ABSTRACT
Among the first countries for World Heritage sites number, China has just shown the concerning in heritage conservation recently in XX century. Since the Maoist period, the country went through many pressures by fast process of urbanization, rapid population growing and also moments of inexplicable destruction. It just started having attention after the reforms supported by Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping, then the participation of China at the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1985, marked its entrance in an expert and foreigner community and implicitly declare the acceptance of international principles on conservation. The improvement of Chinese architecture heritage conservation policy is very encouraged but China still need to promote coordinated programs between cities, in order to better relocate its top-down financial support. The wall of Zhaoqing together with others Chinese cities walls are subjected for World Heritage promoted program. Choosing Zhaoqing as our study case means we are learning, from a Western perspective, the Chinese heritage issues, in order to create a supporting base for debate the differences with the Italian experience.

Keywords
Chinese Heritage, city walls, conservation, ancient relics, World Heritage Program, Zhaoqing Municipality

1. FROM EXPERIENCE TO LEGISLATION: THE HERITAGE CONCEPT IN CHINA
In the last twenty years China arose among international Urban Studies thanks to the extraordinary growth occurred in its cities, pushed at the end of the Eighties by the progressive reforms toward marketization. Beside the constructions of many New Towns, Business Districts or new residential towers, that brought about the creation of a new typical Chinese urban imaginary, China has always paid more and more attention to its architectural heritage, recognizing - pragmatically - not only cultural values but also monetary ones (Li et al. 2008).
This new concept passed through different phases and was not identified at the same manner during XX Century. Tracing the most important passages means to directly trace, at
the same time, the troubled past of Chinese history, where from different political frameworks derived other conceptualizations.

The Republic Revolution of the Twenties, conducted by Sun Yat-sen, was a blooming period for Chinese universities, that slowly approached the introduction of western research methods. In 1929, thanks to an increasing systematization of humanistic disciplines, the “Society for Research in Chinese Architecture” was founded in Beijing by Mr. Zhu Qiqian, former Minister of the Public Works. Although its objectives were concerning a wider field of interests not only focused architectural issues, has to deny its reforming power because of the arise of the Civil War and the Second World War.

The Maoist period has substantially changed its view on heritage many times, alternating between a clear celebration of strategical national monuments (building up “Party memory”), and the tremendous actions carried on by the Cultural Revolution at the local level, destroying any iconoclasm opposing the communist regime.


The fundamental turn arrived with the reforms supported by Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping, who, introducing a “capitalism with Chinese characteristic” (Vogel 1990), has reinforced - also in the field of heritage - the idea that it could be managed as an important economic resource. Following these principles in 1982 the “Law for the Conservation of Public Properties” was passed and, considered as the cornerstone of the Chinese heritage approach, it was upgraded in 1991, 2002 and 2008 (Frenda, 2014). The promulgation of the 1982 Law also has to be read in the larger frame of the urbanization emergency, as a possible way to oppose the trend.

Meanwhile its progress in the heritage ruling system, China decided to confront itself in an open debate in order to achieve international qualitative standard, both for research
methodology both for evaluation. The participation to the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1985, marked its entrance in an expert and foreign community and implicitly declared the acceptance of international principles on conservation (Zhu 2012). The Central Committee also compiled, in the same year, a list of 24 “historically and famous cities”, including Beijing, Suzhou and Shanghai, carrying on the battle against an irresponsible urbanization. A continuous relationship with the Australian ICOMOS and the American Getty Conservation Institute since 1997, has brought the State Administration of Cultural Heritage to publish and approve in 1999 the “Principles for Conservation Site Heritage in China” (Zhang, Bai 2002), upgrading the national rule of 1982 to a more operative method and, as it’s possible to read in the initial purposes, setting “professional guidelines for heritage conservation” for “Departments of municipal construction, land and housing management, disaster response and environmental protection, and parks and gardens as well as religious and ethnic affairs”.

China waited until 2004 for the promulgation of two important documents useful for local government in order to manage their sites. These are the “Principles for the Conservation Planning of National Cultural Heritage” and the “Application for Approval for Conservation planning of National Cultural Heritage”, and rule the procedures for what to do in case of an intervention on national heritage.

The introduction of a scientific perspective about the historical memory of a specific site, aimed at maintaining its “authenticity”, the “stratification” of the past or work on a “minimum intervention”, has fought with a vision, coming from the a tradition matrix, where the original restoration was seen as the best way to preserve. The internal division among disciplinary experts that derived from the reception of international principles, demonstrate how China has carried on the conceptualization of its heritage sites, combining both institutional passages and scientific debates on wider views of Chinese culture².

The Chinese Central Government, also thanks to its numerous candidacies on World Heritage programs, has surpassed the initial internal division in favour of a pragmatic acceptance of international methods, and is now carrying out a difficult devolution of ruling instruments at the local level. In fact, to this day, there doesn’t exist a uniform legislation for helping local governments in the safeguarding and planning of their sites, as it is preferred to relate to national procedures.

In Guangdong Province there isn’t a uniform program in order to manage interventions on important heritage sites, but at the same time list compiling, safeguard zoning and tourist driven projects are numerous. In 2008 Wang Yang, the new Provincial Party Secretary of Guangdong visited the city of Foshan and stated that the industrial and city environment has to be improved. Then a new policy of “three Oldies” transformation was created, put forward with the support of the Ministry of Land and Resources. By the term “Three Oldies”, rulers were referring to the old city (jiu changzhen), the old factory (jiu changfang) and the old village (jiu cunzhuang). The objectives of this experimental document were looking for the creation of new instruments for contrasting the illegal land-use conversion that occurred in these areas, because of the lack of specific planning legislation.

Nowadays China has to focus on how it might be possible to control and manage its heritage asset at different administration levels. The high number of conservative projects all over the country, an uneven legislation framework and the great number of strategical sites that has to confront with a fast growing urbanization, are all factors that mine the possibility to distribute resources and plan efficiently. In order to maintain its powerful presence among the first countries for World Heritage site number, China needs to promote coordinated programs between cities, in order to better relocate its top-down financial support.
2. ZHAOQING CITY WALLS - HISTORICAL NOTES

Zhaoqing was the capital state of a number of ancient dynasties, as well as home to the governor palace of Guangdong and Guangxi Province for nearly 182 years. Furthermore, it was the forefront of the relationships between Eastern and Western worlds: in 1583 Italian missionary Matteo Ricci established here his first mission.

The ancient wall of Zhaoqing is testimony of the city’s past, and it carries such testimony on its structure. The wall was built during the Song dynasty (AD 1049 – AD 1054) as an ordinary wall. In 1113 it was extended to encompass the city and it became the draught control center for southwestern China. Through the following centuries, the wall underwent many modifications, repairs and extensions, among which the most important were the following:

- In 1614 (Ming dynasty) the governor of Zhaoqing, Zhang Jingxin, increased the height of the wall by 3.5 Chinese feet, and opened the 4 gates.
- In 1651 (Qing dynasty), commander Xu Erxian and governor Zhang Zhibi turned down the houses that had been built near the city wall and built new institutional buildings.
- In 1915 (Minguo), the city wall was damaged by a flood and Li Guanghan allocated funds to repair it.
- Between 1924 and 1926, all city walls were destroyed except for the Piyun building; the average height was reduced by 2.5 meters, and the gates were removed and changed into ramps to favor traffic entering the city.
- Between 1986 and 1996, the government of China rebuilt the city wall.

The structure of the wall was intended to prevent flooding, first and foremost. The lower part of the wall was based on stones and paved over with bricks, in order to better withstand the huge impact of water when flooding struck. The Pingding method was used to puzzle the bricks of the wall, a method still used today in flooding areas. From the bottom to the top, the width of each layer was reduced by 1-1,5mm, resulting in a strong protective layer which was wider at the bottom and stronger at the top. The cross section was trapezoidal, as to enhance its stability.

3. ZHAOQING ANCIENT CITY WALL PLANNING FROM 1980s

The City of Zhaoqing began to pay attention on ruling its ancient city walls during the Eighties, also due to the new economic era promoted by the Central Government. On May of 1984, “The rules about enhancing the managements of City Walls in Song dynasty” was published by the City Administration and on March of 1985, a leading team was set up for repairing the Piyun building and the city walls of the Song dynasty. A period of pure re-construction completed the maintenance on the famous Piyun building in 1986 (fig.2). On November of 1987, the rules about protection range of the city walls in Song dynasty and construction zone were mapped out again by the City Cultural Ministry and City Land Planning Bureau opening a debate on containing the city centre against the fast urbanization.

Since the 1960s, there were 5 establishment and revision works regarding the city master plan happening in Zhaoqing, which had a very promising guidance for the development of the city, especially those ones taken place in 1988 and 1995. These two masterplans made Zhaoqing develop orderly and kept properly the urban landscape pattern, which maintained a good inheritance of the development orientation.
The protection area of ‘Zhaoqing Historical and Cultural City’ was defined by the last master plan of Zhaoqing, including Duanzhou Zone and Dinghu Zone, with a total area of 704.9 Km².

The plan was used for guiding the coordinative development between the protection and updating of historical and cultural city, generally providing technical laws and rules for conservative practices. Moreover, it was set up according to the “Requirements about protection and planning of historical and cultural city” published by the Construction Ministry and the National Heritage Board.

During the Nineties the local government paid an increasing attention to the protection of the city. In 1996, the government turned down the houses in the eastern protection area located as the north of the ancient city wall and built a wide green zone together with a 40 meters wide roadway. Meanwhile protective repairs had been given to such part of city wall letting it show its original shape, continuing in a on site repairing, proceeding in little phases and without a coordinated project. Nowadays it’s possible to read all these various interventions, that has created an imaginary where it’s quite impossible to recognize a coherent historical layering.

Conscious of these matters in 2000 the local government invited the Planning and Design Institute of Tongji University, to draw up the "Protection Plan of Historical and Cultural City of Zhaoqing", including the protection of the ancient city wall into the Master Plan of the city. The Tongij contribution has to be read as an important moment on which Zhaoqing could list under a scientific methodology its heritage asset, and begin to understand that was necessary passing from little interventions to imagining the necessary changes under a wider program. The two most essential operations were the environmental remediation had been made on the western part of the north side of the city wall in 2003, letting the city wall show the most magnificent scenery of its northern part, and an allocation of 20 million yuan of special maintenance funds in order to repair the northwest section.

At the beginning of 2005, in order to implement the plan of protecting the historic city of Zhaoqing and to improve the city environment and satisfy the requirements of a developing
market, the City Planning Ministry of Zhaoqing commissioned the Planning and Design Institute of the Southeast University to plan in detail the preservation and revival of construction of the ancient city.

The proposal of Southeast University showed a complex and deep study on the actual site. Approach method seemed to be western school adopted, selecting interventions, planning minimum changes and enhancing the most important relics. The design not only reflect ideas on conservation of the historical parts of the town as buildings, antique wall, but also attempted to integrate the people and public activities by introducing more public spaces as squares. By the way this proposal have never been realized.

![Figure 3. The “Ancient City Wall Conservation and Planning Master Plan” by Tongji University](image)

On November of 2013, Zhaoqing City launched the revision of the “Historical and Cultural City Protection Plan” that was then commissioned on March of 2014 to the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Urban and Rural Planning Design. After a middle phase concerning in 2009 the plan of the wider area of the whole City centre of Duanzhou District and another one in 2012 for the Yuejiang area, just near the city walls and facing the southern riverside, on June 12th of 2015 an expert consultation was held. Nowadays the mentioned Institute is improving the planning results based on the relevant comments and expert consultation, and the suggestion come from the Urban and Rural Planning Committee. Once the review will be successful, it will be sent to the Provincial People's Government waiting to the final approval. The Plan combine not only arguments of the specific site of the city walls, but a more wide program in order to show Zhaoqing as an important cultural centre: a more strategical and coordinated plan than an operative methodology for the city centre.

On April 7th of 2015, the Culture, Radio, Press and Publication Bureau of Zhaoqing made a public bid about the “Zhaoqing ancient city wall protection planning services (2nd time)”, won on April 28th of 2015 by the Beijing Guowentan Cultural Heritage Protection Institute.

This seems to be the last phase of a nearly thirty years old of various plans, researches and programs about the ancient city centre. What it’s clear is that we can only observe a
commitment to an expert society, in charge of planning out a new and updated master plan for the ancient City Wall of Zhaoqing, and not a precise building phase.

Figure 4. The Fuqian Square Aerial view rendering as proposed in the Master Plan and Design of the Song-Town Historical Area in Zhaoqing (2005). Not realized.

4 CONCLUSION: AN ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE REGARDING URBAN PATTERNS

Looking at the Zhaoqing case study we can recognize some of the most important issues concerning not only the Chinese ancient city walls, but more widely what are the topics about a coordinated conservative project in China. In a country that seems, from a Western perspective, growing up fast in every sector, a “tabula rasa” where every project could be possible, an important site like the ancient City centre of Zhaoqing has found strong difficulties in carry on a specific conservative program.

What is essential is to underline the fundamental topics around this ancient city centre comparing to the priorities of the Chinese administration structure. The large amount of the various plans follow the objectives of the local government in spending remarkable financial resources in order to fund the right support from the upper political spheres, like Provincial or State level. At the same time the difficulties for finding, in the Zhaoqing case study, strong monumental relics, could exclude the City among other more interesting cities around. In Zhaoqing we are speaking more about historical urban pattern, a topic less concerning the Chinese conservative practices.

Regarding the Italian experience city walls has always represented, also symbolically, the core of the city and where the conservation of the pattern has also signify a strong past preservation. The walls have indicated where to concentrate all the best conservative practices, freezing a collective memory that it’s not concentrated only in the most important building but in a system of morphological relationship. Recent Italian case studies like the Citadel of Alessandria, the recovery for the fortified Citadel of Padova, the Turin Roman Archaeological area or the Aurelian Walls in Rome, showed the persisting of keywords like “Diffuse Park”, “System” or “Connectivity”, looking at the heritage asset as a whole.

Thanks to this tested attention, that blurs what could be defined as a “zoning concept”, so strong in the Chinese urban planning approach, the Polytechnic of Turin has signed in September 2015 a collaboration with the City of Zhaoqing, inside the wide program promoted by the “South-China Torino Collaboration Lab”, for a consultant activity in managing a Master Plan that has to unify both urban planning and conservative practices.
The lack of unified code of rules on Heritage that could match all the many administration level of the Chinese bureaucracy, it’s one of the obstacle in understanding how local governments could promote and finance its cultural assets efficiently.

Zhaoqing is strongly determined in its candidature for become one of the new World Heritage Sites in China, but the list it’s even now long and every year only one city could be candidate. The unsuccessful project phases that we have underlined has to be seen as the volunteer of the local government to receive the right attention for its heritage asset, even if it’s not aligned with the most influential touristic sites of the country. Many scholars in urban studies has underlined for example the less attention paid by the city of Beijing for its “hutongs” during the Olympic Games. Conservation of urban patterns seems to be a new topic in the Chinese Heritage Concept, that recall important framework in what we perceive as “Memory” in our two distinct cultures.

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NOTES

1. Between 2001 and 2002 the “Principes” were published also in English and are available online at “http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/china_prin_heritage_sites.pdf”
2. Although China were introducing the “Principles” inside the heritage conceptualization, there was an alternative growing up movement especially based on Confucianism ideologies concerning how to intend “historical memory”. The movement gathered many experts, from architects to engineers and historians, that in 2005 met them in the Confucius hometown, Qufu, signing a document named “Qufu Declaration” that refused many of the western principles integrated inside conservation topics in China.
3. Traditional urban pattern composed by multiple courtyard houses until forming a continuous district.

REFERENCES

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