

# ***Thoughts on the Evolution from Traditional Settlements to Modern Residential Areas***

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**Abstract**—This paper expounds the evolution process from traditional settlement to modern residential area from the following three aspects, such as formation mechanism, public space and management mode, so as to find out the nutrition elements that modern residential areas can absorb from traditional settlements. This paper studies the phenomenon of continuation, variation and cut apart in modern residential areas to traditional settlements from private school, market place and aesthetic concept as well as analyzes the changes of traditional settlement to modern residential management modes. In this paper, it is considered that the traditional settlement relies on clan cohesion and Confucian ethics system as the legal aid means to manage the ethnic groups, but modern residential areas cannot imitate the way of management. The modern residential area can be effectively managed only by establishing owners' committees which are attended through all the owners and fairly elected. In this paper it is found that a fault zone appeared in the evolution of traditional settlement to modern residential area. At last, it proposes that residential area with memories, souls, beliefs and a sense of belonging is the one we love.

**Keywords**—*traditional settlement; modern residential area; evolution process.*

## I. THE BACKGROUND

In China, since the housing reform started, the housing property rights have been diversified. Modern residential areas, different from traditional settlements and unitary courtyards, have become the main places for people to live. However, there are still many unsatisfactory things in modern residential areas. Such as: the contradiction between owner and property management company, people lack a sense of belonging, the houses are devoid of history, and so on. This paper studies the evolution process from traditional settlements to modern settlements about three aspects, in the hope that modern settlements can absorb nutrients from traditional settlements to meet people's living requirements

## II. TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT

### A. Formation of Traditional Settlements

China was a large agricultural society until the end of the Republic of China. In ancient China, villages were the most basic structure form of rural basic-level society and the residential houses also existed in the form of settlements. Most people in the same village had the same surname since they descended from the same ancestors. Young people would build

new house near their parents' when they got married and start a new family. With the increase of the population, more and more new houses had been built alongside the old ones. Then the villages were gradually formed and improved. People with different surname would marry into the clan when the village formed a certain scale. The relationship between people with different surnames depended on the affinity of marriage. The living habit which linked by blood ties lasted for a long time. Until today, several traditional rural settlements still have been preserved as outstanding residential heritage.

For example, Gulian Village of Qi County in Shanxi province. According to *Gulian genealogy of Gao*, the ancestors of Gulian village people came from the Bohai sea in Shandong province, and moved to Weinan later. In the Ming dynasty, they migrated to Shanxi via Hongdong (large gradually became one of the dominant family name in Shanxi).[1].

Gulian village's history lasted for more than 600 years, and the people have kept their clan relationship until today. The ancestral instructions and clan's rules which reflecting the customs and moral concepts of Gulian village were recorded in the genealogy and handed down from generation to generation [2].

### B. Public Space of Traditional Settlements

The street and alley is the first basic element that constitutes the public space of traditional settlements. The courtyard belongs to the public space inside the building. The combination of outward street space and inward courtyard space satisfies the dual needs of people for public communication and family life at the same time. As the traffic connection space, staggered streets and alleys constitute the skeleton of the settlement, forming the whole settlement into a complete organism.

For example, the organization form of street and alley in Gulian village is typical "checkerboard", that is, most streets and alleys are linear and meet at right angle.

The widest streets are the four main streets in the east, south, west and north, which are the four horse lanes outside the old Gulian castle. The streets with second width are connected with public buildings outside the castle, which are narrower than the main streets. The width of these streets is 4.0–3.0m. There are also more than 20 residential alleys in Gulian village, with a narrower width of about 1.5–1.8m [2].

Most interfaces of these streets are the gables of residential buildings. In Gulian village, the external walls of structures are so high and have no windows which makes streets narrow and closed. Such this spatial form reflects the internal self-accumulation of settlements, which is also the internal self-accumulation of the Han nationalities.

Old-style private school is the second basic element of traditional settlement public space. In the traditional agricultural society of China, literacy was always the welfare of few people. Wealthy families bounded up in hiring teachers to educate their children and provided teaching space; this model is known as the private school. But the children in poor families had no chance to learn the knowledge of reading and literacy.

The rich villagers also provided funds to gather the children of their ethnic group to study together. This behavior partly guaranteed the learning rights to the poor children. Until the period of the Republic of China, schools were set up, and primary education was further popularized. Private school is an important facility to ensure Chinese civilization to be handed down from generation to generation and it's an indispensable part of the traditional settlement.

Folk religion architecture is the third basic element of traditional settlement public space. Unlike orthodox religion architecture, folk religion architecture was founded by clansmen. Due to the lack of financial resources, the building was not necessarily to be grand, but was more in line with the dimension of human. And the characteristics of deities also had human nature, people prayed to these deities for peace and safety.

For example, the land temple was very common in the Han nationality rural settlements. The god of land originated from people's worship of land. Land can produce grain and it was the "food and clothing parents" to human beings. Therefore, people offered oblations to the deity who was in charge of land. As a place where people worshiped the deity of the land, the land temple flourished gradually. In Chinese myth, the deity of land was a lovely old couple; people called them "Land grandfather and land grandmother". They governed a piece of land as well as the living creature on it.

The folk temple was the rudiment of Temple Theater. The sacrificial ceremony was mostly in the form of poetry, music and dance in ancient times. Sacrificial activities were usually held in folk temples. With the development of performance, there was a need for backstage. And then sacrificial structures with backstage started to be different from temples, these buildings were called Temple Theater. This fixed architectural form is a very special phenomenon in China until now [4].

As a public building in a village, the stage was the indispensable place for temple fairs and opera appreciation, and it was also an important part of people's cultural belief. Up to now, the stage is still an important public entertainment space in rural areas.

#### C. Traditional Settlement Management

Traditional settlement management adopted the way of clan management. Chinese people always cherished the mood of

worship and awe to their ancestors. They put great value on the family estate that their forefathers established for their descendants, so they were very enthusiastic about the construction of the ancestral hall.

When they decided to settle in somewhere, they would save up money to build a temple belong to their ancestors which called ancestral hall. Memorial tablets were placed in the ancestral hall, and people offered incense in every festival and wedding and other important days since they had to tell their ancestors before they make any important decisions.

Ancestral hall was a physical embodiment of ethnic cohesion. Clan management depended on ethnic group cohesion and the management system, which based on the ethnic group cohesion. The internal and external affairs of the clan were presided over by the highly respected elders of the clan and assisted by the enlightened squire. Internal affairs were always handled by themselves. Only major criminal cases, such as human lives would be reported to government. External affairs mainly refer to civil negotiations with other villages and ethnic groups for maintenance and distribution of farming water resources, conflict of mountain, forest and land. It was also organized young men of them to protect villages and keep away bandits. Sometimes those young men would fight with foreigners when they had disputes [3].

The ritual system put forward by Confucianism was the main magic weapon of settlement management. Ethical thought had always occupied a dominant position in traditional China. It was the symbol of the social hierarchy and the criterion of interpersonal relations. As the auxiliary law, ethical thought was applied to coordinate interpersonal relations and had profound impact on the society at that time. It could achieve the effect of self-discipline and self-governance in folk through etiquette and education, so the ethical thought became the standard system with unique features in ancient China.

The financial expenses of ethnic management were undertaken by the income of public lands. In China's traditional agricultural society, farmland belonged to private property, but there are some wealthy villages that also had public lands, and most of the incomes from public lands were used for public affairs in the villages. These funds were used to help children received education as well as to aid the poor native people. This policy was the rudiment of social security.

#### D. Disappearance of Traditional Settlements

In October 1949, The People's Republic of China was founded. In January 1958, *The Household Registration Regulations of The People's Republic of China* was passed by Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. This was the first time that the urban and rural residential area was divided into "agricultural" and "non-agricultural" two different household registers. It was the basic pattern of the current household registration system in our country. And the dualistic structure of urban and rural was formed at that time. Housing was also formed into two different types of the rural housing and urban housing.

The traditional settlements were broken down after the establishing of urban and rural dualistic structure. Although the grassroots organization had undergone tremendous change in

rural areas, but the system was completely decoupled from residences management. The rural housing were still built and managed by individuals and the rural housing was very poor.

At the same time, industrialization developed rapidly in towns, factories and government departments at all levels formed their own "units". This was the basis of the redistribution of resources. The clothing, the food, the residence and the travel of urban staff were all arranged by the staff's "unit". Then the corresponding welfare housing system also came into being.

There were a series of scoring mechanism about distributing housing in kind. According to the level, title, time of service, contribution and other important indicators, the "score" of housing distribution could be decided. The distribution of housing even became the prey of power rent-seeking, thus, resulted in the distortion and unfairness of the distribution relationship. This was the 'unit yard" model of urban staff's housing.

### III. MODERN RESIDENTIAL AREA

#### A. Policy Orientation

After the Reform and Opening up, the number of self-employed workers and peasant-workers in cities and towns had increased rapidly. However, they did not have "unit". So, they isolated from the security system, and could not get the right of housing allocation. To solve this problem, the state had introduced a series of policies which aimed at changing the situation of the welfare housing model.

In 1994, the State Council published a policy—*the Decision on Deepening the Reform of Urban Housing System by State Council*. In 1998, the State Council issued another notice—*Further Deepening the Reform of Urban Housing System and Accelerating Housing Construction*. Its goal was to stop the physical distribution of housing and gradually implement the monetization of housing distribution. Until then, Chinese real estate industry had been booming [5].

As the consumers of houses, on the one hand, people's personal financial burden will increase because of the market oriented housing system; on the other hand, people can choose their houses from different aspects, such as housing type, area, location, decoration, etc. In this way, "strangers" come to the same community and become neighbors. Most neighbors lost the kinship of the traditional settlements, and thus lost the cohesion of the clan, as well as the relationship with colleagues in the courtyard of the unit. Thus the feeling of the identity of the "unit" had been broken.

Modern residential areas no longer follow the theory of "acquaintance society", but need to establish new interpersonal relationships. So far, modern residential areas have been formed, and the defects and deficiencies have followed.

#### B. Construction of Modern Residential Areas

From the perspective of material interests, the Chinese government requires that several supporting facilities must be built simultaneously with the residential area building in order to meet the needs of people.

Basic education facilities as the top priority of the residential areas must be allocated to public construction. Commercial service outlets are the necessary supporting public facilities of the residential areas which are usually set in the periphery of the residential areas or converted the ground-floor housing as grocery store.

The business mode of modern residential area is different from the past. As commerce and industry have been completely separated, modern commercial service outlets has become a pure retail shop, resulting in more frequent re-stocking trips and more concentrated flow of people. But the design of modern commercial service outlets still follows the pattern of the old commercial street. There is no separate design for the flow of goods and the route of customers. So the grocery store portal is not only for the customers but also the entry of the goods, the road in front of grocery store sometimes would be used as the temporary warehouse of the goods or the commercial vehicles parking.

These activities directly affect the sanitation of the street and the common people's passing through. No matter how hard the city managers try, they still can't solve this problem since it was the design flaw. The residential area where people and cars are mixed, the road often becomes a parking place, which will affect the activities of pedestrians.

#### C. The absence of Modern Residential Areas

If it says the schools in modern residential areas are the continuation of private schools and commercial service outlets are the variation of "market fair", then the understanding and appreciation of beauty are completely separated between modern residential area and traditional settlement.

When we visit the traditional settlement, we appreciate her streets, houses, architectural techniques, details and decoration, etc. We could not only get the enjoyment from the architectural beauty but also know about the people and things that had ever lived in this land. But when it comes to the beauty of modern residential areas, people only regard it as green. How different is the aesthetic concept between traditional settlements and modern residential areas!

*Code of urban residential area planning and design* incorporates green land and leisure land as one indicator of landscaping. It says: The habitable zone of public green space should be layout according to the different of residential form. The Code even bring "parking lots and pavement" with its green area statistics. The result is that parking space takes up activity space and road space, which often leads to disputes in the use process.

Modern residential management no longer follows the family model of traditional settlements, and it is also no longer possible to be the small social model of unit yard, but the property management companies make use of the economic means to conduct unified socialized management to houses and their supporting facilities and implement paid services. Theoretically, the property management company is selected by the owner through the market. Under the premise of equality and voluntariness, both parties sign the contract through consultation to clarify their rights and obligations, and perform their respective duties according to the contract. In fact,

the property management company is hired by the local street office and has nothing to do with the owner.

Even if the owners are dissatisfied with the management situation, there is no other way for them except to complain to the property company. The property company also won't have any loss or penalty if it ignores the owner's complaint.

At this time the owners are helpless, so they often adopt the method of refusing to pay property fee in order to revenge property management. Such way has formed vicious circle. In fact, the majority individual demands in residential areas are also common demands of collective interests. When individual demands cannot be met, owners collective rights can achieve the goal of appeal. Moreover, collective actions may arouse the enthusiasm of owners to actively participate things in the management of residential areas. Therefore, the establishment of the owners committee is the key factor to achieve good management of the residential area. It is possible to establish an unimpeded channel to express interest demands of the owners only get through recommending and electing the owners' committee which representing the owners' opinion of various affairs of the residential areas.

Another management focus of modern residential areas is that the elderly population in residential areas must be paid special attention to. With the arrival of aging, the elderly in residential areas will inevitably increase in large numbers. The support of the elderly is a problem that needs to be paid attention to by the whole society.

In traditional Chinese society, old-age care was a family affair, which was clearly stipulated to be undertaken by their sons. Agricultural production activities and the fertility concept of "the more sons, the more blessings" also ensured that their sons had the ability, time and space to support their parents.

When the era entered the industrial society, the social division of labor became more detailed, and the social conditions for children to serve their parents no longer existed, so empty nesters appeared. In particular, the implementation of China's one-child policy, empty nesters have emerged in large numbers after 30 years. Old-age care has become a prominent social problem.

The aged be supported at the original address is a solution which can be better implement. The advantages are:

1. For young people, there is no increase in the burden of supporting parents.

2. For the societies, there is no additional appropriation of social resources.

#### IV. THE EXPECTED RESULTS

Due to the different understanding of the beauty between traditional settlements and modern residential areas, there is no trace of traditional culture in modern residential areas. Compared with the long history, the modern residential area is just like a person who has lost his memory. He did not know where he came from and it has to say this is a sad thing. Aesthetic ideas are also very different between traditional settlements and modern residential area. This is because that people's spiritual needs have never been considered in the residential planning and design.

Modern residential areas not only should be adapted to people's behavior patterns, but also strive to become the place where people's emotion belongs to. In this regard, traditional settlements do the best.

Through thousands of years, great changes have taken place in the world, but human nature is eternal. Whether traditional settlements, or modern residential areas, as long as the residential area can satisfy human nature, it is a livable residential area. We can just cope with the coming of ageing. Residential area with memories, souls, beliefs and a sense of belonging is the one we love.

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