An Analysis of Regional Culture Inheritance in Commercial Pedestrian Streets of New Urban Areas: A Case Study

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Abstract — The continuous development of new urban areas has given rise to the problem of how to reconcile the new and old districts’ styles and establish a unique city image. This paper analyzes the key issues of how to foster new urban areas’ regional character from three aspects: cultural heritage, ecological protection and key areas’ regional character. It also puts forward that city planning should respect cultural tradition and regional character, and take dissimilation ways to achieve inheritance and metabolism of city context.

Keywords - regional culture; urban new area; dissimilation; urban context; heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of urbanization in China, various kinds of new urban areas continue to emerge. Therefore, many cities nowadays are faced with the actual problem of how to reconcile them with the old urban areas and create a unique city image. The paper is intended to summarize the basic principles of fostering new urban areas’ regional characteristics from three aspects: cultural heritage, ecological protection and key areas’ regional characteristics. In addition, based on the case study of commercial pedestrian street of Xuefu Road, Ankang High-tech Industry Development Zone, it holds that the planning of new urban areas with distinct traditional culture and regional character, such as Ankang, should aim to promote the sustainable development by preserving the local character. To solve the contradictions between modern needs and architectural tradition, dissimilation can be a way to achieve the inheritance and metabolism of city context.

A. The Principle of Inheriting Historical Culture and Emboding Local Character

Urbanization is a process of renovation of old city areas and construction of new city areas. Generally speaking, the old areas more or less have some historical heritage, while the new city areas are constructed on vacant space. Different cities, due to their geographic, historical and functional differences, have their different characters. Therefore, the city planning must embody their inherent characters, or construct their new characters. Particularly for the new urban areas of cities with long history or unique landscape, the traditional culture and local character must be explored, in order to reconcile the styles of both the old and new urban areas.

B. The Principle of Protecting Ecological Environment

Many urban districts are located around the old cities, where are of diverse ecosystems and complicated geographic condition. To keep the balance of economic development and ecologic protection, construct an ecological new area and embody the local natural and ecological features is an important goal of urban planning. To protect and make full use of the new city areas’ natural topography and play its characteristics better, can not only play a supporting role in ecology, but also beautify the cities, create functional characteristics, enrich the citizens’ leisure life, hence create a pleasant living environment.

C. The Principle of Strengthening the Regional Character in Key Areas

Modern urban districts have emerged from an early form of a single function, and gradually developed into the main function of moderately concentrated, more urban functions.
mix of urban area, these areas including commercial area, office area, cultural area, residential area, green area, industrial area, agricultural area and other areas. Each area may correspond to different images and it has different cityscape positioning. For example, in the office of science and technology, modern industry and other areas emphasis on modern fashion sense, and in the leisure culture, characteristics of commercial and residential and other regions mainly embodied with the fusion of the old style as well as the cultural heritage, mining city landscape features.

For example, the planning and design of commercial pedestrian street follows the principles of exploring regional characteristics. As the public space of urban core in the city, commercial streets bear the urban local culture and modern development needs. On the architectural image of the pedestrian street, we should take full advantage of local character of architectural space, materials, colors and symbols, and let the charm of traditional culture in a modern building expressive way to show out, and then we can build a modern Chinese architecture with local color. By extracting the architectural symbols, performing modern abstract process, emphasizing the details of the design, applying modern materials and structural expression of architectural renderings, we can create a fresh and elegant architectural image and extract the image of the city with geographical characteristics.

Here based on the Xuefu Commercial Street Project in Ankang High-tech Industry Development Zone which the author participated in, the paper illustrates the regional culture characteristics of construction of new district in the city commercial pedestrian street design strategy briefly.

III. PROJECT PROFILE

A. Project Background

Ankang City is located in the Qinba Mountains in the upper reaches of the Hanjiang River, at the convergence of three provinces in the so-called "Qin head and Chu tail" area. It is also the place where the North and South culture converged. Ankang tradition contains the cultural genes of the Qin Dynasty, Central Plains, Ba-Shu and Jing-chu culture, thus showing the characteristics of combination of not only north and south culture, but also east and west culture, which is vividly manifested in its traditional culture, architecture-based system and Chuan Chu Qin three local dialects. In old Ankang, there are not only miles-long river streets which are lined with numerous shops, but also the residential houses along the quiet and winding alleys. The row upon row of houses, with black tile, thick column, high eaves and thick walls, are all with the trend, showing a unique style which is the combination of both the Qin and Chu culture (as shown in Fig. 1). The traditional songs coming out of the the narrow lanes, the flower-drums’s lively performance under the city wall (as shown in Fig. 2), the continuous peddler’s cries, and the brightly-lit night market, all these freeze into each Ankang citizen’s deep memory.

The old town of Ankang, is featured with narrow streets and crowded buildings, The once hustling and bustling river streets, which were damaged by the floods, have already been replaced with Hanjiang Park and Riverfront Plaza, which were built in the 1980’s. Many traditional streets and old houses were pulled down in that they cannot meet the requirements of modern life, while the few remaining ones are already dilapidated due to the lack of repairing. The
traditional Ankang style and features have been greatly damaged, and its local character is declining. Therefore, inheritance of its traditional culture and exploration of its local character have become the subjects of Ankang old town planning and construction. At the same time, the relatively independent high-tech development zone, which is separated from the old town only by a river, is faced with the problem of how to reconcile the modernity of the new urban area and the tradition of Ankang, such as its historic, ecological and folk culture, and find out a special way to balance the modern urban development and the continuation of Ankang's traditional city context.

B. Project Overview

Ankang High-tech Industries Development Zone, which was founded in 2009, is a provincial development zone. With a planning area of 28 square kilometers, it is located in the north of the Han River, and connected to the old Ankang with the Han River Bridge. Following the principle of “urban planning first, basic infrastructure foremost”, it is gradually developing into an integrated new urban area which is suitable for both work and residence, ecological culture and recycling industry. To beautify the city’s image and improve the dwellers’ life quality, the zone plans to build many supporting infrastructure facilities, including ecological cultural park, ecological business park and ecological sports park. The three theme parks, with different features, integrate the regional customs and folk traditions of Ankang from different perspectives. They embody the Ankang’s long-standing cultural heritage, and thus become urban landscape with Ankang character.

Xuefu Pedestrian Street is located in the north of ecological sports park, the core area of high-tech zone. It overlooks the High-tech International High School across the street, and has good natural landscape. Because of the planning of subway line, the commercial street is limited to a narrow area south to Xuefu Road. The base is on a steep slope, high in the west and low in the east, and gradually narrows from west to east, so the entire building complex spreads along the Xuefu Road (as shown in Figure 3).

IV. THE CONTINUATION AND UPDATE OF CITY CONTEXT

A. Questions

Ecological Sports Park has not only pleasant natural environment, but also a tennis court, children's playground and mountain bicycle lanes and other sports facilities. As the ancillary buildings of the sports park, the planning and design of buildings in Xuefu commercial street has certainly become the focus of attention and controversy.

How to plan the building size of Commercial Street in order to make it an integral part of the ecological park? How to reconcile the modern sports fashion with traditional local character of Ankang, and construct a unique place which can combine both traditional and modern features, and provoke Ankang citizens of memories of the old city? How can we solve these problems and meanwhile be able to maximize the commercial value of the commercial building and create a strong business atmosphere to achieve the goal of “maintaining the park with commercial street revenue”?

B. The responder design strategy

Based on the above issues, the first thing to do is to plan the building size of the commercial street.

Due to the long and narrow topography of the sports park, the commercial street building complex is divided into three groups, which are connected with landscape square. According to the requirements of constructors and project owners, most buildings are of 3 to 4 floors, some 2 or 5 floors, and the total construction area is around 30,000 square meters. To make sure the new buildings can be organically integrated into the park and beautify the environment, the planning should follow strategies:

1) The Embedded

It is the basic requirement of the Place Theory of architectural phenomenological that building should be embedded into the space and reflects the spirit of the place. The planning respects the original terrain, and retains over 7-meter’s altitude difference from east to west. The buildings’ layout and size are both planned according to the topography, thus they and the park are blended into one integral whole. The linear layout provides maximum contact between the building complex and the landscape of the park. Visitors can enjoy different views in different places and in different angles when walking in the park.

2) Break up

Since the layout is linear along Xuefu road and has long street facade, it is difficult to form a lively rhythmic architectural style. Therefore, the design firstly divides the building complex into several groups, and turns the space between groups into landscaped plaza, where a variety of activities can be held. Secondly, each building group is broken into several different sections, which are built into different heights, forming the image of row upon row of well-arranged houses, coinciding with traditional dwellings (as shown in Fig. 4-6). The significance lies not only form a rich facade outline and weaken the pressure of large volume to build a familiar sense of scale, but also simplify the combination to a few single building units, reduce the difficulty of construction, keep the buildings and the vertical design of the site coordinated.

3) To Reduce

Figure 3. Aerial view within the Sports Park Xuefu Commercial Street buildings
In general, reducing the building height is an effective method for reducing dimension sense and creating friendly feeling. Using a variety of combinations of building volume, design forms different building heights with variable types of low front and high back, low two ends and high the middle, or rhythm of ups and downs, and makes the buildings crawling on the ground just like the local houses.

After the problem of overall layout, the main concern is then focused on how to choice a proper architectural style. Here exist two successful cases: one is Commercial Park with modern style of abstract geometry, the other is Cultural Park with traditional style. Which style should be followed is difficult to judge.

Since the core of the place theory lies in the context of the place should be the source of architectural design, what kind of architectural style should be generated in the unique context of the site? American planning scholar Tom Turner’s context theory points out the direction for the style localization, it holds that a new characteristic development should has identity, similarity and difference with its surroundings. This idea is similar to the theory of critical regionalism of Kenneth Frampton, an American architectural theorist, which is that the design should make a critical response to the local traditional, rather than a replication or subversive.

With the strong theoretical support, the style localization is pretty clear. First of all, taking the two context elements of local traditions and surrounding environment for analysis. Previously mentioned that Ankang is located in the transition zone of north and south, the special geographical location created a unique character of traditional culture. This uniqueness is reflected in the diversity and inclusiveness: the North-South cultural inclusiveness, in a few thousand years of history has gradually formed a multi-level reproduction cultural heritage. In Ankang, different counties have different architecture and local languages due to their location. The downtown areas formed a special "Language Island" of North dialects because of the earlier incoming of Zhou Qin culture, have large differences with the rest of the counties. These differences are reflected in the architectural style with the characteristics of both Qin style and Chu style. Through the above analysis, architectural style is determined for the characteristics of southern traditional houses as the keynote, while incorporating elements of the residence in the North Plains. (as shown in Fig. 4-7)

Secondly, the surrounding environment would be analyzed. The north side of the commercial street is Ankang Middle School which has been put into use, using slope roofs with dark gray. Besides the traditional city colors of gray and white, pottery red, a color which is widely used for educational buildings in Chinese, is also applied as the main color. To the east of the site is the high-rise residential community, whose architectural style is a modern Chinese style which is similar to a kind of simplify of Huizhou architectural style, and the color is the elegant grayish-white. Thus, the color problem has been solved, that is, take the classic scheme of black, grey and white from "grey bricks, black tile, and white wall” as the predominant color, then add “Chinese red” in some parts to render business atmosphere and embody Chinese people’s reserved but passionate character.

However, the architectural style of the discussion continues. Since beyond identity and similarity there should be differences and the response to local traditions is critical inheritance rather than a complete copy, and then the last question comes from: how to highlight differences and contemporary of new buildings and traditional buildings and complete the metabolism of the urban context. Urban context is not everlasting but dynamic development. Tradition of Ankang is gradually changing in the modern era of civilization: the original wooden structure has long been replaced by concrete and steel construction technology, and
from the owners to the workers and even the architects themselves, are "new" people influenced by modern civilization. Continue to adhere to that vague tradition, is equal to improper imitating the surface in the form of traditional architecture with modern technology, just like cutting the feet to fit the shoes, rather than in favor of a deeper pursuit of "spirit likeness" instead of "image likeness" to make the traditional modernization and Context organic renewal, and highlight regional characteristics while discover new architectural tradition.

Therefore, glass, metal, artificial stone and other modern materials are widely used in the selection of materials. Modern techniques in structure joints and facade details are used to imply the local tradition, for example, staggered red aluminum curtain wall means the scene of "string of red lanterns", red door frame is a hint of Chinese New Year scrolls, and the red rain awning on the windows is an abstraction of signs and flags of Chinese ancient shops. (as shown in Fig. 5-7) Overall architectural style is both uniform and various, in harmony with the surroundings while full of personality. It reflects a distinct regional tradition features on the overall perception and the modern fashion aesthetic habits on the details of the performance.

V. Conclusion

Xuefu Pedestrian Street is located in ecological sports park of Ankang high-tech zone, the special base position determines its planning must be based on the design principle of key areas. Therefore, the planning seeks to inherit the traditional regional culture. Basing on the study of the collective memory of the Ankang citizens, the planning also takes the modern construction techniques and the unique environment of the park into consideration. Instead of completely copying the tradition, the planning strives to construct a new kind of balance between the modernity and the tradition, which stimulates people's memories of the past, evokes sense of pride of their regional culture, and creates a business zone with strong humane atmosphere and distinctive regional characteristics.

REFERENCES