

IMPACT OF STREET STRUCTURE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIJIANG HISTORICAL TOWN

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Abstract. Lijiang, a UNESCO heritage located in Yunnan province, China, has been transformed from a traditional market town into a modern tourist city. While urban land-uses have been reallocated to accommodate tourism development, physical pattern of the historical town remains largely unchanged during this transformation. I will attempt in this paper to apply configurational analyses of space syntax methodology to investigate whether the street structure has played a role in urban transformation of Lijiang historical town.

Currently we have procured the data from Lijiang's Urban Planning Bureau, in the form of CAD topographic maps, which formed the base map for analysis. A detailed field survey was also conducted by students of Four-year Class of Architectural Department of Shenzhen University last summer, under the guidance of Professor Rao Xiaojun and Associate Professor Wang Haofeng, which gathered high resolution pedestrian observations of 302 pavement locations evenly distributed in Lijiang historical town and precise information about land use pattern, especially distribution of retail business around this area. It is based on their diligent and valuable work that a standard axial line configuration map and a detailed land use map has been able to be created.

In following stages, these collected survey data will be further straightened out and summed up, such that relative variables can be sorted out. The chosen variables thus will be applied for multiple regression analysis to explore the statistical relationship between different variables to the observed pedestrian movement and land use pattern.

Though space syntax theory has proved to be an effective tool in urban studies of traditional western cities, it has rarely been applied to researches within Chinese context. However, since the theory is formed on the basis of all humankind, rather than some specific race or territory, I believe it can also function well in Chinese urban studies. As to this study, research findings are expected to reveal that the street structure of Lijiang historical town shapes the land-use patterns in that movement sensitive land uses locate themselves on street segments where pedestrian movement rates are higher than other parts of the network, which would lend support to the space syntax theory of movement economy in a different cultural context. The way the physical structure supports the urban transformation of Lijiang will also illustrate how the old town acts as a self-organizing system working through spatial and social-economic processes that bring new lifestyles into the old, and this will, however, in turn imply architects and urban planners the appropriate approach to achieve “structural protection” in their future design and planning project in historical towns and cities. Moreover, despite these predictable and pleasant outcome this study may achieve, I am also willing to raise some suspicions about the possible shortcomings of space syntax theory itself, if there is any, I believe, it tends to lie in the general basis from which all its argument has been developed. That is, maybe, despite the shared properties of different societies and spaces, there exists other unconcerned but equally important dimensions, which calls for further discussion.

Keywords. Lijiang; historical town; transformation; street structure.

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