

Abstract

Various sources indicate that heritage has become an important resource for the world tourism industry, such as historical feature areas in China, historic centers in Italy, etc. Such a wide variety of forms, found in the different urban contexts and indicate the complexity of urban transformation. In this context, scholars propose some approaches that complicate the challenge of study, but have a great advantage of preventing generalization. A major strength of the comparative study is that it becomes a driver to scholars to recognize that every city is different and reminds scholars to think about underlying processes. This study focuses on Chinese urban scenic area from the tourist gaze, while looking at similar areas in Italy from Chinese perspective. This study attempts to construct a discussion rather than a comparative study.

Since the 1990s, China has started a large-scale urban renewal activity. Due to lack of experience and mature policy to preserve urban heritage, a large number of historical buildings with abundant memories have vanished under the bulldozers. This process makes the city gradually lose its unique cultural characteristics. It is described as “commodification of heritage” by some scholars means that the conservation policies are adopted by local actors as a means of generating positive external effects, such as tourism and retail activities, it can promote the appreciation of surrounding retail estate. (Zhang,2008; Shin,2009,2010; Yung&Chan,2016; Zhu,2017) When heritage is shared, commerce and tourism coexist, the cultural value of heritage building can be used to get commercial revenues, which can help developers to gain economic benefits (Nasser,2003). In China and Italy, a large number of cases illustrate this similar phenomenon, which leads me to think that urban China is not as unique and independent

as some scholars proposed. In recent studies, more scholars think that China studies need to move beyond the area studies approach and adopt a global perspective.

This study uses the urban scenic area to describe the specific urban space from tourism perspective. Focusing on the transitional process of urban scenic areas by studying morphology, could it help us better interpretation the formation rules of urban scenic space? In this sense, the **hypothesis** of this research is, by exploring the heritage-tourism-commerce as a system (HTC system) of the urban scenic area through morphology, some typo-morphology characteristics can be revealed by studying plan. This finding allows for a better interpretation of the role of authenticity in making urban space, which can lead to understand more subtle comprehension of dialectic between “mass and authenticity”.

For this purpose, this research proposes a methodology framework, which comprises theorizing, analyzing and discussion cycles. First, **Theorizing cycle** follows a qualitative approach for conceptualizing and defining research object by considering one homogeneous urban phenomena both in china and Italy through comprehensive literature reviews. Second, **Analyzing cycles** encompasses ten cases that have long cultural traditions and experienced dramatic changes by studying morphological characteristics and the relevance with the change of urban daily life. A set of analysis criteria is developed that assess morphological characteristics within heritage, commerce and tourism. The main criteria set consists of physical attributes (heritage space) and dynamic of activities (commerce and tourism). In order to assess the performance of analysis criteria set, “**Morphology atlas of urban scenic area**” has been developed, which can contribute to make the understanding model. Third, **Discussion cycles** follows the “equivalence of concepts” (Nadin,2012) through the same analysis criteria to interpret the Centro Commerciale Naturale (Natural Commercial Center, CCN) projects in Italy. This study concludes by discussing urban scenic areas in China and Italy and interpreting the role of authenticity in making urban space. Finally, the dialectic between mass and authenticity is discussed.

Keywords: Urban scenic area; Heritage-Tourism-Commerce (HTC system); Analysis criteria; Morphological characteristics; authenticity and mass tourism; China and Italy.