Historic conservation in rapid urbanization: a case study of the Hankow historic concession area

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ABSTRACT
In rapidly changing Chinese cities, the conflict between conservation and redevelopment appears acute and complex. This paper uses the Hankow historic concession area as case study to examine the evolution in ideology, mechanisms, policy and planning of historic conservation in Wuhan. The findings are based on multiple field visits, semi-structured interviews and a literature review. It explores the roles of various participants who brought these changes, such as local and central governments, state-owned and private enterprises and the public, to provide experiences and lessons for the sustainable development of heritage sites in the future. It argues that historic conservation in China bears significant top-down characteristics. Implementation of laws and regulations regarding historic conservation at the national level, especially the conservation system of historic cities, has played a key role. In this context, local laws, regulations and management systems have been gradually established by local governments who seek the rapid development of the metropolitan areas. However, such a top-down approach has hitherto failed to fully consider the will of local people, and has led to difficulties in implementing historic conservation plans. Meanwhile, excessive government intervention has suppressed the market’s role, thus preventing the full potential of historic conservation and revitalization of historic urban areas.

Introduction
Conflict between historic conservation and redevelopment is a common problem in developing countries (Steinberg 1996). According to Bromley and Jones (1995), as cities weigh up the demands of growing populations and industries on limited land resources with the need to reclaim the heritage inscribed in the urban fabric, the countervailing pressures of redevelopment and conservation are being played out in different cultural and economic contexts. This conflict is even more evident and complex in rapidly changing China. In the Chinese political system, economic growth is the most significant prerequisite for political promotion (Chien 2010). Urban redevelopment was often regarded as an effective way of cultivating GDP, promoting modernization and improving urban competitiveness (Su 2011), while undeveloped historic environments were deemed as signs of backwardness and
decadence (Zuo 2004). After the 1980s, China's urbanization began to pick up speed (Miller 2012). Large-scale urban redevelopment became a common practice in many historic cities. Urban expansion and redevelopment have accelerated exponentially since the 1990s Chinese real estate boom (Wu 2002; He and Wu 2005; Shin 2009). Thus, many traditional areas have been replaced by monotonous, impersonal-scale modern urban spaces (Shin 2010). This has, in turn, invoked criticism from conservationists, and thus promoted the issuing of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics by the central government in 1982 (Sun 1998). Subsequently, a conservation system comprising three tiers was implemented for the protection of historic cities. It comprised officially protected monuments and sites, historic conservation areas, and historic cities. It was established in response to threats of further destruction from rapid urbanization (Wang 2004). Guided by state-level laws, regulations and policy, local governments have gradually included historic conservation into its agenda (Qiu 2014). However, in the past 30 years, the need for urban development has been widely adopted and used by local governments as a justification for policy making concerning the conservation of historic sites (Friedmann 2007). Urban historic areas have faced the pressure and impact of local economic development. Since 1982, 125 cities in China have been listed as state-level historic cities (Zhang 2014). However, this would appear to be a meaningless title for many of these cities because their original urban forms have been almost completely obliterated. Only part of the original historic urban areas have survived, while many have experienced the encroachment or, in extreme situations, being subsumed by modern development (Zhang 2012). In recent years, the resulting tension between conservation and redevelopment has taken a new turn, moving away from bulldozing historic urban areas as a means to redevelop them into modern tourist or commercial developments and instead using its heritage as the selling point (Wang and Bramwell 2012). These changes indicate that as the voice for historic conservation is getting stronger, the demolition-redevelopment mode will experience increasing difficulty to find its place in a historic environment (Yung and Chan 2011). Meanwhile, the economic value of heritage sites is becoming increasingly recognized (Fan 2013), as in many cities worldwide, urban conservation has become a strategy of place-making and economic development (Tiesdell, Heath, and Oc 1996; Yuen and Hock 2001; Henderson 2008; Wang and Bramwell 2012).

Local historic conservation systems in China are gradually being established in response to the changing economic and social contexts. Strong top-down characteristics have shaped the development and implementation of this system. Local governments often exclude the participation of community citizens, believing that it may hamper the efficiency of development (Fan 2013). Furthermore, the government is unwilling to delegate power, and the public lack appropriate channels to voice their opinions (Bray 2006; Ding 2008). However, public participation is believed to be valuable to historic conservation (Chirikure et al. 2010) since it can help resolve conflicts (Sirisrisak 2009), and explicate the meaning of heritage in an area where the values of communities and experts are usually different (Pignataro and Rizzo 1997; Kerr 2000).

Most research regarding China’s historic conservation focuses on the impact on historic urban areas of a specific policy, urban governance, public participation, authenticity and cultural policy etc. However, few attempt a dynamic perspective to identify the changes to historic conservation policies in the context of rapid urbanization, the establishment and improvement of conservation mechanisms, laws and regulation, nor the role of different participants in the process. Thus, to date, the experiences and lessons from this process have not been clarified. This paper intends to contribute to the above-mentioned aspects. Wuhan, the biggest city in central China, was chosen as the case study. Although its political and
economic influence cannot match first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, Wuhan still stands as a representative example among second and third-tier cities in terms of the conflict between historic conservation and redevelopment.

The specific case study area is Hankow historic concession area (HHCA). After the Second Opium War, Western countries established concession areas in Hankow, in which they enjoyed administrative autonomy and extra-territoriality. Therefore, the evolution of its urban spatial form reflects the impact of Western culture, but also bears the hallmarks of traditional and indigenous culture. At present, the historic area has become an integral part of Wuhan's inclusive culture. However, 30 years of rapid urban development has presented both internal and external pressures on this area. While residents are eager to see an improvement to the outdated infrastructure and decrepit buildings that beset their living environment, local governments and developers (due to the scarcity of urban land resources) attempt to maximize the land value of the historic concession area, which is in the central area of the city. Under these pressures, the HHCA sees interventions from various parties, including governments, enterprises (state-owned and private), planners and residents.

Based on their participation in related seminars, discussions and events, including official cooperation on the planning and design of the HHCA, the authors acquired many first-hand planning documents and decision-making information regarding important issues. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four local government officers related to historic conservation, five planners involved in the planning of urban conservation, 12 local residents and 10 entrepreneurs (from real estate, restaurants and retail businesses) who transact business in HHCA. A literature review was employed to analyze and review the relevant policy documents, planning reports and official publications.

After briefly describing the history of the HHCA and its rise, development and decline, the paper outlines state laws, regulations, the background to policies and reviews the mechanism of historic conservation in Wuhan. On this basis, the paper examines the origin and development of historic conservation in the HHCA from the three hierarchies, namely, officially protected monuments and sites, fine historic buildings and historic areas. Furthermore, the paper identifies the role of government, enterprise and the public in the revitalization of the HHCA, and offers a conclusion.

The rise and decline of the Hankow historic concession area

As the traditional commercial centre of Wuhan, Hankow, along with Wuchang and Hanyang, are known as the three towns of Wuhan. Hankow, sitting beside the Yangtze River and Han River, the two golden waterways, with its ample hinterland was the fastest growing but late bloomer of the three towns, and attracted merchants from all around the country. Until the end of the Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty (middle and late seventeenth century), Hankow was ranked as the top of the four famous towns (Hankow, Zhuxian, Foushan and Jingde) of China with its great prosperity (Wang and Li 2000).

Using the treaties signed with the Qing Dynasty after the second Opium War, Western powers opened Hankow as a commercial port. After 1861, Britain, Russia, France, Germany and Japan established concessions in Hankow, and formed a narrow urban area in the previously open wilderness area along the Yangtze River bank (Figure 1). The area had riverside ports and commercial streets with the hustle and bustle of busy crowds on the outside (He and Dong 2004). Public buildings such as embassies, banks, foreign firms, churches, hospitals, schools and restaurants, mingled with residences such as mansions, villas and apartment
buildings with a relatively quiet ambience on the inside (Pi 1993). Although such an urban layout resembled the modern idea of zoning, it essentially followed the classic style of the European traditional cities. For example, tall buildings were placed at the end of major streets as a focal point, and the continuity of building facades along the streets was stressed. After that, Western buildings began to be built in Wuhan in large numbers, along with an unprecedented frenzy of urban development. Thereafter, the overall urban layout of the modern HHCA was formulated (Li and Zeng 2006; Zhang et al. 2012). With the emergence of the Westernization Movement in the late Qing Dynasty (at the end of the nineteenth century),

Figure 1. Location of the concession area in relation to the three towns of Wuhan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
modern factories and schools were founded in architectural styles that were either purely Western or a Chinese-Western mixed style (Li 1988).

Political tumult after the 1911 Revolution rendered the concession area a haven of choice for government officials and wealthy people. They built mansions, villas, high-end residences and apartments as well as Lifen4 neighbourhoods in the area. The Japanese occupation of Wuhan in 1938 halted the development of the concession area, and certain blocks were damaged. At the end of World War II the concession area was reclaimed by the Chinese government, with the original urban functions remaining unchanged. From the CPC’s rise to power in 1949 until the late 1970s, the Wuhan municipal government adopted a policy of full utilization and gradual transformation towards the historical area (Xiong 2007). Due to growing demand for office and residential spaces, coupled with the lack of funding, the government had to accommodate more residents in the area. This resulted in increasing population density, and the rebuilding of certain mansions and residences into office buildings. Some of the commercial or warehouse buildings were rebuilt as dormitories, and some old banks and foreign company buildings became offices of government institutions. During this period, although the overall urban layout, architectural style and the surrounding urban environment remained largely unchanged, low-quality constructions, such as some dormitories for employees of government institutions and enterprises, found their way in between old buildings, using whatever meager spaces they could find. This resulted in the deterioration of the urban environment.

Since China’s reform and opening up, urban development in Wuhan city has both accelerated and expanded. New buildings have been built around the city as the physical embodiment of the government’s and citizens’ dream to build the modern city. However, new development has also made its way into the historic urban areas. In 1985, local government in Jiang’an district, where the concession area was located, launched a redevelopment project of several Lifen units in the historic concession area, in which four traditional Lifen units were demolished to build a high density commercial-residential complex (Chen, Dong, and Li 2006). In the 1990s, the practice of building high-rise, high density residential complexes had become more common. From 1990 to 1991, Wuhan’s city government initiated a redevelopment programme that would expand the redevelopment of decrepit and endangered housing to residential quarters, blocks, clusters, streets and parcels (Wu, Hu, and Jiang 2009). The programme had a huge impact on the concession area and its historical surroundings. For example, the original police station in the French concession was demolished, and the first high-rise building was built. Various towers have followed suit, and this has greatly damaged the original historical context.

With rapid economic growth and rising standards in urban development, the HHCA faces not only external threats of demolition, but also internal problems during its self-adaptation, such as declining urban vitality in local communities (due to outflows of population and business attracted by the surrounding new development); deterioration of building and infrastructure due to the lack of maintenance over the years; the encroachment of public spaces by illegal building, and parking. Overall, the quality of the living environment in HHCA is less than desirable.

**Conservation of the Hankow historic concession area**

**The establishment of a national historic conservation system**

The early 1980s saw the beginning of China’s rapid urbanization (Wu 2002) and the normalization of historic conservation. At the time, frequent instances of damage to immovable
heritage sites during urban redevelopment caused concern to scholars and conservation authorities (Yeoh and Huang 1996). Their efforts promoted the issuing of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics in 1982 by the state government which represents a law-ensure status of relics conservation in China (Whitehand and Gu 2007; Lv 2008). In accordance with the law, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage identifies and ratifies those with important historic, artistic and scientific values from a pool of provincial, municipal and county level historic relics. They are then designated as officially protected monuments and sites for conservation. The law also stipulates that, in urban planning practices, municipalities should include the conservation of officially protected monuments and sites at various levels inside their administrative areas. Those cities with abundant resources or relics of important historic significance can be appraised as ‘historic cities’ by the state cultural authority, along with the urban and rural development authority and environmental protection authority (SCONPC 1982). Thereafter, in light of changing social conditions, new scenarios and new issues in the conservation of relics prompted the state to revise the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, and added a new component, namely, historic conservation areas (SCONPC 2002). Until then, a three-tier conservation system, comprising historic buildings, areas and cities was formulated.

Establishment of the historic conservation regime in Wuhan

Guided by state laws and regulations concerning the protection of relics, the conservation of HHCA has been gradually put on a strong legal footing, and has become an important component of local economic and social development policies. In 1984, the Wuhan municipal government made its first version of the comprehensive plan for the conservation of a historic city. In 1986, Wuhan was promulgated as one of the second batch of state-level historic cities by the State Council. Subsequently, the comprehensive plan went through two revisions, with the addition of specific plans and area level conservation plans (Liu and Luo 2013). A conservation system was established with relatively complete categorization, levels, tiers and competent authorities. This involved three departments under the Wuhan municipal government, namely the Bureau of Cultural Heritage, the Bureau of Housing Management and the Bureau of Urban Planning. At the architectural level, the conservation objects comprised two categories: officially protected monuments and sites and fine historic buildings.5 The former refers to all immovable relics with important values as identified by the state relics law. This represents the highest level of protection, and comes under the Bureau of Cultural Heritage’s jurisdiction. The latter includes all historic buildings which are not in the list of officially protected monuments and sites but are identified by the relics conservation law of Wuhan city. This category is administered by the Bureau of Housing Management. Making and administrating the plans at the municipal level concerning historic conservation are the responsibility of the Bureau of Urban Planning. The plans comprise three categories: (1) the conservation of an historic city, stressing the establishment of a city-level hierarchy and framework for historic conservation and the subjects of conservation; (2) the conservation of historic townscape districts (the main area of HHCA is included into this category), aimed at the conservation of areas in Wuhan with a large number of concentrated historic buildings, and whose architectural style, spatial layout and streetscape can almost completely reflect the regional cultural characteristics of Wuhan at a certain historic period; and (3) the conservation of an historic urban area, which is smaller in scale compared to the
second category, but with relatively rich heritage sites which can completely and authentically reflect the regional characteristics of Wuhan (Table 1).

Over the years, the Wuhan municipal government has also endeavoured to provide a legal basis for historic conservation through local laws and regulations such as the Methods of Relics Conservation of Wuhan in 1994, later revised as Stipulation on Relics Conservation of Wuhan in 2008, then the Stipulation on the Protection of Historic Townscape District and Fine Historic Buildings measures of 2012. Through these measures, government responsibilities, financial support and punishment for violation are clearly identified.

### Conservation of officially protected monuments and sites

The statutory conservation of HHCA began with the protection of important historic buildings in the area. In accordance with the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, officially protected monuments and sites are categorized as state, provincial and city (or county) levels according to their values with corresponding conservation measures. They are promulgated by the State Council, provincial and city (or county) governments. Since 1982, a total of 44 officially-protected monuments and sites at various levels have been ratified in the HHCA, out of which eight are state-level officially protected monuments and sites, 18 provincial-level and 18 city-level (Whswxgj.gov.cn 2016). In line with the provincial and municipal stipulation on the implementation of relics conservation laws and regulations (WPC 1994; HPG 2005), the conservation boundary and development control zones are identified along with setting of signage and maintenance of scientific records. Their design, repair and rebuilding require the approval of historic conservation authorities at corresponding levels, in addition to the urban planning authority.

Compared to the departments responsible for economic development, the Bureau of Cultural Heritage is a relatively weak institution. It has smaller human and financial resources that are not capable of making conservation plans to cover all officially protected monuments and sites. As early as in 1997, the State Council issued a Notice on Strengthening and Improving Relics Conservation, which demanded that the conservation of relics should be incorporated into several plans, including a local socio-economic development plan, together with an urban and rural development plan. The discussions and findings would then form part of the resulting fiscal budgets and system reforms, with officials at various

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Bureau of cultural heritage</th>
<th>Bureau of housing management</th>
<th>Bureau of urban planning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>Officially protected monuments and sites</td>
<td>Fine historic buildings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties</td>
<td>• Setting of boundary for conservation</td>
<td>• The evaluation of fine historic buildings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Signage and label for preservation</td>
<td>• Setting of technical standards and management codes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Documentation of conservation by designated office or personnel</td>
<td>• Reviewing of the repairing, refurbishing and construction plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Instructing the daily maintenance and management of historic buildings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Historic city</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Historic townscape districts</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Historic urban areas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Making and implementing the conservation plan of historic city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning and management of historic and cultural townscape and fine historic buildings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning and management of historic urban areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 1.** Authorities for historic conservation and their duties in Wuhan.
levels given different responsibilities for the implementation of these plans and recommendations (known as the five incorporations). However, the notice was not actually implemented by the district governments. Although the municipal government basically implemented the five incorporations, only 2 million Yuan per year can be used for historic conservation in the entire city due to the large spending budgets on urban infrastructure and new development projects. Therefore, with the exception of national level historic monuments and sites, most others in the HHCA were not efficiently protected or repaired.

**Conservation of fine historic buildings**

The selection criteria of these officially protected monuments and sites are very rigorous. They focus on buildings of significant historic, artistic and scientific values which are usually related to major historic events and figures. For example, from the eight state-level historic monuments and sites in the HHCA, seven are related to historical events concerning the Communist Party of China. The result is the exclusion of statutory conservation for many valuable historic buildings, together with the simplification of conservation methodology and management. To practise the new state guidelines of the historic conservation law, the Wuhan municipal government issued and implemented the *Stipulation on the Conservation of Old Town Districts and Fine Historic Buildings* in 2003 in response to these challenges, thus expanding the scope of architectural conservation. Thereafter, buildings that have been built for over 30 years and have historic and cultural importance can be identified as fine historic buildings. Moreover, the general conservation principle, a competent administrative authority, and the responsibilities of owners and users are now clearly defined (WPC 2003). Through the survey of the municipal housing and property management authority, the review of heritage sites and urban planning authorities and the approval of municipal government, 76 historic buildings are identified in the HHCA, of which 29 are level one and 47 are level two fine historic buildings (Whfg.gov.cn 2016).

The improvement of the statutory system of historic conservation in Wuhan saw the Wuhan Bureau of Housing Management strengthening its monitoring and administration on fine historic buildings, and signing maintenance responsibility contracts with owners of fine historic buildings. The inspection and repair monitoring mechanism has been established since 2003. In 2014, the Wuhan Bureau of Housing Management made conservation drawings for 20 priority buildings out of the 209 listed historic buildings in the city; 13 are inside the HHCA. These conservation drawings are technical guidelines for the conservation, repair and use of historic buildings. The public can make enquiries for detailed information on buildings through internet resources that permit them to monitor the misconduct of owners. This helps to ensure better law enforcement. The municipal government plans to complete the conservation drawings for the remaining historic buildings in the coming five years.

In 2011, industrial heritage sites were also included into the conservation efforts of Wuhan municipality. The municipal government made the *Conservation Plan of Industrial Heritage Sites*. Furthermore, in February 2013, for the first time the Wuhan government publicized a list of 27 industrial sites for conservation, 10 of which are in the HHCA.

The past 10 years have seen a constant rise in the number of officially protected historic buildings in Wuhan. There are now 139 (according to statistics from the website of the Wuhan Cultural Bureau), 40% of which are located in the HHCA. However, for most of these buildings,
conservation only means keeping them away from demolition. Most heritage sites confront the problems of illegal buildings, lack of government supervision and insufficient funding. These problems are especially obvious with residential buildings. In the random surveys of four fine historic houses (Table 2), three face problems caused by the poor quality of the building, bad sanitation and safety issues. The only exception is the Luojiashan building group. The community boasts tidy and clean streets, with no illegal construction. The survey also shows that the former three are inhabited mainly by migrant workers and vendors, while in the Luojiashan community, 98% of the 200 households are original residents who love the local environment. With an increasing awareness of historic conservation, the protection of old houses has become a common understanding between residents. What happens in the Luojiashan community gives us similar insights to those of other successful examples. First, it is only by involving the participation of residents that historic conservation can be fully implemented (Chirikure et al. 2010; Waterton and Smith 2010). Second, original residents have a stronger sense of belonging to their communities, and may actively participate in historic conservation when they fully understand the value of historic buildings. Therefore, historic conservation and revitalization of communities should aim to maintain the way of living by the original residents.

### Conservation of the historic townscapes district and historic areas

The planning for historic city and urban areas over time in Wuhan was carried out by the Wuhan Planning & Design Institute (WPDI), a sub-institution of the Wuhan Planning Bureau. The WPDI is the largest planning and design and consultancy firm in Wuhan. They made three versions of the Historic City Conservation Plan and a series of specialized plans. In the first version of the *Historic City Conservation Plan of Wuhan City* (1984–1990), the conservation of heritage sites expanded from individual buildings to urban areas with original historical features (Hu, Xie, and Liu 2008). In the plan, some heritage sites in the HHCA are listed as subjects of conservation. The planned period was also a special time for the municipal government to redevelop historic urban areas. At the time, making anew the urban appearance was not only the way for government to gain achievement but also a public expectation. The HHCA also suffered encroachment from certain property development projects due to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fine historic buildings</th>
<th>Bagong House</th>
<th>Shanghai Village</th>
<th>Dongting Village</th>
<th>Loujiashan Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construction time</strong></td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1910–1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection level</strong></td>
<td>level one</td>
<td>level two</td>
<td>level two</td>
<td>level two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of storeys</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of units</strong></td>
<td>220</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Types of residents</strong></td>
<td>35% are natives, the others are immigrants who are workers and traders</td>
<td>50% are natives, the others are immigrants who are workers</td>
<td>66% are natives, the others are immigrants who are workers</td>
<td>98% are natives, the others are immigrants, who are workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living conditions</strong></td>
<td>Sewage is everywhere, noisy, many unauthorized constructions</td>
<td>Wires are everywhere, sundries occupy public space, many unauthorized constructions</td>
<td>Sundries occupy public space, some unauthorized constructions</td>
<td>clean and tidy, no unauthorized constructions, fine facades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
its location in the traditional commercial centre and close proximity to the Yangtze River, ultimately rendering the conservation plan largely futile. In 1996, in the revised plan, based on a consideration of the reality of urban development, the composition of historical relics and their distribution, hierarchies of conservation were identified, and historic urban areas were regarded as important aspects in the historic city conservation plan (Hu, Xie, and Liu 2008). Four historic townscape districts were identified, including one in HHCA. Since the will for new development in the area was still strong, the conservation scope for historic townscape district in HHCA was narrowed down to a 2.46 km² area, not including the former German and Japanese concessions, out of which three areas were selected as key historic conservation areas with clearly defined boundaries. This was done to avoid hindrance to a certain degree of redevelopment in some traditional areas. The limited coverage of the conservation area resulted in the fact that areas outside the key historic conservation areas were virtually under no regulation, and were often subject to destructive redevelopment. On the other hand, even within the key historic conservation areas, unapproved constructions continued due to the absence of specific conservation planning, measures of implementation and basis for regulation. In 2002, the Conservation Plan of Yiyuan Area implemented by the Planning Bureau expanded the coverage of the historic townscape district to include parts of the original German concession. The total area amounted to 2.82 km², and a multi-level and flexible conservation approach was established. The three levels comprised the control, coordination, transitional and redevelopment areas, with specific respective regulation requirements (Figure 2). In the control area, strict codes for the height, form, mass, colour and function of the buildings were applied. In addition to these regulations, four areas with distinct historic characteristics are identified as key conservation areas in which the height of new buildings should be 15 metres or below, and should coordinate well with the existing urban fabric. The plan played an important role in regulating redevelopment and protecting the historic context of the concession area. Since the implementation of the plan, the threshold for new construction projects in the control area has been significantly increased. Only two new development projects have been approved in the area whose land areas are only 0.52 and 0.21 hectares, respectively.

In the third version of the plan in 2006, the conservation coverage of the historic townscape district was further expanded southward and westward, with a total area reaching 3.5 km² (Gu 2012). The plan called for the conservation of the completeness and continuity of historical context, the reasonable setting of the coordination area and control of population. Furthermore, the plan had further specified the focus on conservation in the four key historic areas in the HHCA.

From the evolution of the conservation plan over the years, it can be seen that the scope for conservation in the HHCA has been constantly expanded and the measures improved. This reflects that the relationship between conservation and redevelopment has moved from an overly imbalanced state to a general equilibrium. Although still far away from the ideal objective, the awareness of historic conservation by governments has improved, and will undoubtedly become a strong top-down force of conservation. In fact, state-level laws and regulations on conservation have played an important role in promoting Wuhan’s historic conservation planning (Qian 2007). For example, in 2002, the amended Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics identified the principle as prioritizing conservation and rescue, reasonable utilization and strengthening management of heritage sites (SCONPC 2002). The principle stresses that protection and rescue of heritage is a top priority and is the
precondition of utilization. Guided by this principle, the discovery and rescue of heritage has become an important effort of the historic conservation in Wuhan city. Many heritage sites were identified as new conservation subjects with the deepening of conservation planning. In 2010–2012, the Wuhan Bureau of Urban Planning made the System Planning of Historical and Cultural Areas of Wuhan which further implemented the guidelines in the Master Plan of Historic City Conservation. The plan identified the features and roles of areas, and designated them as historic and cultural areas. Six new areas were added as conservation subjects, of which one was in the original German concession. At the same time, the bureau also organized the making of the detailed planning of five historic areas in the HHCA.

Figure 2. Conservation Plan of Yiyuan Area (A multi-level and flexible conservation approach). Source: WPDI.
The avid pursuit for economic development has often put the conservation in a passive state and led to many regrets (Smith 1998; Mowforth and Munt 2009); HHCA is no exception. For example, to make way for economic development, the early conservation plan left out the Chinese settlement area in the late Qing Dynasty, causing the obliteration of its historic context. The area has now become a modern residential quarter, crowded with high-rise buildings which have greatly damaged the skyline of the concession area (Figure 3). Similarly, early conservation plans also failed to incorporate the original German and Japanese concessions, which have now been transformed by heavy redevelopment. Even within the core conservation area, the realization of the conservation objective is still a long way off, and although large-scale demolition has been contained, most historic areas lacked maintenance and saw severe loss of vitality.

Revitalization of the Hankow historic concession area
Governments at various levels attempt to find potential for GDP growth in every urban area. The HHCA, due to its geographic location, has become one of the most valued areas in the city. Naturally, both the municipal government and the Jiang’an district government have been striving to promote economic development through the redevelopment of the area. At the beginning of the century, the success of the Shanghai Xin Tiandi demonstrated a new possibility of value-adding through historic conservation in Chinese cities. Since then, the approach to economic development of the HHCA has turned from large demolition and construction to an ambitious urban revitalization. In the last decade, governments, developers and the public have influenced this transition from their own perspectives and approaches.

Government vision of historic area revitalization
Compared with pure conservation, governments are often more motivated for revitalization. The Wuhan governments at various levels have acted to develop policies, plan, invest and...
Improve the administrative processes to promote the revival of HHCA. In the 2002 Conservation Plan of the Yiyuan Area, the historic townscape district was categorized into three different types: areas with concentrated historic buildings were identified as control areas with strict protection requirements; other areas have been deemed as coordination areas and redevelopment areas, with gradually loosening restriction over development from the waterfront area towards the inner-land area. The approach attempts to use the economic gains from the inner-land’s high-density development to support the conservation of the waterfront historic area in a bid to balance development and conservation. Following this guideline, the municipal authority made a series of revitalization plans of the HHCA.

In 2006, Wuhan Urban Development Investment Company Ltd, a state-owned enterprise affiliated to the municipal government, researched the redevelopment of the HHCA, and presented the idea of building the Hankow urban centre in its feasibility report. It attempted to integrate historic conservation with international finance, boutique shopping and high-end housing through a mega-sized residential development project. However, the plan failed to gain approval due to its excessive size and density. In December 2007, Wuhan was approved by the State Council as a pilot reform district, and became one of the forefront areas in China’s development. Subsequently, it began a new round of rapid development. In 2008, the municipality put forward a series of economic incentives. The focus of historic conservation shifted towards economic revitalization, which attempted to adjust urban land use and introduce modern service industries to bring about economic benefits along with historic conservation. In the same year, the Bureau of Urban Planning made the Conservation Plan of the Historic Townscape District in HHCA based on the original Yiyuan Area Conservation Plan. The highlight of the plan was to adjust the land use of the area, and to coordinate the relationship of the four historic areas in terms of space, circulation and features (Liu and Luo 2013). Later that year, entrusted by the Jiang’an District government, the Bureau of Urban Planning made the Development Plan of the Business Area of the Jiang’an Waterfront (which covered the original concession areas of five countries). The objective is to fully utilize the geographic and historic advantages of the concession area, and update it into a municipal-level financial centre, creative base and tourist destination. It also presented five general development strategies for modern service industries, including the strengthening of its status as a financial and business centre, luxury store shopping centre, cultural and creative centre, digital and information centre, tourist and recreational centre (Jiangan.gov.cn 2016).

Two Area One Street project

In 2009, the Jiang’an government initiated the Two Area One Street Project, i.e. the Qingdao Road Area, Jiqing Street Area (Figure 4) and the areas along Yanjiang Avenue. Its focus was on the restoration of historic buildings, demolition of illegal buildings, improvement of facilities and promotion of mixed-use development. The Qingdao Road area project was the one first expected to be implemented as the area underwent the demolition of many historic buildings due to the construction of an underground tunnel through the Yangtze River. The government wanted to use the project as a catalyst for the redevelopment of historic urban areas. They entrusted the WPDI to make a specific plan for the area, which aimed to introduce new functions, meet present demands, inject new vitality and improve environmental quality through conservation, renovation and redevelopment (Huang, Smolders, and Verweij 2010). The project was named an ‘urban strolling area.’ Another project, located in the Jiqing Street...
area, was on the site of a previously famous night market of local specialty food and performances which had to be relocated owing to the construction of the tunnel. While the purpose of the updating of the Yanjiang Avenue area has been to aim at better tapping the economic potentials of historic urban areas, the key strategy is to relocate 23 government institutions inside the area for business purposes, making the waterfront area a business area with high-end corporate headquarters, financial and business enterprises etc. At the time, the mayor of the city even said that, if necessary, the government was willing to relocate its office area if a Fortune 500 company wants the land.

However, these projects in HHCA did not go as smoothly as the government hoped. Despite the considerable resources invested, the expected results have not yet been realized. The redevelopment projects of Qingdao Road and Jiqing Street areas were both implemented by a state-owned enterprise affiliated to the local government to ensure the better
implementation of the government’s vision. It was anticipated that both projects would continue the traditional urban fabric but in a new way, and be transformed into a higher-class commercial area. All the original residents were relocated for a complete displacement of land use. To date, over 2 billion Yuan has been invested in the Qingdao Road project for compensation for residents’ relocation and the ownership transfer of historic buildings and infrastructure development. However, it has failed to attract enough businesses, and the planned ‘urban strolling area’ has not yet happened. Even worse, the historic buildings along the streets are left vacant and the communities have lost their vitality. For the Jiqing Street project, it was redeveloped away from its original location, while the architecture was a mixture of Chinese and Western style. It was an attempt to coordinate with the Western style buildings in the concession and, at the same time, demonstrate the indigenous culture of Jiqing Street. However, in reality the original outdoor food stalls with impromptu performances by folk artists along the street have been transformed into relatively closed large-scale or boutique restaurants, where the strolling experience is non-existent. Folk artists left for other areas because of the lack of appropriate places to perform. This greatly reduced the attractiveness of the new Jiqing Street. At the same time, due to high construction cost and the resulting high rent in the new Jiqing Street area, some local traditional snack restaurants failed to settle as planned. Since the completion and operation of phase 1 in 2011, business has been bleak. For example, only five of the original 20 restaurants remain in business. The already finished phase 2 of the New Jiqing Area has also failed to attract businesses.

Governments usually have a stronger capability in implementing construction projects, especially in building and infrastructure projects because of their advantages in administration, information and policy. Consequently, their will for interventions continues to expand. However, the difficulties facing the two revitalization projects in Hankow indicate that the strong government intervention capability has lost its magical touch in the market economy, and governments are unable to handle all project operations in the revitalization of historic urban areas. At the early stage of the two projects, the local government promised to continue and innovate local culture, but the reality was the updating of physical environment through new buildings imitating the traditional style, and rebuilding on another site leads to the loss of the original cultural atmosphere, social network and vitality of the community. Although financially well compensated, the relocated residents lost their familiar neighbourhood environment and social life. They passively accepted the complete transformation of the community while they had no way of voicing their opinions or participating in the top-down revitalization planning. When an urban project cannot satisfy the needs of the market or effectively support social communication and rich public life, its failure seems unavoidable.

**Real estate development and historic conservation**

Yeoh and Huang (1996) examine the experience of urban conservation policies in Singapore, and argue that a zoning approach to urban conservation may result in more intense development outside the designated conservation zone by giving a wrong signal to market forces. This is also the case facing the historic townscape district of the HHCA. Due to the absence of a protection requirement outside of the conservation area, the attitude of landowners or developers towards heritage sites may determine the destiny of the non-conservation area.
Most developers choose to demolish and rebuild to generate quick profits in the current real estate market boom. This phenomenon is referred to as the ‘politics of selection’, and it is suggested that more destruction would take place in non-conservation zones that are much less restrained by regulations (Shin 2010).

It is true that the pursuit of profit is the basic instinct of an enterprise, but the method of pursuit can be varied. In the number of real estate development projects in the areas around the historic townscape district in HHCA, Shui On group from Hong Kong took a different approach to the Wuhan Tiandi project. The design team comprised mostly international firms, such as SOM as the planner, Benjamin Wood as architect, WAA International Ltd as landscape architect and P-T-Group as consultant. The team took heritage sites as a resource of adding values to the property and preserved all nine historic buildings inside the site, although they are neither officially protected monuments and sites, nor included in the list of fine historic buildings of Wuhan. By renovation and displacement of new functions, these historic buildings have exhibited unique charm, and have blended well with the new modern architecture (Figure 5). The new block comprises retail business, catering, entertainment, business, accommodation and other functions where people may experience a strong historic and cultural ambience. Since its completion in 2009, this commercial pedestrian street has been popular among city residents and has since become one of the landmarks of Wuhan. As exemplified by the much higher proper prices compared to other projects, it is possible to combine heritage sites with urban redevelopment in an economically and socially viable manner.

Nevertheless, Shui On’s Tiandi mode is essentially to build commercial developments instead of providing historic conservation. It is not a practice or an endeavour to conserve the wider urban historic environment, but rather to produce a so-called conserved historic place for the sake of bigger commercial return, in which historic conservation is more like the background stage. This fact has made this mode quite controversial (Lv 2007; Yu 2011). However, the Tiandi mode still bears great significance, as it has objectively inspired public interest in cultural heritage protection.
awareness of historic conservation and promoted more people’s consideration and discussion on the value of heritage sites. It has practically influenced the orientation of urban redevelopment. The old development mode based on complete demolition and brand-new construction in a historic context has lost its popularity both with the government and the public.

Public participation in historic conservation

In the Chinese political context, economic growth is an important part in evaluating performances of government officials, while efficiency is regarded as a precondition for political achievement. Therefore, public participation is not valued because it may slow down the efficiency of decision making concerning development. In the case of the HHCA, most planning and policies are made in a short time period by experts, government institutions and municipal leaders. While occasionally supported by the on-site investigation of planning experts, due to limited time, they are hardly in-depth studies.

However, the exclusion of the public in planning and decision making does not mean that they do not have the will to participate. In 2009, the government announced the plan to demolish tens of thousands of square metres of historic building in the British concession due to subway construction. The plan was very controversial. Many citizens had heated discussions on the Han net (a local website) and launched an offline conservation campaign. Concurrently, the public’s voluntary social, economic and cultural activities became a bottom-up force behind the revitalization of historic areas. According to Tiesdell, Heath, and Oc (1996), the revitalization of historic areas includes not only that of physical structure but also economic activities inside of architectural and urban spaces. Meanwhile, the public spaces of historic areas need revitalization and vitality. With the furthering of urbanization, and driven by the voluntary activities by the public in pursuit for modern lives, many historic functions of spaces in the HHCA have been adjusted and demonstrate new vitalities. For example, many historic buildings in the original British concession have become cafes and bars which have an historic atmosphere. Some freelance artists have chosen to settle in the original Russian concession, and have turned the area into an artists’ village comprising studios, art saloons and galleries. Five historic factory buildings of the original Xintai Foreign Firm run by Russian merchants were acquired by a group of Chinese who returned from overseas. They were developed as a market for folk culture and creative industries which

Figure 6. The reuse of five historic factory buildings. Source: author.
accommodate communications between groups, contemporary art exhibitions, folk art experiences and small-scale concerts (Figure 6). The *Yangtze River Daily* called the space a model of the conservation and reuse of historic buildings (Cjrb.cjn.cn 2016). These grassroot forces of conservation have been constantly growing and have become an important power in the future revitalization of the HHCA.

**Conclusion**

This paper aims to draw experiences and lessons in historic conservation amid China's rapid urbanization, and to provide references for the sustainable development of heritage sites. Taking the HHCA as a case study, the paper presents the evolution of ideology, institutions, policy and planning of historic conservation in Wuhan city, and the role of participants in this process to provide an understanding of the conflicts and changing relationships between historic conservation and redevelopment in Chinese cities. In the 1980s, large-scale urban development emerged in China. New constructions have been regarded as the path to economic growth and modernization while the old, traditional urban areas were deemed to be a symbol of backwardness and obsolescence which have often fallen to redevelopment or demolition. The case of HHCA reflects similar experiences of most historical urban areas and historic buildings, in that many historic buildings and their environment survived thanks to several key factors. First, the implementation of laws and regulations regarding historic conservation at the national level, especially the conservation scheme of historic cities stipulated by the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, which promoted the establishment of a three-tier conservation system comprising historic buildings, areas and cities in various localities and demands efforts on historic conservation amid rapid urbanization. Second, with the establishment of local historic conservation systems, Wuhan has also explored some new approaches to historic conservation according to its own social, economic and cultural context by expanding the scope of conservation to those left out of the national historic conservation mechanism. For example, fine historic buildings and industrial heritage were added to the conservation subjects. Moreover, historic townscape districts were included in the conservation hierarchy and incorporated into legal administration through local laws and regulations. Third, conservation plans have evolved alongside urban development, through constant revision of conservation plans for historic cities. Thus, through the making of detailed plans and specialized plans at various levels, the scope and depth of HHCA have been constantly expanding, and have provided strong support to ensure the conservation of historic buildings and sites. This has been accompanied by a decision making and management framework for the administration and implementation of these policies to ensure that the conservation of historic buildings and sites can be administered in a structured and systematic manner. Fourth, the competent departments for historic conservation have been clearly identified, in that the Bureau of Cultural Heritage, Bureau of Housing Management and Bureau of Urban Planning are responsible for the conservation of different types of heritage sites, thus promoting the progress of conservation practices at various levels.

In China's governing system, the effective implementation of the above-mentioned factors depends on the efforts of the local government. During the past 30 years, strong intervention by the government has resulted in the rapid transformation of cities, and the establishment, development and improvement of local historic conservation systems in response to pressures of economic growth. The case of HHCA fully reflects this top-down
characteristic and the changing understanding of local governments regarding historic conservation and urban redevelopment, from a relationship of contradiction to seeking the balance between the two. At present, revitalization of historic urban areas has become the major policy of the local governments towards the conservation and development of historic cities. However, this top-down mechanism also has particular problems. First, the current historic conservation mechanism succeeds in preventing historic urban areas and buildings from demolition, but so far has failed to ensure sufficient supervision and financial input. Thus, most historic areas suffer from outdated and substandard infrastructure, deterioration of building quality and buildings that were illegally constructed but are not so easy to remove. Second, government-led historic conservation and planning focuses on the efficiency of decision making based on the judgement of the so-called elites. Citizens, especially the local residents, have little participation in the process. This disconnect does not stimulate the vitality of the community, and often leads to social conflicts. In addition, excessive government intervention has suppressed the role of the market in historic conservation and the revitalization of historic urban areas.

The Wuhan municipal government has laid out an ambitious plan for the revitalization of the HHCA. Undoubtedly, government will continue to play a leading role in this massive and complex plan. However, if the public and businesses can be encouraged to participate in this plan, it will help to attract more forces to participate in historic conservation, promote the sustainable development of heritage sites and help to achieve consensus among the major actors in this area.

Notes

1. Officially protected monuments and sites: according to the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics (SCONPC 1982, 2002) this term refers to relics for conservation for their important historic, art or scientific values as ratified by governments at the county-level and above. They comprise three levels, namely state-level key conservation units, provincial-level and city or county-level conservation units. According to their different levels, the conservation boundaries of these units are identified by the State Council, provincial governments and city or county governments, respectively, along with the setting of signage and illustrations, documentation. These units are managed by designated offices or personnel.

2. According to the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics (SCONPC 2002), historic conservation areas refer to those urban areas or villages with relatively abundant, concentrated heritage sites and are of great historical value or revolutionary memorial significance. They are approved and announced by the governments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government, then submitted to the State Council for the record. The urban areas with relatively abundant and concentrated heritage sites, but have not been listed as historic conservation areas, are usually called historic areas.

3. In China’s political system with highly centralized powers, the central government has its supreme authority ensured by the constitution and is the decision maker and executor of the most fundamental issues of the state; the local governments do not possess an evidently independent constitutional status and their mission is mostly about implementing the decisions of the central government at the local level. However, as representatives of local interests, the local governments have a natural impulse to seek faster and better development for their respective regions. In accordance with the relevant state law, the protection of cultural relics in China requires the implementation of a location-based multi-level administrative mechanism. According to this system, local governments at various levels are responsible for the protection and conservation of relics in their administrative regions.
4. Lifen: this term refers to a typology of row-house residential community popular at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century in Wuhan. Lifen has a clear-structured street system with a mixed Eastern and Western architectural style similar to that of the Linong of Shanghai. The HHCA is home to the largest number of Lifen residential areas in Wuhan and is also the most representative.

5. Fine historic building: according to the *Stipulation on the Conservation of Historic Townscape District and fine Historic Buildings in Wuhan (WPC 2003)* regulations, these terms refer to those buildings built for over 50 years with special historic, scientific or art values; or are of commemorating or educational values and are not identified as officially protected monuments and sites. They are nominated by the municipal housing, urban planning and cultural relics authorities, reviewed by an expert commission and then ratified by the municipal government.

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