Connecting Urban Histories East and West

In early December 2008, some twenty-five scholars from Taiwan, China, India, the United States and Europe met during three days in Paris, at the headquarters of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), to share their views on the recent developments of research in urban history. The main focus was on Chinese cities of the modern period, spanning the Ming and Qing dynasties and up to the Republican era (fifteenth-twentieth centuries). In the mind of the conference's conveners, this was to be an occasion for China historians from across the world to share their research experience on Chinese urban centers with a European scholarly audience and set a base for a profitable dialogue. The selection of essays presented here is the result of this meeting and aims at extending and consolidating such a dialogue.

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In recent decades, the community of social sciences and humanities has been increasingly receptive to research initiated from a plurality of geographical standpoints and giving a voice in their own right to narratives stemming from regions hitherto considered as marginal or approached through the paradigmatic lens of the Western experience. In the field of history, this on-going effort has given rise to what has been termed "world history," or "global history," and which ought to be understood as history from a plural perspective. Among the many voices that, in recent times, have sought to bring to the fore the variety of historical experiences that characterize the evolution of human societies in the last centuries, those of the Subaltern Studies group have been quite influential. They were instrumental, for instance, in drawing attention to the lower strata of India's colonial society, those socially, economically and culturally "subaltern" parts of the population,[1] whose words were never recorded in the sources and which nationalist as well as Marxist historiography had been, up to then, all too willing to subsume in the model-narrative of Western educated elites-led national emancipation.[2] This interest in the rank-and-file of society was by no means new among the community of historians at the time, nor was the critique of the conventional model of historiographical narrative. Methodological options set aside, the genuinely innovative dimension of the subaltern studies research agenda took the form of a downsizing of the influence, and thus of the importance, of Europe's centrality over the world's historical evolution in the last three centuries, which had been largely dominant in all mainstream social elite oriented historiographies of the period. Some authors such as Dipesh Chakrabarty went as far as claiming the need thoroughly to

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1.   In the Gramscian understanding of the notion of "subaltern classes" (le classi subalterne). See Antonio Gramsci, *Cahiers de prison* (Quaderni del carcere).

2.   The classic work in this respect is Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993. On the early research agenda of the Subaltern Studies group, see same author, "On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India," *Subaltern Studies. Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 1, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 1-9.

reconsider the Old continent's role — and that of the West in general — in this evolution in the light of its "provincialism."[3]

Along with Edward Saïd's deconstruction of the West's essentialist discourse on the Orient in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pointing to its role as the marker of the former's sense of superiority and as a tool for its domination over the latter, the intellectual posture advocated by the Subaltern Studies group,[4] even though it did not go unchallenged,[5] paved the way in Europe, and even more so in the United States, for the development of postcolonial and postmodern studies. In the historical field, the progressive re-dimensioning of Europe's position as the driving force of the world's modern history has led historians to strive to provide more balanced accounts of the relationships established over time between different parts of the world, starting especially from the late fifteenth century, trying for example to draw the actors from all sides into the picture of these encounters in as equitable a fashion as possible.[6] Asia, especially its southern, south-eastern and eastern maritime façade, has received a growing share of attention in this regard, its preponderant position in the pre-modern world's economy and commerce being rediscovered in a way which echoes its ongoing rise in world affairs today.[7]

Being a central actor on the Asiatic scene, China has not remained on the margins of the trend. Outside of the country at first, and also inside it in the last two decades or so, scholars of the pre-modern period — the Ming and Qing dynasties in particular — have been increasingly interested in providing a finer picture of the Middle Kingdom's embedding in Asia's geopolitical, cultural and economic setting, all factors whose influence was decisive over the *longue durée* in shaping the Chinese empire's specific historical evolution up to the present. Among the issues recently discussed from this perspective, the question of the diverging paths followed at the time by the economies of Western Europe's monarchies on the one side, and of China's empire on the other, has received its share of attention. Here again, if one sets aside the actual explanations provided to account for the divergence, one of the most influential headways made in these works lies in the balanced approach resorted to in order to analyze the characteristics and the historical evolution of the economy at both ends of the Eurasian continent.[8]

Rather than taking for granted from the outset the superiority of a supposedly homogenous European experience towards economic takeoff, these studies strive to contextualize in detail

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3.   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for the 'Indian' pasts," *Representations*, vol. 37 (1992), p. 1-26. See Jacques Pouchepadass, "Les *Subaltern Studies* ou la critique postcoloniale de la modernité," *L'Homme*, vol. 156 (2000), p. 161-186, esp. p. 173.
4.   Edward Saïd's work, *Orientalism*, was first published in 1978, a mere four years before the first volume of the *Subaltern Studies* series.
5.   For an overview of some of the challenges voiced to subaltern studies, see Jacques Pouchepadass, art. cit.
6.   Among the large number of works belonging to this trend, I will mention here only three recent ones: Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, London, Bloomsbury Press, 2007; Patrick Boucheron (sous la dir. de), *Histoire du monde au XVᵉ siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2009; Romain Bertrand, *L'histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIᵉ-XVIIᵉ siècle)*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2011.
7.   See for example François Gipouloux, *La Méditerranée asiatique. Villes portuaires et réseaux en Chine, au Japon et en Asie du Sud-Est, XVIᵉ-XXIᵉ siècle*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2009.
8.   Roy Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience*, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell University Press, 1997; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 2000; Jean-Laurent Rosenthal & Roy Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence. The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2011.

the foundations and features of each situation, shedding light in an historical fashion on the factors that determined each side's specific evolution. In other words, both experiences are set on an equitable footing and their respective attributes considered in their own right. This neutral and unprejudiced standpoint explains why comparison in such instances has borne interesting fruits, even though the conclusions arrived at by different authors may well be at odds. It also demarcates these efforts from earlier attempts at such comparison, most notably the 1950s and 1960s Chinese scholarly endeavor to study the country's "sprouts of capitalism" (*ziben zhuyi mengya* 資本主義萌芽), which, as its name suggests, was heavily influenced by the modern evolution of the European economy and sought to individuate proofs of similar features and trends in China's historical development. Even though it was not entirely unsuccessful, still, this line of research resulted to a large extent in the depiction of the Chinese empire's historical experience as a debased version of its superior European model, seriously flawed by a series of missing characteristics — of the "had not" and "did not" type —, which prevented it from embarking on the path to "proper" economic development.[9]

In general terms, it can be said that the outcome of this multisided effort at shifting perspectives has provided us with a better understanding of the evolutions at work in the centuries leading to the present, and with a clearer sense of the fact that apart from the West's historical experience, in time, several regions of the world, more or less linked to it, had experienced quite similar social, economic and cultural developments, which had led them to an equivalent level of civilizational achievement, to say the least. To turn things around, thanks to this global body of works, it seems overtly reasonable today to consider that, perhaps setting aside the Americas, the *terra incognita* "discovered" in the Orient by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, followed by the Dutch, the French and the British along the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were actually worlds in their own terms, politically and institutionally mature, highly integrated economically and commercially, often well prepared militarily, sophisticated technologically and endowed with age-old intellectual, religious and artistic traditions. In these "full" worlds,[10] the appearance of the European newcomers did not stir reality up as much as it did in Europe. For a long time they were simply considered as new actors on the interregional scene, who raised the level of competition in commerce to a higher level and with whom trade could be done, especially in spices, which they were eager to purchase, despite their tendencies to disturb local power equilibriums in their efforts to establish permanent settlements along the maritime routes in the name of their sovereign, for instance the Portuguese *Estado da India*, or in that of mercantile companies such as the British and Dutch East India Companies.[11]

As many authors involved in the effort to pluralize perspectives have noted, superimposing on the narrative of Europe's sixteenth and seventeenth-century encounter with those worlds, that of its subsequent domination of most of them through colonialism and imperialism — which would not come into full being for another two to two-and-a-half centuries —, does not

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9. See for example Nanjing daxue Ming Qing shi yanjiushi 南京大學明清史研究室 (ed.), *Zhongguo ziben zhuyi mengya wenti lunwenji* 中國資本主義萌芽問題論文集 (Collected essays on the question of the sprouts of capitalism in China), Nanjing, Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1983. For a more balanced approach, see Wu Chengming 吳承明, *Zhongguo ziben zhuyi yu guonei shichang* 中國資本主義與國內市場 (China's capitalism and the country's inner market), Beijing, Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985.
10. In reference to the notion of "monde plein" used by Pierre Chaunu and other historians to describe late medieval Western Europe.
11. See among others Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *L'empire portugais d'Asie, 1500-1700*, Paris, Le Seuil (collection Points Histoire), 2013; Romain Bertrand, *op. cit.*

serve the parties involved. Commonly found in many historical works up to the first half of the twentieth century at least, this approach suffers from an obvious teleological flaw, whilst over-emphasizing in an anachronistic fashion the prevalence and role of one dimension of the story. The alternative accounts of the encounter itself produced in the last decades by specialists of non-Western area studies and, more generally, of the multiplicity of historical experiences around the world in recent centuries, are the result, among others, of their coming to terms with this analytical bias. The shift in perspectives has been largely fuelled by the focus set on local sources, not so much new as seldom used for that purpose up to that point. Addressed primarily through a local or regional lens, the issues raised have eventually contributed to the downscaling of the influence of the West's model or of its impact, as has been pointed to above, at least for the periods of time during which it actually cohabited with different forms of human organizations and historical experiences, without the latter being subordinated to it.

But as appealing as this research and methodological agenda is for area studies in general, it should be noted here that the path towards plurality of viewpoints and equitability in treatment is a narrow one. If the aim is to provide a balanced illustration of historical developments in a specific region or "country" of the world in the last centuries, eventual "extraneous" influences and encounters should not, as a matter of course, be left out of the picture. Achieving this aim thus requires a two-pronged effort, one that, on the one hand, includes a careful analysis of the object of study itself, through its specific sources, in order to give a clear sense of the general framework prevalent at that time and in that place from a variety of angles — political, insti-tutional, economic, social, etc.; and on the other hand, it requires a thorough presentation of the outside influences that may have affected it, including the means through which they did so, and the manner, progressive or sudden. In other words, for the period considered here, the effort must be to put the particular historical evolutions experienced in a given place in per-spective, without over emphasizing the role and influence of the so-called Western model. At the same time, this model should not be deliberately excluded from the narrative either, for this last approach does no more justice to historical phenomena than its Euro-centric counterpart once did.[12] Rather than outright comparison, which, in the field of history, has often proved unable to overcome the prejudices of Euro-centered historiography, the notion of "connection" and its historiographical echo, "connected histories," provide firmer grounds from which to approach specific historical phenomena in different cultural contexts.[13] It is in part the aim of this collection of essays, centered on China's modern experience at urban life, to provide some additional clues as to how to do this.

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In the area of the world we define as China, cities have had a long history. According to archeological finds, after the first urban gatherings appeared on the Mesopotamian plain around the middle of the fourth millennium BCE, dense human settlements of a similar nature

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12.   Janet Lippman Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250-1350*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.
13.   See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *in* Victor Lieberman (ed.), *Beyond Binary Histories. Re-imagining Eurasia to C. 1830*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 289-315 ; Serge Gruzinski, "Les mondes mêlés de la monarchie catholique et autres « connected histories »," *Annales HSS*, vol. 56-1 (2001), p. 85-117.

developed along the banks of the Ganges, the Nile and the Yellow River two to three centuries later. This was the start of a pluri-millenary course of events that eventually turned cities into the major theatres of human interactions we know today.

In China as elsewhere, urbanization was a slow process, and there as elsewhere, it was characterized by a variety of stages and features, which fitted the principles its polity was erected on, especially in its imperial dimension. Thus, over the *longue durée* of its historical development, urbanization in China, and the form and qualities of its cities, can be partly distinguished from those observable in other parts of the world. Arguably, if only because of the magnitude of growth of its urban centers in recent decades, the country's present-day urban experience can still be described as somewhat distinct from that of other countries on the planet, but from a perspective encompassing the last two centuries, more striking yet is the convergence towards what can be termed the model of the "municipal city."

This model is rooted in the discrete historical evolution experienced by European cities starting from early in the second millennium CE. It construes them — however demographically and geographically defined they might be — as administrative units in their own terms, endowed with a varying degree of autonomy.[14] As time went by, and following the different paces of state-building processes in distinct European countries from the late Middle Ages up to the present, these urban administrative units were progressively integrated in the wider network of bureaucratic circumscriptions governing a given territory. Today, as is well known, this model, with possible minor adjustments from one country to another, is largely prevalent around the world, a fact that may well be considered as a testimony of yet another dimension of the process of globalization and of the profound influence Western-bred institutional frameworks have had over the coming of age of modern state institutions.

Per se, this evolution does not call for criticism. More problematic is the fact that, over the last century or so, the echoes of other forms of urban development in time and space have largely tended to fade out, overwhelmed by the impact of the municipal, or European, model. While not unique, the example of China is illuminating in this instance. Historical studies of the urban phenomenon in China have been on the agenda for years, but for a long time research has largely been targeting what can be termed as the history of modern Chinese cities, starting from the last decades of the imperial regime and continuing into the Republican era. Interestingly, this period, which approximately spans the years 1850 to 1950, is the one that saw the introduction of the model of the municipal city in China. Transplanted at first through the international concessions granted to the foreign powers in a growing number of Chinese urban centers by the pressured imperial authorities, it then progressively extended to the rest of the country's urban network starting from the early twentieth century. Symbols of this evolution, treaty ports — among which Shanghai ranks first — have drawn most attention from the scholarly community in China itself and abroad.

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14.   In this instance, bibliographical references are innumerable. See for example Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 1974 reprint; Régine Pernoud, *Les villes marchandes aux XIVᵉ et XVᵉ siècles*, Paris, éditions de la Table ronde, 1948. See also the following volumes of two large collective works devoted respectively to French and European urban history: Georges Duby (éd.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, vol. 2, *La ville en France au Moyen Âge*, sous la dir. de Jacques Le Goff, and vol. 3, *La ville des Temps modernes, de la Renaissance aux Révolutions*, sous la dir. de Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paris, Le Seuil (collection Points Histoire), 1998 reprint (1ˢᵗ ed. 1980); Jean-Louis Pinol (sous la dir. de), *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine*, vol. 2, *La ville médiévale*, by Patrick Boucheron & Denis Menjot, and vol. 3, *La ville moderne (XVIᵉ-XVIIIᵉ siècle)*, by Olivier Zeller, Paris, Le Seuil (collection Points Histoire), 2011 (1ˢᵗ ed. 2003).

This important body of work has shed light on the various dimensions of urban realities at the time, from social, economic, and political as well as institutional points of view, depicting the transformations affecting communities located at the forefront of the country's modernist drive. It has been instrumental in conveying a sense of a golden age of the Chinese city during that period of time, especially in the first decades of the Republican era.[15]

However influential this line of investigation may have been, and however relevant its results, one cannot but consider that it has contributed, incidentally, its share to the marginalization of China's pre-modern urban experience. Finding in the urban centers of early twentieth-century China the common markers of what cities in the West were supposed to be made of — first and foremost forms of autonomous city-government institutions —, these works have tended to reinforce the role of the European *idéal-type* of the city as the standard of comparison. Thus, outside a limited circle of specialists, the shared knowledge of pre-twentieth century Chinese urban centers remained patchy at best for a long time. One should probably not be surprised, then, to find the following statement on pre-modern Chinese cities in the writings of such an eminent and influential historian as Fernand Braudel: "No independent authority ever represented a Chinese city as a whole in its relationship with the imperial State or with the radiant power of the countryside […]. The city, home of the imperial officials and of the feudal lords, was the concern neither of the crafts nor of the merchants; no bourgeoisie could grow at ease there."[16]

Rather than holding Braudel accountable for this affirmation, which would have sounded overstretched to urban historians of pre-modern China even a few decades ago, one may be better off underlining that it is characteristic of the ascendancy the European model of urban development has long experienced over the historiography of cities around the globe — an influence which has yet to recede decisively. Among the various reasons for such resilience, two will be mentioned here. The first is linked to the prominence in the field of social sciences of figures who, like Fernand Braudel, have delved into the matter of cities at one moment or another of their careers: from Henri Pirenne, Max Weber, Arnold Toynbee, Marc Bloch and Lewis Mumford, to Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, Paul Bairoch and Douglass North, to name but a few. Even though, from a purely historiographical point of view, Max Weber may well have been the most influential in laying down the foundations of what has been called above

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15.   Among the large number of publications, see for example David Buck, *Urban Change in China: Politics and Development in Tsinan, Shantung, 1890-1949*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1978; Marie-Claire Bergère, *L'âge d'or de la bourgeoisie chinoise, 1911-1937*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986; David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989; Christian Henriot, *Shanghai 1927-1937. Élites locales et modernisation dans la Chine nationaliste*, Paris, éditions de l'EHESS, 1991; Frederic Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1995; Joseph Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City. Modernity and National Identity*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999; Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance and Modernity in China, Canton, 1900-1927*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999; Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu. Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937*, Cambridge (MA), Asia Center, Harvard University, 2000; He Yimin (ed.), *Jindai Zhongguo chengshi fazhan yu shehui bianqian, 1840-1949* 近代中國城市發展與社會變遷 (Urban development and social transformation in modern China, 1840-1949), Beijing, Kexue chubanshe, 2004; Yves Chevrier, Alain Roux, Xiaohong Xiao-Planes (sous la dir. de), *Citadins et citoyens dans la Chine du XXᵉ siècle : Essais d'histoire, en hommage à Marie-Claire Bergère*, Paris, éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'Homme, 2010.
16.   In its French phrasing: "Aucune autorité indépendante ne représente une ville chinoise dans son ensemble, face à l'État ou face à l'éclatante puissance des campagnes […]. La ville, résidence des fonctionnaires et des seigneurs, n'est la chose ni des métiers, ni des marchands ; aucune bourgeoisie n'y grandit à l'aise." See his *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme: XVᵉ-XVIIIᵉ siècle*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1979, vol. 1.

the European *idéal-type* of the city,[17] taken as a whole, and despite some differing views they may have expressed individually on various specific issues, these authors share the opinion that, by and large, the cities of Europe from the Middle Ages to the modern era were the crucibles in which political and economic institutions, social organizations and juridical notions central to the advent of our contemporary modernity were cast.[18]

The second reason has to do with the ideological dimension bequeathed to cities in the Western political tradition. Democracy — for this is at stake here — is commonly held as having originated in Ancient Greece's *polis*, of which Athens may well be considered as the epitome. Similarly, European medieval communes, who lie closer to us in time, have also been construed, in some instances, as some sort of precursors of modern forms of democratic institutions.[19] The fact that both these historical modes of institutionalization of political power display significant discrepancies with present-day principles upon which democracy is — or ought to be — founded is not overtly relevant here. Of much more relevance is the strong relationship established in the Western intellectual and cultural framework between cities and the emergence of proto-democratic forms of government and individual freedom, as Henri Pirenne's rendering of a famous German saying aptly summarizes: "The air of the [medieval European] city makes free."[20] Weighing the actual impact of such a correlation is arduous of course, but in the context of the last century or so, at a time when Western scholarship in the humanities has been prominent and during which democracy has been largely assumed to represent the ultimate political horizon of mankind, one may surmise that this correlation has done much to impose the historical experience of European urban centers as the decisive model against the backdrop of which to consider other paths of urban development.

At the same time, this last statement points to a predicament China studies, and not only the specific field of Chinese urban history, remained trapped in for some time in the past: the propensity to dress an inventory of the lacks and deficiencies of the country in its historical development compared of course to its Western counterparts — *i.e.* the "had not" and "were not" method alluded to above.[21] For some years now, this approach has been losing ground, and one can only guess that the present "global turn" will marginalize it even more. This marginalization, however, ought not to lead to the mere replacement of a dominant model by another, nor, perhaps worse, to the relativistic claim that similar historical phenomena observed in different cultural settings should not be compared because of an alleged irreducibility of cultural specificities.[22] As is well

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17.   See his influential work *La ville*, trans. by Philippe Fritsch, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1982; on the notion of *idéal-type*, see his *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, trans. by Julien Freund, Paris, Plon, 1965.
18.   Among others, see Max Weber, *Histoire économique — Esquisse d'une histoire universelle de l'économie et de la société*, trans. by Christian Bouchindhomme, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.
19.   See for example Henri Pirenne, *Early Democracy in the Low Countries: Urban Society and Political Conflict in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, New York, W. W. Norton and Co., 1971.
20.   The German version goes "Die Stadtluft macht frei;" see H. Pirenne, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
21.   Braudel's above mentioned statement is quite representative of the influence of such an approach. In some ways, Etienne Balazs's contributions on Chinese cities written in the 1950s also purvey the sense of a similar influence at work. See for example his "Les villes chinoises. Histoire des institutions administratives et judiciaires" as well as "La naissance du capitalisme en Chine," both reprinted in *La bureaucratie céleste. Recherches sur l'économie et la société de la Chine traditionnelle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, respectively p. 206-218 and p. 290-312.
22.   This claim is often accompanied by the deceptive belief that only individuals born and bred in the region or country where the phenomenon is being studied in its historical dimension can achieve a true understanding of its characteristics, because of an hypothetical proximity linked to presumed qualities and capacities acquired through the fact of having grown up and lived there.

known, history does not follow a predetermined path. Similarly, no model of historical experience should be inferred as being predetermined to become dominant. In other words, in its historical dimension, the form taken by urban development in Europe across the ages, however closely related to the present situation, should be construed as one among other possible forms of such an experience. And in order to fully understand its uniqueness as well as the range of its impact on the alternate forms that developed in space and time, the latter's qualities and properties need to be seriously taken into consideration, so as to institute a genuine dialogue.

This collection of essays, in the limited range of the topics treated, will seek to address the question of what late imperial Chinese cities actually were in their own terms. Rather than a direct comparative approach, its ambition is thus to provide the community of historians in general, and of urban historians in particular, with substance for connecting histories.

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As far as historical connections are concerned, another aim of this collection of essays is to bridge the gap within the field of Chinese urban history itself between the important body of works centered on the "golden age" of Republican-era municipal cities and their late imperial counterparts. As alluded to above, urban history has been on the agenda of China scholars for some time now and keeps on drawing the attention of younger generations of researchers, in China and outside. The authors whose works are gathered here are an illustration of this situation. In the last thirty to forty years, the field has gone through important evolutions, which have significantly enhanced, at least among specialists, the understanding of the urban phenomenon in China in its historical dimension. Along with the protracted interest in the country's urban "modernity," starting from the late nineteenth century and going well into the twentieth century — which "Shanghai-ology" probably represents best —, one of the most remarkable developments has been the focus on the late imperial period (mid-fourteenth to early twentieth centuries), that is, the Ming and Qing empires (respectively 1368-1644 and 1644-1911).

During the second half of the twentieth century, Japanese historians, among others, have described how, at the turn of the second millennium CE (tenth-thirteenth century), the momentum of urban expansion in China picked up significant speed, a process characterized by the rise of demographically large cities as well as by the multiplication of towns of smaller size. This course of events was accompanied by the extension of rice cultivation in the Yangzi river basin and in the South of the country, the surpluses of which allowed for the development of arts and crafts and stimulated regional commerce in a growingly monetized economic context. This Song-dynasty (960-1279) economic and urban "revolution" had lasting effects on the Chinese empire's regional equilibriums, tilting progressively its economic and cultural core towards the South, and most specially the Yangzi river delta — or Jiangnan region —, from its former Northern location along the reaches of the Yellow river. Incidentally, in the following centuries, Jiangnan was to become the most highly urbanized region of the country.[23]

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23.   See the article Katô Shigeshi 加藤繁 devoted to the development and prosperity of cities in the Song period included in his posthumous *Shina keizaishi kôshô* 支那経済史考証 (Studies in China's economic history), 2 vols., Tokyo, Tôyô bunko, 1953, vol. 1, p. 299-346; Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信, *Chûgoku toshi shi* 中国都市史 (History of Chinese cities), Tokyo, Tôkyô daigaku shuppankai, 2002; Jacques Gernet, *La vie quotidienne en Chine à la veille de l'invasion mongole*, Paris, Hachette, reprint 1968 (1st ed.1959); and E. Balazs, the two articles previously cited in note 21 above.

Late imperial Chinese cities were the inheritors of this urban expansion, as it carried on into the Ming and Qing dynasties, only partially impacted by the mid-seventeenth century dynastic transition. The expansion of the Chinese empire's economy, starting from the sixteenth century, triggered an unprecedented development of interregional trade over the next two centuries, as commodification gained ground in almost all walks of life. By the mid-eighteenth century, as is today largely accepted, the Chinese empire, in what were at the time its Qing frontiers, had turned into one of the most — if not the most — affluent and potent territory in the world, a situation reminiscent of the course the country appears to be presently set on. As they are today, urban centers at the time were major theatres of this evolution. Such eighteenth century Jiangnan cities as Suzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, Nanjing or Songjiang (actual Shanghai), boasted several tens or hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, while their hinterlands were dotted with urban centers and market towns of smaller size.[24] According to some estimates, the level of urbanization in this specific region may well have reached 30% in the eighteenth century. While other parts of the empire did not reach similar rates at the time, urban centers were nevertheless a common feature of their landscapes, with such major cities as Beijing, Shengjing (present Shenyang) and Tianjin in the Northeast, Canton (actual Guangzhou) and Foshan in the Southeast, and the large conurbation of Hankou (present Wuhan) in the central reaches of the Yangzi river, to name a few.[25]

Thus, not only could urban gatherings be found very early on in the history of Chinese territory, but the evolution of the urban phenomenon there, starting from the second millennium CE at least, was of a remarkable amplitude, particularly in a pre-industrial context. This has led some authors to surmise that up to 1800 approximately, half of the world's urban population may well have resided in cities located inside the Chinese empire's borders, so that pre-modern urban history could, in a sense, be considered to have been composed predominantly in a Chinese key.[26] Considering the fact that demographic figures for pre-modern China are not overly reliable, this assertion would certainly need to be better corroborated, but it does provide an intriguing echo of the present course of urbanization in China, which has moved along at a hectic pace over the last three decades. More importantly still, it points to the necessity of taking the "*longue durée*" of China's urban phenomenon into consideration if we are to grasp its historical dimension in all its diversities.

It is not the place here to propose a comprehensive view of the field, but some general comments may be useful in contextualizing the series of contributions brought together in this volume. As is the case in all sub-disciplines, some topics related to China's urban history have received more attention than others, as a result of specific research agendas or simply because

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24.   Among others, see Linda Cooke Johnson (ed.), *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993; Fan Jinmin 范金民, *Ming Qing Jiangnan shangye de fazhan* 明清江南商業 的發展 (The development of commercial activities in Jiangnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties), Nanjing, Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1998; Kawakatsu Mamoru 川勝守, *Min Shin Kônan shichin shakaishi kenkyû* 明清 江南市鎮社会史研究 (A social history of Jiangnan market-towns in the Ming and Qing dynasties), Tokyo, Kyûko shoin, 1999.

25.   See G. William Skinner, "Regional urbanization in nineteenth century China," *in* G. William Skinner (ed.), *The City in Late Imperial China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1977, p. 211-249; Li Bozhong 李伯重, "Zhongguo quanguo shichang de xingcheng, 1500-1840" 中國全國市場的形成 (The formation of a market in China, 1500-1840), *Qinghua daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 清華大學學報 (哲學社會 科學版), 2000-4 (2000), p. 48-54.

26.   See Eric Jones, *The European Miracle. Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

of source availability. For example, the role and position of Chinese cities in the late imperial period's economy and commerce have drawn their share of consideration, works in this arena shedding light on their position as important poles of consumption, and as centers of production and transformation of goods and commodities of all sorts, including in the sphere of luxury products.[27] In particular, they have pointed to the development, starting from the sixteenth century, of proto-industrial structures of production, most notably in the Lower Yangzi's fast growing textile sector. They have also hinted to the importance of cities in the structuring of geographical space, through the links they established with their hinterlands, nearby as well as at a greater distance. In the wake of such evolutions, the Chinese empire's economic production underwent a form of regional specialization, provinces located along the middle reaches of the Yangzi river, for example — most notably Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi and Sichuan —, turning into grain producing champions whose exports allowed for the sustenance of the highly urbanized South-East costal region. These trends are all testimonies to the growing level of circulation of goods in an environment marked economically and socially by the expansion of monetization.

Other studies approaching cities from the junction of the economy and society insisted quite early on the various forms of social organizations found in late imperial China's urban centers, such as guilds or corporations, as well as associations bringing together individuals from a same locality or region (whether a district, prefecture or province). These works have shown that such organizations have played a decisive role in the structuring of large parts of urban economic and commercial activities in a way that closely recalls the interventions of corporations, crafts and trades in the economic life of European urban centers in the pre-modern period. In Chinese cities, associations were also central in framing social relations, through their charitable and religious activities among others, and in some cases took up responsibilities for the management of services geared toward the whole urban community.[28] To bring this all too short summary of some of the trends of research in Chinese urban history to a close, one can also mention the cultural sphere. This subfield has received growing attention from researchers in recent years, including such topics as consumption and commercial advertisement, and the formation and refining of tastes and fashions, as well as the development of urban entertainment, be it oriented towards literati tastes or the needs of common urban dwellers.[29]

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27.   See Wu Chengming, *op. cit.*; R. Bin Wong, *op. cit.*; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*; Li Bozhong, art. cit.; Wu Jen-shu 巫仁恕, *Pinwei shehua: wan Mingde xiaofei shehui yu shidaifu* 品味奢華: 晚明的消費社會與士大夫 (Elegant Taste: Consumer Society and the Literati in the late Ming), Taipei, Academia Sinica, Lianjing, 2007.
28.   See for example Imahori Seiji 今堀誠二, *Peipin shimin no jiji kosei* 北平市民の自治構成 (The self-governing associations of the people of Beiping), Tokyo, Bunkyodo, 1947; He Bingdi 何炳棣, *Zhongguo huiguan shilun* 中國會館史論 (A history of China's guilds), Taipei, Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1966; William Rowe, *Hankow. Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1984; same author, *Hankow. Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989; Susan Naquin, *Peking. Temples and City Life, 1400-1900*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2000.
29.   Among others, see Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003; Wang Hung-t'ai 王鴻泰, "Xianqing yazhi –– Ming Qing jian wenren de shenghuo jingying yu pinshang wenhua" 閒情雅致 –– 明清間文人的生活經營與品賞文化 (Leisure and taste: the management of daily life and culture of appreciation among the late Ming and early Ch'ing literati), *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊, vol. 22-1 (2004), p. 60-97; Wang Cheng-hua 王正華, "Guoyan fanhua – wan Ming chengshitu, chengshiguan yu wenhua xiaofei de yanjiu" 過眼繁華 –– 晚明城市圖，城市觀與文化消費的研究 (Looking at prosperity — a study of city representations, urbanity and cultural consumption in the late

As mentioned above, the body of research devoted to China's late imperial history in recent decades, taken as a whole, has provided historians with a better understanding of the role of cities in the making of modern China, shedding light on the specificities of urban life and on its evolution in time, and showing the extent to which it was characterized by social, economic and cultural fluidity. If only one result were to be highlighted, it could arguably be the fact that even though the Chinese empire never saw the assertion of a "bourgeois" stratum in the strict sense — *i.e.* in the late-medieval and early modern European political and juridical sense —, it did see a specific social category of urbanites progressively develop: a category which, by and large, and obviously with variations from one city to another, gradually forged for itself a specific form of identity, distinguishing it from the rest of society.[30]

Even though much work obviously remains to be done in the field of Chinese urban history, especially when one takes into account the amount of historical knowledge available for cities of the West, the research trends summarized above, and many others, have contributed to its renewal and to its dynamism in recent years. As it happens, most of the authors of the articles brought together in this volume have been instrumental in this process, contributing actively to redefining the boundaries of this sub-field through the recourse to new types of sources that have allowed them to tackle issues hitherto left mainly untouched. What this broad body of research tends to show is that when the European municipal model of urban modernity arrived on Chinese soil starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, it did not land in a "wilderness of marshes."[31] Rather, it inserted itself in a rich and geographically diverse urban tradition. And while it did actively contribute to the thorough reshaping of this tradition during the twentieth century, the ways it could do so were determined to a large extent by the structures and characteristics of that tradition, and by its resilience. Thus, to provide a comprehensive account of what urban life in modern China's cities might have been, it seems imperative to better connect the late imperial phase of the story to the Republican one, so as to assess with more accuracy the impact of the municipal turn.

Apart from trying to draw the attention of urban historians in general to some of the specificities of the urban phenomenon in China, it is our hope that the following medley of recent research efforts will also provide a contribution in the direction just alluded to. By bringing together specialists of China's late imperial and Republican periods, the aim of the conference conveners was to go beyond the pre-modern/modern China divide, and, at least in the specific field of urban history, to better connect both periods' "histories," in many ways different, and yet sharing many similarities.

Ming), *in* Li Hsiao-t'i 李孝悌 (ed.), *Zhongguo de chengshi shenghuo* 中國的城市生活 (Urban life in China), Beijing, Xinxing chubanshe, 2006, p. 1-52; Li Hsiao-t'i 李孝悌, *Zuori dao chengshi –– Jindai Zhongguo de yile yu zongjiao* 昨日到城市 — 近代中國的逸樂與宗教 (In the cities of yesterday. Recreation and religion in modern China), Taipei, Lianjing, 2008.
30.   For early considerations on such aspects, see for example Étienne Balazs, "Les villes chinoises. Histoire des institutions administratives et judiciaires," *op. cit.*, p. 206-218, and his "Marco Polo dans la capitale de la Chine," *Oriente Poliano: studi e conferenze tenute all'Istituto italiano per il Medio e Estremo Oriente in occasione del VII centenario delle nascita di Marco Polo, 1254-1954*, Roma, IsMEO, 1957; see also Jacques Gernet, *op. cit.*
31.   Kerrie L. MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes. The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

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The volume comprises twelve articles, which have been paired into the six parts that structure the whole book. The first part, "Cities as space," takes up the question of urban space and the way it was construed in late imperial China. In her contribution, Siyen Fei looks at the problem from the viewpoint of late Ming Nanjing, exploring the sociological dynamics of the city and its specific urban spatiality through a careful analysis of a treatise devoted by Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565-1628) to the customs of the locals. Stressing the binary notions of "host" (native) and "guest" (sojourner), as Siyen Fei tells us, Gu appropriated the long-established *fengsu* 風俗 discourse, turning it into a tool for the description of urban space. As a result, the latter appears not so much marked by formal legal autonomy, as by the continuous inflow of newcomers and the new social activities they introduced into the city's grounds. In an interesting attempt at "connecting histories," the second article, by Lillian Li, approaches the question of urban space through the lens of city building — or rebuilding — during the early modern era (fifteenth-eighteenth centuries), in China of course, as well as in Europe and the Islamic world. The comparison takes here as its object not only the city in its physical form, but also the way it was rendered visually, through maps, paintings and architecture, in all three cultural areas. One of the main conclusions Li arrives at is that whereas in the context of competing states in Europe, and to a lesser extent also in the Islamic world, rulers eagerly turned their city building projects and their visual representations into instruments of political ambition and cultural competition, in the Chinese case, urban space was construed and celebrated as an important part — yet not unique and not necessarily culturally prominent — of the prosperity of the polity as a whole.

The second part of the volume is centered on the development of specific forms of urban consumer culture during the late imperial period. The topic, which has drawn growing attention in the last decade or so — even though not necessarily from the city-oriented standpoint adopted here —, is considered through two main channels, commercial advertisement and gastronomy. First, Wu Jen-shu offers an original account of the rise of what he terms as an "advertising culture" during the late imperial period, most notably in the highly urbanized Lower Yangzi region. In his article, he provides a careful analysis of the different dimensions of advertisement and of its specificities in the Chinese context, showing how it not only served the commercial interests of specific producers and retailers, but also helped define and direct the tastes of different echelons of urbanites. As Wu concludes, consumption should be regarded as one of the main characteristics of Ming-Qing China's urbanity, one that clearly distinguished cities from rural communities in the landscape of the empire's human geography of the time. Joanna Waley-Cohen, the author of the second article, would certainly not dismiss this point. Describing the evolutions of gastronomy in China's eighteenth-century, Waley-Cohen points to a strengthening of the link in this regard between commerce and aesthetics due to the growing commodification of the epicurean pleasures of cooking, and of their main performers, the cooks. But she also brings to the fore the personal investment of the Qianlong emperor (*r.* 1736-1796) in this arena of cultural activity, highlighting how the Court, and thus the capital, became a trend-setting locale, which increasingly competed with the empire's elites in the sphere of culinary tastes, especially those living in the cities of the Lower Yangzi region, bringing about a form of "politicization" of practices generally considered as belonging to the private sphere.

The third part of the volume is entitled "Cities envisioned" and looks at cities through the lens of literature. Taking the transition from the Ming to the Qing as its background, Wai-yee Li offers a

vivid depiction of how Yangzhou, site of a bloody massacre during the Qing conquest of Jiangnan in 1645, was thereafter presented in post-transition literati writings. As time went by, and as the city recovered from the trauma, Li subtly unravels the way its past as well as its present, during the last decades of the seventeenth century, became embedded in a sort of dialectic literary trend in which remembering and forgetting, resistance against and compromise with the conquerors, as well as the critique of the population's past "sins" — seen by some as having wrought havoc on its grounds — and the nostalgia for its former grandeur, all came to be important parts of local literati culture. Likewise set in Yangzhou, Lucie Olivová's article, in turn, takes us along the route followed by the local scholar Li Dou 李斗 (?-1817) in his famous description of the city and its surrounding area, *The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou* (*Yangzhou huafang lu* 揚州畫舫錄), which was first published a century and a half after the Qing conquest. In a way reminiscent of other such works describing cities at the time, the *Yangzhou huafang lu* offers a thorough account of the sites and of local matters deemed of interest by the author, as well as a host of information on persons more or less closely linked to the city's history and destiny. As Olivová's careful analysis of the text aptly shows though, Li Dou's work not only offers a rich description of the city — which had just experienced a good century of (possibly) unprecedented peace and prosperity —, but also a fascinating testimony of the way an eighteenth-century Chinaman might construe the socio-cultural dimensions of an urban landscape.

The next section of the volume is entitled "Religion in the city" and seeks to highlight the role played by religious institutions in late imperial China's urban context. The two articles presented here take Beijing as their object of study. In the first, Lai Hui-min takes up the question of Tibetan Buddhism and of its development in the empire's capital under the Manchu regime. Through an extensive use of different Qing-era archival holdings, Lai is able to precisely describe the various religious activities of the main Tibetan Buddhist temples of the city. But this documentation also allows her to highlight the extent of the cultural and economic impact of this specific form of Buddhism at the local level, which, as is well-known, was held in high regard by some of the dynasty's most celebrated monarchs. Ju Xi's contribution, in turn, offers a striking case study of the way religious worship, temples and local economic and commercial life could be intertwined in the city's environment. Making use of the extant epigraphic resources related to a specific temple of Beijing, as well as of archives from the city's Republican-era Chamber of Commerce, Ju reconstructs in a micro-historical way the destiny of one specific trade venture in the city — that of pork meat —between the eighteenth century and the first years of China's communist regime, in the 1950s. Ju's account offers a vivid description of the multifarious dimensions of religion in an urban setting such as modern Beijing, and the way its influence largely faded away in the past century as a result of the challenges posed to it by modernist reformism.

The fifth section of the volume deals with the administration of urban centers in Qing China and some of its specificities. Jérôme Bourgon offers an important first attempt at describing the enforcement of justice in a Chinese urban context through the example of executions and prison life in Qing-era Beijing. Making use of a host of resources, including visual materials, Bourgon draws attention to a field of research already extensively studied in the case of European cities, but which has largely remained untouched to this day for late imperial China. Luca Gabbiani's article is centered on the question of urban administration under the Qing dynasty, approached form the angle of the capital, Beijing. Relying on archival materials produced by local as well as central authorities, Gabbiani's contribution describes in detail the "modern" turn given to city government in Beijing at the beginning of the twentieth century, during the famous *Xinzheng*

— or New government — reforms. But he also seeks to connect this reformist effort to the previous structure of urban governance, thus showing the important administrative heritage the reforms could draw from.

Finally, the sixth and last part of the volume is devoted to the various contours of urban sociability. Turning the gaze away from the traditional teahouses, the most commonly addressed subject matter in this regard, in his article Xavier Paulès provides a detailed description of the opium houses and gambling dens of Canton, the large metropolis of southern China, in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Apart from the obvious diversity of such locales, which Paulès renders aptly through recourse to sources such as newspaper reports, what this work underlines is the fact that such venues, far from being only "dens of vice," actually catered to groups of individuals who often shared the values, feelings, experiences and knowledge linked to what they considered as acceptable pastimes. Christian Lamouroux's work, in turn, brings the reader back to northern China, during the period spanning the last years of the Republican era and the first of the communist regime. The article is centered on the social, economic and legal function of the *pubao* 鋪保, or shop warrantors, in Beijing's commercial environment at the time. Mainly drawing on the archives of the municipality, Lamouroux analyzes the network of business and personal relationships prevalent among the community of merchants and shopkeepers of one specific street of the city. In this micro-level narrative, the various social, economic and institutional actors of everyday life appear in their own right, shedding light on the various dynamics of local sociability as well as on some of the outside factors — at the time mainly linked to the change of regime in the early 1950s —, which were to bring about disruptions in this regard.

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In order to bring this brief introduction to its end, I would like to express my gratitude to all the persons and institutions that have contributed to making the conference and successive publication possible. My deepest gratitude goes to Li Hsiao-t'i and the "Urban life and culture in Ming and Qing China" research group at the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica in Taipei. Without the support of the former and the active participation of the members of the group, this whole project would certainly not have come into being. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica, and Harvard University for the financial support they provided at the time, which made the conference in Paris possible. My warmest thanks also go to the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Paris, and in particular to its former director, Franciscus Verellen, who, on very short notice, agreed to provide logistical support for the conference and, through the EFEO's press, a venue for the publication of the volume. Many thanks also to Wu Chun-huei, who, in Taipei, provided invaluable technical support during the preparation of the manuscript, especially with the illustrations.

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Luca GABBIANI,
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