



## "Western Imitation" in modern China's urban planning practice between the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China (1860-1927)

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At the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China, the ancient Chinese city was gradually transformed into a form that closes to a city with modern significance in terms of nature, the concept of construction, the management system and the spatial structure. Since the Western powers had previously dominated the global capital trade model and implemented the urban planning and construction paradigm, most of the modern Chinese learned and imitated the western models when they re-planned the original Chinese city areas. From the main source of imitation, it contains three categories: the concession, Japan, Europe and the United States. From the practitioner of imitation, most of them are politicians, social reformers, intellectuals with western culture and overseas Chinese with advanced notions. Their understanding and longing for the western urban planning laid the foundation of the transformation of China's modern urban planning. Based on relevant historical materials and existing researching literature, this paper analyses the process of understanding, imitating and implementing in modern China's urban planning practice between 1860-1927 so as to make it clear that the particularity and universality in the birth and formation of modern Chinese urban planning.

**Keywords:** Planning history, Urban planning practice, Western imitation, The exchange of planning ideas, Modern China

### Introduction

The period of Late Qing and the Early Republic of China was the transition phase from Chinese traditional cities to modern cities. After the defeat of the Opium War in 1840, China was forced to be involved in the development of the world capitalist economy and to shake the traditional Confucian values that have been formed in China for thousands of years. With the tide of China's opening to the outside world and the rise of advanced productivity, a batch of coastal and littoral port cities took the lead in developing into industrial and commercial cities and drove the rise of traffic, industrial and mineral cities as well as the transformation process of traditional cities.<sup>1</sup> Such a revolution has actually opened up the process of the modernization of Chinese cities, and the force for the revolution comes from two mutually opposite subjects: One is foreign settler, as forerunners, they constructed concessions and leased territories and colonized cities in order to operate Chinese market; The other is rejuvenated Chinese people, as latecomers, they have established self-operated trading ports and constructed new markets and new cities (in order) to resist the impact of foreign capital. According to historical researchers, China (Chinese people) who lack of modernization experiences was extremely puzzled when facing such a new administrative unit—Urban— especially in terms of administrative organization, planning for construction, and management system, etc. Actually, in order to construct the so-called modern city in their mind, they not only explored by themselves but observed, researched and selectively simulated the Western practices<sup>2</sup>.

The modern time in China was generally begun on the Opium War of 1840<sup>3</sup>, however, for the modern urban planning of China, it actually began in 1860, and the construction of municipal facilities such as building roads in Shanghai was taken as the prototype of modern city planning in China<sup>4</sup>. After continuous efforts and exploration, until the establishment of the Nanjing National Government in 1927, Chinese modern urban planning has entered an institutionalized stage<sup>5</sup>. In this paper, the period of the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China was mainly concentrated between 1860-1927. This period is not only the transition period of traditional Chinese cities and ideological concepts but also the birth and breeding period of modern city planning in China. At this stage, under the constant impact of Western material and spiritual civilization, the Chinese people continue to think and explore the mode of modernization that suits the Chinese cities themselves and has a different understanding of the West<sup>6</sup>.

What needs to be emphasized is that the West here is actually the West in the eyes of the Chinese people, and it is not a specific geographical concept but refers to an external, new knowledge system compared with the Eastern philosophy system. In addition, the Chinese understanding of the West in modern times was actually a dynamic



development process, and It has been constantly changing under the circumstances that were defeated by the Western invaders and the continuous infiltration of western capitalist economy and culture. From the rejection of the West in the early 19th century to the acceptance of the West in the 1920s, China has been going through a long time. Since the Opium War of 1840, “first, technologies affecting material existence; then principles concerning state and society; and finally, ideas touching the inner core of intellectual life. The Self-strengthening Movement of the T’ung-Chih [Tongzhi] period, the reform movement of 1898, and the May Fourth Movement of 1919 marked the climactic points of these three stages”<sup>7</sup>. As part of the influence of western culture, modern urban planning in China was continuously introduced and implemented in this historical context.

Based on relevant historical materials and existing research literature, this paper analyzes how the Chinese (government) learned and imitated the knowledge of Western urban planning at the period of late Qing and the early Republic of China(1911-1927). From the imitation perspective, this paper tries to construct a basic framework for the history of urban planning in early-modern China which could be divided into three parts: (1) Imitating Concession: The renewing planning for old urban areas and the planning for self-opening trading port; (2) Imitating Japan: Nantong, Kunming and other cities’ planning; (3) Imitating Europe or America: Guangzhou, Shantou and other cities’ planning.

### **Imitating Concession**

After the Opium War(1840), due to the economic and trade invasion of foreign colonizers, foreigner’s residence, also being called the concession<sup>8</sup>, appeared in coastal areas and along rivers in China. The earliest concession was obtained in 1843 by the United Kingdom in Shanghai, and then Western countries successively established concessions in cities such as Shanghai, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Zhenjiang and Hankou by the time of the Boxer Rebellion (1902). These Western-style blocks have become ‘windows’ for contacting Chinese and western cities and their municipal construction techniques<sup>9</sup>.

In 1865, 26 roads had been built in Shanghai’s public concessions, which were designed in a chessboard layout and formed a network of urban main road. At the same time, the concession also developed road cleaning management and road public facilities, and it has become a neat, clean and advanced Western-style block, which is different from the very beginning of “a mudflat, number of huts”. The concession, with its neat and flat roads, modern carriages and streetlights, is presented to the Chinese people of Shanghai in its advanced posture, so that they think that the difference between the concession and the Chinese community is too huge and even felt “the roads to the concession are flat, while the Chinese communities are in turmoil”, and even marvels at the difference between them just as heaven and hell”<sup>10</sup>. In order to change the worse sanitary conditions, they attributed the construction advantage of concession to urban engineering and practically absorbed public works construction and public health among them<sup>11</sup>.

In Shanghai, from the 1860s onwards, Shanghai taotai(道台) and Shanghai county magistrate(知县) began to imitate the concession of municipal management methods to improve the Chinese territory.<sup>12</sup> In the 1890s, the Chinese territory became more and more decayed, even becoming an important reason for Cross-border road construction in the concession. Therefore, it has become imperative to emulate the West and concession to improve the Chinese territory.<sup>13</sup> In December 1895, the Nanshi Road Engineering Bureau was established by Qing Dynasty and began to construct the first road in Nanshi, that is Nanshi Waimalu (now Zhongshan South Road). The construction and management of Nanshi Road Engineering Bureau directly imitate Municipal Committee and Shanghai Land Regulations. In 1905, Shanghai Merchants Yu Huaizhu and Li Zhongyu established the General Engineering Bureau Inside and Outside of City. This organization was set up entirely in accordance with the concession system, and continuously improve the municipal modernization of the Shanghai Chinese territory<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, the construction of municipal projects in other regions of China continued to develop under the influence of the concession and Shanghai. In 1894, Zhang Zhidong built the first modern road in Nanjing, which is basically the same as the technical structure of the Shanghai concession road. In 1905, Zhang Zhidong set up the Hankou Road Engineering Bureau in Wuhan, which is specially used to improve the traditional street and ally in Wuhan<sup>15</sup>.

Because of the high cost and slow effect of old city renovation, the Chinese (government) began to develop new urban areas according to the Western model. After the Sino-Japanese War, in order to self-strengthen to save the country, boycott foreign colonizers, and safeguard its sovereignty, the Qing government imitated the concession to carry out the planning and construction of self-opening trade ports.<sup>16</sup> In 1898, Zhang Jian set up Wusong Opening Port Engineering Bureau and begun to build the road and develop the land by imitating the operation mode of concession. In 1900, Zhang Zhidong opened a commercial port in Wuchang, established Market Bureau, hired a British engineer Murray to map and draw a full map of Wuchang commercial port(Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> In 1904, Jinan has opened the commercial port, the local authorities in Shandong immediately set up General Commitment of



Trade Port, which consists of Engineering Bureau, Patrol Police Bureau and Adjudication Hall. At the same time, it also elaborated *Jinan Self-opened Commercial Port Regulation*<sup>18</sup>.

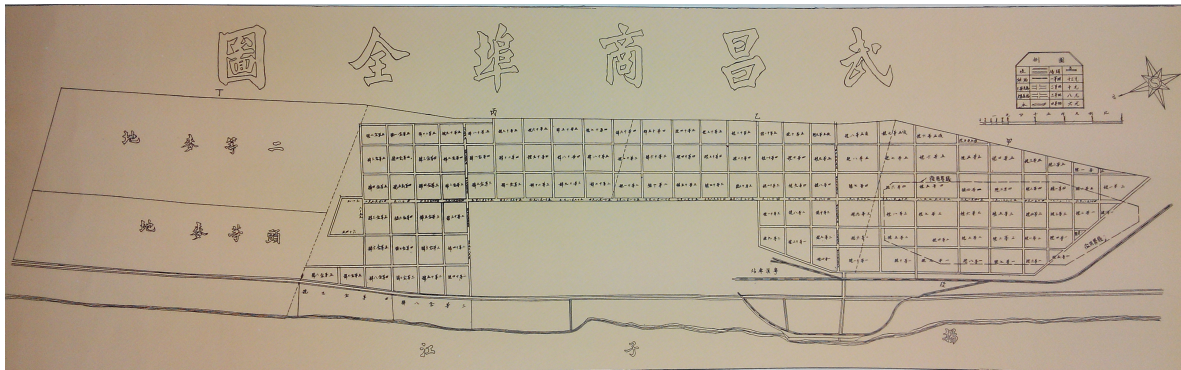


Fig.1 The New District Plan of Wuchang

It can thus be seen that the Western concession has brought about a certain demonstration effect in the construction of Chinese cities. In particular, the opening and construction of the Shanghai Concession triggered the imitation and learning of the concession by the Shanghai Chinese territory, which has led to the development of urban planning, such as road and other municipal infrastructure, and has brought modern urban civilization and urban modernity.

### Imitating Japan

The modern Chinese urban autonomy movement originated from the learning and reference of the Western urban autonomy system. During this process, Japan became the most important source of imitation, and the person who accepted or contacted with western culture and education are foreigners from the West. They introduced and spread autonomy system, while the minister of the late Qing Dynasty were those who had mastered political rights to practice.<sup>19</sup> In 1905, the five great ministers visited the United States, Europe, and Japan to inspect institutions of foreign countries and compared them with China. After returning China, they thought that some urban planning matters such as landscape, dwellings, ditch and road all belong to the task of autonomy system. They also clearly proposed to imitate Japan carrying out autonomy system and to establish modern public space gradually such as libraries, museums, zoos, and parks, etc<sup>20</sup>.

In 1903, Zhang Jian travelled to Japan and conducted a 70-day inspection of Japan. He witnessed the tremendous changes that Japan's Meiji Restoration brought to Japan, including industry, education, urban planning and construction and political systems, which triggered his idea to imitate Japan and began to implement the grand vision of overall improvement in Nantong<sup>21</sup>. In July 1906, Zhang Jian organized a surveying and mapping class at Tongzhou Normal University, inviting Japanese teacher Miyamoto to teach courses, which contained mapping surveying, flat-panel surveying, needle surveying, levelling, practice and drawing. In 1908, Nantong established the Surveying and Mapping Office to map the entire city and carried out large-scale urban construction and planning, specifically including establishing of road construction office (1912), creating modern transportation, development urban electricity and lighting, protecting the old city and constructing new city, establishing modern communication agencies, building city parks and road, planting trees, etc. With the efforts of Zhang Jian, Nantong was eventually built into a model urban in modern times<sup>22</sup>.

In 1902, Yuan Shikai drew lessons from Western and Japanese political systems to implement the New Deal and established General Administration of Engineering imitating Dutong yamen (都统衙门), and this organization was mainly responsible for the road, river, bridge, wharf, house, land, electric light, street, trees and so on. In conjunction with the New Deal, Yuan Shikai first promoted local autonomy nationwide and compiled a plan for the construction of the Hebei New District in Tianjin. In 1903, Yuan Shikai approved the *Developing the Hebei New Market Constitution* (开发河北新市场章程十三条) which was drawn up by the General Administration of Engineering, and the field that east to the railway, west to north canal, south to the Jinzhong River and north to Xinkai River was delimited as the new area (Fig. 2). The new district built a grid-like road system and arranged government offices, schools, parks, factories houses, and also built an iron bridge to connect with the old city.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to institutional imitation and learning, planning theories like Garden Cities were also spread to China through books, newspapers, and overseas returnees.<sup>24</sup> In 1919, Tang Jiyao, the governor of Yunnan Province, who graduated from Imperial Japanese Army Academy, set up Yunnan Municipal Government Office to govern the province and organize the province's municipal administration. In the spring of 1922, in order to realize the modernization of Kunming's construction intentions, Tang recalled Zhang Weihai, who was studying in Japan, to



organize Kunming's municipal administration. In the spring of 1922, in order to realize the modernization of Kunming's construction intentions, Tang recalled Zhang Weihai, who was studying in Japan, to organize Kunming's municipal administration. In July, the Legal Affairs Committee composed of Zhang Weihai and others studied the construction of municipal facilities in Guangzhou, Beijing and Wuhan, and imitated the *Provisional Regulations of Guangzhou Municipality*(*广州市暂行条例*) in 1921 to draft the *Provisional Regulations of Kunming Municipal Government Office*(*昆明市政公所暂行条例*). In August, Kunming Municipal Government Office was established. The establishment of the office provided a platform for the western garden city theory that Zhang Weihai studied through Japan to develop in Kunming, and it has become the first planning practice of the application of garden city theory in modern China.<sup>25</sup>

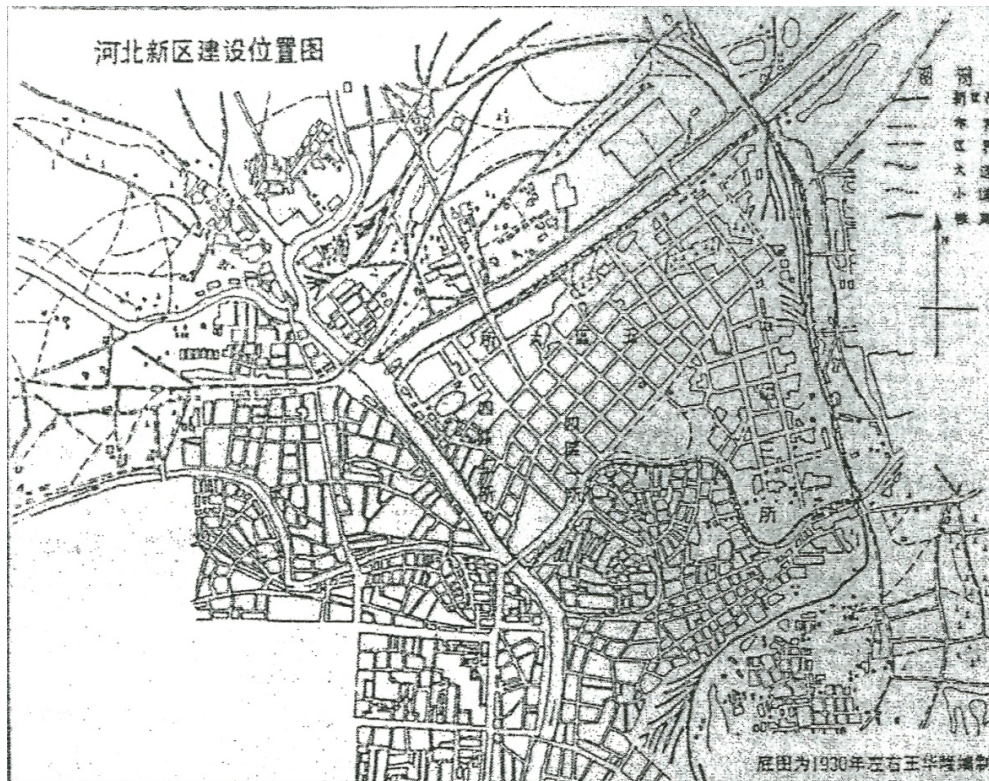


Fig. 2 Planning of Tianjin Hebei New Urban Road Network

Under the influence of the Sino-Japanese War, activists such as the rulers of the Qing dynasty and advocates of the Westernization Movement began to dispatch ministers to investigate abroad, send overseas students to Japan, employ foreign teachers from Japan and teach courses, etc., accelerating the process of modernization in China. In addition, after the 1909 *regulations of local autonomy in villages and towns*(*城镇乡地方自治章程颁布*) was promulgated, the urban construction activities had an institutionalized program, which also promoted the dissemination and practice of urban planning knowledge throughout the country, invisibly accelerated the modernization of the city and the transformation of urban space.

### Imitating Europe and America

Due to the official young children studying in the United States policy in the late Qing Dynasty and the decision of repaying the boxer indemnity of the Qing Government in the Way of developing education in the United States, a large number of students went to the United States to learn Western technology and culture. By the 1920s, the latest achievements and practical experiences of European and American urban planning and planning education have gradually been introduced into China by students studying abroad and foreign experts, bringing modern European and American urban planning theories and systems to some degree.<sup>26</sup>



After 1920, Guangzhou imitates the United States to establish a municipal system, promulgated the *Provisional Regulations of Guangzhou City* (广州市暂行条例), and became China's first modern city with an independent municipal government. In 1921, in order to improve the living environment of the Old City, the Guangzhou City Hall and the Works Bureau implemented the "municipal improvement" and guide the development of Guangzhou's early "garden city" and the eastern suburbs through the exemplary construction of new residential areas, building the eastern suburbs as a model residential area along the Baiyun Mountain. In November, 1923, the Guangzhou Municipal Administrative Committee passed the resolution *Opening up Guanyinshan Park and Residential Areas* (开辟观音山公园及住宅区办法), which become the first implementation plan of garden residential area in modern China. In 1927, Lin Yungai succeeded Sun Ke as mayor and continued to promote the planning of new residential areas, and Cheng Tiangu was appointed as the director of the Works Bureau. On March 33, 1928, the *Constitution of Building a Canton Model Residence Area* (筹建广州市模范住宅区章程) and design drawing (Figure 5) were promulgated and implemented by the *Committee of Building Canton Model Residence District* (筹建广州市模范住宅区委员会).<sup>27</sup> At the same time, in 1921, Sun Ke invited the American architect

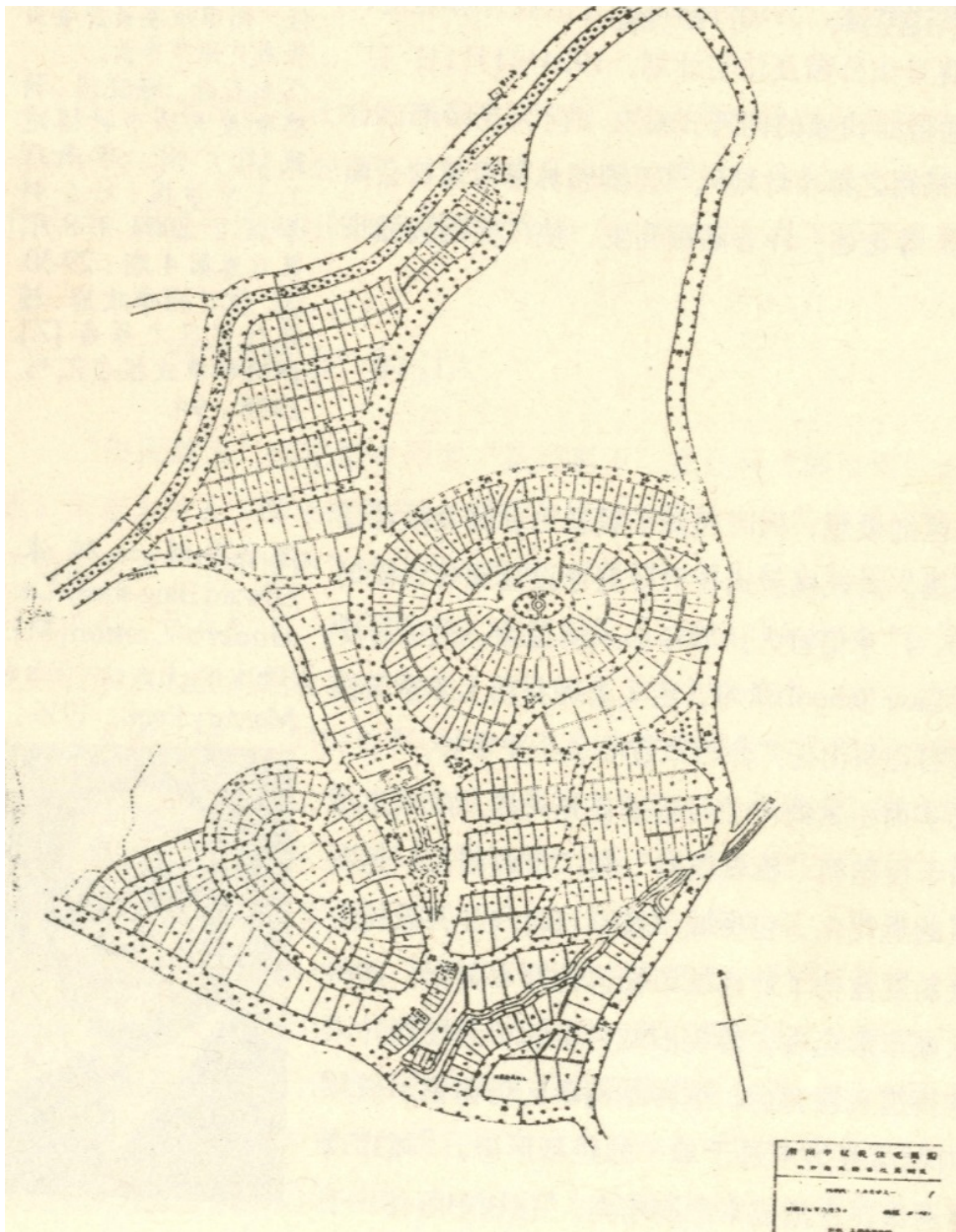


Fig. 3 Map of Guangzhou City Model Residential Area



Henry K. Murphy to design the Guangzhou municipal centre and then put forward the concept of Chinese classical renaissance<sup>28</sup>.

In April 1921, with reference to the Guangzhou municipal system, Guangdong provincial government set up the Shantou city hall. There were six bureaus contains finance, engineering, education, public welfare and public security. In accordance with the conditions of the seaport, the Bureau of engineering set up three sections for construction, banning and embankment, and the modernization of Shantou was carried out. In 1922, the Shantou City Hall drafted the *the New Plan of Swatow Municipality*(*汕头市政厅改造市区计划书*) and planning drawing(Fig. 4). The plan is free from the improvement plan that was mainly characterized by building roads and demolishing of the city wall, and more shows the scientific rationality of modern urban planning and has become the earliest planning text developed by Chinese (government). In order to improve the appearance of the old city, the plan consciously uses the Garden City as a guiding ideology; the zoning plan is guided by the functional zoning plan of Europe and the United States and linked urban zoning with urban industrial and commercial development.<sup>29</sup>

Before the establishment of the Nanjing National Government in 1927, the practice of modern urban planning in China for European and American imitation and learning was carried out by students studying in Europe and America and foreign experts. In particular, after the establishment of the Guangzhou municipal system in 1921, the city planning management and development agencies of the Ministry of Labor and Industry were truly separated after which modern urban planning theory and practice have actually started to develop universally in China.

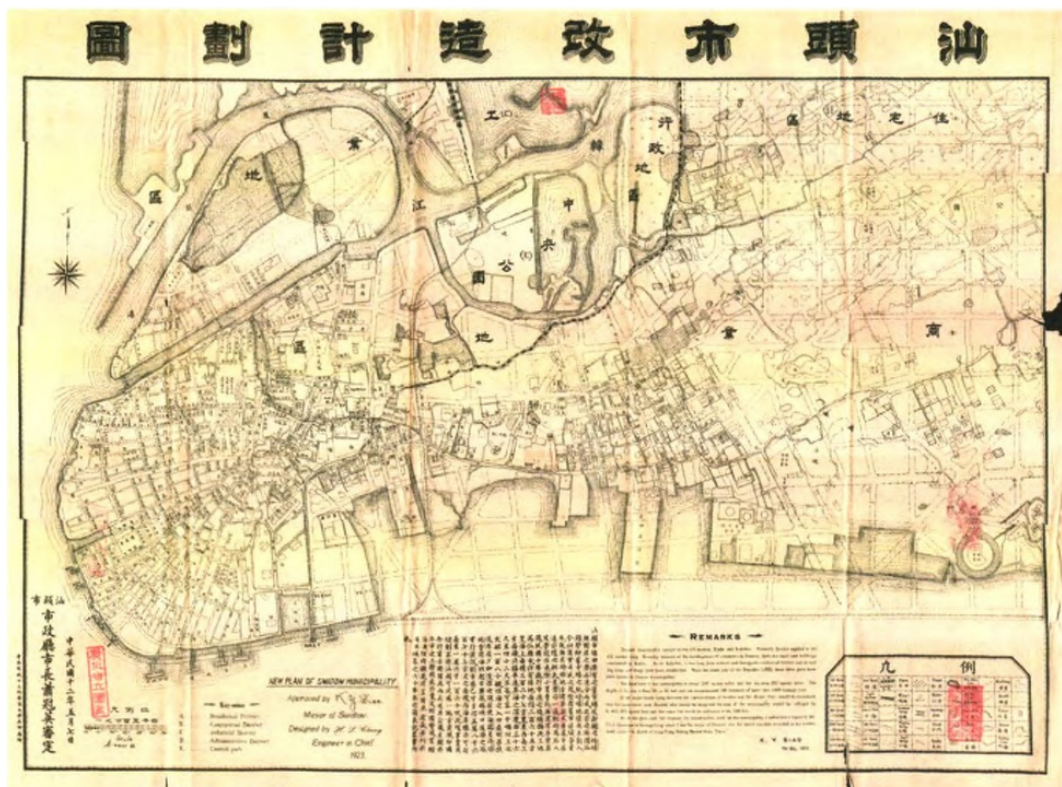


Fig. 4 New Plan of Swatow Municipality in 1923, approved by K.Y.Xiao.

## Conclusions

Based on prior analysis, it can be seen that ancient Chinese cities had transformed into a form that close to a city with modern significance in terms of the nature, the concept of construction, the management system and the spatial structure after the construction of the period between 1860-1927. The traditional Chinese cities were used as a tool for political rights, and the urban system developed along with the national governance system. What's more, the urban planning and construction in the traditional period is essentially a tool for maintaining feudal governance services.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the urban and urban planning in the traditional Chinese period was influenced by the thoughts of *Zhou Li*(周礼), *Guan Zi*(管子), *Feng Shui*(风水), etc. The characteristics of oriental traditional philosophy were reflected in the site selection, city planning and spatial layout, etc. and Formed a traditional urban



spatial structure symbolized by the city wall, Yamen Office(衙署), Chenghuang Temple(城隍庙) and Lifang(里坊).<sup>31</sup> Since modern times, etiquette ideology has been greatly weakened in traditional Chinese culture. The increase of modern urban population, the expansion of the city scale, and the change of the nature all urgently require the improvement of the urban environment, especially the traffic conditions, the demolition of the city walls, the widening of the streets, the addition of new roads and the construction of residential buildings and industrial and commercial buildings different from traditional forms, etc. have become the main contents of the modernization process of Chinese cities. It can be said that the Chinese city, through the imitation and practice of the Western planning system and technology at the stage of the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, the urban nature of China has begun to transform from a traditional city centered on politics and military to an industrial and commercial city; The city's management system is transformed from urban and rural integration to the urban independent; The urban spatial structure changes from a closed urban ritual space to an open and orderly urban modern space.

In addition, along with the Chinese people's ideological changes in treating western cultural knowledge, as well as the influence of media such as newspapers and translation books, Chinese people's cognitive process towards Western science and technology knowledge have gone through the following process of rejection, recognition acceptance, learning and imitation and exploration. Urban planning practice of this period was more as a part of municipal construction, the Chinese (government) saw urban planning (municipality construction) more as a way to achieve prosperity, strength and self-improvement during Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China, combined with the actual conditions of Chinese cities, they have continued practicing and exploring the path to modernize the city that suits China itself.

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### Disclosure Statement

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### Endnotes

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1 Wu, "The history of modern architecture in China", 60-75.

2 Wang, *Urban planning history of China*, 16-20.

3 Hsü, Immanuel and Braj, *The rise of modern China*, 22.

4 Li and Guo, *Chinese Early-modern City Planing and Culture*, 13-15.

5 Ibid.

6 Hsü, Immanuel and Braj, *The rise of modern China*, 8.

7 Hsiao, "The Philosophical Thought of K'ang Yu-Wei", 129-193.

8 The term "concession" was first derived from the "Hankow Concession Treaty". The original article reads: "After the treaty was enacted, people would not be allowed to reconstruct their houses and sheds in the concession."

9 Li and Guo, *Chinese Early- Modern City Planning and Culture*, 14.



10 "On the construction of road engineering", 1880.

11 Zhang, "A Study on the History", 16-17.

12 Xiong, *Shanghai*, 127.

13 "Again on wanting to imitate the West", 1877.

14 Lai, Wu and Xu, *The history of modern architecture*, 446-449.

15 Fang, "Zhang Zhidong", 82-86.

16 These self-opening trade ports mainly in Yuezhou, Wusong, Sanduao, Qinhuangdao, Wuchang, Jinan, Weixian, Zhoucun, Haizhou, Pukou, Chifeng, Zhangjiakou, Duolunbeier, Guihua, Longkou, Jining, Zhengzhou, etc. See, Yang, *Port opening and social change*, 58-60.

17 Liao, "An analysis of Commercial Port", 59-60.

18 Jinan Self-opened Commercial Port Regulation (济南自开商埠章程) main content covers the following points: the location and nature of the commercial port and its sovereignty, with land management to promote the development and construction of the city, the establishment of urban construction and building rules.

19 Shen, "the thought of local autonomy", 159-182.

20 Niu, *legal culture of urban planning*, 54-55.

21 Yu, "Fourth of Historical Research Series", 140-143.

22 Zhang, *Study and exploration*, 251-266.

23 Lai, Wu and Xu, *The history of modern architecture*, 506-507.

24 Lu, *development and transfiguration*, 506-507.

25 Han and Li, "Thoughts and Practices", 111-118.

26 Lai, Wu and Xu, *The history of modern architecture*, 353-355.

27 Peng and Cai, "Guangzhou Modern "Garden City"" Ideological Origins", 148-151.

28 Peng, *Modernity and Locality*, 125-126.

29 Ibid, 91-92.

30 Zheng, "Theory of knowledge and practice", 25-29.

31 Cheng, *Research Method*, 11.

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