ARC573 Architectural Criticism and Journalism

Architectural History in Harbin

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Architectural History in Harbin

Harbin, a northern city in China, is reputed as the “Oriental Paris”. One century ago, about twenty countries established their consulate generals in Harbin, which turned it into an international metropolitan city. The immigration of the peoples from many countries to Harbin brought about diversified cultures and various styles of architecture in this city, which constitute the very special features of Harbin.

Harbin was a colonial city, which had been occupied by Tsarist Russia and Japan in different periods. Thus, the development of architecture can also be divided into various durations according to distinguished external implanted culture.

From 1898 to 1917, the primary period of Modern Architecture in Harbin.

Harbin was a small village until the built of the Mid-East railway. From then on, Tsarist Russia began to plan, build and develop this city as a future essential transit hub. In this period, Russian Style and Art Nouveau were the leading styles.

From 1917 to 1931, the developing period of Modern Architecture in Harbin.

In 1920, the Chinese government regained the sovereignty of the Railway and many foreign investment enterprises came. In this duration, besides Russian Style and Art Nouveau, Eclecticism had been the major style in architecture. What’s more, there were also some Chinese traditional Style buildings.
From 1931 to 1949, the late stage of Modern Architecture in Harbin

The “September 18th Incident”, which marked a beginning of an all-round aggressive war launched by Japan against China, occurred in 1931. In early 1932, Japan occupied Harbin. Since then, a series of Japanese Modern Style architecture were built.

The three periods above constituted the Modern Architecture Period in Harbin. At that time, there were four major architecture styles in Modern Harbin: Russian Style, Eclectic, Art Nouveau and Japanese Modern Style.

From 1949 to now, the Contemporary Architecture Period

In 1949, People Republic China was founded. Harbin entered a new stage. At first, the buildings followed the general style of Harbin. But during the Culture Revolution, many historical buildings were demolished. Many simple “box” buildings occurred that time, undermined and destroyed the unique feature of Harbin.

After reform and opening-up, the regeneration speed of the city was very fast. However, there were still a lot of problems. It seems that there is a lack of relationship and dialogue between the new and old buildings. Besides, the government demolished many historical buildings and built new so-called “European style” buildings.

We should explore the deep context of Harbin, not only the surface symbols. For the protected historical building, we should treat them as a developing centre to promote new development. For new buildings, they should be in accordance with the city color and scale. Through various design methods, we should keep the unique character of the city and also reflect the contemporary feature of the time as well.