



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

COURSE OF Architecture Construction City

Abstract

**Hehua Tang, Reading of a Historical Chinese District,
Rethinking the Relation with the Historical buildings**

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by

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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. 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 led 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 today's 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 centres from the Modernist *damnatio memoriae* introducing for the first time the concept of typomorphology. 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 into 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 applied to a specific area inside the Hehua Tang district, wanting to deepen the study of the traditional housing typology of the Old South Town, the Nanjing's courtyard house and its ability to adapt itself to the changes of times, still maintaining its true identity. It appears clear that often the new housing typologies do not offer the same outcomes in terms atmosphere and feelings for the inhabitants. The scale of the traditional courtyard house is, in fact, truly the human scale and the system of collective corridors and spaces allows it to better face the possible changes in functions and dimensions. Having to design next to one of the most well preserved historical urban fabric of the area, give the great opportunity to rethink the traditional features of the Nanjing's courtyard house in a new way. This study fits in the current government attention toward the Chinese historical district's renewal that have usually been transformed into luxury, touristic districts, erasing in this way the original roots of the areas.

The alternative design suggestion for the South-East area of Hehua Tang is provided seeking to achieve a result able to meet both government, investors and inhabitants needs. The historic districts are, in fact, not only a valuable resource for tourism. They can also be used as a benchmark to generate a new sustainable developing path, based on the traditional knowledge and their vernacular characters. This is the direction in which the Chinese policies toward historical districts actually seem to

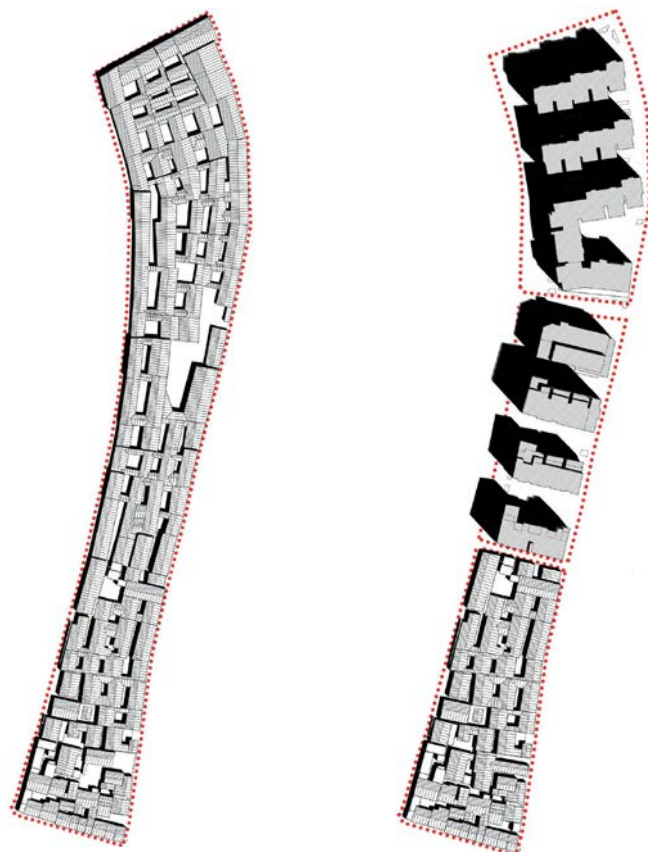
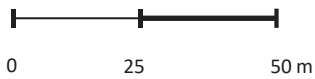
move, even if with alternating results. The present research inserts itself in this new course, adding a western approach contribution based on a conscious, direct reading of the area.

four new pilot projects for the area



1929

2017



Morphological evolution of the case study area



The new courtyard house typology

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