



The Chinesenization of American Zoning in the 1980s: From Shanghai Hongqiao Experiment to Wenzhou Old Town Renewal

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The most instrumental reform in Chinese urban planning system during the market reform in the 1980s is the introduction of so-called “regulatory detailed planning” (in Chinese pinyin, kong gui), an adaptive form of American zoning in Chinese cities. However, this episode of the reform hasn’t been closely examined from a historic and critical perspective so far. Based on archival research, mapping and interviews, this article traces the planning and development process of Shanghai Hongqiao New District and Wenzhou old town, and explores the original process of transplantation and localization of American zoning in Chinese cities. By comparing the planning and construction explorations of the two cities, we will argue that although it learned much from zoning techniques, especially the control indexes, the regulatory detailed planning is more to be a platform for local government to negotiate with the foreign businessmen and other private sectors, rather than representing public intervention and regulation in the US, and served as a technical tool to materialize the development goals of Chinese cities.

Keywords: planning history, zoning, Reform and Opening Up, Shanghai Hongqiao, Wenzhou old town renewal

Introduction

For the first three decades of People’s Republic of China, based on the soviet model, master planning was considered a core instrument to arrange land use and spatial layout of cities, while detailed planning was made for direct implementation of specific projects, to “materialize” the national economic plans. Beginning from the early 1980s, with the introduction of foreign direct investment and land reform, a more regulatory approach was introduced. It borrowed the control indexes such as floor area ratio (FAR), building density, height limits from American zoning into the traditional detailed plan-making system. Regulatory detailed planning is not the simple imitation of American zoning, Chinese urban planners have selectively borrowed tools and indexes from zoning to fit in the institutional context.

Regulatory detailed planning was conceived in the planned economy system and developed in the market economy period. Fundamentally, it is not only a technical tool for the government to manage urban land and space effectively, but also a social product under the political and economic system in a particular historical period. After its evolution of more than thirty years, regulatory detailed planning has become the core of Chinese urban planning and management system nowadays. The introduction and evolution of regulatory detailed planning are widely recorded and discussed in Chinese planning history, however, there still lack of an in-depth review with certain historical distance.

The birth and later wide application of regulatory detailed planning began with local experiments in which Shanghai and Wenzhou (a merchant town in Zhejiang Province) have had a pioneering impact. This article traces the planning and development process of Shanghai Hongqiao and Wenzhou old town. Due to the different hierarchical status of cities in the country, local culture, the involvement of social groups and many other factors, there are great differences in the sources of funding, investment and modes of cooperation for the construction and reconstruction between the two cities, as well as the roles and functions of the planning policies. As a show window opening to the outside world representing Shanghai, Hongqiao New District Area has been selectively developed in cooperation with large foreign corporations. The redevelopment of Wenzhou old town, on the other hand, has been depended more on small-scale private capital, overseas Chinese businessmen, joint ventured with local state-owned enterprises. Nevertheless, the experiments on planning by the two municipalities were for the same purpose— seeking new sources of capital to finance urban construction.



Shanghai Hongqiao New District Planning

Shanghai is one of the pioneer cities to carry out the urban planning reform in the beginning of 1980's reform and opening up. Shanghai used to be the largest trading financial centre in the Far East and the largest industrial and commercial city in China in modern times. It was also one of the most important industrial and technology bases, and the largest port and trade centre since the foundation of PRC. However, after ten years of Cultural Revolution, the economy and society in Shanghai were badly damaged. In order to develop the economy under the reform and opening policy, Shanghai government vigorously attracted foreign investment and carried out the experiment of land reform. Under the new policy, the traditional urban planning formulation also needed to change. Hongqiao New District¹ was chosen to be a pilot plot by Shanghai government to introduce foreign capital, and the new planning innovation experiment was carried out as well. Hongqiao New District Planning realized the transformation from “placing the buildings” to index control and it is considered the first experiment of regulatory detailed planning.

At the beginning of opening up, in order to expand foreign communications and attract foreign investment, Shanghai government decided to develop a “micro-district” for foreign consulates tourist hotels and international trade centre. They chose a 0.65 square kilometres site which located between the city centre and Hongqiao airport (Figure 1). There were farmlands, rural houses, several factories in that area, the municipal infrastructure were very weak (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Location of Hongqiao New District



Figure 2: Old Scene of Hongqiao New District in 1970s

According to the requirements of the relevant government departments, Shanghai Urban Planning Bureau made several rounds of detailed planning which focused on functional distribution and architectural form during 1979-1983(Figure 3&4). Retaining the thought during the planned economy period, urban planning was considered the “deepening and concrete” of planned economy, the planning institute just materialized the government plans.



Figure 3: Detailed Planning in 1980



Figure 4: Detailed Planning in 1983

In 1984, Shanghai was listed as one of the 14 coastal cities² “opening up” to the world. The Mayor Wang Daohan declared that:“ Hongqiao New District Planning has been made, the land will be provided this year”³. Then many foreign businessmen especially overseas Chinese (including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan compatriots) began to contact and show great interest in this area. In order to promote Hongqiao New District better, Shanghai urban planning institute adopted the international practice, completed Hongqiao New District detail planning-site layout(Figure 5).

In 1980, American female Architects Association⁴ visited China, introducing the land zoning of United States for the first time. According to the atticle written by the Office of the Chinese Architecture Society, the female



architects introduced the zoning in New York. The use of each land was formulated and specific requirements for the volume, style, greening and density of the building were put forward. Those buildings which complied with the regulations would be encouraged, and those violated the regulations would be referred to the court. Female architects called this law a "carrot and stick" approach to planning management. It aroused the interest and attention of Chinese architects at that time.

Before the formulate of the site layout planning, Shanghai Urban Planning Bureau had began to sample the land use and construction capacity in different periods in Shanghai, referred to architecture and planning regulations before and after the liberation, collected planning and architecture laws of American, Japan, H.K. to make Shanghai Technical Regulations on Land Use Management (上海市土地使用管理技术规定). Land classification, building density, building height and other control requirements were included. This site layout planning extracted eight control indexes⁵ from this Management. The index data of FAR, building density were calculated depending on the previous detailed planning. This planning adopted the internationally acceptable planning technique and broke the traditional form of detailed planning.

Overall, the new form planning referred to the land use division and index system of the American zoning, and was expressed in the form of similar zoning maps. One of the main contents of the zoning——zoning ordinance, were more absorbed in the technical regulations. On the basis of traditional detailed planning, this new plan added zoning maps and indexes, its basic research, municipal support and transportation of the detailed planning still remained. Although the index datas were the “translation” of detailed planning to a large extent, it was still a great breakthrough at that time.

The essential feature of zoning is law, the land use, building height, density and so on specified in zoning could not be easily changed. While regulatory planning was only a general technical document of the planning department then. It did not have legal status, so the indexes were easily modified for a variety of reasons.

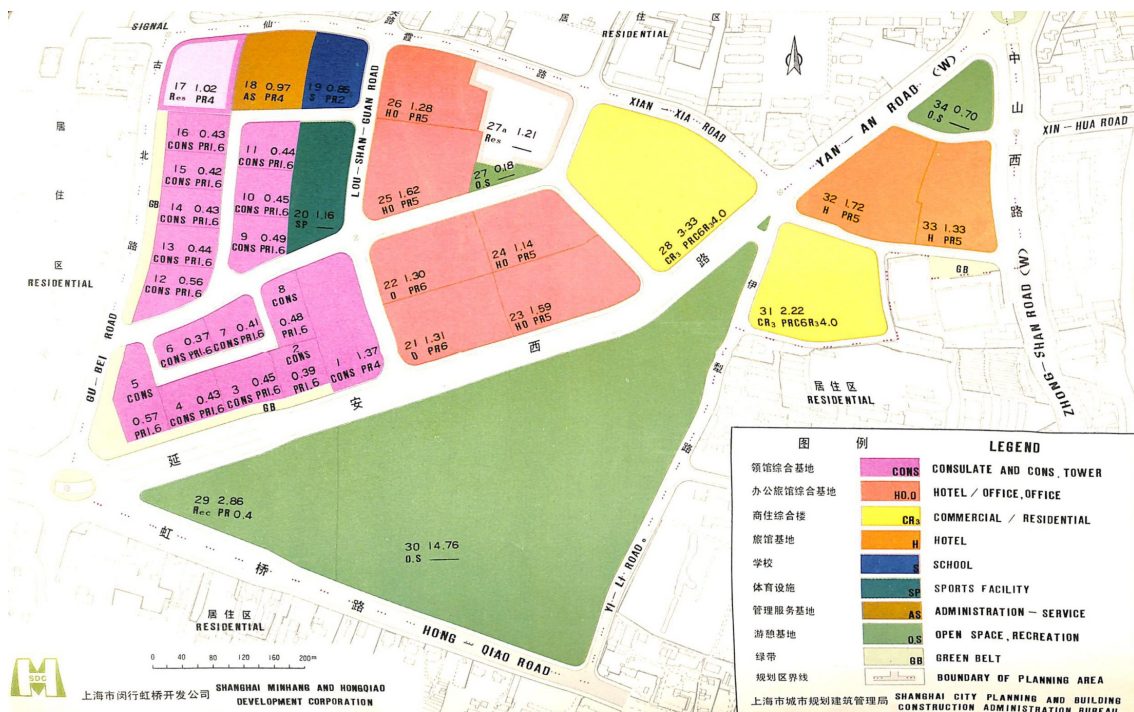


Figure 5: Shanghai Hongqiao New District Detail Planning-Site Layout, 1984

The change of the traditional planning made it easier for foreigners to understand the developing conditions of Hongqiao New District. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the reform and opening up policy in China had just launched, government's rules and regulations were not perfect. Initially, there were only several foreign businessmen showed interest in this area, most of which were overseas Chinese and Hong Kong compatriots. Shanghai government preferred to cooperate with large foreign corporations. Take the first foreign capital project Hongqiao Hotel for example, the government agreed to cooperate with Yi Shen Industrial Corporation (伊沈实业公司)⁶ in 1979 because of Cyrus S. Eaton's abundant capital and international reputation. After a long controversy about design and cost, Cyrus S. Eaton withdrew, and then Shanghai government refused to continue cooperation with Shen Jianbai after consideration. The hotel were invested by Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration. Before 1984, although several corporations had intention to invest, no substantive progress was made.



In 1984, Shanghai became one of the 14 coastal cities with preferential policies and measures, the new planning followed international practices of Hongqiao New District was released, and Shanghai Minhang and Hongqiao Development Co. (上海闵行虹桥开发公司)⁷ was established to organize operation of Hongqiao New district. All of these actions accelerated the pace of attracting foreign direct investments. Pacific Hotel⁸, Yongtze Hotel⁹ and New Hongqiao Mansion¹⁰ were the first joint venture projects(Figure 6&7). The planning could be easy to understand by foreigners and became the basis of negotiation.



Figure 6: Panorama of Hongqiao in 1984



Figure 7: Panorama of Hongqiao in 1987

In order to reduce risk, land readjustment and subdivision were made according to foreign developers demands, FAR of the plots chosen by foreign investors were mostly increased. In 1986, Shanghai decided to choose a plot in Hongqiao as a pilot of Land Lease. In 1988, plot 26 was called for bids at both home and abroad. The planning requirements of plot 26 were adjusted because of the bidding. The main control indexes of planning were accepted into the bid document and contract. With the deepening of land reform and Deng Xiaoping's South Tour Speech¹¹ in 1992, more and more foreign direct investments were introduced, leading to extensive modification of control indexes. the FAR and building heights of many plots were increased (Figure 8). Sino-foreign joint ventures and foreign-owned enterprises are in the majority of all the development companies (Figure 9).The foreign investment mainly came from H.K., Japan and America.



Figure 8: Far changes from 1984 to the present

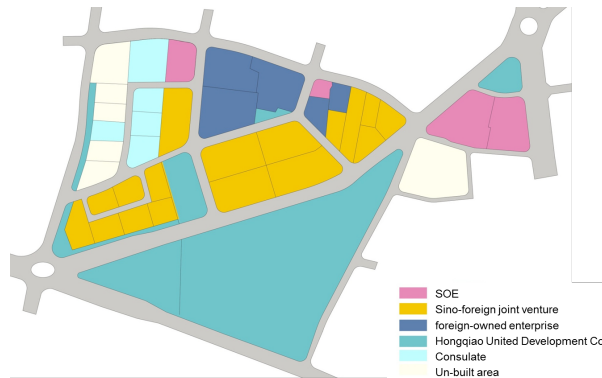


Figure 9: distribution of different developers

To make a brief summary, the birth of regulatory detailed planning was to adapt to the demand of opening up, make it easier for foreigners to understand the development conditions. Although it ostensibly learned from America zoning, the planning purpose was to facilitate the city development rather than maintain public interests. The planning served as a plat for Chinese government and foreign corporations to negotiate. When the Land Lease Policy came into power since 1986, the regulatory detailed planning essential basis for land lease. However, it's worth noting that the adjustment of the control indexes were the result of negotiation between government and foreign businessmen to a large extent.

Wenzhou Old Town Renewal Regulatory Planning

Wenzhou is a city with a history of more than 1600 years, however, due to several historical reasons, there was very little investment in Wenzhou from Chinese central government since its founding in 1949. The old town located in the Midwest of Wenzhou (Figure 10) and covered an area of about 8.9 square kilometres in 1980s. The infrastructure and housing construction of the whole old town were seriously lagged behind before the reform and opening up. The progress of the old town renewal was slow in early 1980s because of the less investment from the central government and the city's development policy which focused on developing



new area. Wenzhou was one of the highest population density areas in China at that time, with old houses, crowded traffic and poor infrastructure (Figure 11). At that time, the rapid development of Wenzhou's small commodity economy had enhanced the masses' economic power and they had the ability to reconstruct the old town.



Figure 10: Location of the Old Town



Figure 11: A Bird's Eye View of the Old Town

In 1984, Wenzhou also became one of the 14 coastal cities, however, the poor infrastructure and construction of the old town couldn't keep pace with the opening up and economic development. Then Wenzhou government decided to focus on old town renewal, starting with Renmin Road reconstruction. In 1987, Wenzhou Planning Bureau made the Middle and West Renmin Road¹² Detailed Planning (Figure 12). The government considered it as a "test area" for real estate development. They expected that the reconstruction of Renmin road would attract social funds to make ends meet. Although people's market awareness were raising at that time, the planning form was still traditional, which focused on architectural forms, function and traffic.

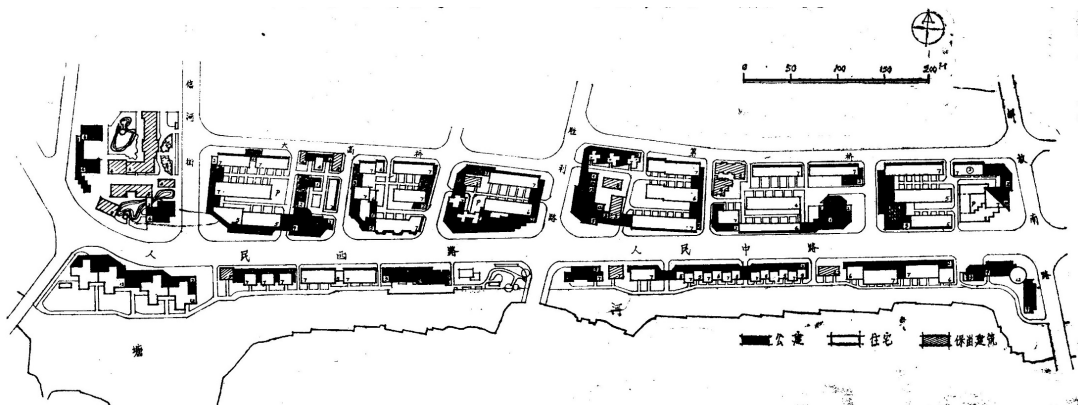


Figure 12: Middle and West Renmin Road Detailed Planning, 1987

With the development of commodity economy and serious problems of the old town, the Wenzhou planning department believed that the original planning management methods could not cope with the complicated construction and management of the old town. In 1988, Wenzhou Urban Planning Bureau began to formulate the full-coverage Old Town Renewal Regulatory Planning¹³ based on the master plan.

Since the Hongqiao New District Planning made in 1984 and gained attention after the National Conference on urban planning and design held in Lanzhou in 1986, Guilin, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and other cities also carried out experiments and made many efforts to explore the contents, expressions and control indexes of regulatory detailed planning. Ding Junqing, who participated in this planning, recalled that they learned much from American zoning and Shanghai experience, and also referred to the planning experientments in Guangzhou, Suzhou, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Nanjing etc. The Old Town Renewal Regulatory Planning integrated both the theory and technology of various regulatory detailed planning firstly and got promoted nationwide.

Instead of considering the building layout of every plot, this planning payed more attention on the whole city's integrated control. The planning could be divided into two phases: the first phase was the old town renewal regulatory planning; the second phase was the 11 blocks regulatory detailed planning which was made on basis of the first phase and was the main content of the whole planning¹⁴. The first phase was the deepening of Wenzhou Master Plan made in 1986. In order to realize the goal of reducing population and building density of the master plan, this planning reduced residential land and increased commercial and traffic land (Figure 13). Unlike the control indexes calculated on basis of detailed planning in Hongqiao New District, the determination



of FAR and other control indexe in Wenzhou old town were more complicated. Take FAR for example, the planners first forecast the total population to calculate the average FAR, and then determined the FAR of 50 areas (Figure 14), then furthermore calculated the FAR of 287 plots (Figure 15), finally they made the final adjustment according to real estate development benefits.

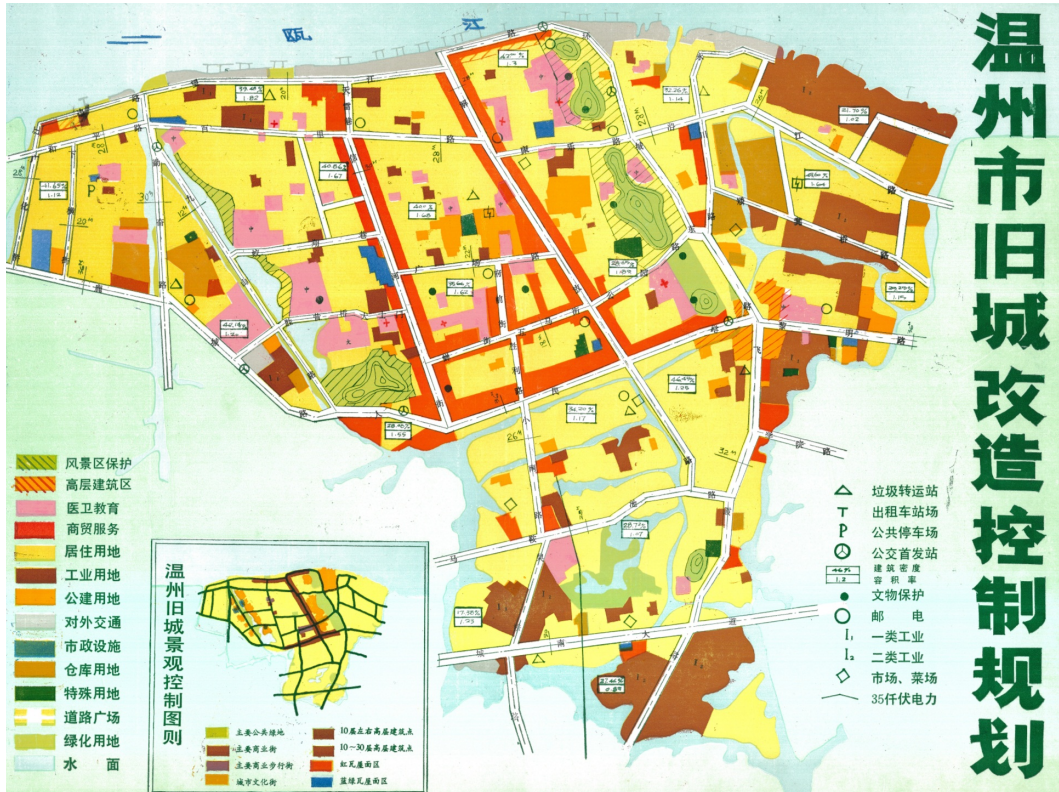


Figure 13: Land Use Planning of Wenzhou Old Town, 1988

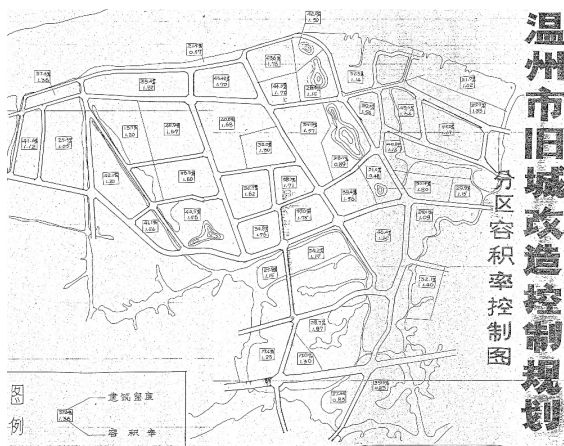


Figure 14: FAR of 50 areas, 1988

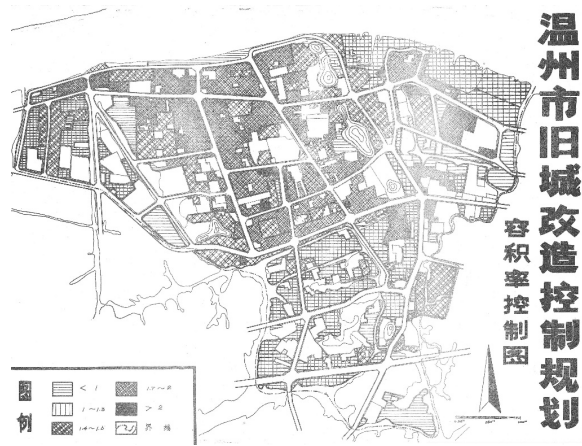


Figure 15: FAR of 287 plots, 1988

The 11 blocks regulatory detailed planning emphasized the comprehensive indexes, including land use, building density, FAR, building height, etc to achieve the quantitative control (Figure 16). Extra building density, FAR, building height along the street were added into the control indexes of residential land to improve the efficiency of land use (Table 1). The planning contents of the Renmin Road detailed planning were translated into control indexes of the 11 blocks regulatory detailed planning.



Figure 16: Zoning map of Wuma Block (a part), 1988

Land use (C)	FAR	Land use (R)	building density	FAR	building height
	building height		building density along the street	FAR along the street	building height along the street

Table 1: control indexes of commercial land and residential land

Besides the planning texts and zoning maps, the planning bureau also made Wenzhou Old Town Renewal Planning Management (trial) (温州市旧城区改造规划管理试行办法) and Wenzhou Old Town Land Use and Construction Management Technical Regulations (温州市旧城土地使用和建设管理技术规定) as the final planning outcomes. These two regulations were approved by the municipal government with the planning texts and maps. The model of Wenzhou regulatory detailed planning formulation was promoted throughout the country after the “regulatory detailed planning seminar”¹⁵ held by the national Ministry of Construction in 1991.

Compared with Hongqiao New District Planning, the content and form of Wenzhou Old Town Renewal Regulatory Planning were closer to zoning. First of all, Wenzhou realized the full coverage planning of the old town, while zoning also generally controlled the land development of the whole city. Secondly, Wenzhou closely combined the regulations with the planning, which was more similar to the main contents of zoning. The difference was that the legislation of zoning was following the principle of bottom-up, considering more about the will of local residents, and it was a comprehensive reflection of the local interests in the city; on the contrary, Wenzhou Old Town Renewal Regulatory Planning was not the will of the local residents, it was considered by the planners and local government from the overall situation, and took into account the overall needs of the city.

The reason why Wenzhou old town renewal regulatory planning got promoted is not simply for the advancement and integrity of the planning techniques, but also owe to its important effect in promoting the reconstruction of the old town. Renmin Road reconstruction was the pilot project of the whole old town, the local government proposed to push the housing commercialization to make ends meet. It chose several real estate companies¹⁶ for the contract through public bidding. Residents lived along the street would be relocated at the original place after the reconstruction. The government also set up Renmin Road Reconstruction Headquarter (人民路改建工程指挥部) to organize and coordinate the whole reconstruction project. Some planners from urban planning bureau joined the headquarter simultaneously.

In the process of renewal, several high-rise buildings constructions delayed because of the fund shortage. At that time, the national land use reform had been full swing, and the central and local government launched a series of policies to attract taiwan compatriots and other foreign capital. Since 1990, several taiwanese businessmen showed interest in the Renmin Road reconstruction and established joint ventures with local real estate



companies to conduct the construction. Then more and more joint ventures were established to develop high-rise buildings along Renmin Road. The old town renewal regulatory planning played an important role in providing development requirements and calculating the land price. The reconstruction were funded by the residents and development companies. The government obtained 30 million by leasing land from 1989 to 1992. The renewal of Renmin Road provided a great experience for the comprehensive renewal of the whole old town.



Figure 17: Scene of Renmin Road in 1992



Figure 18: Scene of Renmin Road in 2004

The old town renewal were in full swing since Deng Xiaoping's South Tour Speech in 1992. High-rise buildings were widely constructed along the main streets, especially on main intersections. They were mostly developed by joint venture real estate enterprises established by overseas Chinese of Wenzhou (Figure 19). During the development process, the FAR of many plots were increased after the negotiations. For example, the original FAR of the Global Mansion plot was 1.8, while it actually reached up to 4.9.



Figure 19: main distribution of different developers from 1980 to 1998.



The Wenzhou old town renewal regulatory detailed planning was considered the summarization and aggregation of various regulatory detailed planning experiments at that time. This planning strengthened the leading role of urban planning department in the old town renewal process. It played an important role in land leasing, land price calculation, and guiding the further planning, and also played an active role in the development and negotiation. However, the negotiations between the developers and the government often led to the modification of the planning, which aimed to maximize the interests of the two sides. The flexible regulatory detailed planning had become a tool for the local government to negotiate with the developers for the common interest to a certain extent.

Comparison and Conclusion

Here is a simple comparison of the two Chinese zoning experiments. In terms of the planning formulation, Shanghai Hongqiao New District borrowed eight control indexes from American zoning and referred the previous architecture regulations, and then “translated” the detailed planning. Wenzhou learned more experience from other cities especially Shanghai besides zoning, and emphasized the control indexes along the main streets. Both of the two experiments reformed the traditional forms of detailed planning, focused more on control indexes rather than architectural layout and emphasized economic measurement. The two plans also remained some traditional detailed planning contents and showed obvious Chinese planning characteristics.

Shanghai and Wenzhou carried out construction under the guidance of regulatory detailed planning. The similarities of the two cities were that the local government transformed from a constructor to a rule maker and city manager. Unified development institutions were established to organize the whole construction. As a show window opening to the outside world representing Shanghai, Hongqiao New District has been selectively developed in cooperation with large foreign corporations, especially those listed on Fortune Global 500. The Shanghai government would like to take Hongqiao New District as a catalyst to promote investment and opening up, and to further promote the prosperity of Shanghai economy. The foreign businessmen who came to invest also took the investment in Hongqiao New District as a springboard to enter the Chinese market. The redevelopment of Wenzhou old town, on the other hand, has been depended more on small-scale private capital, overseas Chinese businessmen, joint ventured with local state-owned enterprises. The Wenzhou government implemented the old town renewal in order more for improving the city environment and raising the living standard. The formulation and adjustment of the planning mainly focused on the feasibility of the development and considered whether it could make a profit. Most of the overseas Chinese businessmen who invested the old town renewal put their own interests first. Nevertheless, the planning experiments of the two cities were for the same purpose—seeking new sources of capital to finance urban construction.

In conclusion, the introduction of regulatory detailed planning serves as a technical tool rather than a continuation of its past, to materialize the development goals of the cities. It has been instrumental for the governments marketing its development goals to the global market, and has provided a platform to negotiate with the private sectors, rather than representing public intervention and regulation in the US. The frequent adjustment of planning control indexes, especially FAR during the development process, reflects the testing of market acceptance and the maximizing development benefits. A new urban development control system in Chinese cities has ever since begun to establish.

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Yun Shen is Assistant Urban Planner at Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning & Design Institute. She graduated from Tongji University with a Master of Urban Planning in 2017. This article is based on her master thesis, which studies the birth and evolution of regulatory detailed planning since the 1980s, supervised by Prof. Li Hou.



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Endnotes

¹ It was called "foreign micro-district" (涉外小区) in 1979, and then renamed "West Yanan Road and West Zhongshan Road area" (延安西路中山西路地区) in 1980, later renamed the "Hongqiao New District" (虹桥新区) in 1982. In 1986, this district was approved as a national economic and technological development zone.

² In order to further carry out foreign economic cooperation and technology exchange, introduce foreign capital and advanced technology, the central government opened 14 coastal cities (Tianjin, Shanghai, Dalian, Qinhuangdao, Yantai, Qingdao, Lianyungang, Nantong, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang and Lianyungang), giving preferential policy and economic management autonomy.

³ Shanghai Urban Planning and Design Research Institution. Report on "the Approval of the Hongqiao New District Planning", 1984.

⁴ From April 6 to 27 in 1980, at the invitation of Chinese Architecture Society, fifteen people from the delegation of the Chinese research group of American female Architects Association conducted a visit and academic exchange in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou and Guangzhou. Fifteen members of the delegation, Linda Simmons, Hu marg, Ai Dezhi and Cauchy, made several academic reports. The main contents included urban planning, residential building design, interior decoration and materials, zoning was introduced in detail.

⁵ Land use, area, building setback, building area density (floor area ratio), building density, building height, entry and exit location, garage parking area.

⁶ The company incorporated in Bermuda, Cyrus S. Eaton was the chairman, Shen Jianbai was the president.

⁷ This company re-established a joint venture called "Shanghai Hongqiao United Development Co. Ltd. (上海虹桥联合发展有限公司)" in 1985.

⁸ The first Sino foreign joint venture construction project in Hongqiao New District. It was invested by Shanghai Minhang and Hongqiao Development Co. Ltd., Shanghai Traveling Company and Japan Green Wood Construction Co. Ltd.

⁹ It was invested by Shanghai Minhang and Hongqiao Development Co. Ltd., Shanghai New Asia Limited by Share Ltd Hongkong Yun Ke International Investment Co., Ltd. and King-pai Co. Ltd.

¹⁰ The first comprehensive office building in Hongqiao. It was invested by Shanghai Minhang and Hongqiao Development Co. Ltd. and Bank of China (Hong Kong and Macao).

¹¹ From January 18 to February 21 in 1992, Deng Xiaoping visited Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shanghai and other places, made a series of important speeches, known as the South talk. These speeches reiterated the necessity and importance of deepening reform and opening up and accelerating development. Deng Xiaoping's South Tour Speech marked the second wave of China's reform and opening up, which played a key role in promoting China's economic reform and social progress in 1990s.

¹² Renmin Road was a transportation, life and business main road across Wenzhou. In 1985, Wenzhou Planning Bureau made the East Renmin Road detailed planning, however, only three projects completed because of fund shortage. In the face of the development of the individual economy in Wenzhou, the public construction enthusiasm was very high, and the main traffic road in the city has widened except the the Middle and West Renmin Road. The government chose it as the key point of the old town renewal, and combined with the East Renmin Road reconstruction project which had been stopped before.

¹³ Yang Xiuzhu was the deputy director of the planning bureau and served as the technical leader. The other staffs included Gao Yunguang, Yang Weifeng, Lou Shifan and other 41 people, composed of local urban planning technicians and managers.

¹⁴ Gao Yunguang (1990).

¹⁵ In 1991, the national Ministry of Construction held the "regulatory detailed planning seminar" in Wenzhou, Yang Xiuzhu reported the compilation and implementation of the old town renewal planning in Wenzhou. The representatives of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Zhuozhou introduced the compiling of their regulatory detailed planning respectively at the meeting. The practice of Wenzhou had been highly valued and recognized.

¹⁶ The real estate companies were emerging in Wenzhou since 1984, and the earliest real estate companies were funded by the government related institutes.

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