Ph.D course: Memory and the City

Urban Transformation in the Concession Districts in Hankou

from a Socio-historic Aspect

The case of Former German Concession District

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Abstract: In the city, the time can be seen (Mumford, 1937). As the physical carrier of the social activities, the urban space is the result of various periods’ factors as social, cultural, political contexts. By studying gradually on the transformation of the physical urban landscape, the social life, the social behavior and social psychology to present the special character and feature of the Zujie (concession districts in Chinese) as a “particular historical cultural space”. By collecting/analyzing a large range of sources including published sources, cartographic materials and carrying out interviews, the aim of this research is to explore the interrelation between the social-cultural transformation the urban morphology in concession districts in Wuhan, paying a particular attention to the former German concession as a case study at the end to provide proposals for the holistic integration/regeneration in historical district and the enhancement of humanistic ecology for local society.

Hankou former German concession district is one of the concession districts in Wuhan equipped with the intensive and the best-preserved historical cultural heritage sets and provided with the distinctive spatial characters in which the transformation of a new social structure and social life is underway. It is treated as the media of Western and traditional Chinese culture as well as an important constituent part of the multiple Hankou culture. The research is composed of four parts: i) by analyzing the instrumental cartographical materials to put into evidence the spatial heterogeneity during the cultural-spatial formation in the former German concession district.(Figure 1.) In this part, a series of historic maps and published/non-published documentations will be the solid base of the research. ii) by utilizing different method to collect documentations/traces (e.g., official sources as: demographic data, chronical
documentations and official publications; or physical traces by conducting the field survey carrying out semi-structured interviews and occasional conversations with local inhabitants) the social-cultural characteristics to define the social structure and social life in concession district as a marginalized community. In this part, a research on the concession society will be carry out and the shed light will be given to today’s concession district in which, the social subjects can reach an identification or fragmentation with their life model in certain social/political background after the long-time collective construction. iii) by summarizing political decisions and planning tools on urban heritage preservation to reflect the paradoxical approach of Chinese urban heritage and the consequent social degradation in historic concession districts iii) for conclusion, a series of proposal regarding the holistic preservation and regeneration will be put into evidence so as to create an intersection by enhancing the approach of documentation, education and the sustainable development in historic district preservation.
Since 1861 the United Kingdom set up the first concession in Hankou, Hubei province, western powers as Germany, Russia, France, Japan had also set up concessions along the Yangtze River covering an area of about 2.2 square kilometers (Figure 2.)
Hankou, ranked the second position for the number of the colonial countries meanwhile it has the third largest concession district in China by the end of nineteenth century. The German concession lasted for 21 years, and it was the shortest one in the five concession areas in Hankou. However, its spatial character and urban tissue has been preserved throughout the history and it is the representative case study in which the historical urban tissue meet the dramatic social transformation of today.

Different buildings with heterogeneous typologies constitute the distinctive spatial pattern of the area. In this research, all the buildings can be identified as following categories:

i) Consulate buildings

All the affairs were administrated directly by the consulate at the beginning of the colonial period. As the expansion of the Western power and foreign settlements, a municipal council was established for serving all the interests meanwhile the consulate executed exclusively the right of supervision without participating directly the administrative activities. The historic buildings in this area include the following preserved buildings: The German consulate, German police station.

ii) Bank, company, financial building
C. Melchers gmbh & co. was the first trading company starting to build the storages, specialized ports for the trading activities, electric bulbs factories, leather factories, extending also for residential buildings along today’s Yanjiang Avenue and Shengli street. The total construction area was 9500 sq.m, including today’s Melchers Palace.

iii) Residential buildings

There are a large number of residential buildings: Lifen, single buildings, and terraced buildings, etc. Among which the time of completion of Lifen traced to the end of the nineteenth century to 1937. A number of Lifen buildings have been well-preserved which represent the core cultural appeal of the Lifen culture in Hankou. Meanwhile playing an important role as a relevant component in demonstrating the urban culture of Wuhan city.

In recent years, multiple planning achievements such as urban design and conservation program which target Hankou former concession district have been compiled in accordance with relevant municipal and district requirements about the conservation of famous historical and cultural cities. However, there are problems about the imbalance in the management and the monitoring during the implementation process.

References:
Preservation plan of Yiyuan road Historical Cultural District, Wuhan planning Bureau.
Detailed plan of Eryao road area, Wuhan planning Bureau.