

Chinese Urban Visions: the Birth of Urban Sociology in China

Introduction

In 1934, an article in the *Academia Sinica Journal* discussed recent urban development in China. Urbanization was closely linked to the development of a modern economy, as “savings from commercial capitalism are used to take the first step towards developing the industrial capitalist age. Farmers lose land and so are forced to leave the villages to find work in the cities, and this benefits modern large scale production...Because of this, modern commercial areas are also those with a large population density. Commerce attracts people and this is a peculiarity of modern cities.” This rapid growth had a huge impact on urban administration, since “as the quality of life rose, people gradually made more pressing demands of their governments. Several decades ago, such demands were unimaginable. Formerly, those things which people managed themselves are now managed by the government.” After listing several things that the government should now manage, which included transport, health, education and the like, the author concluded that “as the living standard of people in cities improves, the daily activity of urban governments becomes more complicated.”¹

This range of responsibilities is hardly new to those who are familiar with scholarship on cities in late Imperial and Republican China. Moreover, we are now well aware of the many innovations in cities across China that created urban modernity, which far from being rolled out according to a uniform model emerged as a complicated expression of national and international discourses on urban management that combined with central and local government initiatives, as well as private individuals and multiple other non-State actors. In this paper, I argue that the development of urban modernity in China created a shift in how cities were discussed in the

¹ Jiang Kangli, “Guanyu zujin shixingzheng de jige genben yuance,” [Concerning the Improvement of Several Basic Principles of Urban Administration] in *Shehui kexue congkan* [Social Science Series] No. 2 (1934): 272.

1920s and 30s. No-longer were they seen as intrinsically *backward* compared to those in other countries, especially Europe and America, but rather they were beset with the *same* problems as cities in other industrial capitalist economies. This subtle shift in the discourse on urbanization and urban management did not mean that planners and sociologists suddenly saw Chinese cities as on a par with London, New York, Tokyo, Paris or Berlin. Rather, they recognized that the problems of urban China were the same as those the world over, and often required the same solutions. In making this argument, I am arguing that by the 1930s, Chinese urban scholars actually adopted, largely uncritically, a met-narrative surrounding the development and identity of cities that was imported from the West. In this, I follow Jennifer Robinson, who has argued that since the birth of urban sociology in Chicago in the 1920s, it is the Western experience of urbanism that has defined what a city is understood to be, and how one goes about studying and changing it.² In adopting theories of urban development from the West in the first decades of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars accepted explanations of urbanization that reflected little of the Chinese experience. Such a phenomenon was largely a result of the time that many scholars spent in American universities, and illustrates that conceptions of urban identity in China were being seen in the same way as those elsewhere. Chinese cities, the inhabitants, and their problems were now seen to be very much part of the modern world, a narrative that has survived the vicissitudes of war and revolution, and continues to influence their development and that of Chinese society more generally.

The Development of Urban Studies in China

Much of what was recognized as modern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century China emerged first in cities, and late Qing reformers had much to say about the urban

² Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, (London: Routledge, 2006): 3 – 6.

environment. Thinkers such as Sun Fo, the son of Sun Yatsen, and Liang Qichao were heavily influenced by European urban planners. They saw the physical reconstruction of the city as a transformative act that would bring about the emergence of a new and modern Chinese nation, complete with an enlightened and civilized population.³ Perhaps the most obvious physical manifestation of this was road-building, as reformers in Suzhou adopted European discourses that saw roads as the arteries and veins of the cities. They repeated the assertions of foreign observers such as Arthur Smith and Tokutomi Sohō that “the primitive state of urban roads revealed a worrisome lack of public mindedness and national consciousness among the population.”⁴ Sun Yatsen later made their construction a national priority, and urban planners and local officials emphasized road construction both in and between cities.⁵ The call was taken up by the members of the National Road-building Association of China, which was founded in 1921, and also saw a unified road system as the hallmark of a modern nation.⁶ This was part of a lively discourse on *shizheng* [urban administration] that often implicitly argued for cities to be modern they had to have certain attributes. While urban China was always seen as relatively less developed than cities in Europe, America and to some extent Japan, the early discourse emphasized an intrinsic backwardness. However, in the 1920s a subtle shift began to take place. No-longer were cities in China seen as *not* modern. Instead, they were increasingly recognized as part of a global urban system, their development caused by the same factors as those in more ‘advanced’ countries. The reason for this is simple. By the 1920s and 30s, Chinese cities had acquired many of those characteristics that were seen as emblematic of urban modernity the

³ Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 51 – 55.

⁴ Peter Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity: Reconstructing Suzhou, 1895-1937*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 79.

⁵ Sun Yatsen, *Minguo zhengfu jianguo dagang* [The Fundamentals of National Construction] (Xin shidai jiaoyushi, 1927).

⁶ Kristin Stapleton, “Yang Sen in Chengdu: Urban Planning in the Interior,” in Joseph W. Esherick eds., *remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900 – 1950*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999): 97.

world over, a fact that has long been recognized by historians.⁷ Such development both brought them up-to-date and provided a basis for a re-evaluation of the urban itself.

Chinese Urban Theorists and Planners

Part of the reason for the development of a new urban theory was close identification with foreign intellectual strands. The first decades of the 20th century saw an increasing number of Chinese studying urban planning and the emergence of university courses and professional organizations devoted to the subject. Many also went abroad. Zhao Ke has identified fifty-four scholars who studied some form of urban administration outside China, just over fifty percent in the USA, with half of the remainder taking courses in France.⁸ Many of them published extensively on all aspects of urban administration and some 150 books were written during the Republican period, the vast majority concentrating on urban government and administration.⁹ Organizations that were established included the *Zhonghua shizheng xuehui* [Chinese Association for the Study of Urban Administration] set up in Shanghai in 1927 and the *Shizheng wenti yanjiuhui* [Society for the Study of problems in Urban Administration], which founded the journal *Shizheng pinglun* [Urban Administration Critique].¹⁰ Meanwhile, universities across China began to offer courses on urban planning. Out of this, urban sociology emerged as a discipline in the late 1920s, and was offered as a course in Jinan National University and Fudan University, both in Shanghai, although there were only two textbooks.¹¹

⁷ David Strand, “‘A High Place is no Better than a Low Place’: The City in the Making of Modern China,” in Wen-Hsin Yeh Ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 98 – 136.

⁸ Zhao Ke, *Shizheng gaige yu chengshi fazhan*, [The Reform of urban Administration and the Development of Cities] (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaikē quanshu chubanshi, 2004): 78.

⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 119 – 121.

¹¹ Qiu Zhi, *Dushi Shehuixue yuanli*, [Principles of Urban Sociology] (Shanghai, 1934): 1.

The sheer volume of literature on urban studies defies analysis in so short a paper, so I shall concentrate on a few sources and individuals who were most active in the field. I have therefore relied on articles in *Shizheng quanshu* [Complete Book of Urban Administration] published by the National Road-building Association of China, and particularly those by Dong Xiujia, who studied at the University of Michigan and the University of California. Upon his return to China he was closely involved with a number of organizations and published several textbooks.¹² He can be seen as representative of a generation of scholars who studied urban administration in the years between World War 1 and the Nationalist Revolution. This generation was followed by scholars who came into contact with the emerging theories of urban sociology that really cemented ideas about urban modernity. Born in 1901 in Anhui, Wu Jingchao studied in Chicago with E.W Burgess and Robert R. Redfield in the mid-1920s, when the Chicago school of sociology was leading the field the world over in the development of this subject.¹³ On his return to China, he worked in Ginling University in Nanjing, before moving to Qinghua University, where he taught until taking up posts in the Nationalist Government. After the war, he returned to Qinghua, and continued to work in universities until 1958. He published several books, including the first textbook on urban sociology *Dushi shehuixue* [Urban Sociology] in 1929.¹⁴ Together with *Dushi shehuixue yuanli* [Principles of urban Sociology], which was published in 1934, this formed the basis for developing Chinese understanding of urban development during the Nanjing Decade. Finally, I shall concentrate on articles published in *Shizheng qikan* [The Journal of Urban Administration], which was the mouthpiece of the Fudan

¹² Kristin Stapleton, "Warfare and Modern Urban Administration," in Sherman Cochran and David Strand Eds., *Cities in Motion: Interior, Coast, and Diaspora in Transnational China*, (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2007): 59.

¹³ Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹⁴ Li Peilin, Qu Jingdong and Yang Yabin, *Zhongguo shehuixue jingdian daodu*, [Guide to the Classics of Chinese Sociology] (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009): 314 – 317.

University Association for the Study of Urban Administration. Founded in 1928, the association reflected the vibrancy of scholarship at the university. Courses on urban organization and administration had been taught since 1925, but in 1929, more courses were added and new professors hired, including Dong Xiujia, while the number of students increased from 54 to 65.¹⁵ A list of some of the members of the society illustrates that some graduates went abroad for further study or found work in municipal governments in China, but others went into business or became teachers.¹⁶ Although only two issues of the society's journal were published, Fudan University offered one of the first courses in urban sociology, and with so many students it was an important center of the field in China.

The Origins of the City

In studying cities, Chinese scholars gained an appreciation of their history, and began to understand how urban development in China was part of a global pattern. Comparing the emergence of cities in China with others around the world was essential to an understanding that any problems in Chinese cities were caused by this urban development, and that Chinese urban identity shared many characteristics with other cities. Chinese scholars asked some very basic questions about cities, such as where they came from, how they developed and what their essential characteristics were. Instead of searching for the answers in Chinese history, they drew on the European experience. The growth of cities was seen as part of historical development and occurred when large numbers of people were drawn to certain areas, which was put down to a number of factors. Commerce was seen as one of the main reasons for the emergence of ancient cities such as Constantinople, while later centers like Vienna, Budapest, Amsterdam and Venice

¹⁵ "Shizheng xi gaikuang," [Overview of the Urban Administration Department] in *Shizheng qikan* [Journal of Urban Administration] vol. 1 (1934).

¹⁶ "Benhui huiyuan xiuxi lu," [News of this Society's Members] in *Shizheng qikan* vol. 1 (1934).

developed along major shipping routes. Current large commercial centers included London, New York, Shanghai and Tianjin. A second economic basis for urban development was industry, and important examples in Europe and America included Manchester, Sheffield, Chicago and Pittsburgh, while further east China boasted Shanghai and Tianjin among others.¹⁷ Ancient political centers included Rome, Assyria and Babylon, as well as Keifeng and Beijing, but more recently, London, Paris Tokyo and Nanjing had all emerged. Large numbers of people also gathered round religious sites, and important spiritual cities were Trichinopoly in India, although Beijing also had many important religious sites. Finally, education was cited as one of the main reasons for the emergence of cities, and the classic examples given were Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁸

Having emerged, cities grew and this development had been particularly rapid during the recent period of global industrialization, something that was recognized as having a huge impact on China. Chinese scholars normally measured urban expansion by population, and Dong Xiujia reproduced statistics from the American authors A. W. Weber and F.G Howe on the expanding urban populations of countries as diverse as America, France, Spain and Russia, before noting that although China lacked adequate data, its urban population was also increasing.¹⁹ The reasons he and other authors gave for this concerned the development of industrial capitalism and were as common to China as they were to other countries. Indeed, Dong Xiujia denied that education, religion and politics were spurs to urban development, and that only with the industrial revolution and the increase in production and migration did cities develop quickly.²⁰ The reason

¹⁷ Dong Xiujia “Chengshi zhi fada,” [Urban Development] in Jiang Jinwu eds., *Shizheng quanshu*, [The Complete Book of urban Administration] (Shanghai: Zhonghua quanguo daolu jianshe xiehui, 1928) part 1 pp. 10 – 11. Zhou Ruihe, “Dushi fazhan zhi qushi,” [Trends in urban Development] in *Shizheng qikan* vol. 2 (1934): 86 – 87.

¹⁸ Dong Xiujia, *Chengshi zhi fada*, pp. 9 – 10. Zhou Ruihe, *Dushi fazhan zhi qushi*, p. 86.

¹⁹ Dong Xiujia, *Chengshi zhi fada*, pp. 15 – 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26 – 27.

for this, argued Wen Chongxin some years later, was that higher wages in factories attracted farmers to the city, while at the same time improvements to agricultural technology meant fewer workers were required in the fields, while long established handicrafts were dying out in the face of mass production. Industrial production was concentrated in cities because of their large surplus labor pools, convenience of transport, and the fact that these two factors led to the establishment of shops, banks and all the other infrastructure required for the expansion of modern capitalism.²¹ This was producing a global urban network as “now there are large commercial cities in every country, where entrepreneurs have their headquarters.”²² While the increase in the rate of urbanization caused by the expansion of capitalism was a global phenomenon, some authors believed that other elements were still important for urban development. For example, Wen Chongxin noted that Nanjing’s recent expansion was caused by it being chosen as the Nationalist capital, and that Zhenjiang had benefited from becoming the provincial seat. However, at the same time older political centers such as Beijing, Luoyang and Kaifeng were in decline.²³

Urbanization was a global phenomenon then, and one that China was very much a part of. Moreover, it was recognized that urban problems were caused by such rapid expansion. Dong Xiujia argued that large cities were complex places and their inhabitants had more needs than people living in the countryside. These included, wider roads, hospitals, fire and police services, electricity and telephone, some of which were the responsibility of private companies, but many of which were the responsibility of the municipal government.²⁴ Several years later, the in a preface to the second volume of the *Journal of Urban Administration* Liu Guoze set out the

²¹ Wen Chongxin, “Chengshi de yiyi,” [The Meaning of Cities] in *Shizheng qikan*, vol. 2 (1934): 5; Yang Zhiming, “Dushi de jingwei,” [The Warp and Weft of Cities] in *Shizheng qikan*, vol. 1 (1934).

²² Zhou Ruihe, *Dushi fazhan zhi qushi*, p. 91

²³ Wen Chongxin, *Chengshi de yiyi*, p. 6.

²⁴ Dong Xiujia, *Chengshi zhi fada*, pp. 12 – 14.

problem even more starkly. “The industrial revolution has caused the rapid development of commerce and industry, and this has led to an increase in the urban population. Because of this, many things that weren’t problems in cities have become so.”²⁵ He went on to argue that China wasn’t quite an equal player on the world stage, since Imperialism meant that China was in the lower reaches of capitalism. The Nationalist Government had done its best to support Chinese industry and oppose further foreign incursion and as part of this had tried to rebuild old cities. However a lack of scientific knowledge stood in the way of further reform, and this was one of the reasons behind the formation of the Fudan University Association for the Study of Urban Administration.²⁶ It is therefore possible to see that while the problems of cities the world over were seen as caused by their development, the discourse in China at times harked back to an earlier theme of the inherent backwardness of the country, particularly when the perceived foreign threat was highlighted. Despite this, Chinese scholars were aware of how urban problems around the world were the result of the development of modern cities, a development that had occurred in China, even if Paris, Berlin, London, New York and Tokyo were more advanced along the route to well organized modernity.

Adoption of a Discourse: the rise of urban Sociology

Urban sociologists in China distinguished themselves from urban planners and claimed to offer a more holistic understanding of the city, but in doing so for the most part adopted a discourse on cities that was born in the Chicago experience. Writing an introduction to *Dushi shehuixue* [Urban Sociology], Sun Benwen commented that the book’s author, Wu Jingchao had just returned from studying in Chicago and had received the latest training in the study of urban

²⁵ Liu Guoze, “Kaiduan” [Preface] in *Shizheng qikan*, vol. 2 (1934): p. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

life. Although this was the first book on the subject in China, the science of urban sociology was also new in America, where Bedford's *Readings in Urban Sociology*, published in 1927, was cited as the only work on the subject.²⁷ Wu himself admitted that his book was not a systematic study of Chinese cities, but merely served to define the limits of urban sociology and to introduce the latest Western scholarship.²⁸ Nevertheless, as we shall see, the work is full of Chinese examples alongside the European and American models. By the early 30s, urban sociology had advanced, and while Bedford's *Readings in Urban Sociology* was still cited as the classic text, Qiu Zhi recognized E.W Burgess' *The Urban Community* and several other books as developments in the field. He provided the following answer to why urban sociology was important.

Now social organizations are extremely complicated, and many new professional branches of learning are being developed to study it...Urban society is the most important aspect of contemporary social organization and requires professional study...Formerly, scholars paid some attention to urban society. However, their focus was not the phenomenon of urban sociology, but rather political aspects and social phenomenon that were not separated from the countryside.²⁹

In this short explanation we find repeated the mantra that it was the growing complexity of society, particularly urban society that necessitated more study, a complexity that included Chinese cities. Moreover Qiu Zhi makes a distinction between the study of *shizheng*, which concentrated on politics and management, and urban sociology which is concerned with the city as a whole.

²⁷ Sun Benwen, "Sun xu," [Sun's Preface] in Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, [Urban Sociology] (1929).

²⁸ Wu Jingchao, "Zixu," [Introduction] in Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*.

²⁹ Qiu Zhi, *Dushi shexue yuanli*, pp. 2 – 3.

To explore how far writings on urban sociology adopted the ideas then emerging in the USA, and particularly Chicago, I shall focus on the emergence of the city and its relationship to the countryside, which includes the perception of a specific urban identity, as well as exploring its physical and social organization. At all times I shall continue to draw attention to how the wider categories of analysis used to compare Chinese cities to their foreign counterparts meant that China was seen to be part of the modern world, with any problems caused in cities the result of recent urban development, rather than any essential backwardness of the Chinese nation.

Both Wu Jingchao and Qiu Zhi described the emergence and development of cities, but did so slightly differently. For Wu, cities were defined in part by their difference from towns and villages. Towns had developed around permanent markets, but they only served a small hinterland. Cities on the other hand developed around wholesale markets. So historically speaking, Jingdezhen was not a city since it relied on only one trade. However, now it was possible to buy a whole range of items wholesale in Shanghai, Hankou and other cities throughout China, in a similar manner to Chicago.³⁰ Wu developed this comparison by explaining how Shanghai, Hankou and Tianjin among others were increasingly integrated into a global trading network that included London and New York. Since shipping was a crucial component of this global trade, port cities were increasingly important and in this regard, Shanghai was China's New York. Although other cities in China such as Hankou and Dalian were also port cities, they were limited in their development because of ice during the winter or the falling water level along the Yangzi River. Despite this, and the competition between some cities such as Guangzhou and Hong Kong, Wu Jingchao clearly saw large Chinese port cities as increasingly incorporated into a global trading network and emerging out of the same dynamics

³⁰ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 3 – 4.

of ever-wider trading areas.³¹ Qiu Zhi defined a city as a place in which many people congregate together on a site that is suitable for building, and which is managed by a political entity.³² He then went on to identify several reasons why people came together in ever larger communities, and agreed with Dong Xiujia that while economics was the most important, people also gathered around political, educational, religious and cultural sites. Examples of ancient Chinese commercial centers included Jingdezhen and Foshan, while in Europe during the middle ages, Italian cities joined those along the Rhine. One interesting cultural development was tourism, which emerged either because of beautiful scenery or a city's history, exemplified in China by Moganshan and Suzhou.³³ Although their explanations of the emergence of cities differed somewhat, both Wu and Qiu made no differentiation between Chinese and foreign cities in this regard, placing urban areas all over the world in the same trajectory of historical change.

When it came to urbanization, both authors emphasized the importance of industrial change, but took a slightly different tack. Wu Jingchao emulated earlier scholars when he noted that industry developed in cities because of the need for labor and markets, although urban development was also caused by better transport systems and the growth of a financial infrastructure. In some of these areas, China lagged behind the West. For example, whereas air mail was now increasingly common in Europe, in Shanghai, bridges and other obstructions made the postal system inefficient. When it came to financial services, China also lacked large banks and had to rely on *qianzhuang* which had few branches.³⁴ Urban development, for whatever reason continued to attract migrants, but here there were some differences between China and America. In the US, there were more women than men in cities, but in China the opposite was

³¹ Ibid., pp. 13 - 21

³² Qiu Zhi, *Dushi shexue yuanli*, p. 26.

³³ Qiu Zhi, *Dushi shexue yuanli*, pp. 27 – 28, 38.

³⁴ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 24 – 26.

the case, a fact Wu accounted for by Chinese views on marriage and women working outside the household.³⁵ In fact we know that in some cities, such as Nantong and Wuxi women outnumbered men in textile factories, but Wu's conclusions indicate an early understanding of how cultural differences shaped modern urban development. Qiu Zhi was less understanding of the differences of Chinese cities, because he adopted a classic Marxist formulation in which urbanization was driven by development in productive capacity. Urban society developed according to the three stages of historical development laid out by Marx, from primitive Communism with little distinction between urban and rural, through feudalism to capitalism. He concluded by stating that since the contradictions of capitalism were most evident in cities, it was here that the working class would develop a consciousness, and under the leadership of intellectuals begin the revolution.³⁶

While Wu Jingchao and Qiu Zhi differed slightly as to the origins and development of Chinese cities, they had similar views on their internal composition. Wu Jingchao cited E.W Burgess' work on Chicago as the model for how different zones emerged within cities, which envisaged expansion in ever wider concentric circles. The center was packed with commerce and entertainment, not to mention major transport hubs, and was ringed with factories, worker housing, a ring of residential homes for the emerging middle classes and then a commuter zone.³⁷ In China, while the commercial area of Shanghai was also the center of the city, this wasn't necessarily the case elsewhere. In Nanjing for example, commerce had developed to the north in Gulou, even though the largest concentration of population was to the south. Wu noted that the municipal government was trying to encourage more commerce in the south of the city,

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 38 – 38.

³⁶ Qiu Zhi, *Dushi shexue yuanli*, pp. 55 – 90.

³⁷ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 48 – 49; E.W Burgess, "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project," in Park et al. eds., *The City*, p. 51.

while at the same time facilitating more housing to the north, which proved that the commercial center was not necessarily fixed, something that could also be observed in other major cities, such as Shanghai where the city had moved West with the population, swallowing up villages around Jingan Temple in an invasion of commercial development.³⁸ Qiu Zhi also saw cities as developing into specific commercial, industrial and residential areas, although he noted the importance of universities, which required more space than schools, and generally developed near large residential areas in the suburbs so as to keep students far away from the temptations of the commercial center of the city.³⁹

Although Wu Jingchao and Qiu Zhi were not the first to argue that urban expansion should be planned, their application of zoning to Chinese cities reflected some of the grand master plans then being drawn up for Shanghai, Nanjing and other cities in China. Indeed, the plan for Nanjing involved close collaboration with foreign architects and engineers, illustrating how despite some Chinese architectural flourishes, and the eventual compromises that had to be made because of lack of funds, urban development occurred within an overall meta-narrative that was adopted from the West.⁴⁰ Wu Jingchao recognized that Chinese planners were already thinking along the same lines as those in other major cities around the world. He noted with approval the division of Shanghai into commercial industrial and residential zones, and reported that an article in *Shenbao* in 1928 had published plans to zone Nanjing. However, China's capital still had a long way to go before it was comparable with major international cities.⁴¹ Despite this, Wu's acceptance of the importance of planning and recognition of its influence on China illustrates how urban management had also truly entered the modern age.

³⁸ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 50 – 51.

³⁹ Qiu Zhi, 142 – 143.

⁴⁰ Charles D. Musgrove, "Building a Dream: Constructing a National Capital in Nanjing, 1927 – 1937." In Esherick eds., *Remaking the Chinese City*, pp. 139 – 160.

⁴¹ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 69 – 72.

According to Wu, all this urban development had not only changed the physical structure of cities, their social make-up and composition, but created a new urban identity. While Chinese urban sociologists did not adopt the ideas of the primitive that informed their American counterparts wholesale, urban identity was defined in relation to the countryside, and was conceptualized in terms of social relations.⁴² Wu Jingchao emphasized the strength of personal relations in the village, but although the city took the form of small communities, the personal relations were not those seen in the rural environment. He cited the example of tower blocks in European and American cities in which no-one knew their neighbor and noted that in China, because few cities had such structure, a little of the community spirit remained in the streets, although relations were not as close as those in the countryside.⁴³ Wu went on to develop his notions of urban identity through the idea of conscience, which was something formed by education and environment. In the countryside, everyone worked to the same standard in their social relations, but in the city, different cultures and modes of behavior led to different standards of social relations, which could produce both conflict and opportunity.⁴⁴

Concentrating less on a specific urban identity, Qiu Zhi took a slightly different approach, following a Marxist understanding of the relationship between the city and the countryside, in which each is opposed to the other in different epochs.⁴⁵ Qiu traced this relationship, and concluded that far from the countryside supporting the city, as many sociologists claimed, it was actually changes in the city that were causing change in the countryside. He cited the example of finance, where urban institutions such as modern banks were expanding out into the countryside and beginning to alter how agriculture was financed, even as agricultural technology was also

⁴² Robinson, *Ordinary Cities*, pp. 23 – 25.

⁴³ Wu Jingchao, *Dushi shehuixue*, pp. 73 – 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78 – 79.

⁴⁵ R. J. Holton, *Cities, Capitalism and Civilization*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986): 20 – 21 and 30 – 31.

expanding. In the future, urban management would solve the inequalities in the city, and expand commerce and industry out into the countryside dissolving the differences between these two spaces.⁴⁶ While this Marxist formulation said little about what urban identity was, it defined the city against the countryside, something that was an implicit adoption from Western theory.

Conclusion

China is now an urban society, and while successive governments and some intellectuals have discussed the notion of rural reconstruction, for the most part it is cities that have led economic and social change. There are many causes of urbanization in China and around the world, but in the modern global capitalist economy, cities have taken similar developmental paths. As Chinese cities expanded and acquired characteristics then seen as denoting urban modernity, scholars of urbanization in the early twentieth century gradually abandoned the idea that they were backward. Instead, the first urban sociologists in China saw their cities as emerging out of the same historical circumstances and facing the same challenges as those the world over. Historians now understand that while urban development took place within the context of early twentieth century globalization, peculiarities of Chinese society and culture such as native place societies, also helped to define urban identity. However, the work of scholars in the early twentieth century provided a far simpler picture of the city. As we look to understand contemporary urbanization in China and the challenges some of the new mega-cities face around the world, it is important to remember that the way people see cities often helps to determine what they become. In China cities were increasingly seen to develop according to a Western model, and perhaps it is the legacy of this that helps to determine some of the characteristics today.

⁴⁶ Qiu, *Dushi shehuixue yuanli*, pp. 110 – 111 and 254 – 255.

