

Learn from White City —Utilizing the experience of White City's Heritage Preservation in China's Preservation and Rehabilitation of Traditional Settlements

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Abstract

The preservation work of White City of Tel Aviv as an urban heritage faces similar situation as the preservation of China's traditional settlements. First, in both cases, the preservation includes not only historic buildings but also the whole settlement as a cultural landscape. Second, both preservation and development are vital and urgent for the residents, and the preservation aims at creating a living city. Third, the amount of historic buildings in need of preservation are tremendous and the majority of them are privately owned. However, in China, the preservation and rehabilitation works of traditional settlements are confronted with enormous problems and challenges, especially on management, preservation, and financial aids. Therefore, it might be beneficial for architects and heritage practitioners in China to learn from the preservation of White City in three aspects: legislation and management, preservation and rehabilitation, and living and development. By this means, the rural built heritage can act as the motivator for the development of China's countryside.

White City of Tel Aviv, as a type of urban heritage

White City of Tel Aviv was listed in the World Heritage Lists in 2003 because of its "synthesis of outstanding significance of the various trends of the Modern Movement in architecture and town planning in the early part of the 20th century", and its adaption to Israeli "particular cultural and geographic context" (The World Heritage Committee 2003). The white city is not only popular among the tourists, but also

enjoyed by local residents, which I found in their proudness of their community when I interviewed them there.

Besides, Tel Aviv is the economy, technology and culture center of Israel, and White City is the central part of the metropolitan area, functioning as the cultural motivator for urban development.

Compared with preservation process of other kinds of world heritage sites, such as archaeological sites, ancient cities and monuments, the preservation of White City is unique in the following aspects.

Firstly, the preservation includes both the historic modern-movement-style buildings, and Sir Patrick Geddes' urban design on the garden city and community, green boulevard, four types of urban streets, etc. His principles were kept and still applied today--"determining the nature of the city's fabric" and residential life. The urban space, historic buildings, residents and their lifestyle have constituted the unique characters of the urban cultural landscape.

Secondly, preservation and development are both vital to this modern city, and Tel Aviv has succeeded in integrating its "historic districts" into the living city (Fabian, Roy, and Nurit Alfasi 2009). However, the paradox of these two aspects seems not settled in two other urban cities with highly valued modern built heritage – Brasilia and Chandigarh. For example, in Brasilia, today's social realities are ignored in order to strictly keep Costa's original Pilot Plan (Danilo Matoso Macedo and Sylvia Ficher 2013). Meanwhile, the Indian government even cancelled Chandigarh's application for world heritage site because they

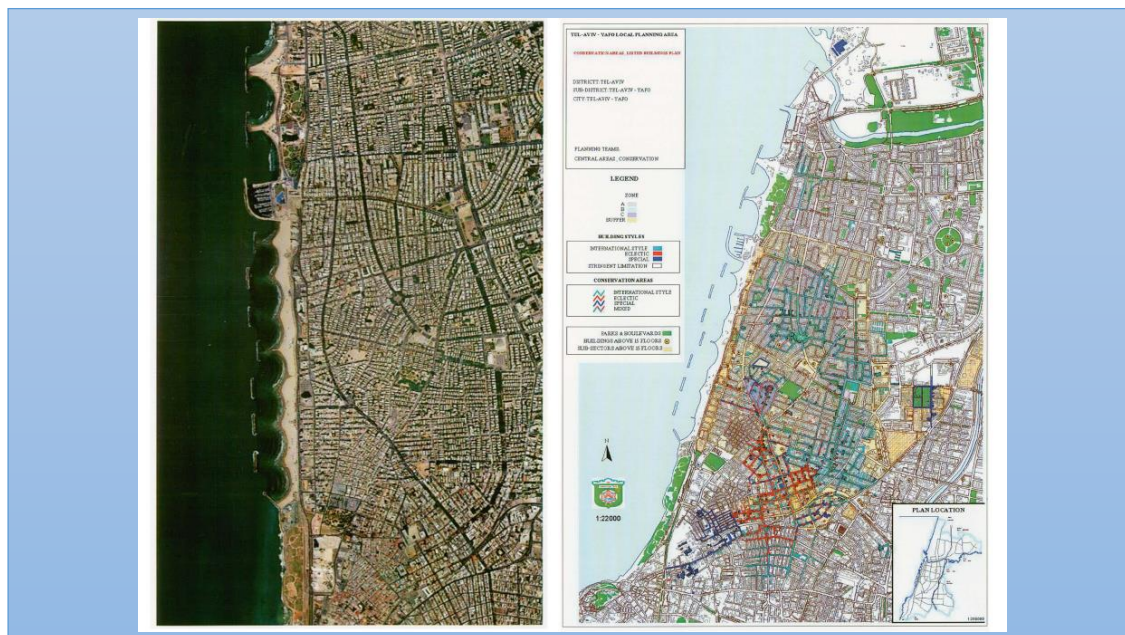


Figure 1. Left: An aerial photograph of the city center of Tel Aviv
 Right: Map of zones proposed for Nomination including buffer zones
 Source: UNESCO.2003.“Nomination file 1096.”

believed that Le Corbusier's plan had been adapted and modified to align with local spatial practices of everyday life (Robert Flahive 2017).

Thirdly, the amount of historic buildings in need of preservation is tremendous. There were 661 buildings out of total 2320 buildings in the three central zones and 483 buildings in buffer zones listed with preservation and 120 of them with stringent preservation (UNESCO 2003).

Lastly, majority of the ownerships of historic buildings are private. Seen from the report, 97% of the buildings are of private ownerships and multi-private ownerships in Zone A, 98% in Zone B and 88% in Zone C.

Based on these four unique characters, White City of Tel Aviv has been preserved not as a “town-museum” like many ancient cities aiming at conservation, but a “living city” through rehabilitation.

Problems of China's preservation and rehabilitation of traditional settlements

There are three levels of preservation in China's preservation system: historic buildings, historic districts, and historic towns (also

known as traditional settlements). Similar to White City, the traditional settlements in urban and rural China as a type of human-settlement heritage also face the problem of how to deal with a large number of privately owned historic buildings in need of preservation in the process of urbanization.

First of all, the preservation of traditional settlements incorporates not only historic buildings, but also the natural and cultural environment. Besides, the conflict between preservation and development is severe in China's traditional towns. Many traditional settlements are in danger of disappearing because of the rapid urbanization process or in danger of assimilation because of a single tourism development model. What's more, the amount of traditional settlements and buildings is huge. There are 6819 traditional villages listed in Traditional Village Lists published by the Ministry of Housing and Construction and there are hundreds of vernacular houses in each traditional village. Plus, most of the houses are privately owned.

However, these traditional settlements are facing severe problems and challenges in the process of preservation and regeneration. According to a report by Professor Chang Qing from Tongji University, there are currently

three major problems in the process of protecting and regenerating the built heritage in rural China: problems of management, preservation and financial aids (Chang Qing 2019).

Problems of management

There are two independent departments, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Housing and Construction, each of which is independently in charge of the preservation of traditional settlements. Even in the same project, their evaluation criterion, management mechanism and disposal methods are different and sometimes contradictory. Also, although there is law (*Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics*) that regulates the basic principles for the protection of cultural relics, there is no regulations or guidebooks for the community committee or residents to conduct their preservation activities.

Besides, the fast development of tourism in China in recent 20 years has turned many traditional settlements into tourist attractions and many farmers have rent their houses to developers. However, the rental income is generally very low and difficult to meet residents' demands for living (They have no farmland to grow food because of tourism), which results in a lot of conflicts between the ownership and use rights.

Problems of preservation

The repair and construction works in traditional settlements are lack of control in quality and quantity. There are many new buildings constructed with low quality whose appearance and style are not in harmony with the context and sometimes the new ones constitute more than 50% of the buildings in "traditional towns". The result is a lack of authenticity and integrity. What's worse, the local crafts are disappearing because few members of the younger generation wants to learn them, leading to the result that many vernacular buildings all over China are repaired according to a standardized model and lose their local characters and identity.

Problems of financial aids

Funds from the government are very limited and unsustainable. For example, each settlement entitled Traditional Village can only receive 1.5 million RMB for infrastructure



Figure 2. Many private historic buildings, streets, public space and environment constitute unique cultural landscape of the traditional settlements in China.

Source: the author

improvement and 1.5 million RMB for building repair, which is far from enough.

Experiences of White City's Heritage Preservation

Based on the similar situations faced by China's traditional settlements and White City of Tel Aviv in preservation and development, the preservation experience of White City is of vital significance to revitalizing the urban and rural built heritage in China.

Improve management system and establish legal guarantee.

In Israel, there are three levels (national, municipal and regional) of management regime that are responsible for the White City's heritage preservation, all of which have set their own legal instruments separately to provide legal preservation. The plans include The National Master Plan TAMA 35 (national level), Tel Aviv Master Plan (1965) and Tel Aviv Ordinance 2659 b (2001) (municipal level) and The Regional Master Plan TMM 5 (regional level). Besides, the management structure includes two levels-- Municipality and Municipal Department, combining management department, financial department

Outline Plan No. 2650 B		Update 9.11.00	
Conservation of Buildings and Sites in Tet-Aviv			
Table of Contents	Page No.		
1. Name	3		
2. Related Documents	3		
3. Jurisdiction	3		
4. Area	3		
5. Initiator	3		
6. Land Ownership	3		
7. Planner	3		
8. Goals	3		
9. Definitions	4		
10. Regulations	5		
10.1 Listed Buildings	5		
10.1.1 List of Listed Buildings	5		
10.1.2 Required Documentation	5		
10.1.3 Prevention of Damage to Listed Buildings	5		
I. Injunction against Demolitions			
II. Changes and Maintenance Requirements			
10.1.4 Implementation of Development Rights for Listed Buildings	7		
10.1.5 Restrictions regarding Construction, Design and Density for Listed Buildings	7		
10.1.6 Conservation Incentives – Licensing Procedure	8		
I. Construction Regulations			
II. Functions			
10.1.7 Conservation Incentives – Detailed Plan Authorization Procedure	9		
I. Regulations for the Target Lots			
II. Criteria for Granting Additional Development Rights on Target Lots			
10.2 Conservation Areas	11		
10.2.1 Defining Conservation Areas	11		
10.2.2 Regulations for Conservation Areas	11		
10.3 Additional Regulations	11		
10.3.1 Widening of streets Plans	11		
10.3.2 Parking	12		
11. Relation to Existing Plans	12		
12. Implementation Schedule	13		
13. Permits	13		

Figure 3. Outline Plan No. TA2650B
 Source: UNESCO.2003. "Nomination file 1096."



Figure 4. Traditional village and new village in Taoping Qiang village, Sichuan, China
 Source: the author

and legal sector to promote the efficiency of management (UNESCO 2003).

In China, we need to integrate the resources of the different departments, including the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, the Ministry of Housing and Construction, the Ministry of Finance and legal sectors as well as external consultants, in order to establish unified evaluation system and disposal scheme. Different levels of mandatory regulations should be formulated to provide legal protection.

Protect settlement structure as a cultural landscape.

White City is based on Sir Geddes's urban design, which is also a very important part of the integrity and authenticity of White City heritage. From the Advisory Body Evaluation by ICOMOS, it is vital to well preserve the spirit of the Geddes plan including morphology, parcelling, hierarchy and profiles of streets, proportions of open and closed spaces and green areas (ICOMOS 2003). Together with the residents, these aspects of Geddes's urban design constitute the cultural landscape of White City of Tel Aviv.

The values of China's traditional settlements lie not only in the buildings (their style, structure, space, tectonic and decoration), but also in the site selection, layouts of the town, street structure and public space, the way the settlement applies to the natural resources and environment, as well as the methods that buildings adapt to the climate and landform. All of these together constitute the cultural landscape and genius loci of the settlement.

Therefore, the preservation of the traditional settlement should include humans' intelligence to adapt to nature, space structure to promote neighborhood relationship, and sustainable development mode combined with production.

Improve life quality of the residents.

From ICOMOS's evaluation, "the main risks to the White City of Tel Aviv come from its very character as a living city and the central part of a large metropolitan area" (ICOMOS 2003). Thus, improving life quality is a basic demand of the residents for the beginning of preservation. In fact, many improvement strategies have already been carried out, such as improvement of infrastructures and living

facilities, rehabilitation of disposed buildings, which make the restored blocks attractive for new inhabitants.

In China, the development of tourism has contributed to the preservation of heritage and the rise of heritage awareness, but the excessive development of tourism has negative effects as well. For example, many private houses in Shuanglang town in Dali, Yunnan, were rented or sold by the residents to merchants for business after it became a tourist attraction because a large number of tourists make this town noisy, crowded and expensive. As a result, local people and local life, which used to be the most important character and distinctive culture, disappeared.

Consequently, it is a basic demand for the local people to create a livable and comfortable environment, by means of improving infrastructure and facility, renovating natural environment, and avoiding over commercialization through land-use control.

The historic buildings shall be protected at different levels and effectively controlled.

In Tel Aviv, the buildings were classified into three levels of conservation: integral conservation without building addition, with addition of up to one floor, and conservation of the building shells and stairwell.

Besides, there is Instructions for Care and Conservation of the Listed Buildings issued by town planning and construction department in 1999, which clarified the options and restrictions about every aspect of preservation work of a single building from building envelope, bearing wall system, ceilings, roofs to elevators and cable infrastructures. What's more, there is a list of recommended plants which give advice to the residents regarding the trees and shrubs indigenous to city's courtyards.

In China, the 6819 traditional villages should be classified abased on their value. And different levels of villages need different strategies. The most typical villages with high quality and high value need to be strictly preserved intact and supported by more government funds. While the common villages can regenerate from intervention of designers through improvement of space quality and living comfort and regard the traditional

settlement and historic buildings as a kind of country landscape.

Besides, the buildings in the traditional settlement need classified disposal. Different methods such as strict preservation, preservation, addition and reform can be applied to different levels of protected buildings.

What's more, detailed instructions for care and conservation of the listed buildings need to be made by the government, community, scholars and residents together, which can be the guidebook for preservation and restoration works to ensure efficient control.

Guarantee residents' rights to development.

In Tel Aviv, in order to encourage urban renewal and guarantee resident's rights to development, the local committee granted additional development rights on a "target lot", a property where additional building rights shall be granted beyond existing right under certain regulations. For example, in Article 10 of Outline Plan No.2650B, we can see detailed regulations and criteria for the granting rights on the target lot as well as some taxation factors (Tel-Aviv – Yafo Regional Planning Authority 2000).

Another mode is a government urban renew project called "Pinuy-Binuy" (evacuation-build), through evacuating old houses and rebuilding new apartment as well as renewing infrastructures, which benefits residents, neighborhoods and entrepreneurs (Gil Shenhav, Senior Partner, Canaan-Shenhav Architects 2014).

In Lijiang Yunnan, although local residents find it hard to adapt to the needs of the expanding family in historic buildings, they are not allowed to make any changes to the buildings, stipulated by a rigid policy. This stipulation makes the residents regard the heritage as burdens conflicting with their development rights.

There is a good renovation example in Taoping Qiang village in Sichuan where the whole settlement is preserved, including the buildings, streets and public space as well as local villagers and their life. Besides, there is a totally new village in traditional style constructed near the old village with modern

convenient living facilities sold to the villagers at very low price according to the preservation condition of the historic houses where the local families could live a comfortable life or run some small business for visitors. Plus, the villagers can choose to live either in the old village or the new one. They also receive 25% tourism bonus every year.

Similar to the White City, such strategies of transfer of development rights can compensate for the loss of the property value, which benefits both the preservation of traditional settlement as well as the development rights of the residents.

Summary

We can learn from White City in three aspects.

In terms of management, an effective management structure that can integrate all resources and different levels of legal regulations is necessary.

In terms of preservation, classified protection and professional detailed instructions for care and preservation can guarantee the quality of preservation, and the protection of cultural landscape is the premise for rehabilitating and revitalizing living settlement.

In terms of financial aids, residents' right to development can function as the main and sustainable funding for preservation, together with social resources and national finance.

Endnotes

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