Hangzhou - Old views (1912-1949): from the late Qing Dynasy to the Republic of China.

The identity of Chinese public space from Ancient times to Contemporary Society

The sociology of public behaviours in Chinese cities

Paolo Vincenzo Genovese (罗杰威), Pengfei Li (李鹏飞)

University of Tianjin, China
pavic.genovese@hotmail.com

Abstract: Public space has been intensively studied in the West, especially after the 50's, when most western countries turn into mass societies in which mass culture become the mainstream. Scholars have studied public space from different perspectives – anthropology, architecture and urban planning, environmental psychology, geography, and sociology. In all cases both urban forms and people's public behaviours have been studied. In China, there are some scholarly work on this issue. However, Chinese public space is deeply problematic, as a kind of physical environment. In this paper, we clarify three different types of space – private, public, and semi-public space in the Chinese context. Furthermore, we point out how Chinese people's public behaviours are related to China's public space and the relationship between China's public space and China's social structure and social norms, in addition to our historical and typological analysis of the three space types. Finally, we point out the limitations of public space in contemporary China.

Key words: public space in China, public behaviours, architectural identity in China.

Introduction

Public space has been intensively studied in the West, both from its formal political status and its informal civic life status. As a political setting, public space has important symbolic and realistic functions in a modern, democratic society, which can be traced all the way back to ancient Greece. Politicians need formal public places for speeches, ceremonies, and other public events, while civic opponents need formal public settings for protests, rallies, and other organized events. Both groups can use the same public settings such as squares, parks, or streets. The informal public space, on the other hand, captures another key part of modern life – leisure and entertainment. People may just go to public space for casual walks, shopping, meeting friends, or any other spontaneous, unorganized events. In both of these two aspects, western scholars point out a strange trend – the decline or the end of public space, especially after the 1970s. Sociologists categorize the phenomenon in the "community lost" debate, while critical geographers state the trend as "the end of public space" thesis. Putnam analyses Americans' declining interests in public meetings, votings, and even local neighbourhood events such as bowling and community gatherings.[1] This social trend parallels with the physical transformation of American public space – the decline of the usage of formal public settings and the privatization and commercialization of

1. Putnam 1995, pp. 65-78.

public space. Political gatherings such as public speeches and presidential campaigns have been moved to pre-designated places such as university auditoriums or in-door stadiums where have tighter control of the audience. In addition, activists and political opponents' rallies in open public space are under strict regulation.[2] It is in the sense of losing the access to public protest and gathering that Mitchell articulates "the end of public space" argument and argues "the right to the city" for those who need public space to express their demand. Regulating public space's formal functions works hand in hand with the privatization of public space. Squares, parks, and streets, which afford formal political events, have been retrofitted to support more commercial activities.[3] In the informal aspect, there is a similar trend. Jacobs, in her well-known book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, depicts the vivid civic life on the streets of New York City's Greenwich Village and criticizes how modern urban planning can ruin the publicness of the street life.[4] Jacobs' street in Greenwich Village has survived. However, many American cities have died because of the suburbanization of the United States. The spontaneity of urban streets has been killed by chain suburban shopping malls, resulting in many scholarly work on studying shopping malls.[5] In this aspect, again, the publicness has been squeezed. People's use of public place become well-programmed shopping behaviours instead of spontaneous personal activities. If the major problem of public space in the West is its decline and commercialization, which follows the strict logic of capitalism, the major problem of public space in China is dramatically different due to its own historical development. Public space refers to gōng gòng kōng jiān «公共空間» in Chinese. The key term here is gōng «公», as public in the English term. Chinese public space also includes squares, parks, streets, and other places open to people. However, gōng's «公» meaning is very subtle in Chinese. Gōng «公» means both official and public. Or more accurately, sometimes it means official and sometimes it means public. Thus, public space in China is oftentime *official space*. There are barely any studies on China's public space *per se*. Scholars who study China's urban issues have focused on China's urban redevelopment, suburban developments, and urban forms in general.[6] They point out the gated tradition of Chinese cities and urban life. Bray has discussed in great detail the gated work-units in socialist China and how that format continues its influence in contemporary China.[7] Read studies intensively about how contemporary Chinese organize inside their own gated communities to protect their shared/group (not public in the general sense) interests.[8] From these existing studies, we can see the *lack* of public space in China, rather the end of public space in the Western context. However, some anthropologists have studied how Chinese use formal public places such as

2. Mitchell 1995, p. 108-133.
3. Sorkin 1992, the transformation and privatization of American urban space have been closely discussed.
4. Jacobs 1961.
5. Crawford 1992; Kohn 2004.
6. Fang 2000; Wu 2010; Lu 2006.
7. Bray 2005.
8. Read 2008.

gated *official* parks for their daily routine – doing work out, meeting friends, playing chess, and so on.[9] In this case, certain Chinese people, particularly the well-off, retired people, successfully utilize the official parks for their personal/group well-being. To what degree the space is public and how accessible it is to the general public are debatable questions, however.

Before we discuss China's public space, we need to analyse China's physical space in a more general way, in classic and modern culture. The notion of space is complex and it will be approached in the section 2 of this script. But at this moment we need to propose a categorization of space that could be very useful in the following pages. This categorization come from the analysis of space and the city, and it is so general that, in some way, it can be used to describe the Chinese reality as well. We propose three categories of space: private, public and semi-public.[10] Private space represents a very complex concept in China, probably the most interesting among the three, but our paper is based on the analysis of public social behaviours. This is why we will discuss it only beside the key point of our investigation. For private space we refer to the physical environment where people have the most intimate life; this space, usually, includes members of family, or the space where single people live. Private space includes all of the settings where life appears to be exclusive, without defined social rules, with few or even no social interactions between people, or at most with a very limited number of people which are part of a family. All those cases take place inside a private space. Usually, private space could have a limited dimension, but in any case it has the character of having a limited number of interactions and connection. Probably the most important character of private space is the exclusiveness.

Public space, at the contrary, is the one which is mostly open to the inter-relation between people. In this case the interaction between people and the behaviour of a single person have to follow certain rules which define a society in its specificity. We have to point out a very complex question that concerns the space, especially the public one: we are not talking about something strictly related on the *physical* conformation of the space. This is certainly a key element but may not be the principal one. The character of public space is mostly about the *idea* of public connection, or how people recognize a certain kind of space in term of social behaviours. In this perspective, public space is public not because it is "outdoor" or big. It becomes public because of people's common use and interpretation of it. In public space, behaviour is probably the most significant issue. Here, the rules are stricter and the interaction between people are based on customs that are broadly recognized as "civil" for a certain society. This is particularly true in Asian countries and especially in China. Social behaviours and self-conduction belong to a social convention, according with the state and the image that a single person has to sustain in front of the world. This strictness is not a prison, however. Every area of life follows a

9. Farquhar 2009.

10. In this paper, we present the idea of private, public and semi-public space according with basic observation and definition. The topic is extremely large and complex, but this paper assumes that these kinds of space have already been defined in much complete works. As a key reference we suggest the classic: Edward Twitchell Hall, *The hidden dimension*, Doubleday & Co. Inc., New York, 1966. That book concerns the "prossemic" approach and it offers a fundamental study for the idea of space in the sociology.

precise behaviour pattern. Even in the private life, which apparently should be the opposite or in other words extremely free, the "man of culture", the upright gentleman, can dedicate itself into the correct behaviour. And even in this case, we cannot find the "freedom without rules". The freedom in the private space concerns the free choice to behave according with the intellectual cultivation of the "man of culture". The absolute freedom does not exist in the traditional culture, both in public and in private. The formality in behaviours has a direct consequence in the conformation of space in traditional China, assuming a very formal dimension. During the centuries people seemed to act in a very similar (and even depersonalized) way. But, in fact, this is possible only because in private space the behaviours correspond of the freedom of the intellectual occupation, worthy of a cultivated gentleman. This is why public space seems to be uniform and social behaviours and connection are so formal in China. The public dimension belongs to a restricted number of possibilities which all the Chinese, in some way, agree to be involved in.

The idea of semi-public space is much more difficult to define, compared to the previous two. We believe it has a very important function in the analysis of the Chinese space. As a preliminary definition we can describe it as a space which the nature is in between public and private but, in a certain sense, belongs more to the public side. Semi-public space already loosens the character of privacy, the intimacy of private space. People who experience this kind of situation do not have the same grade of freedom as in private settings, but at the same time, they are not subjected to a very open observation of the public. Semi-private space cannot be defined as a "buffer zone" between private and public. This is certainly a kind of space, which belongs to the "place of staying". In this space, people can share time and they have several kind of activities. Basically, we can find many characters that belong to public space. But at the same time, semi-public space has a kind of intimacy which is much higher compared with public space. In semi-public space people can share a moderate intimacy, but the grade of it cannot be similar to private home or rooms. In other perspective, we can define semi-private space as a kind of public space for a restricted number of person. If in public space, at least in theory, all people, from every class and nationality, could take part into all the public activities, in semi-public space this could not happen. In this case, the restricted number of people cannot be identified as the member of a family or a "clan".[11] Semi-public space belongs to members of different families. Semi-public space could be open to public but, in general, they are separate. Following is a list of examples, we can describe some cases:

1. it can be included into a courtyard open to the public, but this courtyard does not belong to a family or a clan;
2. it belongs to a private club or group of people and generally does not need a ticket, but a membership;
3. the people who can be admitted belong to a group which can be easily recognized;
4. the member of the group can easily recognize each other, because they are familiar

11. The idea of "clan" or large family is very important in the Chinese traditional culture. The clans can reach a very large number of members. This has a direct effect to the space and architecture. The most clear example of this can be identified in 王家大院 [Wángjiā dàyuàn] in the province of 山西 [Shānxī].

or because they have a kind of social connection;
5. those spaces can be close or open, covered or not;
6. the size of the setting is in general small, surrounded by boundary or not, but can be recognized by a specific limit;
7. as similar as every private space, it is protected;
8. it has a privileged position, view, facilities, commodities;
9. in general it is designed to have this kind of character. Private space is a result of a project made to fit exactly the request of certain family members. Public space sometime is planned but sometime is spontaneous. Semi-public space is probably the result of a precise plan. The designer plans it with the intention to generate exactly a space with its specific nature and use;
10. in general, they have a good design and quality.

This is not a complete list, but it describes some of the main characters of semi-public space that we intend to describe. We believe that the key point of the three different kinds of space is not based on the size. Public space can be very small and private space can be very big. The key issue is the "semiotic of the space", or how people recognize and use private or public or semi-public space. It's more related to the perception, interpretation and behaviours in the spaces than any other categories.
In the following sections, we firstly analyse the concept of space from the linguistic and philosophical perspective. As in the Chinese context, a pure philosophical analysis of space can be very deep, reaching into the field of metaphysics by itself. This analysis is necessary and helpful for our discussion of the history of public space in China, in Ancient China and its modification during different dynasties, in Socialist age, and after the 1980s. At the same time we analyse the structure of Chinese public space, its typologies, characteristics and dimensions, via interpreting paintings, postcards, historical photos and some modern physical settings. We intend to find some basic rules of the formation of Chinese public space during different periods. After the spatial (and functional) analysis of Chinese public space, in section five and six we make a sociological analysis of the change of family and social life in China, which is highly related to how people use public space. After these sections of space and social structure, in section seven, we discuss family and social structure with public space, comparing the relationship between public space and the structure of Chinese family and society in different ages. Finally, we point out the limitations of public space in contemporary China. We argue that the contemporary design of public space in China *reflects* the problematic structure of family and social life. Moreover, the physical environment of public space itself further *worsens* the family and social problems in China.

Key concepts of space in traditional Chinese culture

The concept of «space» is surprisingly complex. Even if it is a common notion, something that every living creature uses, has experience of, and interacts, that simplicity just works in the area of common sense. Space in mathematics, in physics, in theology, in architecture, in sociology, has different implications and meanings, all related to the *use* that the various disciplines approach the concept of

space. The main issue is that space is used for some activities. It is functional, it is a kind of "place", physical or mentally intended. The idea of space that we have has the power to shape our understanding of space and, consequentially, how we use it, intentionally or unintentionally. We will find, in addition, that the idea of space has many implications and correlations.[12] We find useful to analyse the definition of space based on etymology. The word «space», came form the Latin «spatium»[13] or «SPÂCIUM»[14], or with the ancient Umbro[15] «spanti», with the Doric Greek «spàdion» and the Attic Greek «stàdion»[16]. All the words contain the root «Spa», with the meaning of «to extend»[17] (in Italian: «stendere» «estendere»). If the meaning is clear from the ancient Latin and Greek, much more interesting and dense implication is the ancient German «Spannan»[18] («Spannen» in modern German), because the concept of «Spannan» implicates a "tension", such as «stretch» (in italian: «tendere» but also «distendere», the second with the intention of «relaxation», «de-stress»). According to this sense, we can find that in the Greek, in Latin and in Neo-Latin words, the idea of space is related to an "extension of empty between things", or an "empty entity", but this emptiness is not something non-existent, but a place where things are simply not occupied yet. The only exception is the German with its extraordinary rich philosophical implication: "a void with tension". This is why the modern German has the concept of «zwischenraum», poorly translated into English with «space-between». This term, extremely important in the discussion of modern architecture in German[19], describes the complexity of behaviours, perception, model generation, etc, of the space between things, which has a connotation of dynamic space, compression and release, and all the unpredictable situations that could happen in a "space of possibility". In this sense the idea of «zwischenraum» is unique. The western etymology is certainly limited because we are talking about language relatively recent. It could be interesting in our discussion to analyse the meaning of space in the Chinese language for many reasons: firstly for the special nature of Chinese ideograms, and secondly because our analysis concerns the Chinese space and how Chinese people use public space. In the ancient literature and writing the idea of space appears only in three ideograms: «宇» [yǔ], «宙» [zhòu], «室» [shì]. No other characters, simple or complex, to indicate space. The first one, «宇» [yǔ], has the meaning of «house» or «roof», but also «space». The second «宙» [zhòu] is referred to space, also, the interesting fact is that the direct meaning is related to «infinite time, time without beginning or end»; this will be interesting when we will analyse

12. A wide discussion of this concept is done in Genovese 2013, *Introduction*. For the key concept, the chapter 1 and the chapter 4 for a deep description.

13. See: Dizionario Treccani Online. Word: «Spazio». In: www.treccani.it/vocabolario/spazio/

14. See: Dizionario Etimologico Online. Word: «Spazio». In: www.etimo.it

15. This is one of the ancient pre-Latin language in the area of center Italy. This is an extinct language.

16. This is also the origin of the word «Stadium», intended as sport center.

17. Source: Dizionario Etimologico Online. Word: «Spazio». Op. cit.

18. Related also with «Spanna» in Italian, and in English «Span», or «measure of the hand».

19. The German architect Hans Scharoun, for example, is one of the most important case for the investigation of the concept of «zwischenraum», one of the basis of his complex work.

the metaphysics of the idea of space in the modern concept «空間» [kōngjiān]. The composition of «宇 宙» [yǔ zhòu], in modern Chinese, indicates the universe, in sense of cosmos. «Room, apartment» but also «wife» is the meaning of «室» [shì].[20]

In modern culture, «space» is translated into «空間» [kōngjiān].[21] This ideogram is composed by two parts. The first one«空» [kōng] has the meaning of «empty, void», but also «unreal» and «huge and vast»[22]. Very interesting is the comparison between «空間» [kōngjiān] and «空門» [kōngmén]. The second is a classic term used in Buddhism to express «the teaching which regards everything is unreal, or immaterial». An additional observation: «間» [jiān] has a very interesting meaning because it concerns «something between two things, the space between», or «within a definite time and space», which is very close to our consideration on «zwischenraum». What we have done until now is a short research about the etymology of the word, but, besides that, we have to investigate some additional metaphysical meanings of this ideogram. The first consideration is the comparison between «空間» [kōngjiān] and «空門» [kōngmén]. If «門» [mén] has the meaning of «door, gate», «間» [jiān] contains the word «門» plus «日» [rì], «sun». In both cases we have a door and the door, in many cultures, is guarded by a god, Janus in the Latin world and Kīrtimukha, or Kīrttimukha, in Hinduism. In Chinese culture, Kīrtimukha has his correspondent of «饕餮» [Tāotiè]. In all of the cases, we are describing the gods of the passage, which are related to "space" and "time" and, more precisely, on the exit of this material world to the metaphysical dimension. In detail, Janus has two faces, one looks inside one outside, one to the past, one to the future, but only the third one, invisible, «in between», or «zwischenraum», or «空間» is the real one which departs from the material world to the immaterial (or metaphysical) world. This is exactly the same meaning described by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in *Il simbolismo della cupola* [*The symbolism of the Dome*][23], and even more precisely in *«Svayamātṛṇṇā: Janua Coeli»*[24]. In short, according with Coomaraswamy argumentation in the second paper, this is related to immortality, because to escape from the mouth of the Death[25] (which Kīrtimukha could be an expression[26]) it is necessary to climb a stair or a tree and pass

20. The fact that home and wife are described by the same character it is not a confusion of the Chinese language. Home and wife are strictly related. This is clearly expressed also by the world 樓 [lóu], «a building with two stores or more», which include «wood», 木, and «woman» 女.

21. We will use for obvious reason the Chinese classic ideograms.

22. This note are referred by *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*, 1994.

23. Coomaraswamy 2005, pp. 363-415.

24. *Ivi*, pp. 443-495.

25. *Ivi*, p. 447.

26. Kīrtimukha is obviously not the God of Death, but more the idea of the "Time that consume itself". A Nepali story could be indicative of this: «Before the creation, Brahmā was walking in the empty space. Suddenly He met Kīrtimukha. Brahmā was very surprised because He did not create anything yet». This story was narrated by Mr. Krishna Prajapati, personal friend of Paolo Vincenzo Genovese, during a study trip in in Bhaktapur, Nepal in 2013. The meaning could be describe as: the first things created is the time, before anything else, and the time eat itself, consume itself, as Kīrtimukha did in the mythology of Hinduism (for another version of the story of Kīrtimukha cfr. Campbell 1991, pp. 118-119. For the original edition see Campbell 1974).

from the small hole, which is a mouth, a door (*mukha* in Sanskrit).[27] This is the fissure of the sky (*divaś chidram*), similar to the hole on the hub of a cart or chariot. This is covered by rays (beams) [...]. Who knows this, he is beyond of Sun.[28] We can notice that the symbol of the Sun is related on life and with the world of manifestation. To pass the gate of the Sun «間» means to pass from the mortal status to the immortal one. The gate of the Sun «間» is the material status and so, the meaning of the space in the «空間» could be related to this concept.[29] This explanation is extremely high in the metaphysical point of view. In every expression of the ancient culture we have at least three levels of understanding: high, middle and low (天–人–地).[30] To express the meaning of space in China, we would like to illustrate briefly a key idea which comes from the 道德經, *The Book of Tao and Virtue*, by Lao Zi. This should represent a connection between the high metaphysical and the human world[31]. One of the most direct expression of space is the chapter XI[32]. This part is very famous and the explanation needs a very long description. In the limit of this paper we can mention just three important elements: the concept of 無為 [wúwéi], the sentence «埏埴以為器», and the sentence «鑿戶牖以為室».

The first one, 無為 [wúwéi], is one of the key concepts in Daoism, and also one of the most misinterpreted. The common translation of it is «non-action», which actually is a wrong concept. In short, 無為 [wúwéi] is composed by the character 為[wéi] which indicates «to do, to act», «to manage, to handle, to administer», but also the opposite: «to serve as».[33] In fact to administer – as the governor should do – means to serve and not lead. This term seems to have no particular difficulties to be interpreted. The problem start with the concept of 無 [wú] which indicate a negation, the negative form of something[34]. So, the literal translation is definitely «non-action», but unfortunately the Chinese language, especially the ancient one and surely the traditional concept, cannot be translated literally. To understand this concept we have

27. *Ibidem*.

28. Oertel 2005, p. 447.

29. We can not continue in the limit of this paper about the interpretation of the meaning of the space in the ancient Chinese and Asian culture. We invite to analyse the implication of the characters «間隙» [jiànxì] and «空襲» [kōngxí] related on our discussion.

30. 天 [Tiān], 人 [rén], 地 [de], or sky, human being, earth, the tree element of the reality, where the Man is posed in the "middle earth".

31. The discussion on this point could be extremely difficult and controversial. Lao Zi is considered one of the high expression of the metaphysics in China. Nevertheless he did not express anything new, as Confucius as well. Both of them repeat and clarify the teaching of the ancient especially from the 易經 [Yì Jīng], which represent the highest level of metaphysical thinking of China and surely one of the top of all the world. Our discussion in this chapter will be limited on the high and middle level of interpretation of the concept of the space. We will express the lowest level in the following chapter during the analysis of the physical space in China.

32. Lao Zi, *Book of Tao and Virtue*, Chapt. 11.

33. Word: «為». *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*, 1994.

34. A simple prove of the complexity of the word 無it is express by the numerous meaning that this term is used in the Chinese language. The *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*, 1994, dedicate 22 columns to express the different correlation of this words and the relative meaning.

to refer to the tradition, commentaries and especially the study of 孙子 [Sūnzi]. In short, without too many analysis, we can summarize that the key meaning of 無為 [wúwéi] is «action without intention», or «action according with the nature of the things» and the "nature of the things represents the «order of the heaven» or 天 [tiān]. The fact that Lao Zi uses the term 無 [wú] and the correlation with 無為 [wúwéi] shows that in the chapter XI the concept of space is connected with 無為 [wúwéi]. Thanks to the 無 [wú] it is possible to use the inner space of the house. Thanks to the 無 [wú] it's possible to have light and windows – 鑿戶牖以為室. Thanks to the 無 [wú] the vase can be used – 埏埴以為器. But, always and again, Lao Zi has a particular complexity. He uses 埏埴 [shānzhí] and not vase, or vessel, as usually translated; this is because the main idea of this sentence is related on "in-formal". Vase is something definite and formal. 埴 [zhí] is the soil which contains clay that can be used to make the vase. In addition, Lao Zi also uses 埏 [shān] which indicates a boundary. So, in this sentence we can find that Lao Zi indicates the «function» in the use of the tool 器 [qì]: not the vase itself, even not the cavity of the vase, as commonly translated, but the indefinite things, the «absence» of 無 [wú] from the indefiniteness of the boundary, the limit of the primary material which *could be* formed into a vase. Is this space? According to our understanding of the problem, this is something more fundamental than the simple concept of space. It is probably referred to the basic nature of space. It includes the idea of absence 無 [wú] and the idea of boundary, limit, 埏 [shān]. The discussion on 埏 [shān] is extremely complex because it is also related to separation. Every boundary joins and restrains, connects and separates something, and it is impossible to define appropriately what it is in, what it is out and what the limit is. This is why we have gods to protect the limit, such as Janus and Kīrtimukha. We do not need to continue the analysis. What can we conclude in this section dedicated to the definition of the concept of space in traditional China? In the ancient Chinese culture, space is not a physical entity but something that is surely manifested in the world. It could be defined as absence, but, only with the complexity contained in 無為 [wúwéi]. Space is defined by intangible limit. It is not necessarily empty, but it is something that could be filled in it according with its nature. The space is not necessarily something to admire in its emptiness, but something that is strictly restated on a specific use according with the nature of that specific thing. From the idea of 間 [jiān], space does not have the meaning of abstraction, as in mathematics. It is not something completely mental, or metaphysical, or unreal. It is manifested, it is in the real world, but it cannot be defined by form (無為), or by limit (埏) or frame (鑿戶牖以為室).

Analysis and characters of public space in traditional Chinese culture

If the last section of this paper was concentrated mostly on the philosophical aspect of space in ancient China, in this part we would like to study how this metaphysical idea becomes real. To do this, we choose a classic method: the ancient sources which, in our case, are mostly paintings and old postcards. This choice has a particular reason. The analysis of literature, especially the classic books, is extremely long and complex. In addition, the main classic books of Chinese culture have a very

special character: the literal meaning does not correspond to the real contents of the book. For example, an in-depth analysis of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* – 紅樓夢 [*Hóng lóu mèng*] – will show that the story does not have any intention to describe the life and love story of 賈寶玉 [Jiǎ Bǎoyù] but something much more complex related to the enlightenment and alchemy[35]. Similarly, we will find that in the classic book *Chin P'ing Mei*[36] – 金瓶梅 [*Jīn Píng Méi*] – the life, the situation, and the adventure describe an *interior* space. The characters, especially the main ones, seem to live in an exclusive private space, clearly separated from the "unknown" outdoor space which is never defined or, if appearing, the outdoor space indicates indistinct features. In the *Chin P'ing Mei* the erotic adventure jumps room to room, courtyard to courtyard. All seem to be private and intimate. We have to limit our analysis of the literature, but we can point out some key issues for future study. At first we suggest to analyse what the nature of private space is in the classic Chinese books. At the same time, we have to notice that the spaces described in the books quoted above, are not physical but mostly metaphysical and symbolic. Much more complex will be the analysis of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* – 三國演義 [Sānguó yǎnyì] – and of the *Journey to the West* – 西遊記 [Xīyóu jì] –, because those books contain a much higher philosophical level and complexity. But we could have interesting sources in the collections of short novels, such as Féng Mènglóng's (馮夢龍) *Three Words* (in Chinese 三言 [Sān yán]), the Líng Méngchū's (凌濛初) *Slapping the Table in Amazement* (拍案驚奇), or Lǐ Yú (李漁) also named Lǐ Lìwēng (李笠翁) and his *Twelve Towers* (十二樓). In all those books, the analysis could show an articulated sense of space, both private and public, in daytime and at night.

In our discussion on China's public space, we prefer to dedicate to the discussion on paintings; the description will be much easier and shorter. The analysis cannot be complete but we will mention some key aspects of public space in China, from the paintings of landscape and daily life. Other interesting sources could be the old pictures and postcards made by western people during the late Qing Dynasty. Visually they are extremely indicative. A general consideration about Chinese paintings of landscape is that in most of the cases we have a philosophical approach and the sentences inserted in the paintings as comments are the key parts to understand the meaning of the paintings. Probably, the most impressive and useful painting is the Sung Dynasty (宋代) painting (Fig.1) 清明上河图[37] by 张择端 [Zhāng Zéduān] (1085-1145). In this famous painting we can see a scene from the daily life, but with the particular perspective of the folk situation on the street. If, in most of the cases, Chinese paintings of landscape are dominated by nature and human beings are just small figures in contemplation of the supreme principle (of nature), in the case of 清

35. The complexity of the four classic book of the cheese literature are really beyond our possibility in the limit of this paper. We invite scholars to analyze the sense of the space in the classic literature of China in a much more complete study.

36. We use this version of the transliteration because it become common in the western countries, even if the pinyin is different.

37. In the Beijing, Forbidden City's museum, 北京故宫博物院.

明上河图 the human life is palpitating. Besides the interesting analysis, described in thousands of articles by many scholars, we would like to mention that *space*, in this painting, *is mostly public and semi-public*. We hardly find the sense of quietness represented in most of the Chinese art. In this case the city is chaotic, full of activities. We can find at the same time shipping, happy fellows in taverns, camels from Xinjiang, market, and many other situations. Public life flows along the streets. The street is a key element for public life. People run as water flows in a river. Some parts of the street are crowded, other parts more empty but the scene, in its totality, has a particular balance. In the limit of our analysis, we can notice that the street is certainly the center of public life. It is used as functional element to connect, to link, as a river for the fluency of life. We can notice that at least three settings are for people's standing and for people's reunion: bridges and dock, crossroad – especially in the corner, and particular shops, or restaurants, or taverns, such as the 正店 [zhèng diàn] or winery shops. Squares and widening are almost empty. The road, probably, represents the metaphor of life. But in our case we will focus on the conception of space which is mostly functional for connection; in the case of standing, space is directly connected with commercial, or drinking and eating activities. Rarely do people stand and talk.

The exception is represented by the bridges on river and canal. In this case people stand, have conversations, and so on. An additional observation could be made about some taverns, or restaurants, which represent a kind of semi-public space. They are semi-public because those places are completely open to the public: no door and no walls separate the costumers from the road and, even, they are facing the public life from indoor. Inside and outside are not separated but in deep communication. We can say that the nature of this specific type of restaurant is based on the direct communication between inside and outside spaces. They are surely distinct but also completely penetrate into each other. Another useful source for public space in the Chinese cities are the historical photos and postcards from the late Qing Dynasty. In a postcard that represents Shanghai on 13 May 1907 (上海洋泾浜 [Shànghǎi yáng jīng bāng])[38] (Fig.2), we can find a very similar scenery already described above. A road, beside a dry canal, with several shops on one side, is full of people; some of them are walking along the road, most of them stand beside the boundary of the canal – some people are in a conversation, others selling goods. A small building in the center of the picture has a shop on the corner: the first floor is completely open to the public. Even if we cannot recognize the function of the shop, we can presume that it is a drug-store, or a winery or tavern. The relationship between the road, river and canal, and place of staying is extremely clear in the "river-based town" or "river-based village", such as 安昌 [Ānchāng] in Zhejiang province (Fig.3). In this example, and many others like this, we have an extremely rich space beside the river and canal, usually covered by simple roof and with various kinds of sitting place, sometime just a rough bench or a much more sophisticated and decorated sitting area like in 锦溪乡 [Jǐn Xī

38. In 王迦南，蔡小丽，明信片–清末中国，第二版, [*Postcard of Qing Dynasty*, Vol. 2] 中国人民大学出版社，北京, 2005, p. 44

Xiāng] in Hunan Province[39] (Fig.4). A simpler situation is represented in the postcard of Shanghai, Henan Road [上海河南路][40]; this area appears to be much more in order and the road is basically a walking way for pedestrians and carriage (Fig.5).

The situation is a little different in Canton, where the road is much narrower, just for pedestrians, and completely full of vertical boards for shops and other business[41] (Fig.6). Here the road and its nature is definitely commercial and people stand and walk only for business purposes. The main difference in this kind of space is the size of the road that, compared with the previous cases, is much more narrower and the building along taller.[42] In all the cases discussed, what appears clearly is that the scale of public space, street, river-road, squares, is not very big, or in other words at "human scale". This is extremely important for China's traditional public spaces. An additional case is represented by public theatre, called 戏台 [xìtái]. The 戏台 [xìtái] is an extremely complex typology of theatre. It could be located in a private courtyard, in semi-public space and in completely public (Fig.7)[43] space. This is a very special kind of public space in ancient China. The description of the specific cases could be too long but, as an example, we will mention three cases of public theatre. The first one, private, is testified by the excellent case of 俞源 [Yúyuán][44] (Fig.8) in Zhèjiāng province. In the case of semi-public space, we can select one in 楠溪江 [Nánxījiāng][45] (Fig.9), again in Zhèjiāng province. In the second case, the setting appears much bigger than that in the previous example. The typology of the second courtyard is much more complex because we can find a patio with a second floor covered by a roof, which in the first case does not appear. We consider it as semi-public for the inclusiveness of the space. An interesting 戏台 [xìtái] could be referred to in 天津 [Tiānjīn] in front of 天后宫 [Tiānhòugōng] temple. This case is very special because it is a new project following the traditional typology. It is a perfect example of semi-public space, surrounded by building, but at the same time crossed by a pedestrian street with commercial function, one of the most popular area in Tianjin city. For the public case we find an interesting painting of 清代 (Qing Dynasty), emperor 康熙 [Kāngxī][46] that represents a public theatre located in an almost completely open space that can be considered public (Fig.10).

39. Those two cases are not the most significant in China, but it represent two situation which are the typical concept of the public and semi-public spaces in China along rivers and canal.

40. *Ivi*, p. 165.

41 *Ivi*, p. 106, top.

42. We suggest for future study a very interesting analysis: is understanding of the size of the road and public spaces in the traditional China. We believe that this could bring a very good contribution concerning the understanding of the space. This is, of course, related also to the typology of the road, building, according with different climate condition.

43. The pic show the case in the village of 郭洞 [Guōdòng] in 杭州 [Hángzhōu].

44. Cfr. AA.VV., 中国古镇游，陕西师范大学出版社，北京, 2003, p. 65. The case of this magnificent typology are many. We select this one not for his particular quality but because it' a very typical case of 戏台.

45. Cfr. *Ivi*, p. 114.

46. In 林乾，清代衙门图说，中华书局，北京, 2006, p. 218.

In short we can describe the 戏台 [xìtái] as a space of reunion based on public performance, mostly performing classical stories. What is interesting in this case is the situation of many people who join together to participate in classic entertainment. It is important for our paper to notice that in China people love to be together and spend time in classic entertainment. We will find that, in modern and contemporary China, this habit does not change too much, except for some contents. Modern and contemporary Chinese engage in the Socialist dancing, performance, singing songs from the Maoism repertoire, playing 太极 [Tàijí], 功夫 [Gōngfū], and other martial arts, or the popular table game, like 麻将 [Májiàng] or similar. Clearly the difference are radical. In one case we have the performance made by professional or folk actors on the stage of 戏台 [xìtái]; in the other case, we have shows where common people are at the same time performers and audience. What is common, in every case, is that, traditionally, many people join together to have some activities which are considered "traditional", or which belong to a great past – classic age or Maoism. We believe that the case of the 戏台 [*xìtái*] is extremely important for us to understand the use of public space for the Chinese culture. Public or semi-public space in China support common activities, and this is similar in other countries. The revival of the great past (again Maoism or ancient dynasty it is the same matter) is not unique in China. In Italy, for example[47], the opera theatre has exactly the same function. In the Chinese public theatre, there are some elements of originality that differentiate China from other countries. The specific points are at least three: A) it happens in an open space, public or semi-public, while in Europe, for example, it happens in covered theatres in most of the cases; B) the audience is involved in the activities, playing games, singing or even expressing loud comments, appreciation or rumble or moaning, during the performance of the actors; C) a surprising small number of activities are licit.[48]

In the classic Chinese painting, we find a surprising low number of prototype of themes. As we mentioned earlier, most classic Chinese paintings show the sense of quietness. Yet, there are landscape paintings which include not only the gorgeous and sublime nature, but also people, in different aggregations. An interesting case is (Fig. 11) 四序图 [Sì xù tú] by 姚文瀚 [Yáo Wénhàn]. In this scroll, we have a magnificent landscape, enriched by architecture and pavilions. Many people are captured in the painting and they engage in different activities in small and large groups. Some sail on the river, some contemplate, some discuss with each other, and a larger group assists to a dancing in front of a lord in his palace. The number of group members are variable, from three to many. The painting has the special character to describe several cases of space, public, semi-public and private. The behaviour of people is various.

47. We quote the case of Italy for the only reason that the Italian Opera is a very precise and celebrated style of classic representation in Europe.

48. In our observation we can testify that the following are the most common: classic opera and local folk opera (such as the Tianjin cross-talking named 谦祥益 [qiānxiángyì], 相声 [xiàngsheng] «funny talking»), singing (mostly classic or from the Maoism age), dancing (very common is folk Tango), 太极, 功夫, martial arts, 麻将, various card game, 毽子 [Jiànzi], a very old game based on some trilling rings linked together and decorated by colourful plumes which have to be kick by feet without touching the ground.

In the dancing performance, people are orderly around the dancer, who is the center of the observation. Here the space is divided in the interior of the pavilion where the lord rules the scene, the covered terrace with some audience, and the courtyard, almost empty, with the dancer in the center and some other people beside her. The space in this case is conformed as a square, very regular, and people occupy the area according with a sense of order and clearness. This character is very different from what we have analysed in the previous pictures and postcards. Public and semi-public space in the real world are much more crowded and much less idealistic than those spaces in the artistic painting. However, the previous pictures show a kind of "smell of centuries"[49] that we all love. In both of the situations, the real life and the painting, we can learn something very interesting. Even in the chaotic, crowded space of the postcards, we can easily find a "space hierarchy"; even in the chaos of the real life we still have a very clear use of space without any confusion for position, rules, size and so on. It seems that space is naturally conformed according to "spatial rules" which include position, use, function, and distance. At the same time, the idealistic space described in the painting shows us many interesting ideas. At first, how the space *should be*, according with artistic and literate concept. Secondly, it includes many information about philosophical and traditional issues that show the vision of nature, or metaphysical vision of the cultivated person. In general, space has to be in "order" and reflects the rules of the universe and human societies. We believe that the Daoism has a fundamental importance in the conception of those kinds of art. The last, and much more problematic, case that we want to analyse briefly concerns a category of painting that describes an assembly of people, in most of the cases three or four, or seldom a bit more, who, together, dedicate their time to intellectual activities, such as writing, reading, discussing or simply contemplating nature. Because our intention is to describe space in classic culture, this is definitely a very interesting topic. With more than two people, we can definitely consider this assembly a group which participate in a public situation, sharing idea and obviously space.[50] The painting with this subject are quite a lot but, as usual in the classic Chinese art, it seems to reproduce a type of painting. It is not a *capriccio* or a real situation, but a model, a kind of painting which follows certain precise rules in the composition.[51] In the painting named *Lettered garden* – 文苑图 [Wényuàntú] – by Han Huang[52] (Fig.12), we find four high level men – we assume they are literates – and one servant. The

49. 清代 Qing Dynasty, in 北京故宫博物院.

50. This phrase come from an ancient Italian sentence and indicate the typical bad smell of a certain street of Roma. Horrible, dirty, disgusting bad small, but with the charming of the thousand years of history in front of us.

51. In this part we will not discuss about the private space, or space where some intimate situation happen, include romantic stories, description of family or portrait, erotic painting. All this belongs to a different category of space which is not include in our dissertation.

52. This is not unusual in art. The same European art, especially in the Middle Age and Renascence, was mostly based on model which has indefinite variation. In the classic art this is a common situation: few well defined prototype which are repeated constantly with a limited number of variation. The only change happen according with the different ability of the artists.

literates have inspired faces and they engage in meditation, except the left one who seems to discuss and indicate the scroll on the legs of the second man. For us, the interesting part of this painting concerns the idea of space between few people. They sit closely and inside the group we can recognize clusters among individuals. In other words, in between the five people, we have a specific relationship. In this specific case, we can find this sequence: 2-1-2; two people discuss on the left, one, alone, is supported by a curve tree, and two on the right side, the servant who is preparing the ink and the writer who is contemplating during the composition. A special point of this painting is the quality of the space itself. It is indefinite in the boundary, open to the endless. Few material things are included and in most of the case the space it is represent by the absence of ink and color. This is a very precise philosophical choice but the consideration are really complex and we cannot fix in few line in this paper. This situation describes, probably, the most "private public" or semi-public space: few people gather in a certain kind of activity. Painting with a fewer number of people start to become private and then cannot be included in our description. To find a general rule of this kind of space is extremely difficult. Probably, a very important point in all this situations suggest us to a partial conclusion: every space is based on a center. This center could be represented by a literate, by a dancing, by a theatre or 戏台 [xìtái]. People surround this center with various active or passive activities. The center is not the only element that characterize space in ancient time. Beside this we find something indefinite. This is not a contradiction. In paintings or in real cities, there is a center of human activities; at the same time we find the coexistence of something much larger where this center is dissolved. In other words, we have the compresence of several local centers dissolved into the endless of the universe, or into an indefinite space, which has a very strong philosophical background.

The transition age: from the liberation to contemporary age

This paper is not a historical investigation of the development of public space, but an analysis of its main characters. We believe that a key transformation in the nature of China's public space has occurred after 1949. The modification of life, public and private, and the historical changes, are so radical, which completely modify the asset of China's entire society. The architecture, building, style, language, behaviour and, consequentially, lived space are undertaking enormous transformation.

Among those issues we would like to focus on four points that we believe are very important in the age of transformation:

a) residential block typology;
b) modification of public life;
c) space of celebration;
d) the reflection of the social changes into housing.

Because of the complexity of the topic, we are forced to keep those points in short and give just some general considerations about them. A radical change in urban space after the liberation was necessary to find an appropriate solution for the residential needs in the renovated China. Beside this, the first economic plan during the 50's

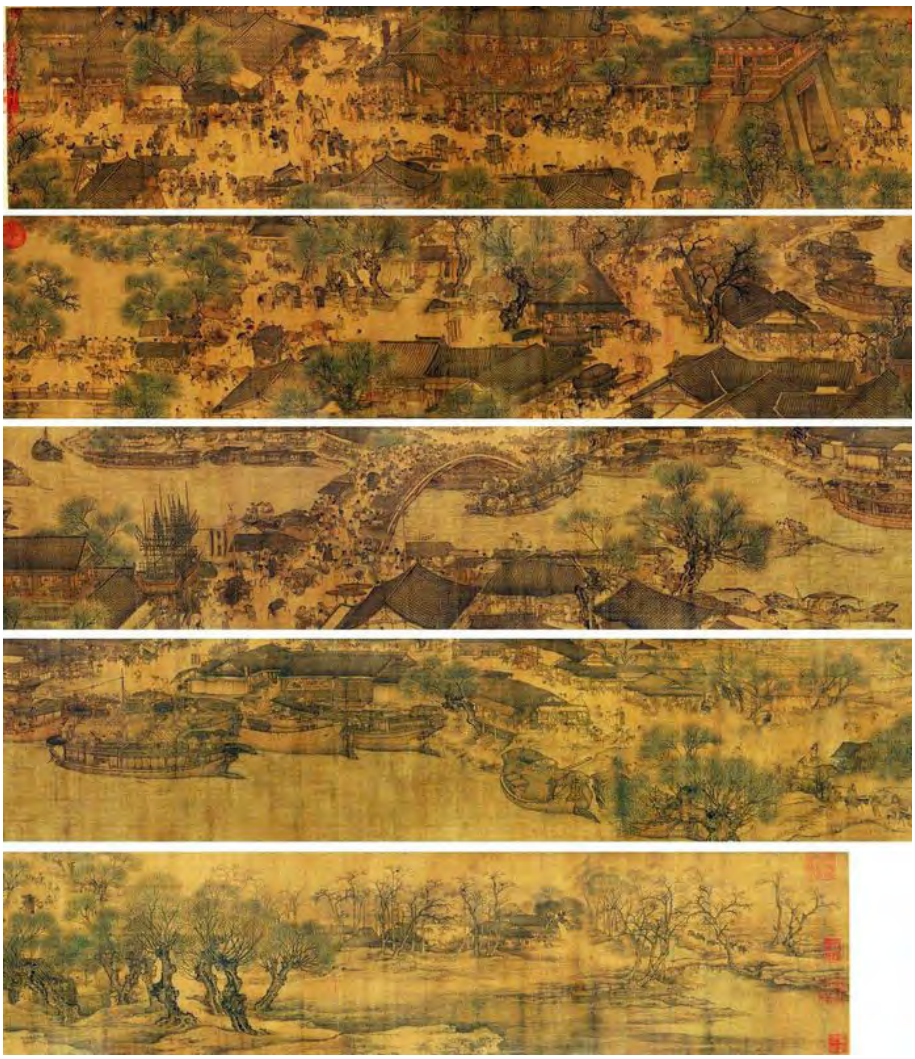


*Fig. 1. Kaifeng. Sung Dynasty (*宋代*) painting (Fig. 1)* 清明上河图 *by* 张择端 *[Zhāng Zéduān] (1085-1145).*

was directed to increase the heavy industry, with the consequent needs of housing for the workers. China followed the Soviet model. This model was based on the industrialized constructive system which has the advantage to be fast, limited in cost and needs a small number of specialized workers, more necessary in other sectors of industry. The main character of this system was the standardization of the project, the serial production, and the systematic construction. The living unit was standard, based on industrialized components. The building was a composition of this standardized unit, assembled together to create residential compounds. The first experiment started in 1952. The standard for each person was 9 m^2 for the Russian model and 4 m^2 for the Chinese one, but the government of China would respect the Russian model to increase the quality of the living condition gradually. This system generated building without elevator, with three or four floors ordered in linear blocks. The access of the different unit was through stairs block or inner corridor. The series of residential sticks were grouped in compound, which included also social service building. We can find a memory of the traditional family structure at least in two aspects: firstly the building was faced to south in almost all the cases and secondly for the traditional inclusiveness of the compound. In other words, the residential compound with the service buildings was always surrounded by railing and the access to the compound was through a gate under surveillance[53]. The Soviet standard came, in fact, by a much early speculation from Germany realized by Walter Gropius and others during the 1920-'30. We can quote the project of *Residential compound Törten*, in Dessau-Törten, 1928 and even more indicative the diagrams that Gropius made for CIAM in 1930[54] (Fig.13). Those cases can be included in the experiment on the "Existenzminimum"[55]; unfortunately we cannot analyse the background of this idea into the modernist Chinese architecture due to the limit of our paper. We believe this is a key issue for the understanding of residential buildings in modern and contemporary China. The typology imported from Russia based on stick was not completely appropriate to the Chinese standard, in terms of life, climate and economic growth. After the first round, the Ministry of Urban Construction established six official version of residential blocks according with different climate area[56]. The typology of parallel block with North-South orientation – even against some evident weakness of this solution in terms of function and orientation – finally won and any other solution for the residential block became obsolete[57]. The astonish fact is that this conformation is prevalent even today. We have to admit that between 1950 and today China's social life and economy have changed a lot. The urban format changed and even the structure of the society had a radical modification. What is surprising is that any question about the functionality of

53. Rowe, Kuan 2005, pp. 94-97.

54. For an analysis of the project in general, cfr. Frampton 1980, chapt. 15.

55. This German word means «living wage», but in architecture it is used to indicate the minimum standard for an appropriate living condition (such as, minimum surface for each person, standard of lighting, high of the floor, ratio between building, volume and green space, etc.)

56. North-East, North, North-West, South-West, Center and South-East.

57. Rowe, Kuan 2005 (2002), p. 97.

this residential block typology, any other options in terms of typology and standards are simply erased in the common practice. The alternatives are considered, at most, as anomalous speculation made by unconventional scholars or architects. Surely, in the last 50 years, other residential typology was created; one of the most interesting innovation was the residential tower. Nevertheless, the impressive element of the architecture of residential buildings in the recent decades is *the absolute rigidity of the market* to conform to the residential block typology. We insist on this aspect because we believe it is one of the key elements in contemporary creation and use of the space, for public and semi-public (and private as well). The rigidity of the market in terms of planning and construction of this typology generates the crystallization of the use of urban space, which echoes a major point we will discuss in the following sections – how space, and built environment in particular, re-shapes social life. The rigidity of the "residential unit" creates a rigid living space. A rigid living space creates rigid social behaviours. In detail, we can notice that in contemporary planning of residential buildings, the design for semi-public space is completely absent.

Modification of public life is a complex issue that deserves a little analysis. In China's contemporary residential building, we can find a very precise definition of private space (the apartment, for example) and public space. We can argue that those two types of space are not appropriate, or very well made, although they have their own certain characters. What is surprisingly deficient is the consideration about semi-public space, space that belongs to a restricted number of people, for example the members of a specific residential compound. The complexity of the discussion comes from the fact that we cannot say that in contemporary residential compounds semi-public space does not exist at all. It can be found in at least two situations: A) in some cases the space around the residential building has a very poor quality, no green space, no space of staying, the area is mostly used for parking car; B) when it has a more sophisticated design and the car road and the parking lot are separated from the pedestrian area. In the second case, inside the gated compound we can find park, sometimes pavilion for recreation, or in the case of luxury building it has spa, gym centre and other public activities. But even this second kind of semi-public space usually is not used by people. We have to admit that in many cases the green space, gardens, and pavilion in the residential compound have an acceptable quality. It seems that contemporary Chinese do not use the space appropriately and ignore the intention of the architects. In residential compounds, people *immediately* jump from the privacy of their apartment to public space outside of the gated residential unit.

This does not mean that Chinese avoid the community life. At the contrary, in many cases we can find a small or large number of people who join together dance, play card, and play the classic chess or similar games, in specific areas of the city. These activities happen in areas which are not particular beautiful or functional. A personal observation could be useful. In the city of Tianjin, in the corner between 营口道 [Yíngkǒu dào] and 昆明路 [Kūnmíng lù], for many years we notice a group of card players, men and women. The interesting fact is that the area is apparently very inconvenient for any kind of staying: it is on the corner of a street cross, very crowded, the traffic jam is very intense and even dangerous; moreover, the pollution is very high

and it is dirty, part of the players is on the pedestrian street but part is in the middle of the road even in a dangerous position; there are no shops around, as a small setting, it has a green area that is extremely small and poor; there are no facilities at all, the area is very recent and no historical memory. Nevertheless, it is very successful and people prefer this kind of space to other much more private or well-designed settings. To analyse the reason is very complex and it has to be studied case by case. A very general reason could be a certain kind of activity which matches the local taste (small restaurant, a personal legal – or better illegal – enterprise for gambling).

The public behaviours discussed above show us that social behaviours in China are mixed between traditional culture and the radical modification introduced during the Chairman Mao's China. We disagree with the idea that describe public life as an "invention" of the Revolution occurred during the 20th Century. We have demonstrate that public life was extremely intense before the Revolution. Surely the age of Chairman Mao introduced a radical change and public life became more collectivized; the way and the occasion of being together change in form (but not that much) compared the previous periods. What some scholars mention as a radical change – such as singing together, public discussion – are different nowadays only in terms of contents; in fact, we can observe a similar dynamic, like the endless repetition of some tales from the mythic past. In this precise moment of history we can notice that the "age of Revolution" has also become a kind of "classic", at the same level of the ancient story. Definitely a radical modification of the social life concerns the quality of this reunion. If before, in ancient times, public life was mostly populated by people belonging to the middle and low class, during the 20th Century this distinction was completely cancelled for historical reasons. During the age of Chairman Mao, the "intellectual council" described in the painting *Lettered garden* – 文苑图 [Wényuàntú] – by Han Huang (Fig.12) disappeared. We can propose the idea that during the age of Revolution, the collectivism did not generate a new kind of public life, but just new form of it, but in some case we can notice the complete disappearance of some form of private life and entertainment. After the 1980s, with the rise up of the so-called "new rich"[58], the form of distinction between different categories of people, has appeared again, often in a very questionable quality that, surely, does not reach the taste of the ancient intellectual.

The political and ideological changes during the Mao age modified the conception of life. In general we can observe a restriction of private space and a very special characterization of public life. The communitarian sense of society has a strong reflection on the behaviour of people and, consequentially, on the structure of public space. Public areas for reunion, such as canteen or public discussion settings, do not represent, probably, an innovation or a radical modification comparing of the previous generation. What probably became original at that time was the frequency of public communitarian life. The creation of a new concept of public life has generated modifications that persists also today. The most evident – even not an

58. In China, sometime this category of people are describe with the derogatory terms of 土豪 [tǔháo], which could be translate into «parvenu».

original invention in China – is *the space of celebration*, where the most important case is 天安门 Tian An Men square in Beijing. The description of the dynamic in the celebration space are not specific to Chinese culture but we need only to mention that the structure of the ancient city itself was modified or rebuilt for the creation of a new type of public event. This typology and structure of event represent a radical innovation compared with the past, where the leader (emperor or similar) was hidden in a mystic aura. It is indubitable that many stylistic elements of the space of celebration in China came from the Russian of the Stalinism. The language of the building itself is a clear sign of it, where the Forbidden City becomes a background of the new era. In the space of celebration people represent themselves, at least in the intention[59]. This symbolizes a new vision and a new perspective in China, which is included in the behaviours and cultural background of the people. There is also the modification of traditional private housing to be discussed. A very diffusive situation touched the time around the 50's. We intend the distribution to the common population of the private houses that once belonged to the rich families.[60] At that time, China was in the situation of a profound revolution. The immense heritage of private houses of aristocracy and high society was consider the mark of oppression of the ancient system. For this reason those huge houses were distributed equally to the poor people. The traditional courtyard house (the Beijinger 四合院 [sìhéyuàn] is probably the most famous case of it) that before belonged to one family (or a clan) was open to accept even forty families (approximately hundred people). This new typology of living was called 大杂院 [dàzáyuàn]. The garden was occupied by new shacks, and the pavilion of the historical houses was internally divided into many rooms to accept many families under a common roof. This modification was poorly made, small and unhealthy, but it represent the common typology of living for the next 50 years.[61] This specific case, extremely complex in the dynamic and consequence, is unique. That is because the basis of the private space in China for thousand years become something different. During the leadership of Chairman Mao the idea of private life was radically reconsidered. The space of privacy was reduced and the public life become more and more important. The space of the traditional courtyard became a space of small community's life. This cannot be considered as public life because the courtyard was not completely open. Instead, it is based on the concept of community, where a relatively small number of families and people live together in a condition of high proximity. Sometime the living space was reduced to the extremely compressed room (1.5x2.5 meter for two people). This situation necessarily created a new kind of social interaction and definitely a much higher mixing (杂 [dà]) and interaction in the social relationship. We suppose that this new organization of

59. The real dynamic are very interesting and precise but in this paper we are forced to avoid the discussion.

60. This issues are highly controversial for the sensitivity of the topic. As scholars, we intend only describe the historical events without touch the political correlation that are completely insignificant in our point of view. Politics belong to a dimension that include perspective that are completely alien for us.

61. Paolo Vincenzo Genovese was involved in the restoration of 静园 in Tianjin, the residence of the last emperor. We can testify the condition and structure on this new addition inside the original building. The story of this renovation is inlcuded in: Genovese-Lv-Yuan 2007, p. 494.

social life and the consequent effect on the living space, has generated in the last fifty years a radical modification in the conception of social space itself. The radical modification, continues in another direction today, towards a more commercialized and privatized China. The new economic situation, the "dream" (nightmare) of the modern China to be rich and wealthy, modifies again the sense of the community life from the recent past. The discussion about the structure of the Chinese family and society could be an indicative effect of this spatial organization. We will turn to a sociological analysis of Chinese families and society in the following two sections.

The sociological change: modification of the structure of Chinese families

In last section, we have focused on the change of public space from the liberation age to contemporary China. Clearly, the change of public space is simultaneously the change of social behaviours. As Lefebvre stresses in his classic book, *The Production of Space*, one of the most significant characters of space is the social production[62]. Physical environment is social. Built environment and lived space are produced by social practices and social values. Furthermore, built environment re-shapes social practices and social values. Before we analyse the relationship between public space and public behaviours, a detailed discussion of the sociological change of the structure of Chinese families is needed. In traditional China, including socialist China, there are two family structures heavily influencing China's built environment—multi-generation family and kin aggregation. Both of these two family structures are undertaking radical changes. Relatives used to live in the same walled city or area, in many dynasties in ancient China. As a family and social structure, kin aggregation has almost been erased completely, starting from Mao's industrialization policies. The living of 大杂院 [dàzáyuàn] we have discussed in the last session can be categorized as a modified type of kin aggregation, because the mixed residents who lived in Mao's retrofitted 大杂院 [dàzáyuàn] were getting along like an extended family or a kin clan. However, as we have mentioned in the last section, this collective living has disappeared when China further modernizes itself after the 1980s. Multiple generations lived in one big family, on the other hand, is another family structure in ancient and Socialist China. It held true both in rural and urban places, although China was mostly rural before the economic reform. It was until 2011 that China's urban population outnumbered its rural population in the first time.[63] Multi-generation family is not a unique Chinese phenomenon, but it was very dominant in China. As late as the 1980s, multi-generation family was still the norm in urban China. Young couples had to live with their parents if the young couples' work unit did not assign them new housing units. One significant change of China's family structure is the shrinkage of the family size. In Mao's China, thanks to the improvement of the national hospital system, the death rate dropped dramatically. A married couple usually had 4 to 7 children. The first two national censuses in the 1950s and 60s did

62. Lefebvre 1991.

63. National Bureau of Statistics. (2011) *China Statistical Yearbook 2011*, Beijing, The Press of Chinese Statistics, 2011 (in Chinese). In: http://data.stats.gov.cn.

Fig. 2. 王迦南，蔡小丽，明信片–清末中国，第二版, [*Postcard of Qing Dynasty*, Vol. 2] 中国人民大学出版社，北京, 2005.

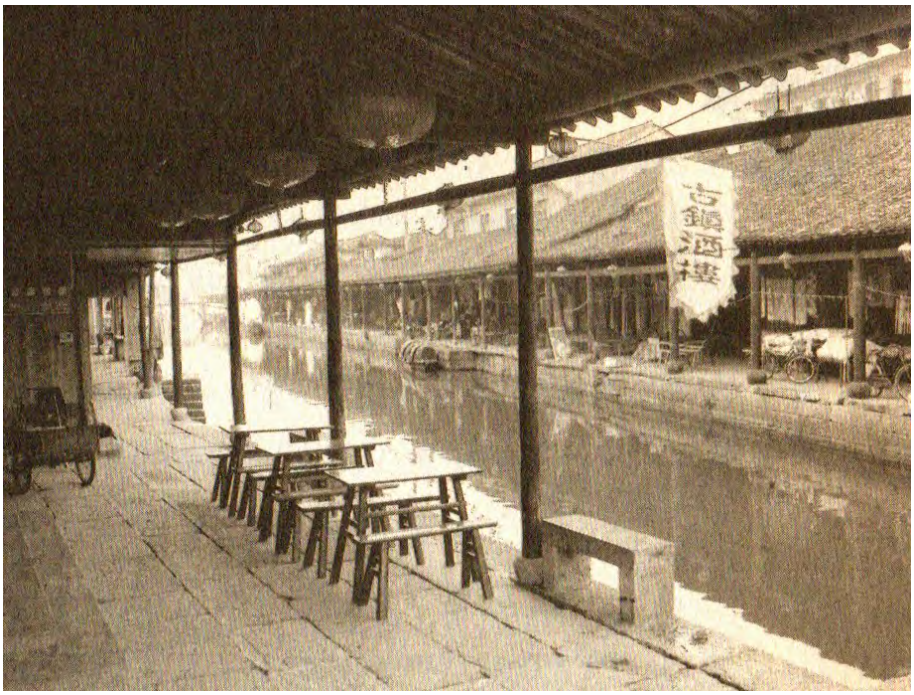


Fig. 3. 中国古镇游，陕西师范大学出版社，北京, 2003.

Fig. 4. 中国古镇游，陕西师范大学出版社，北京, 2003.

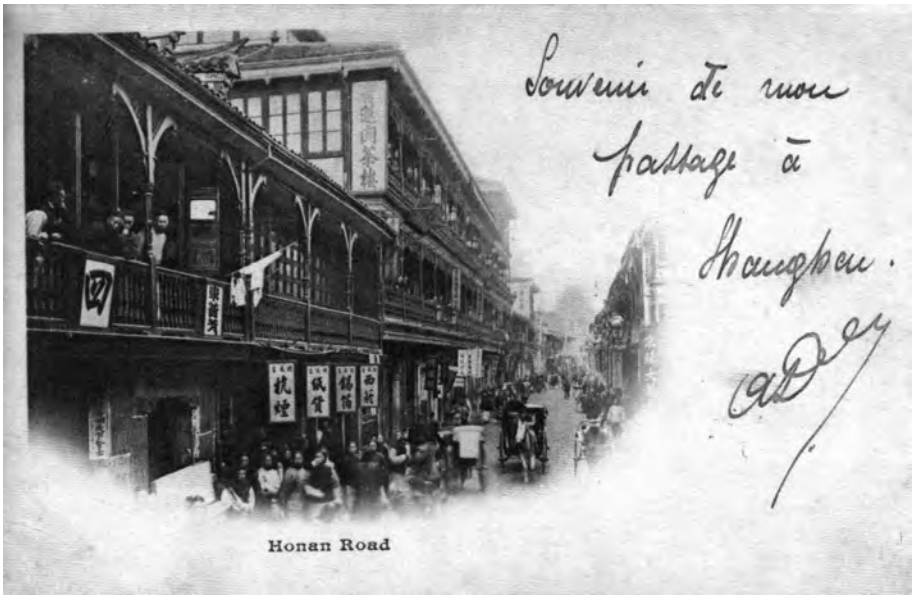


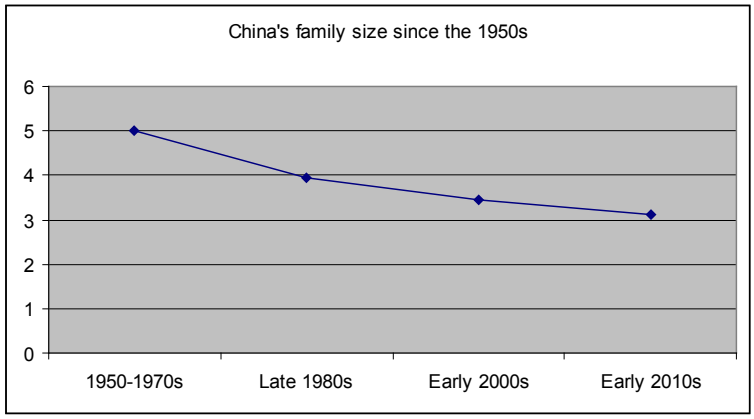
Fig. 5. 王迦南，蔡小丽，明信片–清末中国，第二版, [*Postcard of Qing Dynasty*, Vol. 2] 中国人民大学出版社，北京, 2005.

not count family size. Due to the Cultural Revolution, there was no national census data in the 1970s. So we do not know the exact family size before the 1970s. However, we know that people who were born in Mao's China had 3 to 6 siblings. Big family was no longer the norm since the 1980s, because of the one-child policy. In China's fourth national census, the family size was 3.96. It became 3.44 in the 2000s and 3.10 in the 2010s (National Bureau of Statistics). Nuclear families in urban China can only have one child since the early 1980s. This new population policy, with China's new economic policy, have totally transformed social practices and social norms in China. The generations in the 1980s and after become the "spoiled" generations—one child is usually taken care of by four (or even six) adults. Rural family structure is also under major transformation after the 1980s. Rural couples can have 2 to 3 children under the one-child policy, but they can only give birth to their children and register them in their local rural place. This strict household registration system is still practiced in China currently. As a population policy, household registration «hùkǒu» [户口] is meant to trace and regulate people's residences. To most people, their registered hùkǒu are pre-determined by their parents' official *hùkǒu*. If their parents are urban residents, they are urban. If their parents are rural, they are rural as well, regardless of where they are actually born. There are many constraints if one wants to change one's *hùkǒu*, especially from rural hùkǒu to urban *hùkǒu*.[64] An urban *hùkǒu* has more educational, medical, and social security benefits. As a legacy from Mao's China, this policy has huge impact on contemporary Chinese built environment. After the economic reform, many rural people come to cities to find a living. Yet, unless they have a higher education and get a formal job in the city, or they really make a fortune in the city, they simply cannot transfer their hùkǒu to the city where they live and work. Moreover, they cannot register their children in the city where they live or work. So, if they do not want to pay huge extra fee for their children's education, they have to live separately from their children. This group of people has been categorized as migrant workers or floating population by many scholars.[65] We will discuss the life of this group, with other groups' social life in the next section.

Social life in contemporary China

Social life in contemporary China is strictly work-oriented. In Mao's China, cities were transformed into industry centres. Their sub-districts were re-organized into different work-units, including governmental, industrial, and commercial work-units. Many large work-units had their own schools, hospitals, canteens, housing units, markets, and other utilities for daily life. As we have discussed in section 4, residential block typology was one of the radical transformations which dramatically changed China's constructed space. Together with modification of public life, social life in Mao's China was extremely work-oriented. Contemporary China's social life follows that work spirit, with significant modifications. Firstly, work-unit is still

64. Chan 1996.
65. Zhang 2001.



China's family size since the 1950s. Source: China Statistics Bureau and the authors' estimate.

important for a decent urban life, but many people who work in private companies can earn a decent life without being part of the still powerful work-units such as government bodies, hospitals, schools, and other state-run enterprises. Secondly, housing has been separated from work-units. Even to state-own or state-run work-units that continue to provide housing for their employees, residential communities have been constructed far away from work-units instead of inside them. Thirdly, civic life becomes more commercialized. Contemporary urban Chinese have more places to do shopping, enjoy their leisure time, and engage in other personal activities, in a more commercialized built environment. These major parts of social life are practiced or enjoyed by different people in a very stratified way. Class and hùkǒu are the two major factors to classify urban Chinese in major cities or megacities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. In small and middle cities in inland China, hùkǒu is no longer an important factor. For the sake of our argument, we categorize contemporary urban Chinese into four groups—the local well-off, the local poor, the migrant well-off, and the migrant poor, and describe their way of life respectively. The local well-off normally work in state-own work-units and have more than one housing unit, in the city and in the suburban area. Their first housing was most likely transferred or subsidized by their work-unit, which was the most important factor for their decent life in the city. Logan *et al*. classify this group of people as the winner of China's urban housing reform.[66] They oftentimes live in more expensive suburban communities, with well-off suburban homeowners who were born in other parts of China—the migrant well-off. However, they register their children in the city's schools which provide better and cheaper education. They all have cars to commute between their work and home, and between their city home and suburban home. As locals, they sometimes unite with the local poor to defend their benefits and standing in the city. The local poor is the left-behind group in China's urban housing reform and economic reform. They may or may not own a housing unit in the city, but they do

66. Logan-Fang-Zhang 2010.

not own more than one housing unit in the city. Oftentimes, they are laid-off workers whose former work-units have gone bankrupt or been privatized. Although they have no income for a decent life in the city, their urban hùkǒu provides them basic medical and social security benefits, in addition to the educational benefits for their children. They are not as mobile as the local well-off, but they do have a solid standing in contemporary China's megacities. The migrant poor is the worst group by fortune in China's contemporary megacities. However, its sheer number may be the largest one, among the four groups. Take Beijing as an example, in 2011, the migrant population is 8.26 million, while the local population is 12.78 million (Beijing Statistics Bureau). Given the fact that most migrants are poor and a lot of migrants are not counted in official statistics, the migrant poor form an even bigger group. Most migrant poor live in informal housing—factory dormitories, underground apartments rent by their employers, bunk beds in retrofitted apartments that transfer a two bedroom apartment into five or six bedrooms, and sub-standard housing in nearby urban villages. They are the real labors of China's contemporary megacities. Yet, they even do not have a solid standing in the city where they work 6 or 7 days per week, let alone a decent standing. A comfortable living space is already a luxury for them. Public space, our focus in this article, is just a mirage for this group of people. The migrant well-off is a complex group. Some well-off migrants are the elites, being foreign expatriates, corporation leaders, and celebrities from sports and entertainment industries. Others are university graduates who hold a high-end office job in private sectors or migrant businessmen who have made a real fortune in various sectors in China's megacities. They are still migrants in the city because they do not hold a local hùkǒu. In this sense, they cannot enjoy the educational, medical, and social security provided by the city. This will not be a problem for the real well-off, because they can get everything they need from the private sector. Oftentimes, the migrant well-off live in the suburb. The real well-off, however, may have multiple housing units in the city. They identify themselves as suburban homeowners who work and live in the municipality, and they are also proud of their status as suburban homeowners. Mr. Zhou, a chief editor of a top Chinese magazine in his middle 30s, thinks his community in South Beijing is the monumental community in the surrounding area (Fig.14). Classifying contemporary urban Chinese into four groups underestimates the complexity of modern China. There are certainly more than four stratified groups in China's megacities. Moreover, each group has further differentiation inside. However, this classification portrays the basic social life in modern China.

Relationship between social structure and space in modern and contemporary China

From ancient times to the liberation age, we have already seen a radical transformation of China's public space. As we have discussed in section 3 and 4, all major public settings in ancient China were dramatically modified and even abandoned in Mao's China. Firstly, streets were no longer a major public setting. Mao's industrial policy and block typology transformed ancient China's commercial cities into industrial cities, in which production instead of consumption was the

essence of the city. Narrow streets and open shops became broad avenues and gated super blocks. Spontaneous and un-organized street behaviours almost disappeared completely in Mao's China. Secondly, public theatre as a way of public entertainment was offered by the ruling class—either the emperor or rich officials—in ancient China. In Socialist China, it was modified into indoor performance that was somehow less public, compared to the public Xìtái [戏台] in ancient China. Thirdly, if there was any real invention related to public space in Socialist China, it was the space of celebration. In various dynasties in ancient China, the celebration spaces were certainly important settings, but they were not public. The ruling class (the emperor and ritual officials) used the ceremonial places, such as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, "for" the public (or for its ruling?). However, those ceremonial places were not open to the public. The celebration space in Socialist China was clearly public, since a classless China's celebration space was open to every proletarian. Yet, a semi-public space enjoyed by privileged intellectuals in ancient China was abandoned in Socialist China, because a country of proletariat no longer needed a non-productive class of intellectual, as we have argued at the end of section 4. From Mao's China to contemporary China, we have witnessed another set of radical transformations. Firstly, streets have been re-opened for business activities. However, since Chinese cities have already been transformed into the pattern of wide streets and super blocks, the re-opened stores on the streets lack the quality of publicness, compared to the streets in ancient China as we have discussed in section 3. Secondly, public theatres and even the space of celebration have been commercialized and capitalized, for people who buy the ticket or tourists who pay the entrance fee. People do not use public places for formal speeches, ceremonies, protests, political rallies, or other organized events, not any more, unless the Chinese state organizes these kinds of events in parks, squares, or streets. Still, some retired and well-off people start to re-occupy various urban parks for doing exercise, singing songs, and other body cultivation activities. Thirdly, commodity housing development in the last 20 years has dramatically changed China's private space, and consequentially, public space and public behaviours. From retrofitted courtyard housing 大杂院 to linear residential blocks to gated high-rise apartments, the average private space for Chinese has been increasing in the last 60 years. Yet, the spatial format of contemporary Chinese homes makes people harder to socialize in an easily accessible, communal space. The changes of public space in modern and contemporary China are closely correlated with the changes of social structure. As we have pointed out in the very beginning, what makes public space public is not the size of the space but social behaviours in it. Social behaviours, in any societies and cultures, are directly shaped by social structure and social hierarchy. Social structure and social hierarchy are relatively easy to study in ancient and Socialist China. For the sake of our argument, we cannot avoid oversimplifying the issue, but we attempt to be as accurate as possible. From the Qín 秦 Dynasty (221 BC to 207 BC) to the Qīng 清Dynasty (1644-1911), China had several major dynasties and

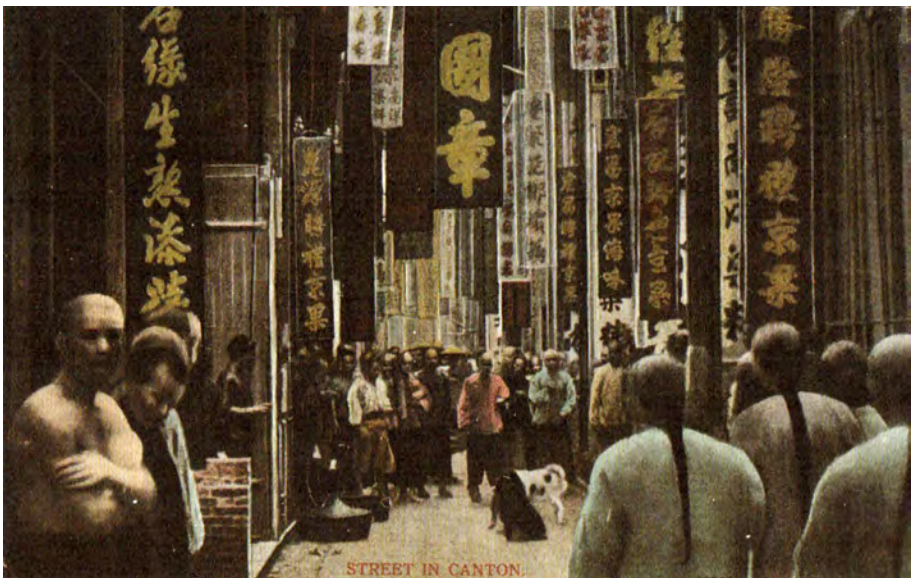


Fig. 6. 王迦南，蔡小丽，明信片–清末中国，第二版, [*Postcard of Qing Dynasty*, Vol. 2] 中国人民大学出版社，北京, 2005.

Fig. 7. 中国古镇游，陕西师范大学出版社, 北京, 2003.

Fig. 8. 中国古镇游， 陕西师范大学出版社, 北京, 2003.

Fig. 9. A.VV., 中国古镇游， 陕西师范大学出版社, 北京, 2003.

periods of war[67]. Ancient China was a strictly hierarchical society, with four classes—intellectuals, peasants, craftsmen, and businessmen «shì nónggōngshāng» [士农工商]. Spaces, and cities in particular, were planned by intellectuals and occupied by other classes. The painting of «Qīngmíng shànghé tú» [清明上河图] did not clearly show this hierarchy, but it was from this structure that China's lived space came into its historical format—big courtyard houses were occupied by intellectuals and officials; some businessmen could make a big fortune to buy houses and land, but they had to train their children to take the national exam and possibly become part of the intellectual class so that they could have a secure standing in the society; craftsmen lived in the back or second floor of their shops which were very crowded. Ancient China's social structure shaped the physical format of urban space; the space pattern, in return, concretized Confucian social structure and social norms.

Socialist China could not be categorized as a class society, but it was clearly bureaucratic and hierarchical. In Mao's China, intellectuals were no longer respected, except some technological experts such as scientists and engineers. Echoing a point we have discussed in section 4, during the age of Chairman Mao, the "intellectual council" described in the painting *Lettered garden* – 文苑图 [Wényuàntú] – by Han Huang **(11)** disappeared completely. That is because a classless Socialist China no longer needed a special space for the intellectual class. But there were intellectuals, certainly; they needed to re-position themselves as scientists and engineers, and as part of the cadre group. Cadre-mass relationship was the most significant social relation in Mao's China. And some people from the mass could climb into the cadre group from hard-working, from certain expertise, or via party-member networking.[68] Because social relations had been reduced into a very simple but subtly bureaucratic version—the leader and the leaded, space patterns in Socialist China seemed to be very barren and strictly work-oriented. Here, again, socialist social structure shaped the physical format of Socialist China's urban space; the space pattern, in return, concretized and further justified socialist social structure and social norms.

Contemporary China is much more complex. It inherits two traditions and it looks into the contemporary West for reference. Moreover, it is still transforming. Michael Sorkin, in one of his review articles about China's urbanization, categorizes contemporary China as a stew: "The convergence of authoritarian administration, haphazard taste cultures, cheap labor, piles of cash, and a civil society that oscillates between the Wild West, imperial refinement, curiosity, cruelty, corruption, canniness and crazy consumption is a rich stew indeed".[69] Contemporary China's social structure is not fixed enough for a definite analysis. It is indeed a hodgepodge, a stew of different space patterns and social norms. As we have discussed in section 6, it has already returned to a class society, with different classes take different positions and benefits in the

67. The materials—paintings and postcards—analysed in our article were representations of dynasties from the Song 宋 Dynasty (960-1279) onward. Our philosophical analysis in section 2 is about textual materials from pre-Qin 先秦 period.

68. Bray 2005.

69. Sorkin 2014.

society. However, unlike ancient China and socialist China, contemporary China does not have a definite ideology and widely followed social norms. It cannot offer unique rules for the production of its space. Sometimes, it wants to follow the ancient tradition. Sometimes, it is constrained by its fading socialist past. Sometimes, it looks into the "imagined" West. Thus, consequentially, contemporary China has failed to produce its modern space in a meaningful and coherent way. With purely "pragmatic" mind-set, it falls into the route of commercialization and residential fortification deeper and deeper. Here, again, a still transforming social structure shapes the chaotic physical format of contemporary China's urban space; the chaotic space pattern, in return, exposes the problems of contemporary China regarding its social rules and social practices.

Conclusion: limitation and problem of the contemporary Chinese space

In our earlier sections, we have discussed the patterns and characters of China's public space from ancient times to contemporary era. Moreover, we have analysed China's social structure historically and the relationship between social structure and spatial patterns in China. From these earlier discussions, we can offer a comprehensive analysis of China's contemporary space (or China's built environment in general) and its problems. According with our analysis, the problems about the Chinese contemporary space need to focus on the lack of quality and the special characteristic of the market connected with the specific structure of China's governance and real estate. What we can notice is that China is one of the few countries in our knowledge where the built environment – private, public or semi-public – is not the result of a social influence but the compromise of other complex dynamic. The organization of space does not reflect, completely, the real needs of Chinese people. It is not the expression of the structure of Chinese families, traditionally or currently. In China, the ancient structure of life has been almost completely interrupted, which is common with the European countries, by the way. As a consequence, the housing and the living space do not correspond anymore with the typology that came from the past centuries, except some historical sites and settings which are reserved as museums or tourist attractions. What is special in contemporary China is the gap between social needs, family structure and the reflection on the living space, the built environment. This could be understandable in public space, which somehow represents the structure and needs of the government and the conception of the State. But in private and semi-public space, the result should be more related on the social structure. Yet, the state is also the manipulator of semi-public space and private space. The social structure cannot be rigidly divided into the state and the private sector. It is a sophisticated interaction between the two aspects. In China, the state and the private sector interact in a way that the state is the ultimate manipulator, both as a rule maker and as a player in the market. But the contemporary Chinese state cannot control everything. It cannot control all private activities. However, the state can control how public space and private space function. The state knows that revolution and change always start from the bottom. No leader of China forgets this simple rule and any "strong" power has to include in its strategy a deep consideration of its people's needs. In this perspective, public space in China definitely reflects the

idea of the Communist State, which is extremely fascinating and very far from being "oppressive". The observation of public space shows the intention and action of the State. One reflects the other in a very precise way. The public life have definite rules and the structure of public space is a manifestation of these rules. This is especially true in some key areas and Tian An Men square is the most emblematic case. The situation is much more complex in other public space, such as small squares, "non-celebrative" space, common roads in the new city and town. But even in all those various case, one element is in common in Chinese cities: the almost absolute absence of "privacy" in public space. To mention a very particular and opposite case is Venezia, Italy. The «calle» – extremely narrow road, as in the local dialect – is public space but with a special sense of "estrangement". It can be used for everything, private and public, legal and illegal. Those roads can even be the theatre of sexual intercourses for lovers, or murdering locale for assassins. The complete loss of privacy in China's public space is something unique and it needs a specific investigation. What deserves a much more precise consideration is the private and semi-public space that, somehow, belong to a much more personal sphere. Definitely, in the conformation of those space, we can find the influence of the policy for security (or social control) which is typical of China. The surprising fact is that in this kind of more "intimate" space we find standards incredibly low in terms of quality and details. The astonishing fact is that we are in a situation of an "almost" free market. At the country level surely we have a precise regulation in terms of social control, including China. But the problem is that the market (in this case the relationship between developers and buyers) should generate appropriate living space for the needs of people who live there. The specific case of China is that the living needs of the Chinese inhabitants are almost completely ignored. And this is not sorely imputable to the Communist government, but to a special relationship of the circle "developers-local government-market-designers-consumers". The developers do their job: try their best to maximize the profit, giving as less quality as they can. "This is the marketing, folks!" The local government is often dominated by corruption and promoting "image" projects. Besides, the costumers are part of the evil circle too. They are incredibly poor in sense of quality. Their demands are absolutely low and they may just keep buying because the housing market is still rising and they do not need to pay any property tax, resulting in huge amount of unoccupied housing units and even ghost cities and towns in urban China. Their knowledge of needs is simply primitive and dominated by financial considerations (as we have discussed in sector 6, the winners and losers of China's contemporary megacities are identified by their housing status). Personally, we have seen several private houses with incredible mistakes of planning that any student of the first grade in any university is unable to commit. The problem is not caused by the designer. We have testified the excellent competence and professionalism of many of them. But their ability is systematically frustrated by the developers who, always, bully the architects with insane requests; the power of the developers is really huge and the rights of the designers are limited. Still, architects and designers have their big fault as well: weakness and greediness. They just follow the developers and the state, and some of them, somehow, make themselves very rich.

This generates the paradox of a strong "self-censorship". The designers themselves, in most of the cases, are forced to produce a low level design to satisfy their clients. These notes about China's real estate "evil circle" are not polemic, but simply descriptions of the reality of the common practice in the Chinese market. Definitely China has some of the highest professionals of the world in terms of landscape, architecture and urban planning, but the main problem is that the circle of the production of the Chinese architecture and built environment does not work appropriately and responsibly. It is an evil and distorted circle that might lead to unbearable disasters in the future. In the limit of our paper we can mention that one of the biggest problems we have found in the contemporary Chinese planning of the living space is the lack of considerations of social needs, both in public space and semi-public and private space. Consequentially, there are the lack of functional public space and the lack of private housing with good quality for the general public. If in the case of public space we can use the structure of the State, the manipulation of the state, and the idea of "social security" to explain the contemporary problems of China's public space, at the private level we have found the evil real estate circle to explain the poor development of China's living space.

Contemporary Chinese's housing needs in terms of social and living usages are ignored and the developers have a too simplistic and poor idea of what the planning of the living space should be. Housing buyers, then, are distorted by their financial needs and "rewards" and further delay and even repress their real social and living needs. The issue that we have pointed out in this section are jut the general overview of the problems and we will describe it more precisely in future works. What is important in this concluding part of the script is the considerations that some key flaws are connected with the production of China's contemporary space. In short:

1. Private space: the spatial structure of the private house are trivial; it does not work well in terms of functional needs of the inhabitants; they are poorly made and quickly constructed for financial profits and asset accumulations rather than serving the real needs of the Chinese family.

2. Semi-public space: we can notice an almost complete absence of a precise planning of this kind of place. Some contemporary residential communities do have semi-public space (as showed in the picture in section 6), but it does not come by a real use. It is mostly based on the idea of "decoration". In other words, the appearance is the main concern, but the formal solution do not express any real use.

3. Public space: many contemporary China's public settings are mostly based on the government regulation. As China further commercializes itself, many public settings' status becomes more ambiguous. How the Chinese state presents itself in the commercialized public space is a topic that needs future studies. Besides the formal problem or the identity problem (shared with the fate of formal public space in the West), from the perspective of design and quality, in most of the cases contemporary China's public space is simply unliveable.[70]

70. This is also confirmed by the recent situation of the air pollution. The open space, in general, are dangerous and unhealthy, in terms of space, security from cars and traffic and also caused by bad air condition.

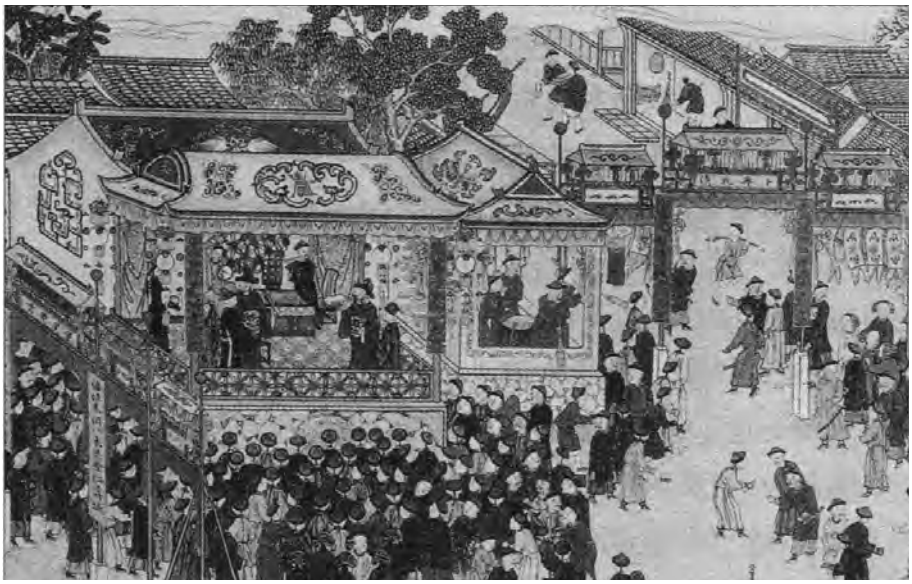


Fig. 10. 清代 *(Qing Dynasty), emperor* 康熙 *[Kāngxī] that represents a public theatre located in an almost completely open space that can be considered public.*

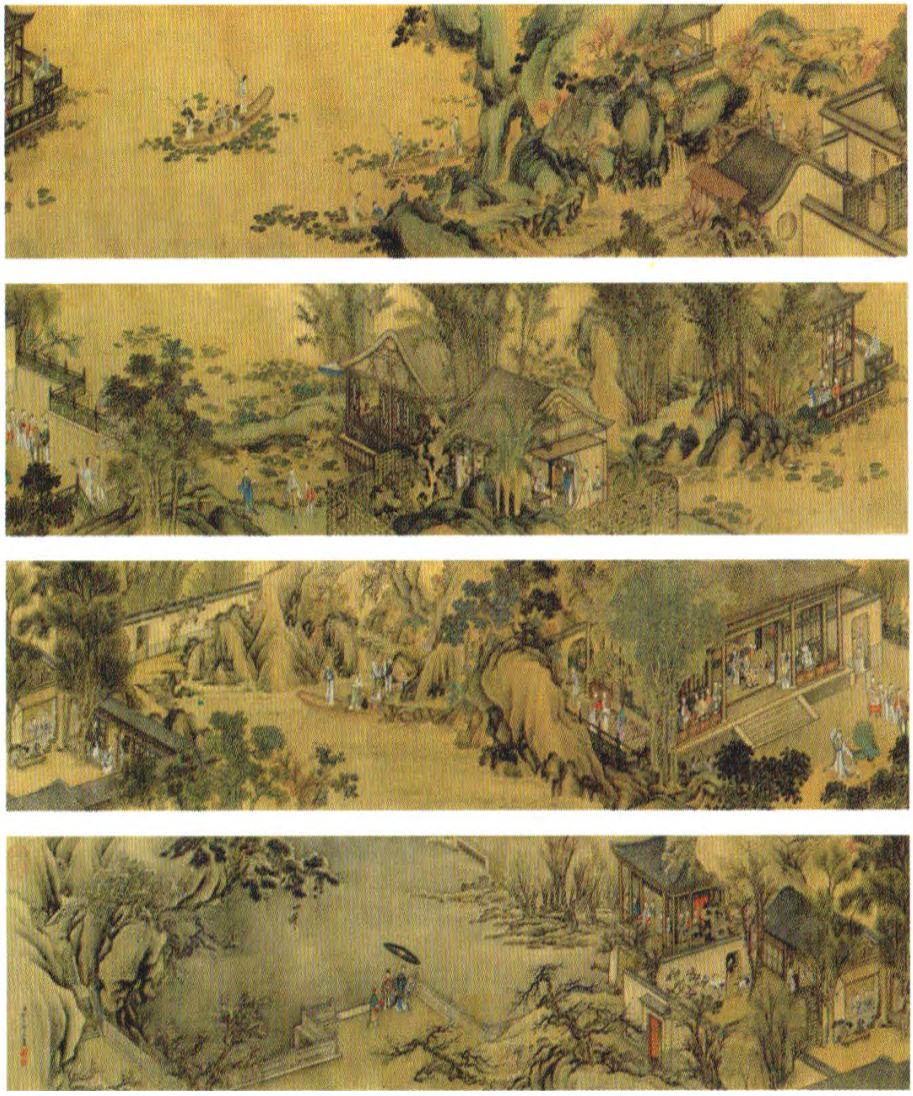


Fig. 11. 中国传世. 山水画，北京出版社，北京, 2004.

Fig. 12. Gabriele Fahr-Becker (editor), Ostasiatische Kunst, Hullmann, 2011.

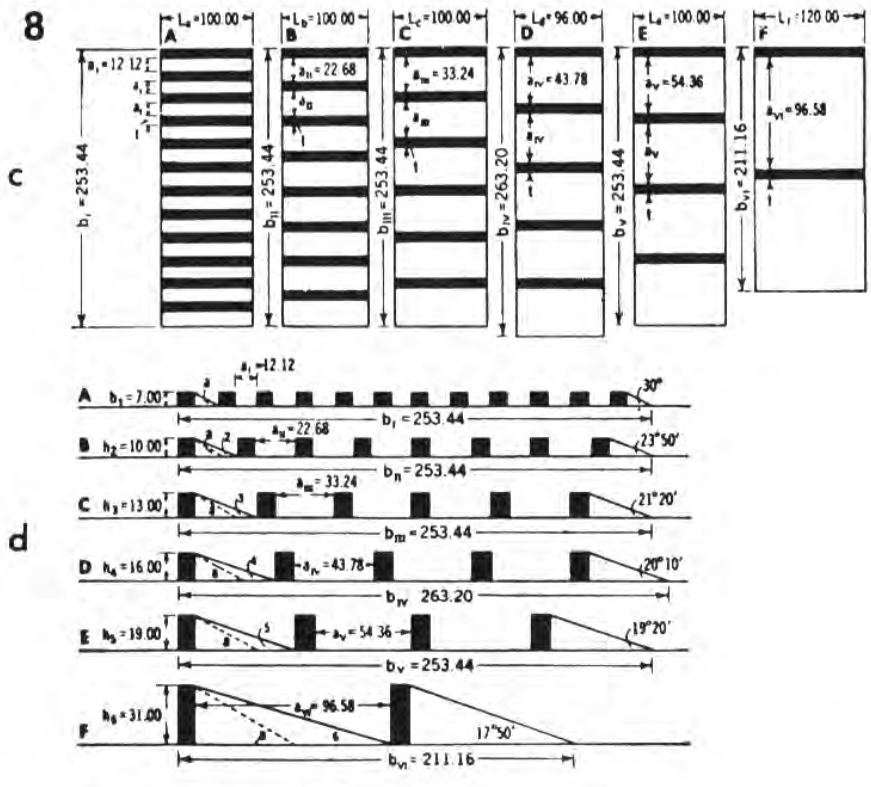


Fig. 13. Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture: a Critical History, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980.

Fig. 14. Li Pengfei private archive.

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