Guest Editorial

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China is experiencing dramatic urban development and transformation. Given the huge volume of construction work in the Chinese cities, foreign architectural firms are extensively involved in providing urban design and planning consultancy services. Urban design is perhaps the most globalised professional field in China. Although there are extensive studies on urban China and its transition in the special issues of journals such as *Urban Geography*, *Town Planning Review* and *Environment and Planning A*, as far as we know, there have not been dedicated journal special issues to Chinese urban design. This special issue, developed from Urban China Research International Network, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, consists of four papers that describe changing morphology, design practice and socio-spatial implications for Chinese urban lives.

The first paper by Deljana Iossifova describes the changing morphology of the city, using a case study of Shanghai. She argues that the Chinese city as well as other Asian cities has always been complex with mixed land uses, and that such a complexity seems to be disappearing because of large-scale urban renewal. But the line between different land uses or uses for different social groups does not serve as a boundary of spatial division. But rather it will continue to be a transition zone that involves intensive social interaction and is becoming a social 'melting pot'. Her ethnographic study of Shanghai's old and new neighbourhoods indicates the symbiosis of different social groups. This finding is interesting in the context of Western notion of the 'fortress city', private governance and gated community (see later paper by Miao Xu and Zhen Yang), as the division between different patches may not necessarily be as clear as we thought. The (re-)use of boundaries depends on social practices. In the Chinese context, the boundary between private and public space is dynamic, and Chinese cities will continue to see patchwork of socio-spatial settings.

The second paper by Zhen Yang and Miao Xu continues on the notion of public *vs* private spaces. Their study focuses on the design and the use of pedestrian streets in the city of

Shanghai. Because of the scale of pedestrian areas and their central location, they call them 'central pedestrian district'. These are developed commercially, which mainly provide shopping spaces that are managed by private companies. Yang and Xu go beyond the narrow notion of 'privatisation of public space', which is commonly criticised in this type of development. They review the history of streets in different development periods. They argue that while these streets were developed for public use in the period of state socialism, they did not present public spaces as they did not possess diverse public uses. The new design approach removed the political doctrine of social control and designed the street into pedestrian space, which led to greater public uses. Their paper is again a challenge to the Western notion of consumerism and demise of public space. Given Shanghai's unique history as a treaty-port city and then as a socialist industrial city, consumerism led to greater rather than lesser public use of urban spaces. Corresponding to the rise in commercial spaces, they argue that the design of pedestrian streets should give more consideration to everyday and public uses rather than landscaping and image-making which is widely presented in the effort of the city government.

The third paper continues the line of query but shifts its focus to residential spaces. Miao Xu and Zhen Yang review the history of design in residential development in China. They argue that China presents a unique historical, political and cultural context in which gated forms of residence evolve. In contrary to the Western notion of 'gated community', social fragmentation and the demise of public space, they argue that China has a long history of building 'gated community', dated back to its imperial era. They present very detailed design features of various walled places, courtyard housing, work-unit compounds, and today's gated community of 'commodity housing'. They compare eastern and western building-space relationship, and argue that because of high density, the internal space of compound evolves into a communal place, while the boundaries themselves change into interactive shopping space. Therefore, the development of

'gated communities' does not necessarily lead to the 'fortress place' in China. In the new period of housing development, they point out that the widespread use of gated residential quarters is caused by the retreat of the government from housing provision and is driven by the rise of private residential development. Therefore, the design feature of gating may persist but it reflects different forces of development.

The final paper by Zhaohua Deng examines the design control practice in China's most developed special economic zone, the city of Shenzhen. Because of its unique status, Shenzhen has the power of its own legislation and thus is most advanced in the regulation of land uses. It adopts a zoning-like ordinance rather than so-called detailed development control plan in other Chinese cities. This power paves the way to implement development and design control. Reading China's recent urban planning, there have been extensive critiques of the practice of using urban design as place promotion device. Various mega projects compete to present themselves as an icon of the city. Deng in his paper shows some progress in design control in Shenzhen, using case studies of commercial office development. He reports that in Shenzhen there is effective cooperation between planning and land administrations, which is rare in Chinese cities. Because of relatively advanced regulatory framework, urban design control in Shenzhen is able to go beyond usual image-making practices for

individual buildings and to consider environmental qualities in the area of concern. Deng provides a detailed case study to show the procedure of implementing design control in Shenzhen, which involves complicated dialogues between the city-planning bureau, the land zoning committee, the master plan consultant, the design consultant and the developer.

Bundled as a set of papers in this special issue, these studies illustrate the history of Chinese urban morphology, its transformation and the progress in China's urban design practices. These papers provide much needed background of urban design in different contexts in which today's urban design evolves.

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