Proceedings of the first international conference on renewal and conservation of traditional Chinese Cities

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Renewal & Development in Housing Areas of Traditional Chinese & European Cities

Proceedings

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The Conference on Urban Renewal in Housing Areas of Traditional Chinese, European Cities

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Urban renewal, rehabilitation or conservation? Some reflections on the base of European and South-East Asian case studies.

To begin, it is useful to remind some definitions:
Urban Renewal is a process where the old urban fabric is demolished to be replaced by new buildings. The project is usually at a large scale, and imply one or several urban blocks or districts.

Rehabilitation means to improve the existing urban fabric and to bring it to modern standards. It can be made at the building scale, (repairs, improvements, amenities) or at the urban scale (in providing basic infrastructures).

Restoration concerns mostly monuments, or buildings with historical significance. It means to restore the building in its original state, or to a stage considered as the most valid in his history. The project is usually at the building, or group of buildings, scale.

The notion of monument in Europe

The concept of heritage/patrimony is a modality of our (in Occident) relation to the past.: the necessity to conserve material objects become a way to fight the fear of death (O. Söderström, 1994). This makes a definitive difference with the Chinese world, where the relation to the past takes other ways than the materiality, and in particular than the architectural materiality (S. Leys, 1987).

Reference to restoration in Europe appears as back as the fifteenth Century: The first printed book of architecture is in 1485 the "De re aedificatoria" from Leon Battista Alberti. It is composed of ten books, the last being concerned with the problem of architectural restoration of the monuments of the past. the book is of course connected to the Renaissance Movement in Europe, which valorized the Antiquity and was constitutive of the art as an autonomous human activity.

From the french Revolution of 1789, the conservation of monuments becomes a competence of the State. This follows the destructions and vandalism which took place during the Revolution. In Switzerland, the government decided in 1798 to raise an inventory of the historical monuments, in order to guarantee their protection. The first protective legislation will be published in 1886. The creation of associations for the protection of monuments (1880, 1905) will contribute to give rise to conservation policies, for which the Historical monuments administrations of the Cantons will be responsible.

In the XIX c., Ruskin and Camillo Sitte publish their work where they both emphasize the value of the monuments and the urban compositions of the past.

Following the huge destructions of the second world war, many European governments will publish protective legislations. The Malraux Law in France (1962) will establish protected sectors, in order to control and minimize the urban renewal process of destruction in the 1960s. From the notion of the protection of individual historical monuments, it goes to the protection of comprehensive groups of historical buildings. The Venice Charter of 1964 is the culmination of the development of Western attitudes to conservation. Articles 12 and 13 emphasise the importance of maintaining the integrity of the original monument:

"Art. 12 Replacement of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historical evidence,\"
Art. 13 Additions cannot be allowed except in so far as they do not detract from the interesting parts of the building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings.

In sum, the western approach focusses on the objective reality of the monument to be preserved. In fact, the result is that the western approach leads to the preservation of the material aspects of architectural treasures, which holds the danger of the preservation of the historical facts associated with a monument, to the point where the spirit of place has a secondary importance. This will result in the historical centre of the towns seen as museums. These urban centres will transform themselves through time into touristic ghettos, or gentrified districts for the wealthy part of the population, loosing parts of their livable qualities, mixing of activities and social diversity.

In the 1970s we see in most european cities the growth of associations of inhabitants opposing to public and private projects of urban renewal. It is the time of conservation demands opposing urban renewal projects. During the same period, following the petrol crisis of 1972-73, a new tendency towards conservation emerges. Whole decayed urban districts of working-class houses will be rehabilitated, especially in the United Kingdom and Italy. One reason is the desire of conservation of the past, others are the need to create a new market and employment opportunities in the field of rehabilitation, and the fact that rehabilitation is cheaper than new construction. The Congress of Amsterdam, the crowning event of European Architectural Heritage Year 1975, welcomes the Charter promulgated by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which recognises that Europe's unique architecture is the common heritage of all her peoples and which declares the intention of the member states to work with one another and with other European governments for its protection.

Among the basic considerations, it is stated that:

*The rehabilitation of old areas should be conceived and carried out in such a way as to ensure that, where possible, this does not necessitate a major change in the social composition of the residents. All sections of society should share in the benefits of restoration financed by public funds.*

One of the most successful experience in this field, has been between 1970 and the 1980s. the one of Bologna in Italy.

**The case of Bologna (Italy)**

The 1960s were in Italy a fundamental moment for the research and definition of new instruments and urban policies connected with the restoration of historical towns. Different Congresses set up the conditions for a new view of the architectural project in the historical parts of European towns: the Congress of Gubbio in 1961 is the first which goes from the concept of monumental conservation to the one of the conservation of districts, including their populations. The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, approved in 1964 in Venice precised that "the notion of historical monument is extended to minor architectures which through time have won a cultural meaning" (art. 1), "Conservation of monuments should be encouraged in their use for a function useful for the society " (art.5), and "Conservation of monuments imply the conservation of the surroundings at the right scale" (art.6).

In Italian Universities, especially in Venice there was a strong movement towards the study and survey of typologies, in order to develop a technical instrument for conservation of housing units.

The Bologna Master Plan was the first to implement all the results of these researches. It was an alternative to the Modern Movement planning which would have resulted to the destruction of the urban centre through motorways and the explosion of the town over the rural areas. As there is now such a risk in many Chinese towns, it is interesting to come back to that example.

In 1960 students of the Faculty of Architecture of Florence decided to study the case of Bologna, a working group under the direction of two deputy mayor and a reknown historian of architecture was set up. The result was the Master Plan presented in 1966, and approved by the Municipal council in 1969, an example for further operations throughout the country.
The work done in Bologna did not concern only the historical centre, but the whole town, its suburbs and its whole attraction area. It was based on two interconnected basic choices:
- the control of the urban sprawl (600,000 inhabitants, instead of 1 million in the previous master plan of 1958),
- the rehabilitation of the existing built heritage, beginning with the historical centre, and the achievement of social services throughout the whole territory.

In the same period, district committees were set up together with a policy of decentralisation of urban services and public administrations in the different urban quarters. These committees had to operate control over the implementation of the master plan principles. For the first time, plans were not technological instruments imposed by the Municipality, but participative tools to implement political choices of the citizens interested in their living conditions. Town planning became a discipline for the wealth of all, and urban planning was no more the result but the reason of the social and cultural development of the metropolitan area.

This new urban policy has been expressed in all fields of activity of the public powers and of the private initiative through new instruments. The continuous betterment and daily experimentation of these instruments at all levels and scales— from the master plan for the town to the detailed projects, from the implementation of the plans to the management of services by the collectivity—do not only depend from the municipal administration. They also constitute the guarantee for a reappropriation of the town by their inhabitants, which is the final objective of the urban policy of Bologna.

In this sense, the master plan has to be permanently updated and modified in order to respect the will expressed by the citizens according to the economical and cultural conditions which themselves are changing through time due to former choices already implemented. The narrow link between town planning and economic choices is translated in Bologna through a three years programmatic planning, and it was possible through this constantly refined planning to manage successfully the space according to the desires of the population. For that the citizens define in collaboration with the municipal administration the characteristics of the plan, which take account of the public and private interests. The awareness of the inhabitants to their "right to the town" take over the urban pattern from the usual conditions of exploitation, avoid urban speculation and protect the whole city as a wealth of the collectivity.

The public control of the landuse in the historical centre is exercised since the municipality approved the master plan in 1969. It has been reinforced with the approval in 1973-74 of the plan for social housing in the historical town and the plan for housing in the whole metropolitan area, both based on the conservation of the existing urban fabric. The success of these plans is directly connected with the long term policy of the municipality, buying land and buildings in order to constitute a public patrimony. It was then possible to have real projects of rehabilitation according to the priorities defined by the budget for the urban quarters and by the programmatic plan for social housing and services. Furthermore, technical and judiciary agreements were signed with the private sector for projects in the historical centre and for peripheral social housing in 1976 in order to control the development of housing.

Direct municipal control (13 sectors) applies on about half of the superficy of the historical centre (450 ha, 80,000 inhabitants, 4000 workplaces in the tertiary sector). Indirect control is made through the neighbourhood committees, which analyse building permits to be sure that the correct use is respected.

Criteria and methods for the restoration

The old town is composed through the successive extensions of different morphological units. It was first necessary to define the characteristics of the urban structures which have perpetuated through history.

The instruments for the preparation of the master plan have been:
- historical and iconographic researches in the archives of convents, families and municipality
- aerial photographs and a campaign of photographs of all buildings (facades, gardens, architectural details, materials, urban furniture, frescoes, interior of houses and their furniture, etc)
- town planning and architectural surveys (scale 1/50 to 1/200)
- in order to define the rules of architectural organisation, the rules of composition of the different elements, the typology of the buildings according to the measures units of the systems of urban composition
- models of blocks (1/100) and of monuments (1/50 or 1/100)
- juridical and socio-economic researches about the state of the houses and the structure of the population
The interpretation of this rich material has resulted in the classification of landuse patterns, housing typologies, etc. It gave the basis for the urban conservation project and the functional reorganisation of each building.

Five types of projects have been cleared:
- restoration
- rehabilitation with reconstruction of the original type
- rebuilding with partial servitude (conservation of facades)
- rebuilding with precise standards
- demolition

Once these categories of projects defined, the master plan can be implemented, plot after plot, or on larger units.
- ponctual project is mostly applied to restoration cases
- project on a grouping of units is applied to the thirteen sectors considered as homogeneous in terms of damage of their typological structures and of their socio-economic functions

At the level of the sector, the project includes traffic, green spaces, services, activities at ground floor.
At the sub-sector level, the block, the project includes rehabilitation operations.
At the minimal unit level, the project presents homogeneous and uniform operations.

In defining the use of the building according to its typology, the technical standards implemented present an innovation: they give the possibility of new uses for old buildings, integrating them in the needs of the present.

Four big categories have been defined:

A. big monuments, blocks of palaces, convents and churches. They will be used for public needs at the level of the district or of the whole town: schools, leisure centres, museums, social centres for districts, dispensaries.

B. organisation of buildings around one or more courtyards, palaces with porticoes and gardens. They will be used for prestige or cultural activities.

C. craftsman and working class houses from XIII to XVIII c. These houses will be treated globally due to their repetitive typology. They will be rehabilitated for low cost housing.

D. all private buildings deriving at smaller scale of the types A and B, or of different types.

Drawings at the scale 1/50, cuttings, analysis of building materials, give the indications for the architectural project. In the next stage, the projects are translated into models at the scale 1/100. These models give to the non-specialist the possibility to understand and participate to the project process.

The plan for social housing (PEEP)

Using different national legislations for low cost housing, this plan was approved by the Municipal Council in March 1973.

Of the thirteen sectors of the master plan, only five are concerned by theses measures. They have been chosen on the base on their homogeneous typologies and their social homogeneity.

The first phase of the plan concerned about 6000 inhabitants (the thirteen sectors content 32 000 inhabitants, on a total of 80 000 inhabitants in the historical centre).

The plots have a width of 4, 5, 7 m. on the street side. The buildings are of the category C, with one to three floors on the street side. The houses originally built for one family have been divided into flats, only the ground floor remaining a shop or a warehouse. They have only two rooms per floor, with windows on the street and the garden sides. The staircase is perpendicular to the corridor which connect the street to the garden.

The three floors houses, will have at the first and second floor, four small flats (30 to 45 sqm.) for students or elderly people. The third floor (60 to 90 sqm.) will be occupied by one flat only for families.
The small buildings in the garden will be demolished. The dwellers have been relocated in other buildings during the works of rehabilitation, and reintegrated after renovation. The level of the rent will remain controlled during a period of fifteen to twenty-five years, in order to be affordable for the inhabitants.

Conventions with the private owners have been concluded, in order to encourage renovation. A financial help amounting to 80% of the costs has been made available for the poorest. Compensations are given to the owners for the loss of value of their premises in case of demolition. The process is open and subject to individual discussions.

The implementation of the plan has been a success. A big part of the buildings have been renovated. Convents and palaces have been converted for public uses. During the 1980s, the changing economic situation brought an end to the experience. From now the impulse has been given to peripheral extensions and new housing types. But for the inhabitants and the tourists, Bologna has been able to keep all its qualities of a medieval urban centre which it is still now.

The notion of monument in Asia

The Eastern approach focuses more on the spirit of the place than the building itself. Although the physical form may change, the spirit and purpose of the original is not only preserved as a continuity, but can be enhanced through the contributions of succeeding generations. In summation, the Western approach focusses on a concern for objective reality, while the Chinese approach calls for the protection of the external features through respect for the inner meaning expressed in the monument, for a harmonious balance between the form and its connotations ("the idea is unique"). This leads to an approach of placing the emphasis not on differences between appearances or the extrinsic form of things, but rather on the underlying universal commonalities. Poetry, paintings and calligraphy expresses this: the individual objects become simply vehicles for communicating these deeper meanings. Consequently, in the field of the conservation of monuments, the allowing of continuous repairs or even rebuilding all respect this concentration on the spirit of the original monument.

"In China, excepting a very small number of well-known monuments, what strikes the visitor is the monumental absence of the past. Most contemporary Chinese towns present today a facade, which without being qualified of new or modern, is curiously lacking any traditional character. The past which continue to stimulate the Chinese life seems to live in people instead of in stones. The cultural revolution, replaced in a larger historical context, could appear as the last of the manifestations of a very ancient phenomena of massive iconoclasm which was recurrent over the Chinese history. The Chinese have understood that "nothing fixed escapes to the starving teeth of the ages". Chinese architecture is made of perishable materials, it has in itself a kind of in-built obsolescence, it decays rapidly and needs numerous rebuildings. The Chinese have transfered the problem. Eternity should not inhabit the architecture, it should inhabit the architect. The transitory nature of the monument is like an offer made to the "the voracity of time", and it is to the price of this sacrifice that the builder insure the permanence of his spiritual intention. The Chinese have conceived the notion that only one king of immortality could exist, the one given by history. The human survives only in the human, it means in practice in the memory of his descendants through the written testimony. The past of the towns was a past of words and not of stones. China has conserved the largest and longest written documentation of the past which exist in the world. But China has built no Acropolis, no Roman Agora. Chinese civilisation has not placed its history in buildings. Even its biggest palaces and its urban complexes have been built in order to project a certain vision, they organize the space more than filling it with buildings. Chinese civilisation has never considered that its history was spoiled or raped when its historical monuments were destroyed or burned. It was sufficient that they could be replaced or repaired in order to exercise again and again their functions. The material object is really secondary. Anyone who will try to reach immortality in the spirit of the humanity will less try to edificate big stone monuments, than to cultivate his human skills in order to express them through imperishable words" (S. Leys, 1987).
We find the same concept in South-East Asia and Japan, accentuated to the fact that most buildings were made of vegetal materials and had to be rebuilt regularly.

In the last decade, under the influence of tourism, of western experts, of International Organisations providing financial help for restoration and the worldwide economy, things began to change, at least superficially. On one side a bigger amount of monuments have been restored (the Forbidden City in Beijing, the temples in Guandong), on the other side fake old streets are rebuilt (Liulichang in Beijing, Qingfend Yitiaojie in Chengde, restaurants street in "Splendid China" in Shenzen), folkloric parks and Disneylands are created (Fan village in Singapore, "Splendid China" in Shenzen, chinese traditional architecture park in Beijing).

Old decayed urban districts are preserved or reconstructed at a scale compatible with the old urban pattern while introducing modern infrastructures (Ju'er Hutong in Beijing).

An interesting example of this new process is the preservation of the remaining old colonial and chinese urban districts in Singapore.

The case of Singapore

Since independence in 1965, Singapore has been transformed from a colonial outpost, known at that time as the "biggest slum in Asia", to a global financial and business centre. Singapore's public housing programme has been one of corner-stone of the political agenda. A major achievement of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) is to have housed over 85% of the population in some half a million apartment units in new towns around the island.

A notable turnabout in the late 1980s has been the attitude to conservation. Till the early 1980s, massive urban renewal and rebuilding afforded little time for conservation. Pragmatic government policies led to the loss of many beautiful old buildings.

Two key factors precipitated significant government action for conservation. Both arose out of changes in the tourist industry in Singapore. The first related to a sharp fall rate in tourist arrivals in 1982-83; the second to the erection of too many new hotels on the incorrect assumption that the number of tourists would continue to increase at a high rate.

Singapore's tourism problems were identified in 1984 by a government appointed Tourism Task Force. It was suggested that redevelopment of urban areas had resulted in a negative impact on Singapore's tourist industry. The report of the Task Force clearly highlighted the urgent need to preserve and restore Singapore's number one attraction- Chinatown. A number of problem areas were identified, including the Rent Control Act, whis was seen by many as an obstacle to conservation in that it discouraged building maintenance and investment in restoration. The report recommended that once Chinatown has been a proven success as a conservation project for tourism, other historical areas of Little India and the culturally Malay areas of Geylang Serai and Kampong Glam should also be conserved, using the Chinatown project as a model. In addition, other historically and culturally significant buildings and sites were identified for conservation. The study team was careful to identify the broader meaning and benefits of conservation:

"Conservation to enhance the image of a product can improve its economic viability and therefore be beneficial. Likewise, conservation to restore or maintain something that will result in national pride is also beneficial. As important as conservation is to tourism, its major goals should provide a sense of place to the local population, a different and entertaining place that is socially clean. The local acceptance is vital to the tourism aspect as interchange among the local residents and visitors is necessary for its ultimate success" (R.A.Smith, 1988).
Conservation is a continuing process of planning the development of a city which recognises its history. The conservation effort can only succeed with the collective commitment and effort of all Singaporeans. In retaining parts of old Singapore, we are retaining the memory of the early immigrants who transformed Singapore from a fishing village to a bustling city. The languages, cultures and beliefs of the immigrants as embodied in their churches, temples, mosques, houses, street names and localities are reflected in the conservation of these historic districts and secondary development areas (URA, 1991).

"A nation must have a memory to give it a sense of cohesion, continuity and identity. The longer the past, the greater the awareness of a nation's identity...a sense of common history is what provides the links to hold together a people who came from the four corners of the hearth" (Mr S Rajaratnam, former Senior Minister, 1986)

The URA, as the Conservation Authority, has completed (1988-91) a Conservation Master Plan for the Island. This plan complements the Central Area Structure Plan and addresses the need for a balanced development with the right mix of new and old buildings. The five phases of identification of buildings/areas worthy of conservation include:

Phase 1A: historic districts and significant areas
Phase 1B: bungalows in good class bungalow areas and their fringes
Phase 2A: additional monuments for preservation in the central area
Phase 2B: additional monuments for preservation in the rest of the island
Phase 3: secondary development areas
Phase 4: buildings of outstanding architectural and historical value in pockets in the rest of the island
Phase 5: State-owned properties worthy of conservation.

Before completing the overall Conservation Master Plan, the URA had initiated various conservation programmes (Murray Street & Cuppage Street, 1977; Emerald Hill 1981; Peranakan Place 1985; Cairnhill Road 1986).

Areas conservation plans aim to:
- preserve as much as possible each area's architecture and ambience
- improve the physical environment by providing pedestrian walkways, plazas, landscaping and control of signages
- enhance the character of each area by introducing new activities while sustaining the old traditional activities of tourist value
- provide guidelines for the private sector to be actively involved in the conservation effort.

The historic districts conserved are Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India, Cairnhill and the Emerald Hill areas, Singapore River and the Heritage Link. These districts are part of the areas allocated by Raffles for the different races in his 1828 Town Plan. The total conservation area in the city adds up 4% of the land in the Central Area.

Chinatown

Chinatown is the area south of the Singapore river allocated to the Chinese under Raffles' 1828 Town Plan. Today it embraces four main areas: Kreta Ayer, Tanjong Pagar, Bukit Pasoh and Telok Ayer. Its surface is 23 ha, 53% are privately owned, 47% government owned. About 1200 structures (700 private, 500 public) occupy the area. They are predominantly two and three storey shophouses, with several religious buildings (hindu, chinese and muslim).

Chinatown exemplifies the range of problems that are common to the other conservation areas: dilapidated structures of good architectural value, tenanted properties under rent control, fragmented land ownership and declining traditional trades.

The traditional Chinese community life is still well represented and the area has remained a key tourist attraction. The variety of building facades exhibits a sense of fine architectural details and creative use of multi-cultural resources. Each of its sub-area has its distinctive characteristics.
The objectives of the concept plan were:

1. to retain and enhance the existing activities which are a part of the historical and cultural heritage
2. to restore buildings of historical and architectural significance
3. to improve the general physical environment
4. to retain traditional trades and activities while consolidating the area with new, compatible ones
5. to introduce appropriate new features to further enhance the identity of the place
6. to involve both public and private sectors in carrying out conservation projects.

The essential design features were:

1. conservation of the entire area, but vacant sites and sites with architecturally poor quality buildings will be allowed to be redeveloped within specified envelop control guidelines.
2. designation of the core area (Trengganu & Pagoda St., Telok Ayer St.) for street activities such as the selling of food, and for traditional secular trades such as tea shops, grocery shops, restaurants and a show house will be reintroduced, and an old theatre will be reconstructed.
3. the creation of a festival plaza and introduction of pedestrianisation in the core area. A plaza will be created on the vacant site along South Bridge Road in front of HDB's Chinatown Complex. It will provide space for large scale festival activities, fairs, puppet shows. Pedestrian connections among the sub-areas in Chinatown will be systematically implemented.
4. adaptive use of buildings to be conserved and used for contemporary functions. It is important to recapture the traditional grouping of similar trades, as this will strengthen this area's sense of identity. Ground floors of the shophouses will be used for such purposes. The upper floors can be used for mixed uses such as residences, restaurants, associations and clubs.
5. improvement to street furniture, signage, etc. Existing old lamps posts, fire hydrants and other public amenities will be kept. Authentic signboards and lightning and the use of compatible historic materials for five-footways and external building surfaces, such as the use of wood for openings and granite edgings for footways would help retain such a desired ambience.

Kreta Ayer

The URA spearheaded its conservation efforts in 1988 by restoring 45 shophouse units in Chinatown (Kreta Ayer Conservation Area: Sago Street, Trengganu Street, Smith Street, South Bridge Road). The restoration included the replacement of all timber floors and staircases, roof members and tiles and the upgrading of water supplies, sanitary, sewer and electrical installations. Decorative features such as ornament plasterwork and woodwork are preserved with the damaged and missing ones restored.

Twenty-six of the 45 units fronting South Bridge Road and Sago Street were offered for sale by tender to the public on a 99-year lease in December 1990. The remaining 19 units fronting Smith Street were offered for short leases by a private investor in March 1991.

Tanjong Pagar

The cluster of some 200 shophouses within the Tanjong Pagar Conservation Area has been restored through the joint participative efforts of both the public and private sectors.

The restoration by the URA in 1987 of the pilot block of 32 shophouse units demonstrated the government's commitment to conservation. In the same year, another 38 shophouse units were sold to the public by tender on a 99-year lease. The remaining shophouse units were progressively released for sale to the public for restoration to new uses in 1988.

New backlanes were created between the rear of shophouses. Necessary infrastructural and supporting services were provided. The environment of the area has been improved through the pedestrianisation of Duxton Hill and provision of sidewalks along all the streets. Lanscaping has been done and adjacent bus shelters have been designed to blend with the overall environment. New surface carparks have been built to cater to the carparking needs generated by new tertiary activities in the area.

Currently the area looks and feels too gentrified: ground floors are occupied by restaurants and tourists shops, or
offices. Upper floors are rented by accountant, lawyers, electronic offices, etc. There is a lack of street life, and the pastel facades look more like some Southern France holiday resort than a lively district.

Kampong Glam

The Kampong Glam conservation Area was originally a large tract of land granted to Sultan Hussain Shah by Raffles in 1819 after he had signed a treaty with Raffles for the setting up of a factory on behalf of the East India Company. The settlement first appeared in the 1828 Raffles' Town Plan as the "Arab Campong" and "Sultan's Compound". The area has basically a residential environment with trading activities at the periphery and along Arab Street. The conservation plans for the area include a cultural park and the revival of a festival street.

Little India

By 1881, the basic structure of the area had been developed with cattle trade established as the economic mainstay of the area. Today the legacy from this period are streets names adopted from the cattle trade, like Kerbau, Buffalo, Lembu Roads, and others. By the 1930s, the influx of immigrants into the area triggered a rising demand for housing and the gradual demise of the cattle trade. Today a wide variety of shophouse architectural styles can be found, with the earlier styles concentrated in the south. The Hindu stupas, Muslim domes and Christian spires that pierce the skyline are a testimony to the urban, multi-religious affiliations of its inhabitants. Little India's core is defined by the area's concentration of Indian trades and shops.

Singapore River

The 2.9 km Singapore river offers some 82 hectares of land for revitalisation and redevelopment, which will be divided in three zones:
- the Boat Quay Conservation Area, from the river mouth to New Bridge Road. The South Boat Quay is characterised by the old riverfront shophouses along the distinctive crescent-shaped river bank
- the Clarke Quay Area, characterised by low warehouses and shophouses
- the Robertson Quay Area, characterised by some large and solidly-built warehouses.

The proposals include:
- the retention of the shophouses at Boat Quay as a commercial zone with new entertainment uses. The river front will be landscaped with a public promenade
- the revitalisation of Clarke Quay as an entertainment and commercial centre, provision for cultural activities will be encouraged, outdoor eating and street activities are envisaged
- the use of Robertson Quay for shopping, hotel and residential uses. Water-based activities such as river cruises and boating will be introduced.

The restoration on Boat Quay was completed beginning of 1993. It was then a very fashionable area with dancing, exotic restaurants (Italian and French), cafes, and high class flats.

Emerald Hill & Cairnhill Areas

Historically residential streets of wealthy Straits Chinese, they display their taste in flamboyant architecture: ornaments in plaster, terracotta, glazed tiles, timber, iron, paint and glass, french windows, pilasters, are richly ornamented. The URA has sensitively upgraded the infrastructure with plantations and parking spaces. Several houses have been beautifully restored and the area has retained a largely residential atmosphere, through many houses have changed ownership as property prices have spiralled to increase their value tenfold.

Heritage Link

The Heritage Link is based on the Master Plan for Singapore's Civic and Cultural District. The underlying concept for the plan is to identify key buildings available for cultural re-use, and to integrate them with the existing buildings of
interests through a pedestrian movement network.
The remaining neo-classical buildings of the 19th Century housing the Supreme Court, City Hall, Victoria Memorial Hall, National Museum, schools, etc, are the finest examples of British architecture that still exist today.

P.G. Raman "Key urban challenges amidst rapid change":
S. has lost its essential character as a historic city because we have shaped it on economic rationale alone...we have not protected the historic cores of Chinatown and Little India from encroaching commercialism and gentrification. restructuring and repairing historic areas ought to be carried out for more profound reasons than just to attract tourists...the methods adopted in Bologna, whereby the inner city historic core is preserved as a residential zone with a large amount of inexpensive accommodation, is worth our study. The tools used in Bologna are large financial grants, strict controls on change of uses, continuous consultation with the residents of each district, and ensuring that grants are made on condition that the original tenants are retained at pre-conservation rents... Can we start some wider discussion on how to conserve not only the physical fabric but also the traditional activities of historic areas, without resorting to dubious ideas like theme parks or, for that matter, turning them into museums of empty buildings? (Sunday Times 26 Jan. 1992)

Conclusion about Singapore

The response from local population to the restoration policies was quite positive:

For 60,4 % of the people the preservation of old buildings was very important as a national symbol. 80,3 % (for university level educated people) found very important to restore old buildings. Wealthiest people (93,7 % for an income level of 2500-2999 S$; 83,1 % for an income level over 3000 S$) , younger people (62,7 % for the one between 15-29 years, against 55,3 % for those 45 years old and more), and Malays (86,3 %, against the Chinese only 68,6 %) were the most enthusiastic (unpublished survey from ISEAS).

This means clearly that, what was seen in the beginning of the process only as a new economic market connected with the needs of tourism, was more than that. Like in Bologna, it is an important factor of cultural identity for the inhabitants. Even if on a technical or conservation point of view, the result is someway counterfeit, it has become a success in the process of national and local identity reinforcement.

What is the impact of the Singapore experience on other urban centres in the region?

Out of the questions of architectural fashions and the influence of the same architects building all over the ASEAN countries, and even now in China, is a large scale policy of urban conservation thinkable somewhere else? First of all, the main differences between Singapore and other countries have to be noted: Singapore is a small territory (580 square km), it is a City-State with a stable population (3 millions people, with a growth of 1,0 to 1,5 % in the last fifteen years) and a strictly controlled immigration. It has had also a unique political stability: since its independance in 1959 (part of Malaysia till 1965), Singapore had the same political party on power and (till 1990) the same Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew.

Through a strong economic policy, developing an important building industry and building massively public housing and new towns, the regime has succeeded in solving housing problems for the majority of the population (more than 85 % of the population are housed in public flats). The historical situation of Singapore, where the land was mostly public land given for development according to long-term leases (99-years), made also easier this public policy, avoiding speculative phenomenas in a market oriented, but government controlled, economy.

On the other side, Singapore is a relatively recent colonial creation (1819). Its whole population came from outside, mainly from South China and Malaysia, and later on from India. To be a Nation, Singapore had to take account of this multi-ethnic diversity. The national and cultural identity had to be based on the richness of this diversity. To claim as a factor of identity the architectures produced by this diversity, could only happen in Singapore.
This set of circumstances doesn't exist in other countries of the region. If we accept the assumption that the conservation project was a mainly a political and symbolical act, this type of policy is not possible elsewhere.

This doesn't mean that there is no conservation policies in the other countries of the region, but their reasons have to be different.

Most South-East Asian countries have still a very lively tradition of rural traditional architecture. It is a vegetal architecture, which by definition can not be the subject of a conservation policy, as it is perishable and has to be rebuilt permanently. The buildings subject to conservation are in fact colonial monuments in bricks and stone, or open air museums for the tourists and for internal didactical purposes. If the shophouses are found in most of the urban centres, they don't have any identity value for the local populations. They are seen as foreign architectures, relatively recent on the historical scale.

In Indonesia, particularly in Java, the main housing problem is the one of the improvement of the urban kampong. Since 1965, programmes for the cleansing, drainage and water adduction of the low density urban districts have been implemented by the government and the world Bank (KIP). They have been successfully extended to most towns. They were not architectural conservation but infrastructure programmes, the inhabitants having full responsibility to improve latter on their houses. The vegetal houses have been replaced over time by brick or cement houses, giving to the areas the aspect of low density settlements.

The only buildings conserved have been historical colonial Dutch monuments, transformed into museums or for administrative uses.

In Kuala Lumpur, very few buildings remain from the Chinatowns. The economic pressure on land development make it very difficult to have any policy of conservation. Historical colonial buildings have been mostly preserved and devoted to administrative uses. Also Malay buildings, like mosques and palaces of sultans are carefully maintained and in some cases rebuilt (for example the Museum of Malacca, reproducing on the base of documents the palace of the rajah).

In Thailand, country which has never been colonised and were the populations of different ethnic origins live in good harmony, the subject of the conservation of Chinatowns is quite different. The introduction of this type of housing has been more recent than in the other countries of the region. It was introduced by the will of the King, in the beginning of the twentieth century, as a symbol of modernity. This type of districts still continue to develop, on a traditional urban pattern but with modern materials.

The country is very proud of its traditional vegetal architectures, and if something would have to be conserved it would be this type of production. The small districts of traditional houses remaining still in Bangkok are carefully kept and inhabited by the wealthiest people.

The conservation projects are reserved to the symbols of religion and royal power: temples, pagods and palaces.

As a conclusion, we can say that everywhere in the region the autochtonous traditional architectures are valuated, against the testimonies of colonial-chinese buildings seen as exogenous and recent. Only in Singapore, the tradition is in the mixture of Chinese, Malay, Indian and British cultures. It is this hybrid architecture which has to be conserved, because it is this architecture which make sense.

What interest of these comparative approaches for Chinese cities and for our Conference?

In the Chinese cities of the end of XX c., the concept of conservation doesn't weight much in front of economic requirements of a running growth. Nevertheless, in the last decades, university researches have resulted in a huge amount of studies about the traditional architectures of the different provinces in the country. This internal production has been complemented by numerous studies made by foreign teams (Japan, France, Italy, Norway, etc). How to use this knowledge for conservation projects? How to establish a balance between economic interests, housing standards, development of modern infrastructures and conservation criterias?

As we have seen conservation has to be set into a social framework. People have to feel concerned and make participate in the process.

In Bologna we had a commun social project involving the authorities and the population. In Singapore the government owns a big part of the land, the project came from the top but was recognized by the population as a
It seems that the speed of transformations in China doesn't allow these types of approaches. The populations feel quite happy to leave their old decayed districts for new flats in the far away suburbs (M. Leaf, 1995). Local governments sell off the land to the developers in the name of the capitalistic economic development. Prices of land in Beijing and Shanghai make illusive the rescue of inner areas. Conservation projects are quickly forgotten in the name of the economic rationality.

In such a context, what could be the "Chinese Way" to conservation?

The category of "monuments" is relatively easy to define: they are part of the history and the culture of the country, they have a didactical role to play for the young generations, and they will continue to attract tourists- both Chinese or foreigners. As Chinese monuments are usually building complexes enclosed by a wall, it is easy to locate them in the urban fabric. They can be the subject of pluriannual programmes of restoration. As the task is a huge one, it will be necessary to educate architects and craftsmen for this type of very specialised work. It will also be possible to develop an industry for conservation components (glazed tiles, bricks, woodwork, etc).

The rehabilitation and conservation of whole urban districts is a much more difficult task. Nevertheless, it is in this field the there is urgency. The question is how to choose, what to conserve, and for whom?

I hope the presentation of the two case studies of Bologna and Singapore, will be of some help in the further discussions.

As a base of discussion, I would propose the following steps in the matter of conserving urban districts:

1. evaluation of the present stage of knowledge about surveys of buildings and study of typologies in China. Use of the concept of typologies in the planning of large scale rehabilitation projects
2. develop soft town planning, in order to provide the decayed historical urban sectors with minimum standards of infrastructures, and this in a sustainable development perspective
3. define new uses for specific buildings, while conserving their built structure
4. establish clear and firm priorities about which urban sectors to preserve: to conserve or to bring to a minimum standard (cf KIP, Indonesia)
5. measure the costs of this type of projects (for example using Rapid Evaluation Methods), and prepare pluriannual public budgets for conservation programmes, ask a financial participation (equipment taxes, or other) from the private developers for these programmes
6. encourage (like in Singapore) partnership between the private and the public, in proposing financial and architectural help for conservation projects

I hope much more ideas, will be proposed, and will result from the discussions of our conference. Thank you for your attention.

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