

IMPACTS ON URBAN CULTURE FROM MODERN CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE IN HANGZHOU

A case study of the former site of Young Men's Christian Association of Hangzhou

YU Zuoping

Architecture and Civil Engineering Institute, Department of Architecture, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

Director: Xu Lei

Mail: yuzuopinglovez@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Hangzhou, was used to be a place of communion established for secular life by Christian organization in Hangzhou. The original buildings of YMCA of Hangzhou are nowadays protected and maintained as historic buildings. This article has analyzed the historical background, the original function, the social impact of YMCA of Hangzhou, as well as the architectural style of the buildings. Three impacts that the buildings had affected urban and social modernization of Hangzhou are concluded as follows: 1. The buildings had promoted the spread of Christian culture, so that Christianity were cognized and accepted in Hangzhou; 2. The buildings had promoted the development of social activities, especially the continuous expansion of impact from non-profit social organizations; 3. The buildings had been a record of integration process of foreign culture and Chinese local culture during the period of modernization of Hangzhou, which had represented its period features and local characteristics.

Keywords: Modern Christianity buildings in Hangzhou, urban culture, impact, original site of YMCA of Hangzhou

1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Modern architectures in Hangzhou

In the modern era in China, collision of Eastern and Western cultures became much frequent. Culture exchanges grew deeply and significantly. During this period, large amounts of Western style buildings appeared in coastal cities in China.

Speaking of the development of modern architecture in Hangzhou, however, it can be seen that although Hangzhou is located in the economically-advanced coastal regions of China, it was not among the major cities where modern architectural activities flourished. Comparing with other cities, architecture in Hangzhou owns some unique characteristics. This is due to the special positioning of the city, the strong atmosphere of travel and recreation, and its historical legacy. Some small-scale modern architectural activities led by Christian Church became the originator of the modern architecture in Hangzhou.

1.2 Modern Christian architectures in Hangzhou

Before 1840, the Christian Church had set hospitals and schools, and held a series of philanthropy activities in Hangzhou. But the development of architectural activities was slow. Only some floors of certain buildings were rent as chapels. For example, the Pishi Hall in Pishi Lane in Hangzhou, which was indeed the predecessor of Sicheng Hall (constructed in 1924).

Christian activities in Hangzhou have a history of near 600 years, but the main development began after 1840 (YANG Bingde, 2005). The spread of Christian culture was difficult to conduct because of the ethnic conflict in China, so the Church was not able to communicate with Chinese people spiritually with the power of religion. On the other hand, most of the missionaries who came to China knew very little about this country, and they thought it unnecessary to respect Chinese local culture because of their ethnocentrism, even they wanted to make Chinese westernized as them. This made it a troubling problem of mixing of Christian culture and Chinese local culture. So the independence of Church in Chinese began to be a matter.

The development of modern architecture in China was as complicated as other fields. The revival movement of Chinese traditional architecture in 1930s had affected Christian architecture in China, which was related to the real awakening of Chinese modern architecture. Some Christian buildings built between 1920s and 1930s had fully represented the period features. (E.g. Sicheng Hall, Gulou Hall, Chongyi Hall and YMCA). (Fig.1)



Fig.1: Some Christian buildings in Hangzhou (by author)

2 INTRODUCTION OF YMCA OF HANGZHOU

2.1 History of establishment

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Hangzhou, was founded by some local Christians of Hangzhou in 1912 (the first year of the Republic of China). At that time, Shanghai YMCA National Association dispatched E. E. Barnett, an American officer, to be in charge of the preparation of its establishment. A temporary board was also found by 12 local personages from local Church such as Zhang Baoqing, Xie Honglai and Zhou Meige. In 1913, YMCA National Association dispatched Ma Wenzhou to assist Barnett. In 1914, YMCA of Hangzhou took the rented house of Dafang Bo as its temporary clubhouse. It had developed well in the following 5 years. Later in 1916, one of the directors, Fang



Fig.2: main building (by author)

Tongsheng, invited Zhu Rui, the viceroy of Zhejiang Province, to plan the original site with a total area of 13.5 Mu (1Mu=666.67m²). They also raised funds from overseas. Finally the new clubhouse was built on Qingnian Road. In 1919, a bell tower, donated by Shanghai Commercial Press and local persons, was built to commemorate Xie Honglai. In 1922, a gym was built for public use in the vacant area on Yingzi Road (today's Jiefang Road).(YANG Bingde, 2004)

2.2 Introduction to the buildings

YMCA of Hangzhou is located at 27 Qingnian Road, Shangcheng District. Today, the main building and the bell tower are still extant, which cover a total area of 4438m². The main building, a three-floor house with a ground floor area of about 2700m², was built in 1918. Its exterior walls are covered with simple bricks. There are arcades on both first floor and second floor, making the building simple and elegant. Extant main building (Fig.2) has been added up to four floors, but its original structure and its Western-style appearance still remains. The bell tower (Fig.3) was built in 1919. There's a gate under the tower, with an arch as the entrance, and there's a bell for timekeeping in the tower, which used to be the standard clock of Hangzhou in the past. There's also a tank on the top of the tower.

In 1997, it was designated as a Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the Provincial Level.

3 ANALYSIS OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

3.1 The main building

The main building was originally built in 1918. The whole building faced east, and is surrounded by a U-shaped gym from south, east and west. It was donated by YMCA of North America. Originally, the main building was an "L" shape, three-floor house. In the middle of the east facades, there's a five-bay arcade with four two-story-high Tuscan columns. Balconies are there on all three floors. There was also a roof garden. The extant main building was repaired in 1988 according to the original structure. Another floor was added to the building, as well as magenta tile were put outside the walls. The main change was that the original flat roof changed to a pitched roof. As there was no other obvious change, the original western style facade was preserved well. (Fig.4, Fig.5)

3.2 The bell tower

The bell tower is located at the intersection of Guohuo Road and Qingnian Road. It faces to southeast with a square plan. It takes about 25 m² including the penthouse, which is called "Erfang" in Chinese.

The tower is a four-floor building, which is divided into three part from bottom to top: the stair floor, the bell floor and the tank floor. There are three arch windows and a round clock on each facade of the tower. The clocks are still working well today. (Fig.6)

There are eaves on the waist of the tower (called waist eaves), with decorating components under them. Above the waist eaves is the tank floor, that the plan is little smaller than the lower floors. On all four facades there're double pilasters and semi-circular archs linking the louvers. The components under the eaves are also for decoration. The roof is a hipped roof with red tiles.

3.3 Summary of architectural style

The main building: According to the observation to the YMCA in Hangzhou, it's not hard to see that its main building is entirely in the western style with a simple and elegant appearance. Experts from American Association Delegation thought that clubhouse with such kind of form and pattern is rare even in western countries today.



Fig.3: bell tower (by author)

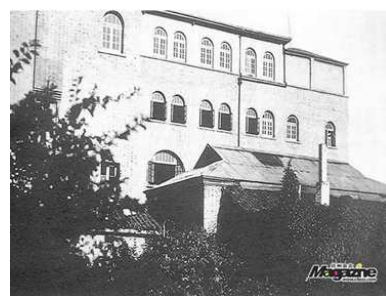


Fig.4: original main building
(<http://www.ccctspm.org/jiaotangfengcai/huadong/2012/1011/121011286.html>)



Fig.5: extant main building (by author)

The bell tower: It's generally in the western style, but the hipped roof is an obvious symbol of Chinese traditional style. Additionally, the simple-brick appearance and the wooden stairs inside are also elements of Chinese architecture. So it can be regarded as eclecticism architecture that combined both Chinese and Western style.

4 IMPACTS ON URBAN CULTURE

4.1 Promoted the spread of Christian culture

YMCA always took "Not to be served, but to serve people" as their purpose. In the period of Republic of China, YMCA of Hangzhou had held activities such as civilian education, disaster relief, and teach-ins involving health, patriotism, ethics, etc., that had certain impacts on society. People began to accept and understand the Church and Christian culture through those social activities, since they might benefited from them, for example, they could be treated well when they got ill or wounded. Finally this led to a harmonious co-exist of both Chinese and Christian culture.

4.2 Promoted the development of social activities

After the establishment of People's Republic of China, especially after the 1990s, YMCA took community work as their core task, involving varies aspects such as vocational training and social welfare service. Communication between youth groups from British, USA, France, Japan, Hongkong and Taiwan are also strengthened, and it had got quite fine social effects. Under its influence, more and more social activities were held in Hangzhou especially in community level. Some societies have learnt from YMCA and organized activities to serve people in need.

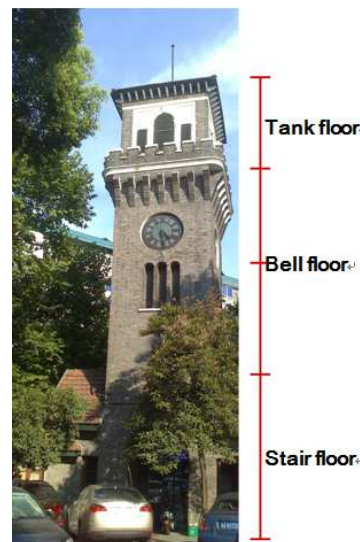


Fig.6: bell tower (by author)

4.3 Recorded the integration process of foreign culture and Chinese local culture

YMCA of Hangzhou was called as "the Crown of Westlake". It's an early example of extant modern western style buildings in Hangzhou. Its architectural form and layout of buildings is in line with those in European countries with similar architectural features, so it can represent the very period of history and culture. It has high researching and preservation value. YMCA of Hangzhou is an important part of Hangzhou's modern history.

5 CONCLUSION

YMCA in Hangzhou is the "spatial carrier" of most of the activities that the association held. Without the clubhouse those activities would have nowhere to be conducted. The form and pattern of the buildings represent a combination of Chinese and Christian culture, which is not only in the field of architecture, but also in social and national cultural levels.

Hangzhou is a historic and cultural city, so it's necessary to preserve the heritages with huge historic and artistic value in Hangzhou. However, it is very regretful that during large-scale activities of urban renewal and contemporary construction, numbers of valuable modern buildings have been or are being torn down. It is an urgent problem to deal with the contradiction between urban development and geritage preservation that we have to face.

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