

**Resource Architecture – XXI World Congress of Architecture
22 to 26 July 2002 in Berlin**

Workshop 04 Resource Networks in Existing Buildings
Name Prof. Dr. Wei Dong

Urban Conservation and Heritage Adaptive Reuse in China

Dr. DONG Wei, Professor
Dr. HAN Dongqin, Professor
Department of Architecture
UNESCO Chairholder on Culture Resource Management
Southeast University
CHINA

Tel: + 86 25 379 4579 , 379 2464
Fax: + 86 25 361 7254
Em ail: dongwei@seu.edu.cn
<http://arch.seu.edu.cn>

China is now in a crucial moment on the course of urbanization. Along with large and rapid urban redevelopment and reconstruction, many of the valuable heritages are in danger or even been simply demolished during the past decades. This gives rise to a movement of urban conservation that initiated by the professionals in collaborating with the governments and inhabitants all over the country. In the past decades, urban conservation was thought been contradicted with urban regeneration, and so it was always in a secondary position in the strategy of urban development. Today, urban conservation, including tangible and intangible heritage protection, has been considered as an important part of the general strategy of urban regeneration. Which leads to a great conceptual transformation on conservation. While in the conservation planning and design, heritage adaptive reuse becomes priority in consideration. The historic and cultural values of heritages are enhanced and improved after they are physically integrated with the urban spatial readjustment and properly reused for cultural, commercial or tourist purposes.

A Valuable Tradition

In China, traditionally there is no conservation ideology exists as the West understood. In Chinese urban history, it seems that the urban development is in an endless cycle of 'demolishing and rebuilding'. As a two-thousand-year old Chinese maxim told that 'there is no construction without destruction'. During the past centuries, Chinese traditional cities and housings were rebuilt again and again by following this principle. With such an understanding, conservation means to follow the traditional ideas and architectural frames but not necessarily to keep the physical form of a building as long as possible. Oppositely, people believe that buildings, like human beings, have their own natural life cycle, and it equals proximately to that of a human being. Therefore, each generation has its own responsibility to maintain the condition of the house well through renewal, repairing, or restoration and hand it down to the next generation. During this process, the physical form of a building or building complex was surely changed while the building patterns and the architectural thought kept. To traditional Chinese, this is a natural and rational development process of the built environment. Because that building is not only a container for life but more importantly, it is a presentative object of ideology. It is dissipative and insensible to keep the physical form artificially of a building unchanged without reflecting the new ideal of the new users or owners. Building is part of the vivid life of human beings but can never be treated as an artificial mummy.

Urban Conservation Development

After 24-years reform, China is still in a radical transition period from centralized-planned economy to a market-guided economy. In the meantime, China is also in the greatest period of urbanization that she ever had in the history. Today's urbanization level is 32%, and the government's aim is 50% in next 10-15 years. Considering 1.3 billion population in total, this gives all cities and towns a high pressure of renewal and regeneration. And now, real estate development plays as the key mechanism in urban construction. All these developments make urban conservation in a very difficult situation.

China has now 99 state recognized Historic and Cultural Cities and Towns, and some 200 in the provincial or municipal level. Moreover, the high historic and cultural values of many other traditional towns and villages are being recognized, preserved and properly developed or reused based up on their very nature and environment.

In later 1980's and earlier 1990's, urban conservation was thought to be contradicted with urban renewal and regeneration in general. Along with continuous large scale and radical urban development, people recognized gradually that urban heritages, such as historic quarters, streets, housing blocks, or various heritage sites and elements, do not play as barriers but the valuable resources in urban regeneration. However, the conceptual transformation in urban conservation from traditional way of conserving architectural ideas by following the historic building patterns to conserving mainly of physical form of the built environment is a difficult process. It means that it breaks off a valuable tradition when accepting West-based criterion. Which pays attention to the physical parts of the human habitat more than that of the ideological as building patterns, and theories, etc. Actually, in the past thousands of years, Chinese cities and architecture have been developed by following this approach. In this aspect, traditional Chinese ideology in conservation assured the great continuum of cities and buildings without destroyed or changed by any outside cultural influence. One can easily identify the tradition and hand it down to the next generation.

Thus, one of the most important issues for the professionals is to combine both western and Chinese conservation approaches together to maintain the genuine traditions, which including both tangible and intangible heritages. The key approaches of conserve and reuse them are as following:

- 1, Respect for the dynamic nature of historic and cultural cities / towns.**
- 2, Establish a regional theoretical system for conservation.**
- 3, Integral urban conservation with the general strategy of urban regeneration.**
- 4, Development of multiple-goal evaluation and management system**