

Research on the Strategy and Technical Path of Historical Buildings' Revitalization and Utilization in the Former Concession of Hankou

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of urbanization, the fate of historical buildings in contemporary urban development and renewal has become increasingly complex. While facing material damage and functional decline, they also bear the dual pressure of market development and policy regulation, which poses great practical challenges to the protection and reuse of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou. In view of this, the article starts with the current situation of the protection of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou, analyzes the contemporary value of historical building protection and reuse, and finally proposes targeted implementation strategies from the two aspects of historical building protection and reuse, constructing a "protection utilization regeneration" conscience cycle system, aiming to continue the unique historical mission of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou, realize their value transformation from "historical relics" to "urban future resources", and promote the revitalization of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou in the new social and economic system.

Keywords: *The former concession of Hankou, Historical buildings, Protection, Reuse, Technological innovation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalization, informatization, and urbanization, the spatial form and functional structure of cities are constantly evolving. As material witnesses of urban cultural memory and social development, the cultural value and social function carried by historical buildings are facing new development opportunities and practical challenges. [1] As one of the earliest open trading ports in modern China, Hankou has been designated as a concession by countries such as Britain, Russia, France, Germany, and Japan since the mid-19th century, forming a composite urban spatial system that combines Chinese and Western architectural styles. It reflects diverse styles and technological exchanges in architectural form, and also demonstrates the complex process of modern China's integration with the world in social life. It is not only an important part of Wuhan's urban history, but also an indispensable physical carrier for the

study of modern Chinese urban culture. Therefore, a systematic study on the protection and reuse of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou can not only effectively enrich the protection and utilization strategies of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou, but also provide a promotable experience framework for the sustainable development of other modern urban historical districts, forming a new model of historical building protection and reuse with cultural heritage value as the core, social sharing as the guide, and technological innovation as the support, realizing the continuity and regeneration of urban historical context in the contemporary context.

2. THE CURRENT STATUS OF PROTECTION AND REUSE OF HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN THE FORMER CONCESSION OF HANKOU

2.1 *Being Not Yet Renovated, and Being Well Preserved*

The historical buildings concentrated on Jianghan Road, Lanling Road, Lihuangpi Road, Shengli Street, and Poyang Street, represented by the former Dehua Bank building, the former British HSBC bank, the former site of the Russian tea company, the St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and the Jianghan Pass Bell Tower, have relatively intact preserved the original structural system and spatial pattern of the concession period. These buildings mostly use brick and concrete or reinforced concrete structures, and the facade decoration has a distinct eclectic and decorative art style, reflecting the profound influence of the international architectural trend on Hankou in the early 20th century. They have high historical, artistic, and social value and have become important carriers of urban memory. However, although some buildings have been included in the list of cultural relics protection, there is a lack of systematic inspection, repair, and protection systems in daily use, resulting in problems such as exterior wall peeling, roof leakage, and structural aging. At the same time, many buildings were repeatedly divided and used or changed their purposes in the 1950s and 1960s, resulting in complex property ownership and making it difficult to implement unified protection projects.

2.2 *Reconstructing on the Original Site, and Continuing the Style*

In the process of urban renewal and functional replacement, some historical buildings along the Hankou River, such as the old warehouse group in the former Russian Concession area and some commercial and residential buildings on Shengli Street, were demolished and rebuilt on their original sites due to serious structural damage or functional changes. By replicating the original building facade proportions, decorative components, and material colors, the overall visual continuity of the historical block was reproduced. While avoiding the damage of high-intensity development to the form of the historical block, the safety and efficiency of the building were improved by

updating the structure and facilities. However, due to the lack of detailed original drawings and repair archives, some buildings can only be restored based on image data or written records during the reconstruction process, resulting in deviations in scale proportions or detailed components. Although it can meet the needs of urban image shaping in the short term, it deviates from the core value of cultural heritage protection in academic significance.

2.3 *Conducting New Construction on the Original Site, and Style Being Discontinuity*

With the increasingly prominent wave of urban renewal, many historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou have been completely demolished, and some development projects have been transformed into high-rise commercial complexes, hotels or residential areas with economic benefits as the guide, completely ignoring the historical context and spatial continuity of the region. In terms of function, structure and even style, they are disconnected from the historical environment, forming a clear style gap. From the perspective of urban morphology, the narrow streets, courtyard style spaces, and low rise buildings formed during the concession period have been replaced by high-density buildings. The scale of the blocks has suddenly changed, public spaces have been eroded, and the visual corridors and landscape rhythms of traditional streets have been destroyed. Modern technology, mainly composed of glass curtain walls and metal facades, forms a strong contrast with the brick and stone texture of surrounding preserved buildings, causing the historical blocks to lose their overall sense of coordination. This not only causes the disappearance of material heritage, but also weakens residents' sense of place identity and cultural belonging.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY VALUE OF PROTECTING AND REUSING HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN THE FORMER CONCESSION OF HANKOU

3.1 *Historical Value*

The existence of historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou is not only the continuation of material space, but also the

solidification of time and the materialization of memory. Its protection and reuse are actually maintaining the "cultural memory chain" of the city. The formation concession of Hankou was an important spatial node for the rise of ethnic commerce and industry in the late Qing Dynasty and the establishment of modern urban patterns. Although it had a clear colonial color, it objectively promoted the development and innovation of urban infrastructure construction. The block layout, road system, and architectural form of the former concession of Hankou carry the historical context of the transformation from traditional urban form to modern urban form. Its spatial layout and architectural remains have become important physical materials for studying the development history of modern Chinese cities. The early architecture of the British Concession and the Russian Concession mostly reflected the Victorian and Russian eclectic styles, while the French Concession introduced neoclassical and eclectic features, reflecting the international architectural trend from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. After the Xinhai Revolution, the rise of national capital promoted the architectural style of "Chinese style and Western style", giving rise to building types such as Hankou Bank and Dehua Building that combine Western structural technology with Chinese decorative vocabulary. This not only recorded the rise and fall of Hankou as a modern industrial and commercial hub, but also reflected the evolution of architectural culture under the interaction of Chinese and Western cultures.

3.2 Artistic Value

The architectural complex in the former concession of Hankou combines diverse styles and high artistic standards, serving as a model of the fusion of Chinese and Western architectural art. On the facade of the building, there is not only the order and proportion beauty of European classicism, but also the integration and transformation of Eastern decorative elements, presenting a unique regional artistic expression. On the one hand, buildings such as Hankou Water Tower and Dehua Bank Building adopted advanced concrete frame systems at that time, which made breakthroughs in functionality and safety, reflecting the achievements of modern architectural technology innovation. On the other hand, the architecture of the former concession in Hankou has evolved from early classical and Renaissance styles to later decorative arts and modernist styles, forming a

lineage of architectural styles spanning nearly half a century. This not only demonstrates the temporal extension of architectural art, but also reflects Hankou's open attitude towards cultural absorption and innovation as a regional center city, constituting an irreplaceable visual cultural asset in the urban landscape. In addition, the architectural sequence along the Yangtze River, the scale control of deep streets and alleys, and the configuration of greenery and public spaces, although the buildings in different concessions have differences in style, form a coordinated and unified landscape feature in spatial layout and block texture, making the former concession of Hankou a historical area with high artistic appreciation and research value in urban landscape.

3.3 Social Value

With urban renewal and population migration, the life memories and local identity of local residents in Wuhan are constantly weakening with the integration of diverse cultures. The historical buildings in the original concession can effectively evoke emotional resonance among residents in material form, becoming an important medium for maintaining the continuity of urban culture and strengthening local residents' "sense of urban belonging" and "cultural confidence". [2] At the same time, in recent years, with the promotion of the concept of urban cultural revival, some buildings in the concession area of Hankou have been transformed into cultural and educational venues such as museums, art centers, and creative parks, which not only enhance the cultural attractiveness of the city, but also promote the public to re-examine the social value of historical heritage. Taking the Jianghan Road area as an example, historical buildings have introduced cultural, commercial, and tourism consumption functions on the basis of restoration and protection, realizing the transformation from traditional commercial streets to comprehensive cultural spaces, and from "historical relics" to "living heritage", which has stimulated new "economic vitality" for historical buildings.

4. ANALYSIS OF PROTECTION STRATEGIES FOR HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN THE FORMER CONCESSION OF HANKOU

4.1 *Learning from Excellent Experiences and Strengthening Management Efforts*

As a product of China's opening up to the outside world in modern times, the former concession of Hankou bears the historical imprint of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures and the early practice of modern urbanization. It is not only a material witness to urban development, but also an important component of urban identity. Therefore, it is necessary to learn and innovate mature domestic and foreign experiences at the institutional and practical levels to achieve scientific protection, revitalization and reuse of it. Since the 1950s, the UK has established a "graded protection" system, dividing buildings into different levels based on their historical and artistic value, and jointly supervising them by local governments and professional institutions. France has established the "cultural heritage protection area" system through the "Historical Heritage Law", requiring overall protection at the urban planning level. In recent years, China has gradually formed a multi-dimensional protection system from legal, administrative to social aspects through policies such as the "Cultural Relics Protection Law", "Regulations on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages", and "Measures for the Protection of Historical Buildings". [3] The protection of buildings in the former concession of Hankou should fully absorb these experiences and form a multi-level management model of "policy coordination department collaboration social participation public supervision" at the local level. In the practical process, it is necessary to establish a hierarchical classification management system. For representative and well-preserved key buildings such as the former Dehua Bank building and the former site of the British Consulate in Hankou, they should be included in the first level protection scope, and their original appearance should be protected and strictly repaired. For ordinary buildings with weak functionality but spatial value, they need to be guided to undergo moderate renovation and reuse. At the same time, government agencies need to establish a professional evaluation and filing mechanism, and

can establish a "Hankou Former Concession Historical Block Protection and Renewal Coordination Committee" to form a cross departmental collaborative platform, ensuring the smooth integration of planning, approval, funding, supervision and other links. Transitioning from "single point restoration" to "systematic governance" and from "government led" to "social co governance", a dynamic protection mechanism is formed to ensure the authenticity and continuity of historical buildings.

4.2 *Utilizing Advanced Technology to Achieve Digital Intelligence Reengineering*

In the context of digitalization and intelligence, the information technology of cash can not only compensate for the problems caused by the lack of historical building data and spatial aging, but also provide accurate data support for its revitalization and utilization, promoting the visualization, traceability, and sustainable development of cultural heritage protection. Taking the historical block of Jianghan Road as an example, a complete spatial information database can be constructed through laser scanning, unmanned aerial vehicle image acquisition, photogrammetry and other means, using BIM and GIS technology to record the structural form of the building status quo. At the same time, multi-dimensional information such as historical evolution, repair records, and material analysis can be overlaid to provide data support for later protection design. At the same time, many historical buildings lack complete archival records during renovation or reuse, which makes it difficult to accurately restore them in later repairs. Therefore, a cloud based historical building archival management system can be established to integrate surveying and mapping data, historical drawings, literature materials, and oral records, enabling cross departmental information sharing.

4.3 *Increasing Publicity Efforts and Building a Joint Guarantee Force*

The continuation of the architectural complex in the former concession of Hankou cannot be separated from the understanding, recognition, and participation of the general public. Therefore, in the protection strategy, it is necessary to strengthen publicity and education, build a diversified governance system among the government, society, and the public, and achieve the socialization and normalization of cultural heritage protection. The

government and universities can collaborate with resources such as Wuhan City Museum and Hankou Modern Architecture Complex to organize activities such as "Urban Heritage Open Day" and "Historical Architecture Lecture Hall", design heritage education courses for young people and citizens, and enhance public cultural sensitivity through exhibitions, lectures, documentaries, city walks, and other forms. At the same time, a multi-channel dissemination through mainstream media, online platforms, and social media can create a public opinion atmosphere of "everyone cares about historical buildings, everyone participates in protection actions", and encourage non-governmental organizations, cultural protection volunteer groups, community cultural associations, and other social forces to participate in protection and supervision.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE REUSE PRACTICE OF HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN THE FORMER CONCESSION OF HANKOU

5.1 *Preserving the Authenticity and Inheriting Historical and Cultural Heritage*

Since the opening of Hankou as a port in the late Qing Dynasty, multiple concessions have been formed, including those of Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan. Architects from various countries have left behind a diverse range of architectural types and styles, from neoclassicism and eclecticism to decorative art styles, forming a unique urban texture. This not only bears material witness to the modernization process of the city, but also reflects the social memory of the intersection of diverse cultures. Therefore, in the process of revitalization and utilization, it is not only necessary to preserve the architectural form, but also to emphasize the continuity of historical information and spatial memory. Taking buildings such as the Central Plains Dehua Bank Building and the Liji North Road Modern Storage Complex as examples, during the renovation process, the protection team can restore the texture of the facade stone through traditional techniques, repair the details of the cast iron railings and tiger windows, and preserve the historical structural system and building materials as much as possible, while achieving functional updates of the building without damaging the original structure and cultural information. At the same time, the historical

buildings in the former concession of Hankou were once carriers of diverse functions such as finance, shipping, commerce, and religion. The underlying institutional culture and way of life constitute the core of the city's modern memory. Therefore, in the reuse design, attention should be paid to the reconstruction of cultural narrative. Taking the former Russian tea company as an example, a "Hankou Port Opening Museum" can be established in the building. Through spatial display, cultural relic display, and interactive experience, the building can once again become a medium for spreading urban history, not only continuing the spiritual value of the building, but also revitalizing historical culture in the contemporary social context.

5.2 *Selecting the Texture and Unleashing Spatial Vitality*

Traditional urban renewal often overemphasizes economic benefits and modern functions, resulting in the fragmentation of the original texture and the destruction of spatial continuity. The successful experience of the Hankou former concession shows that through the strategy of "texture selection", that is, to moderately restructure spatial functions while retaining the core structure, the organic integration of historical environment and modern needs can be achieved. [4] Taking Jianghan Road Pedestrian Street as an example, it was originally the main commercial axis of the British Concession, with banks, commercial houses, and office buildings from the early 20th century concentrated along the route. During the reuse process, the overall protection of the block scale and the key transformation of node spaces were carried out, which not only preserved the scale and visual direction of the historical street outline, but also introduced modern commercial, leisure, exhibition and other diverse functions. The original bank hall will be transformed into an open public exhibition hall inside the building, retaining the dome and colonnade structure, removing some non-load bearing partition walls, strengthening spatial mobility, emphasizing flexible space and shared functions, which not only continues the historical image but also meets the rhythm of contemporary urban life. In addition, the former French Concession area in Hankou has transformed the originally enclosed courtyard space into a semi open cultural and leisure venue through street and alley sorting and green embedding, forming a block level micro renewal unit. It emphasizes the protection of not only individual buildings, but also the overall system including natural environment,

social network, and cultural ecology, making the historical building complex an important component of contemporary urban spatial structure, rather than isolated "cultural relics".

5.3 Coordinating the Style and Integrating into the Local Environment

As a product of the integration of multiple cultures, the architecture of the former concession in Hankou presents diversity and heterogeneity in its style, forming the urban landscape of the "exotic Hankou" at that time. In the contemporary urban context, scientific design control and spatial guidance are needed to achieve the coexistence of old and new, and the complementarity of similarities and differences. [5] Firstly, in terms of style control, the protection plan of the former Hankou Concession proposed the principle of "overall style guidance+zoning control". Taking Jianghan Road to Yanjiang Avenue as an example, the height, material color tone, and eaves lines of buildings along the route must follow the historical block control guidelines to form a continuous visual order. At the same time, for new or renovated projects, a "similar but different" design strategy is required, which echoes the historical environment in scale, proportion, and material, but displays the characteristics of the times in function and detail expression. This not only avoids the historical representation of "antiquity", but also prevents modern architecture from visually eroding historical spaces. Secondly, at the level of environmental integration, through the introduction of functional layout and public activities, the historical buildings in the former concession of Hankou not only serve as "displayed heritage", but also become an organic part of community life. For example, several old buildings in the former Japanese concession area have been transformed into art studios, bookstores, and cafes, becoming cultural gathering places for young people, enabling historical buildings to regain their use value in contemporary society, while promoting the regeneration of local cultural identity.

6. CONCLUSION

As a historical witness of China's opening up to the outside world and urban modernization process in modern times, the architectural remains in the former concession of Hankou are not only historical landscapes in material form, but also composite carriers containing social structure, cultural exchanges, and urban memory. The historical

buildings in the former concession of Hankou exhibit diverse and integrated features in spatial layout, architectural style, and cultural semantics, forming an important part of China's modern urban architectural heritage. The core idea of protection and reuse lies in the diverse integration of technological support, policy coordination, and social participation to achieve the transformation of historical buildings from "passive protection" to "active utilization".

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