

Architecture of Kulangsu: Social Memory of Chinese People in the Context of Modern History

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Abstract

Kulangsu's architectures are not only restricted by the Chinese traditional cultural context, but also integrated with lots of Western cultural elements, thus forming a unique culture expression. This paper starts with the concept of social memory, focus on the relationship between the social memory and the related architectures, then analyses different architectures of Kulangsu, which anchor the sampling static images located at different historical nodes. However, once the individual meets the architecture, the dialogue between the individual and the architecture can obtain the connotation and details of social memories related to more levels and dimensions in different historical nodes. The architecture in Kulangsu has multiple identities. From the perspective of social memory, it not only statically serves as a container to store information of historical nodes, but also dynamically play a role of an interactive participant of construction of social memory to achieve derivative expansion. It breaks the limitation of individual memory, so that all relevant social memories can be derived into a broader and complete memory association space, and the multi-dimensional combination of social memory can be realized. It has a great practical significance to research on the social memory of Chinese people on a cross-culture and multidimensional path.

Keywords: Kulangsu; Architecture; Social memory; Modern China;

1. Introduction

Kulangsu is a small island in the south-eastern corner of China. It covers an area of only 1.91 square kilometres and has a household registration of 12,000 people. The Kulangsu island came into being in the Neolithic Age and since then it has had a history of over 3000 years. Around the 8th century AD, people from the China Central Plains began to move to the islet for development and production. However, it was still sparsely populated for a long time until the Song and Yuan Dynasties when the islet got the name called "Yuanshazhou Islet". In the Ming Dynasty, its name was changed to "Kulangsu".

From the 15th century to the 19th century, the people who immigrated from southern Fujian formed and developed Southern Fujian culture in Kulangsu. In August 1841, the British army occupied Kulangsu. At the same time, Western civilization represented by modern science and technology, ideology and culture were able to enter China's port areas more directly as well (Li wentai, 2019). Then many

foreign companies and consulates were set up in Kulangsu. Since 1863, consulates of British, Spain, France, the United States, Germany, Japan and other countries have also been established in Kulangsu, and foreign businessmen flocked in as well.

By the 1860s, hundreds of spacious and sturdy architectures had been built on Kulangsu Islet. Public buildings like mission schools, mission hospitals, churches, religions tract societies and consulates and residential buildings including mansions and villas were established on the islet, equipped with public medical and health facilities, sports facilities, clubs and other cultural and recreational facilities. These infrastructure constructions objectively prompted the small islet of Kulangsu to become the most representative modern urban area on the southeast coast of China at that time a hundred years ago (Chen juanying & Cheng ling, 2019). At the end of the 19th century, many overseas Chinese who went abroad early to make a living returned to their ancestral home in Southern Fujian after their

successful career (Yuan xuan, 2020), and they constructed many large and luxurious bungalows (Zhang zhixiong, 2019). These overseas Chinese gradually replaced the Westerners and became the main force that changed the development process of Kulangsu. (Qian yi, 2019) In January 1903, Kulangsu was turned into an International Settlement, under the colonial rule of Western powers, the International Settlement introduced a full set of Western urban management and construction systems. In December 1931, the Japanese army captured Kulangsu. In August 1945, the history of Kulangsu being an International Settlement ended. On 17 October 1949, the Kulangsu Islet was liberated by PLA. (Zhangjie & Wuttiiphung Rodkasemsri, 2021)

Nowadays, Kulangsu is a national 5A-level scenic spot and a national-level protected cultural site. It is also included in the World Cultural Heritage List. (Wei qing, 2019)

Kulangsu is an organic whole that encompasses the historically built environment consisting of core elements of cultural heritage, cultural relics, architecture, ancient trees and natural landscape of the island, as well as the multi-culture traditions. There are lots of intangible cultural heritages on the island, such as historical buildings, natural landscapes, cultural landscapes and documents, of which modern Chinese history has the most profound impact. This is an ideal place to study the social memory of Chinese people in the context of modern history.

2. Multidimensional Research of Social Memories

Different architectures in Kulangsu store the group memory of different historical time nodes, anchoring the sampling static images located at different historical nodes. However, once the individual meets the architecture, the dialogue between the individual and the architecture can further mobilize the individual to enter the deep-level information interaction with the region and history, to obtain the connotation and details of social memories related to more levels and dimensions in different historical nodes.

In order to obtain comprehensive and correct information about social memory, researchers collected and analysed data from 6 dimensions:

2.1 Infrastructure

In the 1870s, Westerners who came to Kulangsu were influenced by the modern municipal administration after the Western Industrial Revolution. They used it as a standard to build a modern community, and they also paid great attention to the construction of public facilities such as roads.

In 1886, foreigners stationed in Kulangsu established the Kulangsu Road and Cemetery Fund Committee, which initially formed an institution with modern municipal management functions. Under the management of this committee, the road system around Kulangsu Island has been further improved. By the end of the 19th century, most of the structural system of the main roads in Kulangsu had been formed.

Under the influence of modern urban construction and municipal thinking, Westerners pay more attention to the construction of public environment. The residences are surrounded by public facilities such as churches, clubs, and stadiums, and are connected to each other by roads, thus forming a colonial residential community. At the same time, hospitals, schools, cemeteries, etc. are built in and near the community. (Qian yi, 2021)

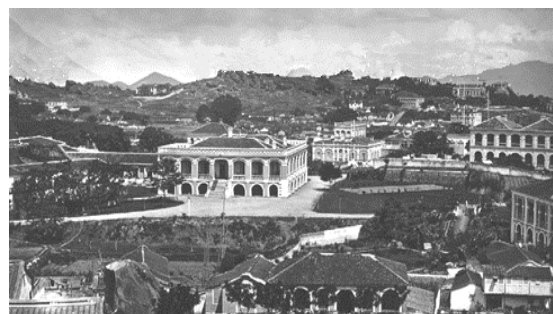


Figure 1: Preliminary formation of a modern community (1880, Kulangsu)

Source: Quoted from LaiSang & YiFang Photo Gallery, Views of Amoy and Surrounding Country series, Cornell University Library, USA

At the end of the 19th century, the road network, power grid, underground pipe network and other public facilities in Kulangsu were quite mature, almost exactly the same as today, which shows that Kulangsu was already a mature and modernized community more than 100 years ago. From the perspective of the

construction of municipal supporting facilities, the telegraph company, the telephone company and the water company were all at the advanced level in the world at that time. Compared with the traditional society in mainland China, Kulangsu is far ahead. (Chen Juanying & Zheng yajuan., 2020)



Figure 2: Great Northern Telegraph Company (1871, Kulangsu)

Source: The International Community of Kulangsu under the Governance Model of the Ministry of Industry and Bureau (Chen Juanying & Zheng yajuan., 2020)



Figure 3: Amoy telephony company (1908, Kulangsu)

Source: The International Community of Kulangsu under the Governance Model of the Ministry of Industry and Bureau (Chen Juanying & Zheng yajuan., 2020)



Figure 4: Commercial Amoy Water Supply Co., Ltd. (1921, Kulangsu)

Source: The International Community of Kulangsu under the Governance Model of the Ministry of Industry and Bureau (Chen Juanying & Zheng yajuan., 2020)

However, the local people maintain the traditional half-fishing and half-farming lifestyle, and occasionally conduct maritime trade. The buildings they live in are basically the traditional courtyard houses named "red brick house" in southern Fujian. These buildings are closely related to the traditional Chinese family ethics system.

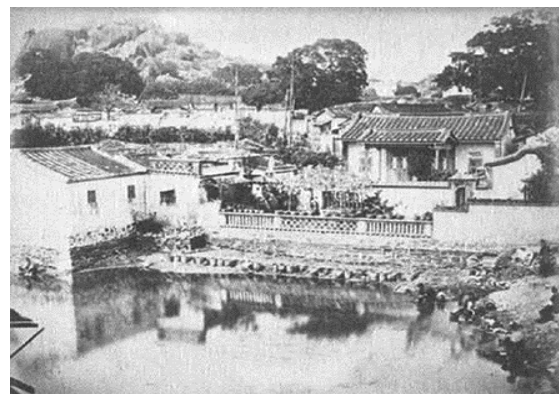


Figure 5: Situation of local people in the same period

Source: Centennial image of Kulangsu Island (Zhou wen, 2017)

The characteristics of the two different communities are summarized and analysed as follows:

Community of Westerners:

The community is scattered on relatively open land, with low building density, and is distributed in points on mesas and slopes, and even on ridges.

It has a wide field of vision, good ventilation, dryness and hygiene, and is convenient for viewing, which is in line with Westerners' concept of location selection for living space.

In addition, from the aspect of landscape, it focuses on the intervention of the overall environment of Kulangsu and the construction of landscape greening within the scope of Westerner's community. Most importantly, the community pays attention to the supporting construction of modern municipal facilities.

Community of local people:

Local Communities: Local communities are indigenous settlements where people live together.

The living area is low-lying and humid, usually under the hillside. The houses are relatively dilapidated and concentrated, surrounded by fields.

Local people and local officials generally lack public awareness in modern civilization, which is also a common phenomenon in China, which has not yet entered the process of modernization.



Figure 6: Community of Westerners & Community of local people (late Qing Dynasty, Kulangsu)

Source: Centennial image of Kulangsu Island (Zhou wen, 2017)

Although Westerners and local people who settled in Kulangsu maintained relatively clear and definite geographical and cultural boundaries, they coexisted for a long time, had many opportunities to contact and communicated frequently. Therefore, there has been a lot of blending in the concept of human settlement between these two culturally different ethnic groups.

At the end of the 19th century, a small number of local people who gradually identified with Westerners' living patterns began to try to imitate Westerners' living culture and living patterns. The returned overseas immigrant groups with modern life experience led the Chinese group to participate in the construction of modern houses and even communities in Kulangsu.

As a result, the boundaries between the local community and the Western community are blurring and merging.



Figure 7: A combination of Chinese and Western architecture (Kulangsu)

Source: Internet / photographed by the author

2.2 Healthcare

In order to integrate into the local society and protect their own health, Westerners have carried out many medical and health activities, mainly including:

2.2.1. Formulate medical and health regulations, manage urban public health and implement relevant health regulations;

2.2.2. Create Western-style hospitals;

2.2.3. Establish medical schools, carry out medical education and train medical talents, publicize medical and health knowledge such as disease prevention;

2.2.4. Medical missionaries conduct disease treatment and medical research. (Wang rigen, 2012)



Figure 8: Hope Hospital (1898, Kulangsu)

Source: Internet

At the end of the 19th century, the first formal western-style hospital named Hope Hospital was built in Kulangsu.

After that, Benevolence Hospital, Private Kulangsu Hospital, Baptist Hospital, Shenzhou

Hospital and other western-style hospitals were established one after another.



Figure 9: Private Kulangsu Hospital (1925, Kulangsu)

Source: Photographed by the author



Figure 10: Benevolence Hospital (1917, Kulangsu)

Source: Internet

According to the records of Western missionaries, the local streets of Kulangsu were narrow, the environment of local communities was dirty. In general the sanitary conditions were worrying.

The living environment of most poor Chinese people is in a dirty, chaotic and poor state, and the awareness of personal and family healthcare is weak, resulting in frequent outbreaks of infectious diseases, and due to the poor medical conditions, people often turn to Fengshui or worship the gods.

2.3 Sports

Kulangsu is the first place where football was introduced in China, and the earliest football team in Chinese history was founded here as well.

At the end of the 19th century, shortly after the establishment of Yinghua college, Yinghua football team was established, which has the similar style with the British football team. The team has maintained long-term unbeaten results against football teams in Taiwan and Southeast Asia.



Figure 11: Yinghua football team (1930)

Source: Internet

2.4 Education

In the field of education, Kulangsu has created several domestic firsts, such as the first kindergarten, the first physical education school, one of the first nursing schools, and so on.



Figure 12: Huaide kindergarten, the earliest kindergarten in China, was founded in 1898

Source: Internet

The foreigner stadium was originally a military playground opened by the British army. It was once a sports venue with complete projects and functions in the southeast China. The stadium is still available today.

After the introduction of modern physical education from foreigners to Kulangsu, through the promotion of church schools on the island, it opened the precedent of basic physical education in China.



Figure 13: The Foreigner Stadium (1880, Kulangsu)

Source: Quoted from LaiSang & YiFang Photo Gallery, Views of Amoy and Surrounding Country series, Cornell University Library, USA

At the end of the 19th century, the first formal western-style hospital named Hope Hospital was built in Kulangsu, subsequently, on this basis, the nursing school of Hope Hospital was established, which is one of the earliest nursing schools in China (1926).



Figure 14: The nursing school of Hope Hospital

Source: Internet

2.5 Arts

Kulangsu has been deeply influenced by Western arts, such as Western music, photography, architectural art, etc. Among them, Western music and architectural art are the most representative, summarized as follows:



Figure 15: architectures of Catholicism, Buddhism and Taoism

Source: Kulangsu, Harmonious Coexistence of Various Religions (Chen juanying & Zheng yajuan, 2019)

Western Music

Since the middle of the 19th century, western music has been introduced into Kulangsu. There are more than 100 musical families on the island. The per capita piano ownership rate of Kulangsu ranks first in the country, and Kulangsu is known as "Piano Island". There are many family architectures of musical families and piano-related museums in Kulangsu. These architectures have participated in the construction of Chinese people's social memory of the continuous spread and development of western music in Kulangsu since the 19th century.

Architectural Art:

Kulangsu, known as the "World Architecture Museum", is the most densely populated island of villas and foreign buildings in China. There are more than 1000 villas on the island with an area of less than 2 square kilometres. These architectures have participated in the construction of Chinese people's social memory of the continuous blending and evolution of Chinese and Western architectural art in Kulangsu since the 19th century.

2.6 Religion

Christianity and Catholicism brought by missionaries, Buddhism and Taoism popular among local people, as well as a group of folk beliefs in Southern Fujian, such as Mazu, Lord Baosheng, God of earth, and Guanyu, coexist harmoniously and blend with each other.

3.Summary

The architecture in Kulangsu has multiple identities. From the perspective of social memory, it not only statically serves as a

container to store information of historical nodes, but also dynamically play a role of an interactive participant of construction of social memory to achieve derivative expansion. It breaks the limitation of individual memory, so that all relevant social memories can be derived into a broader and complete memory association space, and the multi-dimensional combination of social memory can be realized.

At the same time, the researchers also found that social memory is still in the process of development at present. The interviews and questionnaires show that lots of tourists' cognition of architectures of Kulangsu stays in the perception related to literature, art and tourism. The reason for this result is that many shops and hotels with the style of literature and art have been established and transformed in the process of tradition reinvention, the architectures of Kulangsu begin to have a modern style of foreign romance, while the heavy sense of historical and cultural memory has gradually disappeared or weakened. Therefore, the architectures of Kulangsu are not only the interactive participant of construction of social memory in modern history, but also the participant of construction of social memory with fashion and European-style-life as one of dimensions nowadays.

This paper only analyses the social memories of people based on Kulangsu architectures from the 6 dimensions of infrastructure, healthcare, sports, education, arts and religion. Although this research can construct the social memory space of people on the time node of modern China to a certain extent, however, it is not comprehensive and complete enough. In the next step of the research work, the author will continue to focus on the research subject and find new research dimensions of social memories of people based on Kulangsu architectures to constantly enrich and improve the social memories association space through literature review and field work, finally get a better research conclusion.

4. Research Objectives

4.1 To study the social structure and social development of Kulangsu on the basis of related architectures;

4.2 To study the development process of social memory in modern China.

4.3 To research the social memories of Chinese people in the context of modern history on a cross-culture and multidimensional path.

5. Suggestions

In order to achieve the goal of constructing a complete space for social memories in the context of modern China, how to organically integrate the multi-dimensional identity of Kulangsu architecture is the key point. Specifically, it needs to break the limitations of individual architecture, break the limitations of each social memory dimension and break the limitations of static image located at different historical node, then build an associative space dynamically and interactively. Only in this way can researchers accurately and comprehensively construct a social memory system with historical and research significance.

Based on the social memory association space constructed in this study, combined with the new social memory association space gradually formed in contemporary times, the researchers can use dynamic and interactive analysis methods to study the relation and context between them. Based on this study, combined with the local development planning intention of Kulangsu, the researcher can give appropriate and effective governance suggestions to the local government according to the development law. This is also a useful practical significance of this study.

6. Research Methodology

This article adopts the method of qualitative research, consults lots of historical documents and materials, and grasps the important content such as the background, history and culture of Kulangsu's architectures.

The researcher has mastered the information of architectures of Kulangsu in the context of modern history through field work, conducted in-depth research with specific people groups such as artists, tourists, government staff and residents in the form of interview or questionnaire, and used photography and recording equipment to save relevant data.

The last step is that the researchers sort out and analyse the data, apply the research theory for qualitative analysis and draw a conclusion.

7. Benefits of Research

At present, there are relatively few materials of research on Kulangsu's architectures and related social memories. Kulangsu's architectures are not only restricted by the Chinese traditional cultural context, but also integrated with lots of Western cultural elements, thus forming a unique expression. So, this research should be regarded as a cross-disciplinary and comprehensive one. Compared with researches in a single field, it has more important academic value. It has a great practical significance to research on the social memory of Chinese people in the context of modern history on a cross-culture and multidimensional path.

From the perspective of beneficial feedback to society, this research is able to give appropriate and effective governance suggestions to the local government according to the development law. This is also a useful practical significance to serve the local people and produce social benefits.

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