**Architecture and Tourism, Fictions, Simulacra, Virtualities**

***Tourism and the Heritage: from identity research to stereotypes production, the case of Tianjin (China)***

Since the beginning of the XXI th century, the Chinese government strategy sets out the development of tourism economy to drive the economic growth inside the country, to boost cities competitiveness and productivity while reinforcing social cohesion through some strong nationalist feelings. Chinese metropolises compete each other to revitalize their own identity erased during the Maoist years. Recently, Chinese heritage preservation acquired more and more consideration from state and private funding. But what does that mean” heritage”?

“Historic and Cultural Famous Cities” is a label created in 1982 by the Chinese government, a few years after the Cultural Revolution, aiming to protect ancient cities. However, the massive urbanization during the last three decades conducted more [irretrievable loss](http://www.linguee.fr/anglais-francais/traduction/irretrievable%2Bloss.html) than this harsh decade. For a lot of municipalities, the policies and processes to protect their historic urban landscapes seem too complicated or too time consuming to be implemented in a short-term process.

The municipality of Tianjin, a provincial rank like Beijing, Chongqing or Shanghai, was not as innovative as Shanghai or Chongqing and not as famous as Beijing to drive a specific strategy. The city core includes old foreign concessions along the Hai River with a very specific built heritage, giving Tianjin its particular identity. But the vision of heritage as a “form” leads some developers and decisions-makers to promote “cliché”. They use the former foreign government identification of the land as “Italian”, “French” or “Russian” to promote the buildings without any deep analysis. So the sites identity is linked to an historic period reminding a humiliation part of the city history. How to manage together preservation and reminiscence of humiliation? It seems that built environments are definitely constructed for and by tourism.

However, at the end of XXth century, a few University professors were trying to inventory and to map Tianjin Heritage; they were as well dedicated to attract the local government attention on the city specificities. But what is included under the wording “heritage” could be interpreted in various ways. In Tianjin, the reinterpretation of the past conducted to the construction of a touristic place, with foreign architectures, using the existing built shape as a stereotype. The built “Heritage” becomes a touristic product much more important for local government and developers in order to give an identity to the city, than deep studies on urban fabric, local history, inhabitants memories, and archives.

Whether it concerns recent constructions, like the ones along the Grand Canal on North and South sections in Tianjin, or the older ones in the former concessions, the way to promote Tianjin heritage for touristic targets seems to be associated with some story telling not closely linked to the local history and geography. The built “Shape” seems more important than the history of the place, or the enhancing of the current life nor the needs of the inhabitants.

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