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# Identifying the architectural texture of the former British concession of Hankou

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## Abstract

Based on the studies of the former British Concession of Hankou, the article explores the evolving pattern of historical urban texture from prototype to type, with the rationale of architectural typology. Firstly, it builds the prototype concept of urban texture, to analyze the historical significance within it. Secondly, it classifies the urban texture into three types, namely prototypes, types and heterotypes. Methods are also put forward to identify similar texture and isomorphic texture. Focusing on the current situation in which Chinese historical districts are, the research attempt to recognize the value and significance of atypical residential housing forms through the concepts built above, and limit the renovation measures to the units of urban texture with minimal intervention, following the internal evolving rules. Furthermore, the research results are transformed into a ‘minimally invasive’ restoration method, which relies on small-scale and incremental organic renewal strategies, to guide the renovation of historic districts in China.

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*Keywords:* Historic districts; architectural texture; the former British concession of Hankou

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## 1. Introduction

In the endless progress of history, urban has been growing and regenerating constantly, whilst the architectural texture has also been changing within some specific cultural frameworks. The ever-changing texture of historical districts is always in a progress of ‘recession’, deviating from the original texture prototype. As a result, a large number of ambiguous texture types are generated, which blurs the identification of texture prototype and troubles

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the protection efforts on historical districts to a great extent. Meanwhile, the changing texture, which accommodates a piece of memory of urban growth, embeds the texture prototypes with unique values itself. It is hardly possible to imagine a single texture prototype to stand along among the reinforced concrete high-rise buildings, like an aged low house buried in the urban forest. Taking account of this, the research attempt to recognize the texture prototypes and identify the types they belong to in the context of the former British Concession in Hankou, in order to perform a ‘minimally invasive’ restoration and regeneration on the historical districts relying on small-scale and incremental organic renewal strategies.

## 2. Acknowledge to the architectural texture prototype

### 2.1 Concept of the architectural texture prototype

A prototype is an early sample, model, or release of a product built to test a concept or process or to act as a thing to be replicated or learned from. According to this, the author will discuss the architectural texture in historical districts theoretically from the concept of prototype.

Similar to architecture prototype, every historical district in the city has its own prototype for architectural texture. The prototype, as a form of space, is a basic knowledge and usage method towards architectural space embedded in specific social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions. However the city changes, it will always be influenced by the prototype.

From the perspective of typology, architectural texture prototype can be referred to graphic symbols which is abstracted from abundant existing configurations, as the unchanging part in architectural texture. The ‘□’ shape architectural texture prototype in traditional Chinese quadrangle dwellings.

### 2.2. Knowledge to the architectural texture prototype (1930s) of the former British concession of Hankou

#### 2.2.1. Foreign firms building and the texture prototype of public building

There are mainly foreign firms and public buildings with similar configuration of plan in the initiative area, set in 40m \*80m parallelogram areas facing the same direction. Obviously different from the dwelling buildings in the extended area with more lively architecture texture, the initiative area is in structured mosaic texture, which also reflects the order in which the city grew (Table 1).

The texture was generated as a result of the rigorous small-scale grid square in road structure that the concessions adopted on street level in China. The flexibility on the scale and direction of growth and the increased proportion of frontage guarantees the standardization of land subdivision, the fairness of land transaction and tenancy, the permeability of traffic flow and the unity of planning regulation and municipal construction. The short side of typical street line is within 40m to 200m, which enables the land to be divided into two back to back blocks, with at least one frontage to the street each (Fig. 1).

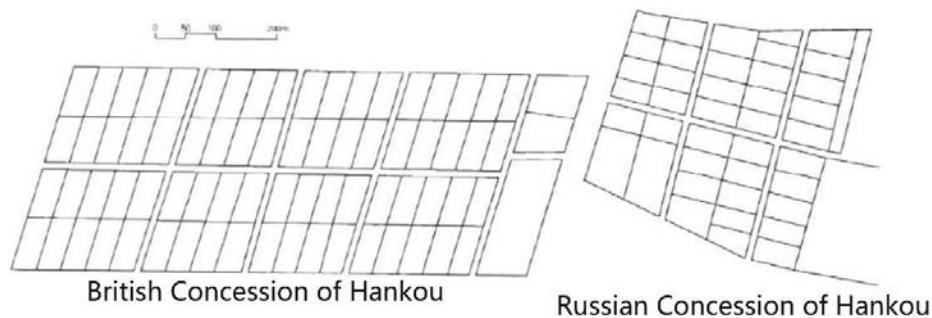


Fig. 1. Blocks of the former concession of China.

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