The Architecture of Harbin’s First Banking Institutions. Fujiadian District

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the architecture of the first banking institutions of one of the largest historic districts of Harbin: Fujiadian (now Daowai). A brief historical overview of the history of formation and development of the district is given. The buildings of banking institutions that have been preserved on its territory have been identified. As a result, the main directions of development of this layer of Harbin architecture, associated with the spread of “Chinese Baroque” and strict Neoclassicism in the architecture of the city, were determined. The architectural features of particular bank buildings are considered and their importance in the formation of the historical and architectural environment of Harbin is shown.

1. Introduction
The history of Harbin is closely related to the construction of the China-East Railway (CER). The city, founded in 1898 by Russian engineers as a settlement near a railway station, was developing rapidly and soon became one of the largest cities in Manchuria, significantly outstripping the Far Eastern cities such as Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok and Khabarovsk in terms of population. The process of formation of the architectural appearance of Harbin reflects the geopolitical and socio-economic changes that took place in the region in the first half of the 20th century. The city was largely subject to foreign influence all this time. Thereby, separate buildings and entire neighborhoods built by Russian and Japanese architects can still be found in the central part of Harbin.

The policy of foreign states aimed at protecting their interests in China, which was one of the largest sales markets during the period under present observation, contributed to the formation of commercial and financial institutions on its territory, one of the forms of which was the creation of a Western-style banking system. At the same time, the Chinese government attempted to counter foreign economic expansion by developing its own banking system, which led to the emergence of public and private banking organizations. As a result, during the period under review, China had three main types of banking institutions: foreign, national and local banks.

The purpose of this research is to study the architectural features of the first national banking institutions of Harbin, which were built at the beginning of the 20th century on the territory of Fujiadian.

2. Literature review
The source base for this study were the works of Chinese and Russian researchers on various aspects of the problem touched upon in the article. The history of the construction of the China-East Railway
is covered in the studies of N. E. Ablova [1], M. A. Vivdych [2], T. Yu. Troitskaya [3]. The architecture of certain types of buildings is considered in articles by T. A. Smolianinova [9, 10], Kai Jun [11], Liu Daping [12]. Professional life of the first architects and engineers who worked on the construction of Harbin was studied in a number of scientific monographs and publications [13–15]. The books by S. Clausen, S. Thogersen [16] and H. Bonin, N. Valerio, K. Yago [17] are devoted to the examination of the history and development of the banking system in China, including Harbin.

3. Materials and methods of research
The study materials are various archival, literary and digital sources devoted to the development of the architecture of banking institutions in the Far East, in Harbin in particular.

The graphic materials obtained by the authors during a field survey of the historical buildings of the Fujiaidian (now Daowai) district allowed a systematic analysis of a number of preserved buildings of banking institutions. The characteristic architectural features of the first banking buildings were identified and their significance in the formation of the historical and architectural environment of this district was determined as a result.

4. Results

4.1. Fujiaidian District (Daowai)
The formation of the Fujiaidian (now Daowai) district in Harbin is associated with the construction of a railway bridge over the Sungari River. Chinese workers began to settle in the section on the outside of the China-East Railway right of way since 1898 [18]. This region was not subordinate to the administration of the CER, but rather was an independent administrative entity subordinate to the Chinese authorities. The territory of the district at the initial stages was developing spontaneously, which explains a fairly chaotic layout of its blocks. Chinese merchants and artisans soon were drawn to Fujiaidian. By 1923, the population of the district reached 25 thousand people. A lot of grocery, tea and tobacco shops, department stores, pharmacies appeared on the territory of the district, agricultural products and jewelry were sold, hotels and public baths were opened. By 1916, the Main Street (Zhenyang-tao) was formed in the center of the district, later renamed Jing Yu, which became the central street and main trade and financial artery of the Fujiaidian District [19]. A distinctive feature of the architectural environment of this area in the early 20th century was a contrasting combination of massive, pompous stone buildings and one-storey Chinese wooden fanzas, which gave its construction a special flair. The implementation of the elements of European order architecture for decorating street facades of large public buildings is also noteworthy. This phenomenon in the scientific literature was called “Chinese Baroque” [18]. The study conducted by the authors made it possible to identify the first national banking institutions that opened their representative offices in Harbin in the Fujiaidian district at the beginning of the 20th century, to review the features of their architecture and determine the significance of these objects in the formation of the historical and architectural environment of this part of the city.

4.2. Architectural features of the first banks in the Fujiaidian district
The Hukou Bank was founded by the Chinese government in Beijing in 1905. From 1908 it was known as Qing Bank and from 1911 as the Bank of China. The organization provided financial support for national industry and trade. It was also engaged in reforming the monetary system. The Harbin branch of Qing Bank was opened in 1910, practically becoming the first Chinese bank in the city [19]. Its small two-storey brick building was located in a section adjacent to the intersection of Jing Yu and N 12th streets. The construction has not been preserved. An apartment building is currently located in its place.

In 1911, the Harbin branch of Qing Bank was reorganized into the Harbin branch of the Bank of China. The institution was one of the four state-owned banks in the city and played a significant role in the financial sector of Harbin [19]. Its small two-storey brick building was located in a quarter
adjacent to the intersection of JingYu and N 3rd streets. The angular construction of the object determined the nature of its three-dimensional composition, based on a combination of two equal in weight and figural elaboration of two-storey brick blocks united by a cylindrical volume insert. The L-shaped form of the plan allowed the most dynamic integration of the banking building in the urban environment. The main entrance was located in a cylindrical volume from the side of the intersection, and two additional entrances were placed in the center of the rectangular blocks. Initially, the building had a beautiful dome in the Baroque style, crowning the angular cylindrical volume, and the painted brick walls were decorated with ornamental elements in the form of cartouches. Later the dome and stucco decoration were lost as a result of reconstruction (fig. 1). At the present time, the building houses a bookstore.

A Zhejiang Industrial Bank branch operated in 1917–1925 on the opposite side of the Jing Yu street, across the former building of Qing Bank [20]. The institution was located in a two-storey V-shaped construction, built in the style Chinese Baroque style with the distinctive use of stucco decoration and order elements (Fig. 2). The plastic solution of its identical street facades is built on the rhythm of window openings and rusticated pillars. The corner of the building is cut off and accented by a round balcony that serves as a canopy over the front entrance. The corner facade is flanked by thin fluted columns with floral motif capitals, which support a triangular pediment with a curved cornice. The tympanum of the pediment is decorated with cartouche and stucco molding of floral ornament. The corners of street facades are accented by corner lesenes at the second floor level. They are decorated with geometric ornament in the form of a “pendant” that consists of a combination of straight lines and rings. A similar ornament is characteristic of the architecture of the Far Eastern Art Nouveau. It can be found in Harbin on the facades of the city station, the passage of the Samsonovich Brothers Industrial and Commercial corporation, the mansion of General N. M. Chigalov and other objects built in the city by Russian architects and engineers. Evidently, when carrying out the development of Fujiadian, the Chinese craftsmen borrowed many decorative elements from the architecture of such areas as the Quay and New Harbin, as well as from the albums of typical projects of the CER. However, in Fujiadian they acquired a completely new interpretation.
In 1908, along with the opening of Qing Bank in Beijing, the Chinese government allowed the provinces to establish state-owned banks themselves with the right to print banknotes. The first institution of this kind in Harbin was Bank of Three Provinces in Northeast China located on N 4th Street, popularly referred to as the “bank of silver money” [19]. Its two-storey building has been preserved to this day and represents an example of eclectic architecture with neoclassical elements in the decoration of facades (rust stone, window frames, brackets) and Chinese baroque in the forms and stucco decoration of attic walls.

In May 1913, a branch of the Harbin Bank of Communications was opened on the same street. Unfortunately, its first building has not been preserved. The second building, designed by the architect Zhuang Jun in 1928–1930, has remained to this day. The construction is adjacent to the southern facade of Bank of Three Provinces in Northeast China. The facility is still used for its original purpose, now it houses a branch of the Agricultural Bank of China. The Bank's architecture is characterized by strict simplicity and monumentality. The four-storey construction of monolithic repositioned concrete is built in traditional forms of Neoclassicism. The street facade represents a three-part symmetrical composition. The center of the composition is a massive Corinthian colonnade, which combines the three lower floors. Interestingly, both of these bank buildings are located on the even side of N 4th street, which has completely preserved the unified front of the historical two-storey firewall development (fig. 3). Whereas the odd side of the street is now built up with modern identical four-storey residential buildings, which were previously occupied by wooden fanzas. Nevertheless, the volume of the building of the Harbin branch of Bank of Communications is perceived as a powerful single monolith and still retains a dominant position in the structure of the street development.

Figure 3. Former building of branch of the Harbin Bank of Communications (currently, the Agricultural Bank of China) and former building of Bank of Three Provinces in Northeast China.

The activity of these three banking institutions laid foundation for the development of a modern national financial industry in Harbin. In 1915, the Harbin branch of Zhibian Bank opened on 4th street [20]. The three-storey rectangular brick construction is built in the Chinese Baroque style (Fig. 4). From an architectural standpoint, the most interesting part here is the street facade, loaded with a large number of decorative elements. The dissymmetry of its composition is due to the location of internal spaces. The wall plane at the level of the first and second floors has a relief that imitates rubble stone. The main entrance is accentuated by fluted half-columns on high bases. The yard and side facades are almost free of decoration, and the planes of their walls are not plastered. The building later housed the Harbin Branch of the Official Bank of Three Provinces in Northeast China, and nowadays has been modified into a hotel.

In the 1930s, the Branch of Manchuria Bank was built opposite the Harbin Branch of Zhbinian Bank, the main branch of which was located in the “Quay” district at the corner of Shang Zhi Da and Tian Di streets. Both buildings of Manchuria Bank can be attributed to the architecture of the
representative style of the colonial period (fig. 5). The constructions have certain compositional and stylistic similarities. In both cases, we see grey reinforced concrete, visually ponderous volume; the front entrance, accented by an order colonnade; and restrained plastic elaboration of the facades. It is noteworthy that such an image of a banking constructions in the 1920s and 1930s was widely used in the architecture of many cities in China. Concessions and representative offices of foreign states were located on their territories.

Figure 4. Former building of Harbin branch of Zhibian Bank (currently, Fairy Tale Hotel).

Figure 5. Former buildings of Harbin Branch of Manchuria Bank (at the corner of Shang Zhi Da and Tian Di streets and on S 4th street).

5. Conclusion
The list of banking institutions presented in the article can be continued. But even in this rather shortened form, it shows the nature and originality of the architecture of the first banking institutions in Harbin, which were built on the territory of the Fujiadian district (now Daowai) in the early 20th century. The brief review conducted in the study shows that most of the objects considered belong to the architecture of the “Chinese Baroque” style with its characteristic use of elements of the order system and rich stucco decoration. There is some distortion of details and proportions, and sometimes a completely new interpretation of traditional European architecture of decorative elements.

In the years that followed, the architecture of Harbin’s banking institutions follows the path of searching for new techniques of plastic expression. Buildings in the style of strict Neoclassicism were built in the city as a result of this process. Some of the constructions analyzed in this article are still used for their original purpose, and some, on the contrary, have been converted into commercial and other facilities. Nevertheless, the preserved buildings of the first banking institutions of the Fujiadian district are an integral part of the unique historical and architectural environment of Harbin, which deserves particular attention and detailed study.
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