffering from poor growing environment.

3

**CITY**



CITY: Fragmented city interface with single function

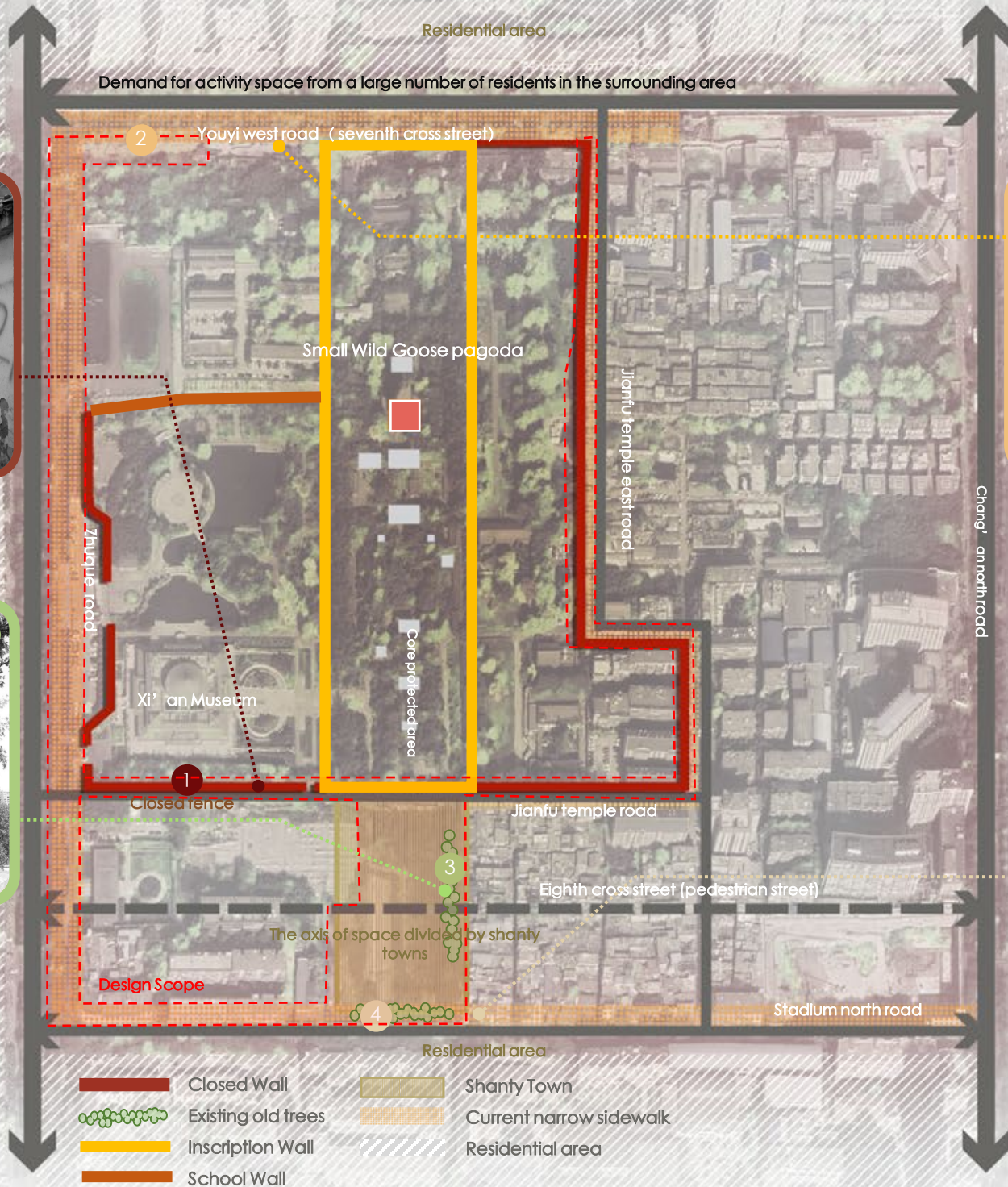
2

**PEOPLE**



PEOPLE: Dilapidated and crowded urban village, the surrounding residents lack space for activities

4

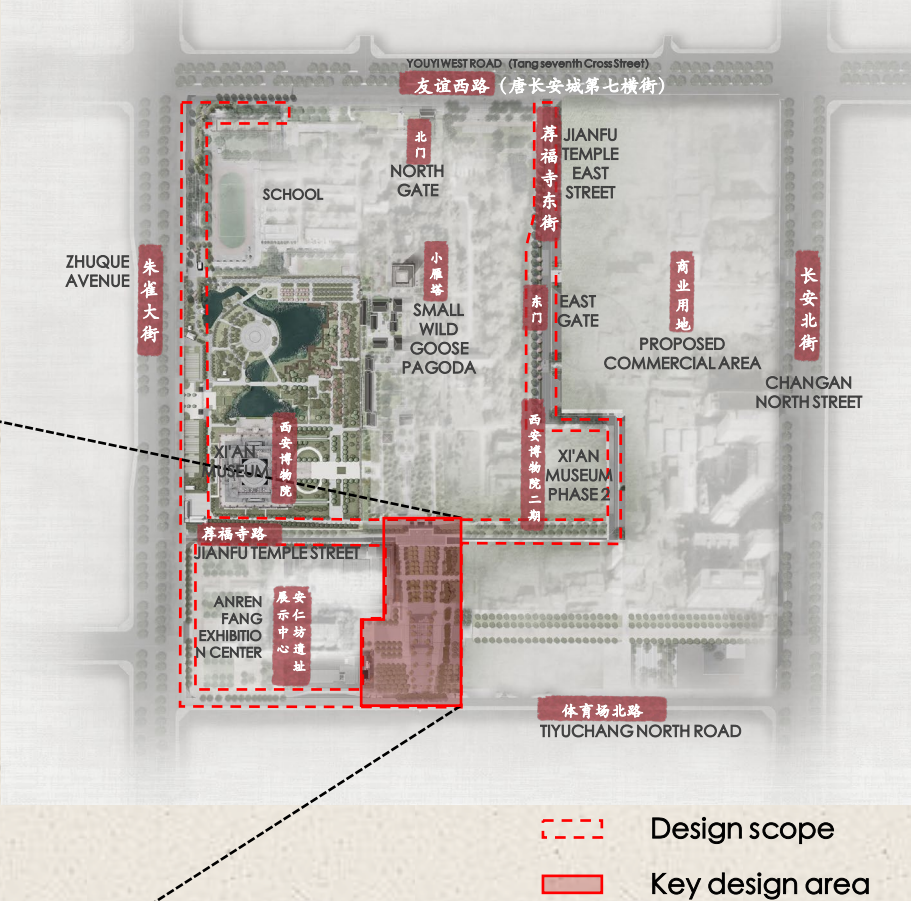
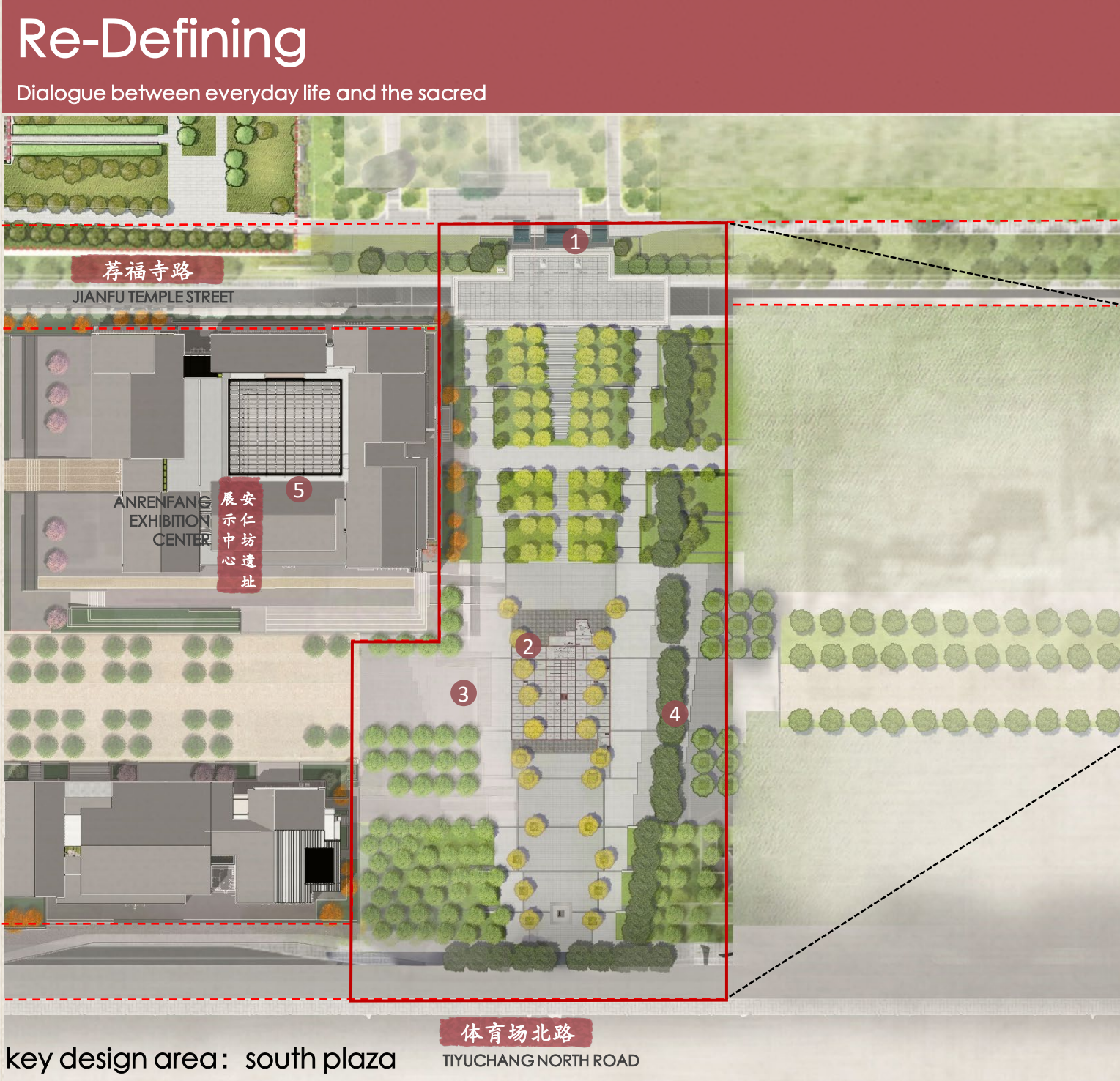


Design Strategies: Re-Defining in four Dimensions

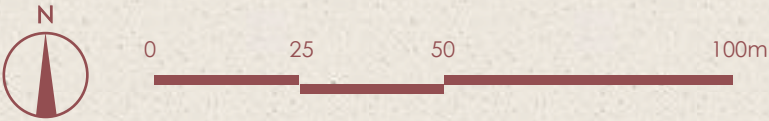
Propose corresponding design strategies in response to the four major challenges faced by the declining historical area of the Small Wild Goose Pagoda.

1	2	3	4
Re-Defining the relationship with historical relics	Re-Defining the relationship with the city	Re-Defining the Relationship with the nature	Re-Defining the Relationship with the people

MASTERPLAN



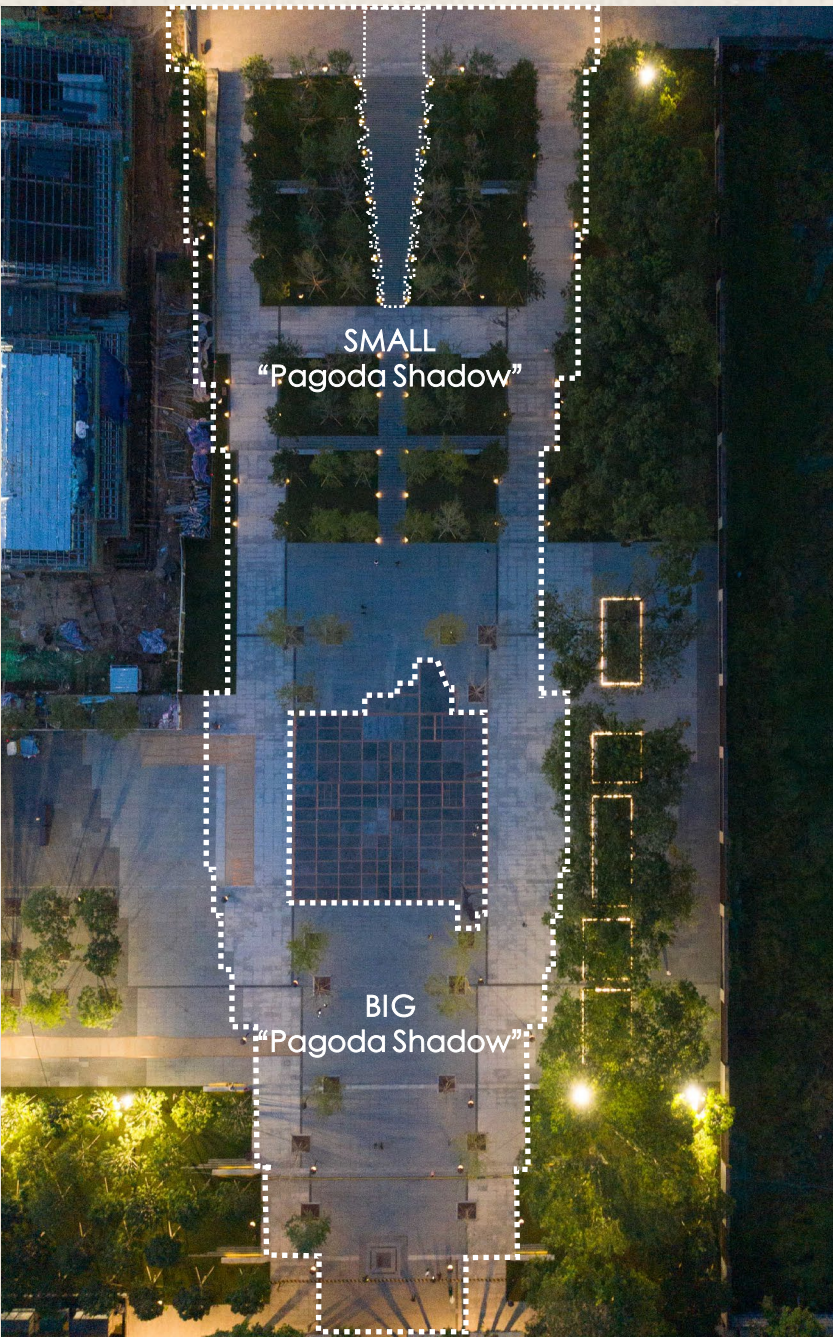
- 1. South Entrance of Jianfu Temple
- 2. 108 Fang of Ancient Lifang System in Tang Dynasty
- 3. Retaining Ancient Wheel Rut Markings
- 4. Retaining Old Trees
- 5. Anren Fang Exhibition Center



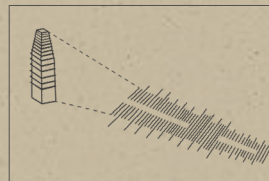
"Re-defining" the relationship between site, cultural relics, city and people with landscape approaches, to realize the vitality revival of historic districts and modern reshaping.

01: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH HISTORICAL RELICS

Spatial Sequence



SPATIAL SEQUENCE



Small Wild
Goose Pagoda

Open		4 Pagoda Shadow Swaying
Secluded		3 Pagoda scene garden
Open		2 Wild Goose Back to Residence
Secluded		1 Watch the Pagoda under the shade



South Plaza

From south to north, organizing a progressive, opening and closing landscape space sequence. Strolling under the beautiful pagoda, feeling the reappearance of vitality of the historical cultural area after thousands of years of vicissitudes.

01: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH HISTORICAL RELICS

Infusing the Culture into the Landscape Details



Design Inspiration



Dense eaves-style architectural language



Color of Tang Tri-color ceramics



Integrating the cultural characteristics of the Small Wild Goose Pagoda's dense eaves-style architectural language and Tang Tri-Color ceramics into the special details.

02: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY

From Being Separated to Sense of Belonging



ZHUQUE AVENUE



JIANFU TEMPLE STREET



YOUYI WEST STREET



Extending the original sidewalks and adopting different design strategies in combination with different urban functional interfaces to create a comfortable walking experience.

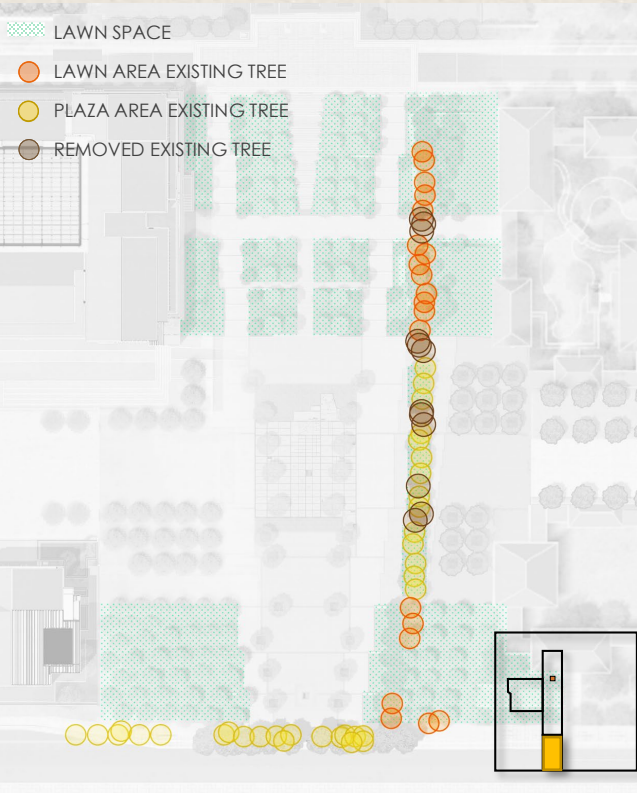
03: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURE

Improving the Living Environment of the Old Trees

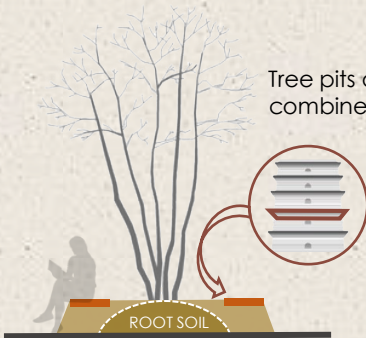


1 Maximize tree protection whilst opening up plaza

2 Ways to protect the tree roots



PLAZA AREA TREE PIT



The design language is extracted from eaves outline

3 Innovative tree support structure

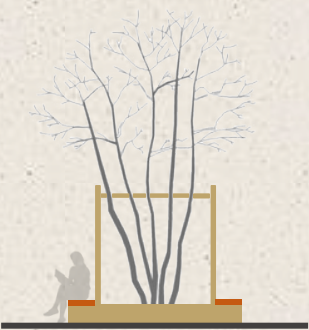


Traditional tree support structure invades the pedestrian space and obstructs people's activities

LAWN AREA LANDFORM



Treat the height difference between the soil ball and the ground through micro terrain



Innovate tree support to make the plaza safer and bigger



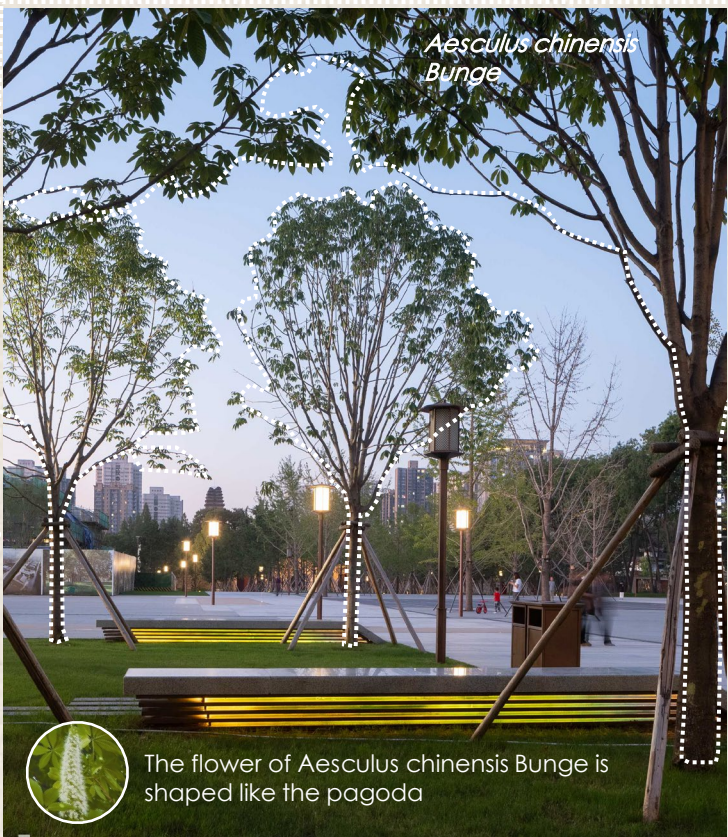
The design retains and adds native trees, and uses an innovative arbor support structure to maximize the environmental and social benefits of the site.

03: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURE

Planting Configuration



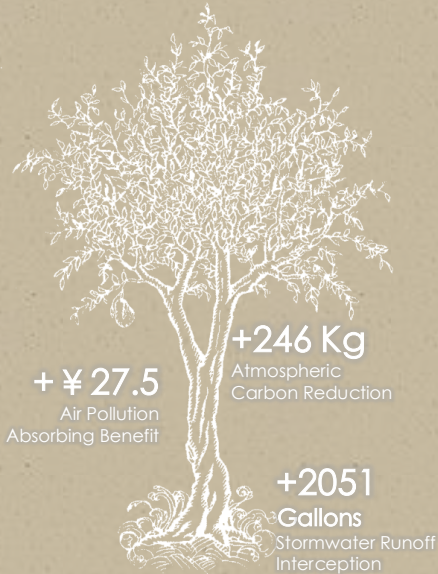
"Wang Chuan Tu" Wang Wei (Tang Dynasty)



The flower of Aesculus chinensis Bunge is shaped like the pagoda



Ecological Benefits of A Single Tree



Site Sustainability

- 1. Store 444t carbon per year
- 2. Increase \$ 7577 air pollution absorbing benefit
- 3. Intercept 3 702 055 Gallons of stormwater runoff

The planting design is inspired by the landscape of Chang'an depicted in the ancient scrolls in Tang Dynasty. Through the selection of local planting species, creating a sacred atmosphere while maximizing the ecological benefits of trees.

04: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE

Diversified And Inclusive Urban Public Space



The design transforms the site from a seldom-used cultural area into a warm public space that carries diverse urban life.

04: RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE

Lighting Design and Nightlife



The warm white light is gently sprinkled on the square, and a golden glow adds a welcoming gesture to the South Gate facing the plaza.

SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION



The popularity increases after completed in 2021



Listed on the list of *must-play in Xi'an* by Dianping in 2021

*Data source: Dianping Xi'an must-see list
https://m.dianping.com/an/reklist/must2021/page/index?ranktype=9&cityid=17&_social_u=Vb86zoiZp5jJHu/qtnpCag==



One of the *top ten* must-see attractions in Xi'an in 2022

*Data source: Xi'an local treasure
<http://m.xa.bendibao.com/mip/47450.shtml>



Visitors to this scenic area has increased by *210%* compared with the same period during the May Day holiday. (from 8500 to 26,400)



Preserve *1ha* existing trees & add *3.5ha* trees which can store *29t* carbon per year

In the collaborative dialogue between everyday life and the sacred, it has successfully resolved the contradiction between the urban organic renewal and protection of the historic districts, realized the vitality rejuvenation of the old ward in the city.