

# Research on the Crisis of City Memory Thinking about Urban Management

Jipeng Liu<sup>+</sup> and Hu Yu

Department of Civil Engineering, Henan Institute of Engineering, Zhengzhou, China

**Abstract.** The city memory records the urban development course. However, urban form and city characteristic lost the function of recording true history in the process of sweeping and frequent urban conversion and renewal nowadays. At the same time, all the issues on the social cognition and identity came forth. On the basis of the study of theory and the investing action of real diagnosis, this paper elaborated the city memory's concept and the significance, as well as the memory crisis of urban form and city characteristic. After the analysis, it pointed out that constructing the city memory has a very important function to protect the city history and culture and construct the ideal living conditions for inhabitant.

**Keywords:** city memory; memory crisis; urban form; city characteristic

## 1. Introduction

With the pace of reform getting faster, our national economy gains a rapid development. The urban construction and urbanization process are also changing and accelerating with each passing day. Apart from that, the current wave of urbanization is sweeping every corner of China has made city lost the function of carrying on the history, inheriting our culture and seeking its cultural attribution. Historic monuments, historical buildings and historic district have been seriously damaged. The loss of inherent trait of regional identity, the traditional city order becoming more disordered and the image of city blindly seeking large and high have drawn increasing public concern. Nowadays, the increasing voice, such as, protecting historical continuity, preservation, developing the city memory, retaining the context of the development of human civilization, creating characteristics and so on are becoming bigger and bigger [1]. We do hope by studying the city memory to carry forward the city history and culture, and to seek further ways to shape the city unique characteristic [2].

## 2. The Study on City Memory

Currently, city memory has not formed a clear, fixed expression yet, it is often cross-interopability with "the memory of city", "the historic memory of the city", and in use it can not only refer to "objects", but also refer to "things" and even the "people" in the past; it can be understood as "city of human memory". Zhengwei BU, the officer of Architectural Theory and Design Committee of China Institute of Architects, explained that "City memory is people's collective memory arising from the approve of aesthetic features within the urban environment and its form elements, including the macro, medium and micro aspects of memory. It can be said that the city memory is city character, which has left a deep material culture and spiritual culture imprint on people's mind and heart" [2].

Comprehensive results from a number of scholars' study, first of all, from the essential character of memory, we can find that memory is an open and dynamic development process. It is an organic unification

---

<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: + (13253582186).  
E-mail address: (zzjipengliu@163.com).

art of the past, present, and future to people based on the purpose of the future; also, memory exists two properties, that is to say, construction and continuity. Secondly, the concept of city memory should include three basic aspects, city form, and city function and city significance. City memory is just a holistic understanding of history to the significance of urban spatial environment and its formation process. Based on these researches we can conclude that city memory is a cognition and reconstruction to the integral city image and significance [2]. The concept of city memory also reflects people's attitude to city history, that is, to put city into the historical river. The development of city is to continually understand and reconstruct the past, and the meaning of protecting history is to witness today. And city memory not only is a kind of "integrity consciousness of history", but also a kind of dynamic, continuous on going of "reconstruction process". This memory represents space, records the time, and reflects the significance. It is also a comprehensive reflection of the relationship between man and society, and a kind of time sequence on the significance of the dynamic process of recording, spatial reflection and restructuring behavior. It may also be said: the memory is content, while the city and the society is a "container" for the "content" of the "doer". Without the human creation, the city will always stay in the past and may lose the memory and vitality.

### 3. The Crisis of City Memory

#### 3.1 Characteristic of the Crisis of City Memory

City memory solidified in urban spatial environment is reflected in people's memory; it is also people's understanding of urban spatial environment significance. Meanwhile, as the urban construction in the gradual process of development, people continue to be active on the city transformation of the spatial environment, consequently, the city memory is constantly in continuous developing and changing, and it is not static. People's transformation activities can influence city memory, and make the formation of city memory not to be divorced from the understanding of environmental significance in the past, and also constantly add new content. If these new contents are out from people's awareness of the environmental significance of the past, it will make city memory dislocated and even memory amnesia (Fig. 1). Dislocation of memory means that the principles we always adhere to in city memory will lose [3]; memory amnesia means that these new contents will completely out off the continuity of the evolution of the environmental significance, so that city memory can not keep blood contact with the significance of environment in the past.



Fig. 1: Space of City Memory Crisis

#### 3.2 The Memory Crisis of City Form

There is a close link between urban form and city memory. So, when we regard our city as a main subject, the evolution of city form is the development process of urban historical precipitation. The city's plan, urban tissue, monuments and other memorial structures record the city's social life and time in different development stages, and make the city history precipitate and solidify down in physical form as the offspring memories and reference content. However, when we regard human as subject, the urban form for people's psychological meaning will show up and the urban areas become the basic reference for people to identify themselves and seek the sense of belonging. Meanwhile, to the society, urban form also show a unique mode of urban cultural inheritance way .Its spatial structure and combining ways of elements concentrated reflect the group consciousness and values in the social urbanization activities [4].

At present, the false engineering of construction and demolition renovation in accordance with historical monuments conducted by each city completely remove and erase the meaning of the areas, which related to the historical events and the time. Thereby, lead to a serious lack and fault of city history and culture. At the same time, frequent and large-scale changes, which destroy the stable relationship of people's daily life on the positioning of memory objects, and make people generally produce a cognitive difficulty, that is “city is becoming more and more difficult to remember”. This kind of urban space alienation and the mutation of inherent relationship between people and objects make people feel hard to experience the sense of identity in the spiritual homeland. Our long-term lived city seems like suddenly become “a foreign country”, which has no historical connection and emotional clings to us.

Before the crisis of urban form memory becoming worse, to solve the crisis, we should first improve the understanding of city memory, urban form in consciousness.

- First, we should watch the construction of urban form in a continuous and dynamic way. Changes in the city, in many cases, are at the expense of meticulous vivid historical memory. Mainly because we do not have correctly balanced, protected and updated the relationship between the concept and method. In fact, the construction of the city is not shifting the “old” and building “new”, but consider how to make a perfect combination between “new” and “old”. Many European practical projects for historical building protection are not merely adopting one kind of method. They may repair the old as the old or change for new, also they may build new one or use new form as a symbol theme to remember the past (Fig. 2). In short, no matter which method they take, they all treat the changing urban history in a wide and open diverse viewpoint.

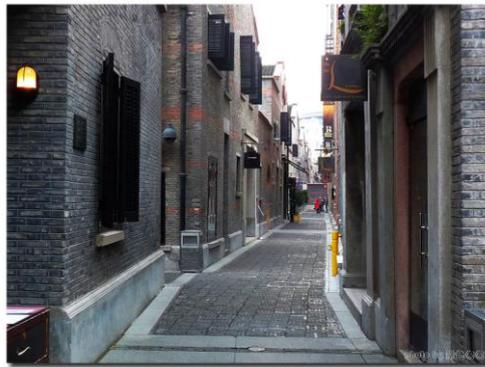


Fig. 2: Xintiandi of Shanghai

- Second, we should build a clear service target of urban form construction. The formation and development of urban form demonstrated in two ways: one is top-down, pre-planning designed city form; the other one is bottom-up, organic city form. The best one is to integrate these two ways and allow it to infiltrate and influence one another, making the city, on the regular overall pattern basis, through the local variation to achieve coordination. But looking back at current errors about city design, in fact, they are both the manifestation of unbalanced development. The city manager only take the highway, subway, building signs, development zones and other large, short-term projects into consideration; the architects influenced by owner, attach attention only on monomer designs, and they hope these designs are able to become regional markers, which always undermine the image of the overall environment. The similar construction projects are in the ongoing, which make the ordinary people to have to live in fear when they cross the street, or to suffer the pain of vehicle noise and exhaust gas. In addition, with the historical districts and the demolition of old houses replaced by high-grade office buildings, leisure and entertainments, residents have to move to the urban fringe areas, which are away from their original familiar living environment. However, we should bear this in mind, although the urban public is unknown, the city's history and future will forever belong to them.

### 3.3 The Memory Crisis of the City Features

City feature, in a certain space-time condition, urban society for their own survival and development, with the current reached civilization, by means of using and transforming nature to create an extrinsic manifestation, which is different from other cities, material and spiritual achievement. City feature, social life and historic feature are closely related, it contains the inherent quality of man and society, reflecting the historical accumulation of human civilization. The feature of a city mostly formed through decades, centuries or even

thousands of years of accumulation and deposition. Driving difficult, but easier to destroy, once destroyed, it is difficult to recover within decades, or even can not be restored.

However, in the course of globalization planning and the architecture design market, more and more large-scale construction projects are designed by the architects away from the local environmental and cultural background.

A considerable number of overseas architects are lack of understanding of urban character and cultural context when in dealing with Chinese urban renewal problems. Based on western “others” of the cultural identity instead of China's social and urban cultural identity, this unfettered freedom will destroy China's city cultural characteristics without any doubt. On the other side, the city authority, for certain purposes, blindly following the trend of the construction, building high-rise, squares, engaging in doing afforest. Once in a city, there is a bright spot, other cities are in the rush to follow suit. No wonder there is such a description: “Pan Kisi likes Mali Le, and Mali Le likes Paddington, all the streets are like the same... your Geluosaite Square, Baker Street, Harley Street and Granville Street, Nepal and so on, all these are dull, boring, listless streets, like a child as similar to the ordinary family, and the Portland Place and Portman Square are their respected parents. The city feature disappears in such utilitarian, timeliness replication” [4].

The city memory is the integral historical understanding of the urban spatial environmental meaning and it's forming process. It contains the city's culture, and the culture is an important basis for shaping the city's character. In many years ago, Saarinen sharply pointed out that: “A lot of people treat urban planning as a purely technical problem, just judging the case as it stands during the planning, while ignoring significant mental requirements. As urban planning is often reduced to the status of handling the superficial actual matter, it gradually gives an impression of monotonous mediocrity”. The city memory is a true portrayal of urban life, and social life is closely related with urban characteristics, it contains the inherent quality of man and society, reflecting the historical accumulation of human civilization. Chinese cities, not only in architecture and urban image totally westernized, even in urban residents lifestyle, fashion, hobbies, etc are also display obvious westernization tendency. When people in efforts to create the future, they lose the memories of city are actually lose their past. The loss is cultural in nature, and consequently causes us to forget our own traditions and characteristics. The vast territory, varied climate and thousands of years of the unique Chinese concept of the ideal inhabit, which leave rich town types and space environment for later generations. The Beijing hutongs, Shanghai lilong, Guangdong sotto portico, Huizhou village, Water Towns South of the Yangtze River, the storied building of Fujian and so on (Fig.3), these personalized space forms are the life expressions of individual performances. Protecting them, not only as a precious cultural heritage for humanity, but also keep the precious memories of the city for ourselves. Each city has its own unique city memory; this is the creativity of the city and the performance of city's spirit. In a deeper level Look, the city memory embodies the city and society's ideals, beliefs, institutions, ethics and values. City memory is a reflection of human and society, there is what kind of person, and then what kind of society, also there will be what kind of memory of the city. City memory tells us who we are and where we come from, where we are going. If there are no surviving historical buildings and urban space, history will not be lifelike; if we lose the proud of the history we live by, we will lack the form evidence and the spirit foundation of the cognition of urban development.



Fig. 3: Tulou of Fujian

To sum up, the city memory is a very broad concept. From the essential character of memory and the links between urban spatial environment and city memory, it can be seen that city memory expresses a comprehensive relationship between people and urban spatial environment. This is our fundamental starting point about understanding the concept of city memory. Based on the accurate understanding of urban spatial environment al significance, people try to transform on their own imitative. City memory gets protective continuance, and at the same time, the environment becomes the basic reference of identity and mental belonging. However, the reality precisely runs in the opposite direction. In the process of blindly pursuing utility and timeliness urban construction and renovation, urban history is brutally cut, subdued and erased. Those modern architectures that have no environmental and historical background are frequently copied in different geographical and cultural context. Behind the modern urban functional space, there are the urban history and local culture embarrassment. Therefore, the city officials at all levels should make the criteria for judging the value of city construction from self-awareness extends to the user in real life. They are supposed to practically concern and care about the users' behavior experience and feeling demand.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The city memory represents people's cognition of the urban spatial environment of the past, the present and the future. The city memory represents a modern city's ideal, reflecting the state, nation, cities and people's value pursuit and also it is a milestone of city history. The evolution of city memory represents the city's progress and prosperity, and it is regional of course, so it can not be copied. To construct a city with unique city memory requires designer should equip with continuous and unfinished long term point of view. On the one hand, make the traditional urban architectural form melt into a new city life and to show a new vitality. On the other hand, it is strongly need to protect and keep traditional urban feature, and perform personalized life and space. Therefore, to build city memory is to caress the city history and culture, and also a pursuit of an ideal city, which has an important enlightenment to our country's contemporary city construction.

#### **5. Acknowledgment**

This work was financially supported by Innovation Program of Henan Province education department natural sciences (2010A560005).

#### **6. References**

- [1] Gaojuefu, "Modern western psychology history," People's Education Press, 1982
- [2] Kevin Lynch, "Urban Form," Linqinyi. Huaxia Publishing House, 2001
- [3] Yubo, "The research of urban memory," Master Thesis, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, 2004
- [4] Tuxin, "Urban memory in urban application research," Master Thesis, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, 2005