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Abstract

**Hehua Tang, reading of a historical chinese district,
rethinking the relation with the Zhongshan road.**

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ABSTRACT

The vernacular district of Hehua Tang, in the Old South Town of Nanjing, represents an endless source of information to understand what really means tradition in Chinese cities. However, as a result of the rapid development and urbanization, the settlement is nowadays suffering the consequences of a progressive urban marginalization that makes urgent a regeneration project. This process has lead Hehua Tang to the paradoxical situation of compresence of high land value and low living quality, making it an emblematic case of the precarious conditions of historic neighborhoods in China: suffocated by coarse-grained high rises, symbols of the market-oriented economy; threatened by touristic-oriented “conservation” policies, which have already denatured the surroundings; and degraded by the continuous status of marginalization, that gives to the settlement a “slum-like” appearance. Despite the completely different context, the todays Chinese cities are experiencing exactly what the historical Italian cities lived in the Sixties. At the time, characters such as Saverio Muratori and Gianfranco Caniggia literally saved many Italian historical centers from the Modernist *damnatio memoriae* introducing for the first time the concept of typo-morphology. In this sense, it is interesting to apply this concept in China, aiming to counteract the economic driven developments, that are threatening the identity of the cities.

In addition to the fascinating typological question, another crucial aspect that has to be taken in account in the regeneration process is the complex situation of property rights. The poor land tenure security and the chaotic distribution of private and public properties, results of continuous twist and turns throughout history, in fact, further complicates the conflict of interest among government, developers and residents. Starting from these two key concepts, typology and ownership, a new methodology, a step by step strategy, is defined and applied to the Hehua Tang case.

The analysis is then completed with a specific study on the delicate architectural and urban relationship that Hehua Tang had and has with the Zhongshan Road, the highway that in the seventies literally broke the historic Nanchinese district in two parts.

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