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COURSE OF
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Abstract

**Hehua Tang, Reading of a Historical Chinese District:
Rethinking the Relation with the City Wall**

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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. This area, in fact, is one of the last authentic residential areas of Nanjing and it is still rich in architectural heritage embedded in a clear historical pattern. However, as a result of the rapid development of urbanization, the area is nowadays suffering the consequences of a progressive urban marginalization. This process has led it 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 neighbourhoods in contemporary China: suffocated by huge 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 today's Chinese cities are testing 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. The research aims to reinterpret and apply this approach as a way to counteract the market-driven developments, that are threatening the identity of the cities.

In this context in addition to the fascinating typological question, another crucial aspects to consider in the regeneration process are the complex factors related to urban economy and politics. The poor land tenure security and the chaotic distribution of private and public properties, complicates the conflict of interest among government, developers and residents. Starting from these two key concepts, typology and ownership, a new strategy is defined and applied to the Hehua Tang case.

The research concludes with the attempt to improve the urban spatial form of the south part of Hehua Tang in harmony with the surroundings and the City Wall. In this sense, the last part of the thesis is focused on the relation between the chaotic urban pattern and the presence of the Hehua Tang's Wall Segment. In the areas along the City Walls the most used approach, is to create some touristic districts that imitate the past. Indeed some old areas have been redesigned with the only objective to show the traditional culture in an ideal way, through the reinterpretation of the old residential streets and reconstruction of the old facades in "style". My project, on the basis of urban spatial typo-morphological theory, has the aim to give a new design solution for Hehua Tang's Wall Segment, making full use of the historical and cultural resources in order to create a comprehensive urban space close to the City Wall.

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