

Aesthetics of Deformity

—One Street, Two Characters

Which street gives me the most profound impression? The answer is not in Shanghai or Berlin, but during a short trip in a small town of Henan province, North China. It is a tiny street, having an interesting name called “comb”, for its path curved as the side of a comb.

“Comb” is so different with the streets that I have ever seen and experienced before. Not only for the name, more important, I found a specialty of charming contradiction there, or to say, it is a street with two characters.

It can be hardly described with adjectives as beautiful, harmonious, satisfying etc. Long history of erosion, devastation and ignorance has deprived it of the tidy appearance, as well as the neat interface. The space is totally full of unsightly environment, disorderly general layout and poor living condition. With first glimpse, you can never be attracted by this street. But after some days' thorough observation and experience, I found many sparks beneath the ordinary outlook.

To some extent, “comb” is lucky for the deserting and neglecting. It still has its own life and its own stories, preventing the destiny of other streets, becoming unexpressive, unemotional and similar square blocks, which is prevalently taken place during the reconstruction of small cities in China. As so, many cultural heritage are preserved in some way, including the inimitable architecture, the traditional neighborhood form, the precious types of handicrafts...

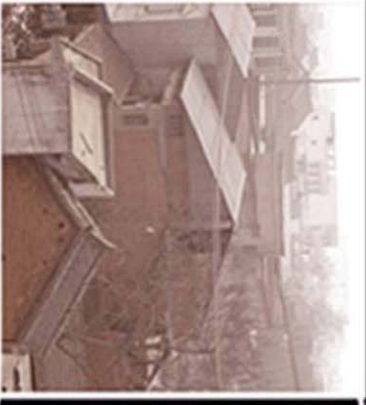
The street acts as a stage, a variety of activities is taken on there, repeating but meaningful. All of these elements make the street a distinctive landmark for the whole city. It is never an ideal or perfect mode, but almost all dwellers aren't intended to move out. That is why I avoid using any rational statistical diagrams or analytical charts. The essential character isn't seen in that way. Just the real living scenes themselves can talk.

“Comb” isn't preserved by the government or urban designers, but through its own tough livingness. I was impressed and shocked by a form of incompatible beauty, and a way of life, the street's life.

I've touched one street's life, hoping to touch more. Actually every street has its life, it can't be simply seen as a line, a boundary or even a part of community. It is unique to the residents, just like Kurt Nilsen sings in the song “My street”: “Well I feel so complete on my street...I will always be right here...”. We have to pay special attention to people, to events, and to read the words beneath.



Deserted Historic Site

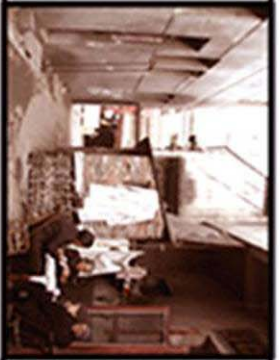


Littery Order

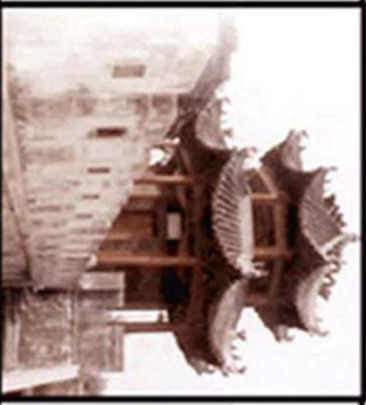
Unightly Landscape



Absonant Visage



Leisurely Living



Cultural Heritage

Special Handicraft



Charming Streets