



Delft University of Technology

## Asian Cities

### Armature, Enclave, Heterotopia

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#### DOI

[10.1177/00961442211026277](https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442211026277)

#### Publication date

2022

#### Document Version

Final published version

#### Published in

Journal of Urban History

#### Citation (APA)

Bracken, G. (2022). Asian Cities: Armature, Enclave, Heterotopia. *Journal of Urban History*, 48(4), 928-936. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442211026277>

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# Asian Cities: Armature, Enclave, Heterotopia

Journal of Urban History  
2022, Vol. 48(4) 928–936  
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Marie Gibert-Flutre and Heidi Imai, eds. (2020). *Asian Alleyways: An Urban Vernacular in Times of Globalization*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 226 pp., notes, bibliographies, index, \$102.60 (hardback).

K. C. Ho. (2020). *Neighbourhoods for the City in Pacific Asia*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 236 pp., notes, bibliographies, index, \$106.63 (hardback).

Minna Valjakka and Meiqin Wang, eds. (2018). *Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China: Urbanized Interface*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 323 pp., notes, bibliographies, index, \$111.86 (hardback).

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DOI: 10.1177/00961442211026277

## Keywords

urbanization, globalization, alleyways, neighborhoods, visual arts, Asia, China

Asian cities are undergoing massive transformation in the face of globalization. Urbanization is not only part and parcel of these transformations; it is often the most visible expression of them. Three recent books explore some of these urban transformations: Marie Gibert-Flutre and Heidi Imai examine Asian alleyways as an urban vernacular threatened by globalization; K.C. Ho looks at the neighborhood scale in Asia's cities; while Minna Valjakka and Meiqin Wang showcase how visual arts act as the "urbanized interface" of China. As I read these books it occurred to me that their topics: the alleyway, the neighborhood, and visual arts, each seemed to represent one of the three city elements outlined by David Grahame Shane in *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design, and City Theory* (2005): namely: the armature, the enclave, and the heterotopia.

Shane is an important urban theorist and historian, his *Urban Design Since 1945: A Global Perspective* (2011) traces the emergence of urban design as a global phenomenon, beginning with the post-war reconstruction of cities, to the collapse of modernist state planning in the face of globalization. *Recombinant Urbanism* was inspired by Crick and Watson's discovery of DNA in 1953. Shane sees their work as revealing "the mechanism underlying mutation: a coded, heritable, alterable sequence of amino acids [where if] you change the sequence, you change the structure of the organism" (Shane, 6). Shane was 'haunted by the idea that there might be an urban sequencing apparatus analogous to biology's DNA spiral code' (p. 6), he wondered how urban actors could relate to this mechanism because "[e]ven apart from the difference of sheer scale" he noted that "there are limits to the analogies that can be drawn between the two fields; the deliberate design of cities is clearly different from biological processes of change, and the flow of energy through a biological cell is clearly different from the flow of energy through a city" (p. 6). "Nonetheless, the idea that urban actors shared some sort of urban DNA provided an inspiration—and lingering question—through many years of research. What were these shared patterns and how were they communicated from one generation to another?" (p. 6).

Shane's work has an important historic component and builds on urban theories that identify normative city models (which, he notes, almost always come in threes). He further notes that each model tends to represent a particular stage of development: the preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial (p. 13), yet "all three are built from three basic urban elements—namely, the armature, a linear organizing device; the enclave, a self-centering device; and the heterotopia, a type of hybrid space embedded within the larger system" (p. 13). He then posits that "[t]he armature, the enclave, and the heterotopia are the basic components of any city, constantly combined and recombined in different cultures, places, and periods" with "the heterotopia, in particular, play[ing] a key role both in stabilizing city models and in catalyzing transitions from one city model to another" (p. 13).

Shane illustrates these concepts by saying that "the armature may be envisioned as the traditional European street. It is a linear organizational pattern or sequencing device, perspectival in structure" (p. 75), much like the Asian alleyways we will see in section 1. The enclave "is a centering device, a static enclosure with a single center and, often, a single function" (p. 75), something we shall see in section 2 with city neighborhoods. While the third element, the heterotopia, is "a special form of enclave that contains exceptions to the dominant urban system. It is hybrid, with multiple subcenters and subcompartments, and is differentiated from its surroundings" (p. 75). Shane notes that "heterotopias often handle flows and manage change for the larger-scale urban networks in which they are embedded" (p. 75). This understanding helps explain some of the contributions seen in section 3 which examines visual arts in China.

### **Armature: Asian Alleyways in Times of Globalization**

Armatures, according to David Grahame Shane, are "linear systems for sorting sub-elements in the city and arranging them in sequence" (Shane, 199). He admits that we "do not normally speak of cities in terms of 'armatures.' Yet every village main street, downtown shopping street, suburban 'miracle mile,' or mall works as an armature" (p. 198). They are "linear urban assemblages [that] bring people together in an axial space to form relationships, to make commercial transactions, be entertained, or to take part in ceremonial or casual communal activities" (p. 198).

Marie Gibert-Flutre and Heidi Imai begin their book on Asian alleyways with a definition of the alleyway taken from the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as "a narrow lane or path for pedestrians" (Gibert-Flutre and Imai, 16). They note that "its morphological characteristics and width may differ from one urban context to another" but that they "are narrow and always paved" (p. 16). They also note that, despite being "a ubiquitous feature of cities in East Asia, alleyways remain often nameless places" (p. 15) and are "often under-represented on official city maps" (p. 16). They also often "lack a formal history, which fully contributes to their marginalization" (p. 21) and that the "lack of consideration and value attached to ancient neighbourhoods in many cities of Asia has led them to often be radically transformed by urban redevelopments, while their residents have been or are being displaced" (p. 16) with the result that "much of the local vernacular—such as communal experiences and knowledge of the city—are being wiped out forever" (p. 17).

Part of this problem is globalization, and this book seeks to reframe Asian alleyways within this context. Gibert-Flutre and Imai turn the "traditional approach to 'global cities' upside down [which] contributes to a renewed conception of metropolization as a highly situated process" (p. 18). They critically explore "global Asia" and "the metropolization process specifically from its alleyways, which are understood as ordinary neighbourhood landscapes providing the setting for everyday urban life and place-based identities being shaped by varied everyday practices, collective experiences, and forces" (p. 18). This allows for an "original, multilayered portrait of contemporary urbanization in Asia beyond its spectacular aspects, providing multiple and alternative narratives of urban changes" (p. 18).

Asian alleyways “share common morphological settings” (p. 19) yet are diverse in their historical development, their architectural expression, and their social organization, which enables them to foster their “vivid social cultural life” (p. 19). It can be hard to know if they are public or private and it “is often unclear to whom they belong” (p. 16), yet this semi-public, semi-private character can encourage informal (sometimes even illegal) activities. Thinking of alleyways as “intermediate zones” (Kisho Kurokawa) or “liminal places” (G.A. Jones) offers them “the potential to become the vehicle of different intellectual, artistic, cultural, economic, and political discourses” (p. 26); seeing them as “in-between” spaces at the interface of domestic and public life allows us to understand their rich capacity to engender the social, commercial, and cultural life of the city.

“The intimate scale, realm, and atmosphere of the alleyway allows all owners to take part in the creation, shaping, and maintenance of a common space” (p. 27), and despite “their small dimensions, alleyways foster multiple and hybrid identities and hold immense potential for a more integrative city” (p. 27). If only we could free our mind from “the public/private dichotomy inherited from the Western conception of urban spaces” (p. 28) we would be able to understand “the richness of the buffer zone and intermediate semi-public spaces at the interface of housing and the street” (p. 28) that the alleyway has to offer. To do this, they argue, calls for a reconsideration of “the diversity and versatility of the alleyway [which] can help us to create and maintain ordinary living places [and] which can be considered as desired alternatives to disintegrating global city terrains and their mega-projects” (p. 28).

The goal of these essays (all of which are well illustrated) is to “combine ethnographic data with theoretical findings to reconceptualize marginalized alleyways and their potential to ameliorate the adverse effects of metropolization” (p. 26), something the papers do achieve (although it would have been nice if the contributors [or editors] had done more to draw strands of their arguments together through cross-referencing—something so assiduously done by Valjakka and Wang in their book).

According to Gibert-Flutre and Imai, the benefits of their approach are threefold: (1) despite their relative invisibility, alleyways remain “the backdrop of the Asian city: their network guarantees the connectivity of most urban tissues in the region. Thus, they constitute the fine grain of the urban fabric” (p. 19); (2) “an alleyway-based geography of the city provides an acknowledgement of diversity, in which marginalized populations are able to assert their agency in city-making” (p. 19) (something we also see in the next section on neighborhoods); and (3) as “blind spots and relatively hidden spaces, alleyways offer the possibility of innovative ‘loosening spaces’ (Franck and Stevens)” (p. 19). Thus, alleyways provide “a good sample for assessing physical, corporeal, and social relations in the processes of micro-scale placemaking” (p. 19), and “are also the material expression of broader social struggles and the locus for generating, proclaiming, and negotiating different cultural subjects as aspects of contemporary urban life in Asia” (p. 19).

Jeffrey Hou’s chapter on Taipei is perhaps the most insightful in the book. He points out that Asian streets and alleyways act like the squares and plazas of Europe as he examines conflict resolution around the Shida Night Market (something which echoes K.C. Ho’s investigations into neighborhood reactions to threats which we will come to in the next section in Tangbu [also in Taipei] and Sungmisan, Seoul). The community-building seen in the Shida case shows “experimental commoning that puts the neighbourhood at the forefront” (p. 160), and also highlights how “alleyways can be an important site for social and spatial innovations in East Asia, rather than just a subject of nostalgia and reminiscence” (p. 175).

Another chapter that resonates with K.C. Ho’s work is Wimonrart Issarathumnoon’s chapter on Phra Athit-Phra Sumen, a shopping street north of Bangkok’s heritage core (and close to the Sumen Fort mentioned by Ho). This has some interesting things to say about heritage and the interpretation of place. Tourists are “attracted to the rituals of everyday life [and] the nostalgic

atmosphere of a community from an earlier period” (p. 126). “The challenge is to try to comprehend how such an area still maintains its place-based identities while advancing its creative dynamism” (p. 118). Here, we see how Phra Athit-Phra Sumen has retained its character through the intensity of its activities, the density and mixture of its built form, and the fact that “uncertain vernacular streetscapes provide opportunities for creative energies while nurturing authentic social life and collective memory” (pp. 135-136).

Three chapters deal with alleyways in China: Judith Audin examines Beijing’s *hutong* from an ethnographic perspective to show how their traditional way of life is under threat from gentrification and tourism. This intermediate space, located between private courtyard houses and the public street, is “a place of appropriation and anchorage, a place of memory and history, but also a place of power circulation and political interactions, shaping specific local practices and meanings” (pp. 57-58). Jiayu Ding and Xiaohua Zhong use the lens of Lefebvrian sociospatial theory to tell the temporal and spatial history of Shanghai’s *lilong* using the Tianzifang redevelopment, which has been “reimagined as cultural heritage” (p. 154). They point out that even though the “spatial results turn out to be similar to those of gentrification in the West, yet the mechanisms are totally different” (p. 154). Unfortunately, their diagram-like map of a *shikumen lilong* (Figure 5.1, page 143) is inaccurate. It shows an inner circle of alleyways turning the normally dead-end side alleyways into through routes rendering the entire *lilongtang* compound far more porous than it usually is.

Melisse Cate Christ and Hendrik Tieben’s chapter (missing from the introduction and its overview table on page 24), looks at Magic Lanes, an “intergenerational community placemaking project” (p. 198) which explores the “larger potential of lane spaces” (p. 196) in Hong Kong, where participation in place construction is often usurped by redevelopment projects, and often leads to “the displacement of residents and businesses, and to the creation of open spaces that do not meet the needs of the inhabitants of the area” (p. 185). By testing ways of providing more inclusive public open space this pilot project shows that “interstitial spaces such as laneways, although unrecognized as countable open space by the city, serve as important public (or quasi-public) spaces for local residents and visitors, and can become key locations for bottom-up placemaking projects” (pp. 182-183). Interestingly, this case also highlights the role academics play in some projects (something we also see stressed in three of K.C. Ho’s five cases in the next section).

The book’s editors have a chapter each: Heide Imai explores urban renewal, cultural innovation, and social integration in Tokyo and Seoul’s alleyways—the only chapter to contain two cases studies, but more could have been done to draw their findings together. However, the idea of trying to understand the “nature and potential of the alleyway as a ‘boundary’ between past and present” (pp. 87-88) is fascinating and shows how alleyways can be “viewed as the material expression for broader social struggles, and a locus for generating, proclaiming, and negotiating different cultural subjects, which are aspects of contemporary urban life” (p. 88).

Marie Gibert-Flutre’s chapter examines Ho Chi Minh’s alleyways, seeing them as challenged liminal space where “multifunctional and lively urban spaces” (p. 34) are increasingly being used for vehicular traffic. David Grahame Shane’s armatures “act as containers for the activities and spatial practices of urban actors on foot” (Shane, 198), yet Asian alleyways’ traffic issues (once the bicycle, now increasingly motorbikes and cars) are highlighting an old dichotomy: should such spaces be a place to move through or be in? Singapore was wracked by Veranda Riots in the 1880s when authorities wanted five-foot ways to be kept clear of merchandise so people could use them as pathways. One solution to this problem is Gibert-Flutre’s suggestion that alleyways be allowed to foster socio-economic activities as a counterweight to the new, heavier traffic, which would boost their “*riveraineté*” (Antoine Bres), something she sees as one of the key elements of the city (p. 53).

The book ends with an insightful (if somewhat pessimistic) chapter in which the editors question the Asian alleyway's future. They see that the "consumption and commercialization of the alleyway [has] effectively reinforced its recognition as a commodity and decreased its practical usability—especially the ability to function as a common neighbourhood space" (p. 213). The suggestion that the alleyway be allowed function as a "kind of in-between place, which, if left alone, is an alternative landscape of remembrance, or places of a heterotopian nature" (p. 209) is rather weak and unconvincing, given the contents of the rest of the book. However, the idea that "urban planners could gain deeper understanding of how to support spontaneous developments and create meaningful places" (p. 219) by studying alleyway is far more useful, as is the editors' laudable desire to escape "the predominant Western-based concepts of 'public,' 'private,' and 'semi-public'" space (p. 215). These essays test concepts that illustrate not only "the critical evaluation of their transferability and applicability to other cultural contexts" (p. 215) but also how this research could "offer us new insights into how to deal with similar situations and contested urban areas in Europe or America" (p. 215), a task certainly worth further pursuit.

### **Enclave: City Neighborhoods in Pacific Asia**

Marie Gibert-Flutre and Heidi Imai note that "[m]any aspects of urban experience—including those of history, heritage, urban populations, ways of life, and livelihoods—are indeed defined and shaped at the neighbourhood level. Yet, much of it remains overlooked by policymakers and many urban studies academics" (Gibert-Flutre and Imai, 17). K.C. Ho would agree. His monograph, *Neighborhoods for the City in Pacific Asia*, tells us that "the urban neighbourhood must be reconceptualized and recovered within studies of the city" (Ho, 209-210). He also thinks that "because the neighbourhood is intimate and familiar, it is also the first source of collective action. Such action represents the working out of rights and responsibility, respect for diversity, and a learning ground for active citizenship" (p. 210).

Ho's book is extensively illustrated, with excellent maps and helpful images showing the various spaces under discussion and their social activities. There are also a number of helpful tables summarizing his findings. The five cases are all quite different, some pro- and some anti-government, but all explore the neighborhood, how it is used, and how it relates to wider issues of city governance. This resonates with David Grahame Shane's definition of the enclave as "a self-organizing, self-centering, and self-regulating system created by urban actors" (Shane, 177).

The first three chapters in Ho's book act as an extended introduction to the five test cases, with the first chapter examining urban studies' literature to highlight the importance of collective action in placemaking. One of the author's main contentions is that "many issues such as liveability, heritage, sustainability, and even citizenship (through participation), are produced and therefore should be addressed at the neighbourhood level" (Ho, 16). City governments often overlook this level of scale when it comes to resource provision, yet, as Ho points out, it is "the directing of resources to local areas and empowering residents and small businesses that makes cities liveable" (p. 18). One of his key arguments is that "initiatives created at the neighbourhood level create a fresh alternative to state-driven and market-driven ventures" (p. 29), something he sees as a potential "third way" and an alternative to "'market-centred' neoliberal strategies" (p. 29). Another key argument is that "such neighbourhood initiatives do not remain local but impact the city in different ways" (p. 29).

Chapter 2 examines the political economy of cities in Asia, while chapter 3 explains the author's methodology in detail, including the logic of using comparisons in multi-sited research. Ho highlights three potential approaches: (1) Grounded, where primacy is given to data in selecting cases, meaning the researcher has to keep concept formation "undeveloped before entering

the field” (p. 60); (2) Analytic Ethnography, which begins with theory and the focus of the research is an extension or refinement of this; and finally (his own preferred approach), (3) Comparative Case Approach, which attempts to “strike a balance” between the other two (p. 64). Ho believes that “theory need not blind (as grounded approaches suggest)” (p. 69) but also that “theory should not blind (a danger in analytical ethnography)” (p. 69). Instead, it “should present a set of arguments against which the researcher reacts, with insights gleaned from local realities” (p. 69).

The first case, Sungmisan, begins with a trigger event: Seoul’s city government wanted to build a reservoir and locals protested. When the city backed down, buoyed by their success, locals implemented ideas they had shared during the protest. As a result, Sungmisan “represents a neighbourhood where village businesses create a materialist conception of a place-based community, building interests and activities among residents to create a network of friendly affiliations” (p. 102). Ho also notes that “[t]he importance of an active neighbourhood is not lost on district officials” (p. 99).

Mahakan in Bangkok is the opposite of Sungmisan: “a neighbourhood whose residents have a weaker voice when articulating their demands” (p. 107). Weak, but not inactive. When the Bangkok city government wanted to turn their site into a park, residents embarked on the “unusual strategy of making a cultural rights claim linked to the heritage of its neighbourhood” (pp. 108–109). Support from academics was important here (something we also saw in the previous section in Hong Kong and Taipei), but Mahakan is also important because “it sheds light on an important tension between the civil bureaucracy and politicians” (p. 109). Ho laments Bangkok’s too narrow definition of heritage (which resonates with Wimonrart Issarathumnoon’s investigations into nearby Phra Athit-Phra Sumen) and calls for a new understanding that could “incorporate a more complete set of local traditions of the old capital” (p. 127).

Tangbu in Taipei also saw a reaction triggered by government plans: the building of a clinic was stopped by local residents and a number of old sugar warehouses (of no particular architectural merit) were converted into a museum and park. The process saw the appointment of a community planner who helped establish the new uses (also with the involvement of academics) but Ho laments that the project has proved to be something of a white elephant (or “mosquito building” in Taiwan) due to its lack of a sustainable vision for the future and the fact that locals reverted to their old lives once the initial threat was neutralized (p. 150).

Langham Place, Hong Kong is unusual in that it is an inner-city regeneration as well as a mega-project. It is also the only case in this book to represent a public-private partnership. Ho shows how once the local interests organized themselves (with help from the chairman of the Mong Kok District Board) they “became a formidable force in negotiations” (p. 170). This project also highlights the importance of amenities not “just to the people who fought for them, but also to the city at large” (p. 159).

The final case is Tampines (in K.C. Ho’s home town, Singapore). Here he illustrates the role government (and, again, academics) play in community building through the co-creation of new amenities with the residents. Not without its challenges, the implementations, if successfully managed, have implications for the wider city. The vast majority of Singapore’s population live in public housing, so “national goals are tied to housing policies” (p. 181). Ho sees the “need for different government departments to work together” (p. 180) and points out that it is “at this level of planning that the government intervenes to foster social life and a neighbourhood community” (p. 182).

The book ends with a thoughtful chapter expanding Gaston Bachelard’s topo-analysis of the home to the neighborhood. The home area of the neighborhood (using Kearns and Parkinson’s definition of a five- to ten-minute walk from home) lies ‘just beyond Bachelard’s intimate space of the home’ (p. 205). The neighborhood, “shaped by regularity and sustained by a common set of practices” (p. 205), “becomes the basis of a community of residents willing to act together to

defend their shared space” (p. 205). Ho sees this as “the smallest scale at which the division of politics occur” (p. 207), and as “the cases presented in this book show, when city governments enable neighbourhoods, the liveability of the city is enhanced” (p. 216). This final chapter seems to point to a bright future for democracy in Asia; its five cases show how “neighbourhoods where residents come together and participate collectively become learning grounds for democratic citizenship” (p. 213).

## Heterotopia: Visual Arts in Contemporary China

The heterotopia is a slippery yet beguiling concept developed by Michel Foucault to describe spaces that are simultaneously mythic and real. David Grahame Shane sees them as “enabling experimentation” (Shane, 14), and experimentation is something we see aplenty in Minna Valjakka and Meiqin Wang’s *Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China: Urbanized Interface*. For Shane, the heterotopia “identified particular places in the city where processes of change and hybridization are facilitated” (pp. 9–10). He uses the concept to “articulate how urban systems and fragments change in modern and postmodern urban systems as actors slice and recombine urban elements” (p. 9). He stresses that the “altered situation of the postmodern city and the role of heterotopias in accommodating accelerated change [have been] brought about by faster communication and transportation systems” (p. 14). Urban heterotopias are “specialized patches, acting as testbeds of change” (p. 9), they bottle up that change in spatial pockets so “urban actors can conduct concrete utopian experiments without endangering the established disequilibrium of the larger system” (p. 10).

Shane admits the heterotopia “can be confusing, as there is no single, stable appearance or guise under which heterotopias perform their complex functions” (p. 231). David Harvey sees them (basing his reading on that of Henri Lefebvre) as something that “delineates liminal social spaces of possibility where ‘something different’ is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories” (Harvey, xvii). It comes, not “out of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily lives” (p. xvii). Harvey states that “such practices create heterotopic spaces all over the place. We do not have to wait upon the grand revolution to constitute such spaces. Theory of a revolutionary movement is the other way round: spontaneous coming together in a moment of ‘irruption,’ when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different” (p. xvii). And this is exactly what we see in Valjakka and Wang’s collection of essays examining artistic practices in China, where people react to the changes wrought by urbanization and the neoliberal globalization causing it.

Oscar Wilde once said that “[a]ll art is quite useless” (Wilde, 22). The art we see in this book, however, is anything but. Valjakka and Wang show how “innovative artistic and creative practices initiated by various stakeholders not only raise critical awareness on socio-political issues of Chinese urbanization but also actively reshape the urban living spaces through the formation of new collaborations, agencies, aesthetics and cultural production sites” (Valjakka and Wang, 13). These artistic practices are located (as the book’s subtitle suggests) at “the interface between visual arts and urbanization in Mainland China” (p. 14) and have contributed to the “emergence of a new urban aesthetics” (p. 15). They “facilitate diverse forms of cultural activism as they challenge the dominant ways of interpreting social changes and encourage civic participation in the production of alternative meanings in and of the city” (p. 13). “Their significance lies in their potential to question current values and power structures as well as to foster new subjectivities for disparate individuals and social groups” (p. 13). They do this by “complicat[ing] and contest[ing] the mainstream representations of state-led urbanization and open up alternative readings and contingencies for participation in urban life” (p. 15).

China's urbanization is "characterized by the rise of the city and megacities as the paragons of social development" (p. 19) and "in conjunction with globalization [is] a major drive for the production of urban space in China since the 1990s" (p. 19). One of the book's most important points is that while "artists, practitioners and urbanites are not trained urban planners, able to design urban development, their intuitive responses to and critique of the (re)formation of urban landscapes says much about the living circumstances of these spaces" (p. 21). Divided into two parts, Part 1: Representations, sheds light on the ways in which visual arts have responded to urban changes via "new methods, strategies, styles, forms and subject matters" (p. 22). The five chapters in this section show how visual arts have the "power to make the invisible visible and to make previously silenced voices heard" (p. 23). Part 2: Urban Interventions, also with five chapters, explores how artistic practices are reshaping the city and redefining everyday experience.

Visual arts are helping reshape China's "social fabric and opening up possibilities for new subjectivities to emerge" (p. 25). The case studies examined here are "sites of continuing artistic and creative experimentation, where multiple agencies and manifestations emerge and inspire new ways of negotiating impacts of urbanization" (p. 27), which underscores their heterotopian function—something explicitly highlighted by Zhen Zhang in chapter 1, which highlights the motifs of mortality and loneliness running through Yang Lina's films documenting China's most vulnerable citizens. They do this through a critical, creative engagement with "the social consequences and traumatic effects of the accelerated urbanization sanctioned by state capitalism" (p. 37). Chris Berry, in chapter 7, examines the work of another female filmmaker, Cao Fei. Like Yang Lina, Cao Fei's work blurs film and documentary (something once controversial but now going mainstream with films like Chloé Zhao's *Nomadland* [2020]). Berry's is perhaps the most insightful chapter in this book. It makes explicit reference to Foucault's heterotopia, developing the concept into "heterotopic mirroring" (p. 214) as a way of explaining some of Cao Fei's work, particularly RMB City, which she made under the pseudonym "China Tracy." (This also happens to be the cover image for Robin Visser's *Cities Surround the Countryside* [2010], a book frequently cited in this volume, and even critiqued by Minna Valjakka in the final chapter for not including graffiti as an art form in her "otherwise insightful study on post-socialist urban literature, film, and art" (p. 288).)

Berry sees Cao Fei's work as "a response to China's rapid urbanization and the transformation of its existing urban spaces, which are no longer shaped by socialism but instead by what [his] chapter considers as China's engagement with neo-liberalism, including and facilitated by globalization" (p. 209). He notes that the "Chinese experience of modernity has also been one of disenchantment" (p. 225). This disenchantment is to be found in *sang wenhua* (not mentioned in the book): the disillusioned rejection of China's achievement-oriented culture epitomized by Chinese Communist Party posters. In a China where jobs and home ownership are increasingly unattainable, *sang wenhua* rejects China's 996 culture (working from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week). The idea that art can compensate for alienation may be a commonplace, as Berry himself admits (p. 225), but he sees Cao Fei's art as an antidote to this in its ability to "re-enchant otherwise alienated urban spaces" (p. 225).

Chinese Communist Party posters are examined by Meiqin Wang and Stefan Landsberger in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Wang's investigations are particularly interesting in that they illustrate how these billboards seem as if they are advertising commercial brands, something that is "revealing for a society that adopts consumerism [as] its primary ideology" (p. 120). It also shows how those who can afford to consume are "represented as more modern in comparison with their counterparts since modernization is now defined as the consumption of consumer goods rather than as contribution to the society" (p. 135).

One of the other troubling issues in the book is the way in which violent evictions have become the norm in China's "urban revolution" (Maurizio Marinelli referencing Henri Lefebvre in chapter 2). Marinelli's work also cites David Harvey's concern over "predatory urban

practices” (p. 66) and Harvey’s advocating of “the right to the city as a new and fundamental type of human right” (p. 75). Marinelli’s chapter highlights the plight of China’s “half-citizens” (p. 66), the migrants who actually build the country’s new urban dream but who cannot afford to live in the buildings they construct (p. 66) (something also mentioned by Jiang Jiehong in chapter 3 [p. 103]).

Elizabeth Parke, in chapter 9, stretches the concept of artwork to breaking point in her discussion of *banzheng* (phone numbers scrawled on Beijing’s pavements to advertise services helping migrants obtain fake certificates—not unlike the “business cards” advertising sexual services that used to be found in London’s telephone boxes). It would have been interesting to know if Ms Parke phoned any of them. It was a pity, however, that Wang Fuchun’s photograph “No. 258 in Beijing” (mentioned on page 279), was not shown, especially as it seems so important for the research. The chapter does, however, raise an important issue by saying that “[i]nstead of denouncing the *banzheng* as an urban disease, perhaps the root causes that drive the demand for these services should be addressed” (p. 281).

One thing that all of these investigations have in common is their illustrating of just how useful art is, not just for highlighting current problems in China, but also for showing creative ways of dealing with them. Art here acts like “a barometer for the new urban soul” (p. 310), and becomes “a vehicle of affective processes and knowledge exchange that broaden the understanding of the public sphere in Chinese cities today” (p. 312). “While doing so, they inevitable [*sic*] open up novel discourses and terrains of problematization” (p. 27). This fascinating and important book calls for “a greater interest in investigating how visual arts in China could contribute, challenge, or redirect the ongoing urbanization processes” (p. 27) because this will help “play a role in the development of a new public sphere despite the continuously oscillating levels of censorship” (p. 27).

## Conclusion

And finally, to return to David Grahame Shane, who believes “that the emergence of enclaves, armatures, and heterotopic, hybrid spaces is fundamental to the urbanization process” (Shane, 15). He says that “cities are necessarily built around a variety of patches or enclaves [neighbourhoods] that are interconnected by an ecology of armatures—transportation and communication networks [alleyways, all of which are] crucially complicated by a wide variety of embedded heterotopias [in this case artistic practices, that act as] primary places of urban change, accommodating exceptional activities and persons” (Shane, 14).

We saw in Valjakka and Wang’s explorations of visual arts in China the continuing fecundity of Michel Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia; we also saw, in section 1, how the vitality of alleyways’ *riveraineté* overlap with the neighborhoods of section 2, which also showed how neighborhoods act as cradles for Asia’s burgeoning democracy, something that is increasingly important in the face of neoliberal globalization and the challenges its urbanizing tendencies bring. The dynamism of these responses, both artistic and pragmatic, is heartening because it lets us see that people *can* react, *can* make a difference to their city, their homes, and their lives. And that gives us all hope, and not just in Asia.

## Author Biography

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