and more colourful. Since the period of identical state-planning housing has ended, new identities have to be found to create a sense of 'home'. An easy way is choosing artificial solutions like thematic architecture. Much more effective is the adapted continuation of creating small communities, based on the old danwei system. A new society is being created here, built on a tabula rasa but organisational founded on adapted communal roots. **m**

NOTES

(1) Editor's Note: There were two Opium Wars. The first one was between China and Great Britain, and the second one was between China, and Great Britain and France. The Empire of China banned the English smugglers to sell Indian opium in China. The Chinese were defeated, and had to tolerate the trade of the drug. Besides, they submitted Hong Kong to Great Britain, and Macao to Portugal.

(2) Editor's Note: Heuristic is an investigation and discovery technique that searches the solution for a problem using the lateral thinking. It accepts methods such as sizing up, elaboration of diagrams, and reverse reasoning, among others.

China: Conundrums, Constructions and Cities

Bert de Muynck (co-director of Moving-Cities)

> *Chasing bits of truths is like catching butterflies: pin them down and they die.*
> *Simon Leys, The Burning Forest*

The Absence of Insiders
In 2004 Rem Koolhaas wrote in "Triumph of Realization" a timely piece of propaganda on China's state of affairs, in which he carefully avoided the pitfalls of specialization: "With a mixture of concern and fascination, all eyes are focused on China. Perhaps the greatest gamble in the history of mankind, it is a gamble that no one can afford (China) to lose. China's visible transformation into an economic and political giant represents a case of a 3000-year-old "adolescent" growing up in public [...]. It is easy to imagine it going wrong but essential to imagine it going right. Participation in China's modernization clearly does not have a guaranteed outcome. The future China is the moment's most compelling conundrum; its outcome involves all of us – there are no "outsiders"". Is China a world without outsiders, with cities without strangers, featuring a society without exclusion? All of these are hard to imagine while moving from one Chinese city to another. Designers, inhabitants, citizens, investors, vendors, decision makers, land owners, migrants, white collar workers, and students are all part of the future that is under construction. But reality, as everywhere else, is shaped by real-estate investors and the reigning party. Everyone else is an outsider. But does it make sense to claim the opposite – that there are not enough "insiders"?
About fifteen years before the UN-report and Rem Koolhaas, Xiangming Chen published the essay "Giant Cities and the Urban Hierarchy in China " highlighting the following difficulties: "...the large number of rural residents becoming urbanized can only be absorbed by these citified towns. If this policy is smoothly implemented, we will witness unprecedented major population redistribution in China that will involve total redefinitions of both urbanization and urban places. (...)This comprehensive picture of very large cities in the context of China's urban policies suggests that an effective Chinese model of urban development has yet to crystallise." A lot of the attempts to grasp the vastness of China's urban development are centred on forms of fantastic-forensic research. Fantastic because every description and analysis contributes to the outsiders' image of a country floating on waves of irrational, unbelievable, and impressive developments. Forensic because when architects, planners and researches arrive at their city of investigation they are surrounded by crimes and wonders of construction they could never fathom. Investigations on Chinese cities need a different form of specialisation, one that, as Simon Leys wrote in "The Burning Forest", is both necessary and impossible: "Specialisation is necessary. The wealth, scope, and diversity of Chinese culture wildly exceed the assimilating capacities and intellectual resources of any individual. [...] Specialisation is impossible. China is an organic entity, in which every element can be understood only when put under the light of other elements; these other elements can be fairly remote from the one that is under consideration – sometimes they do not even present any apparent connection with it."

Five Elements
For a long time, architects have been dealing with the issue of context; dealing with the relatively possible task to find aesthetic, formal and organisational clues in the immediate environment of any given plot. In today's world, context, like firecrackers, explodes in a multitude

of directions, with different times and patterns of organisation. Context can be shaped, coloured and timed according to one's preference; it can suggest reacting upon the global late-capitalist swindle, speeding into the dead-end street of iconography, being a homage to some whatever typical European city, or simply embracing the logic of a whatever, it does not matter and in the end we die world. In China, a lot of context is situated in-between cities.

Kevin Lynch stated that the image of city deals with visual quality, the mental image of the city and the apparent clarity or 'legibility' of the cityscape. For Lynch the notion of context is comprised of five elements – path, edge, district, node, and landmark – which are considered simply as convenient empirical categories, within and around which it has been possible to group a mass of information. Next to the world of cities, there is also The World of Man, as C.A. Doxiadis explained in the essay bearing the same name. This one also consists of five elements: "Man and the space surrounding him are connected in many ways within a very complex system. Man's space is just a thin layer on the crust of the earth, consisting of the five elements which shape man and are shaped by him: nature, in which he lives; man himself; society which he has formed; the shells (or structures) which he builds; and the networks he constructs. This is the real world of man, the anthropocosmos, half-way between the electron and the universe." While moving from one city to another, it is clear that these ten elements – all trying to bring the notion of the human scale on the forefront of any urban debate – become part of an organic entity, in which every

element can be understood only when put under the light of other elements: nature and nodes, networks and edges, shells, paths and society.

The Existence of MovingCities and One-Million Cities

We established MovingCities in 2007 after an interview we conducted with urban nomad Kyong Park who told us, besides many other things, that "we should consider looking at cities not as shrinking or expanding, but as moving cities." Being in China for a year by then, we committed ourselves to the investigation of the conundrum. Since then we talk, walk, travel, teach, write, read, lecture, advice, organize, and blog. Everything, so far, but building Moving-Cities talks about the mega-cities of China – Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Chongqing – but also of its one-million cities – Chengde, Baotou, Zibo, Nanjing, Ningbo, Harbin, Zuhai. Yes, most of these could be anywhere – so could Chicago, Frankfurt and Milan, right? – and show at a first glance look-a-like urban land-scapes; government buildings, endless rows of housing developments, high-rise congestion in the Central Business Districts, over dimensioned street sections, sidewalks and buildings. Surrounding these is the constant hustle and bustle of traffic, street vendors, shops, cabs and crowded parks. The smell of China's cities is the smell of an immersive theatre of progress; a particular blend of industrial, entrepreneurial, survival, metal and food particulars that thickens the urban air. We have been in cities where it had not rained for months, in cities where the smell of stinky tofu competes with the smell of fresh concrete, cities along rivers, cities

tucked away between mountains, cities with frozen lakes, cities where the air is filled with mosquitoes. We have been in typhoon cities, cities with towers as far as the eye can see, in smog filled cities, in sweet and sour cities. We believe these cities only exist in China. Exploring those means moving around in elevators and by foot, by cab, train, airplane, pedicab, subway, and bus, being exposed to accidental encounters with architectures located on the fringe of city and countryside. Everywhere we feel the pressure of urbanization but are also left behind with a sense of impossibility to assimilate and be remote at the same time. There is the reality of cities that are growing everywhere, of neighbourhoods and roads disappearing, buildings and highways emerging. In China, cities are so new that it is hard not to simply stare at them and suffer from architectural aphasia.

Catching up with the speed of urban development, China is building an impressive railway network – a 19th century form of expansion mixed with a 21st century speed of technology – intensifying mobility between the one million cities. Urbanized China, seen from the train, is a barcode of the built and unbuilt, a landscape dotted by smokestacks, agricultural fields, construction sites, bridges, highways... all in different stages of development. From Shanghai to Nanjing, where the train experience was a continuous blending of buildings, construction sites, agricultural fields, industrial factories, highways, highrises,... We drove for two hours through a non-stop city: China's high-rises and railways are construction-site corridors. A bus drive in December 2008 from

Beijing to Chengde revealed another image of China's in-between cities landscape: we saw the capitals' out-skirts as a landscape dotted with low rise villages and French castles. It is hard to dream these things.

Case study Zibo, the Zero Degree of Urbanisation?

Zibo, located in Shandong Province, a coastal province of eastern China, has been irresistibly pulsating on our research radar since we found it sitting at the end of an alphabetical list of China's cities featuring more than 1 million inhabitants. Zibo is city number 117. It is a Chinese city of the invisible type, one with a few lines on Wikipedia: "Famous Industrial City, Capital of Ceramics Production Base and City of Petrochemical Industry" and barely visible on any of today's rusty urban research radars. So what to expect from a city that one only knows from a simple search and selection of growth figures and population projections? Upon arrival we spent the day zigzagging Zibo, along large avenues, run-down blue facades and rooftops, capturing impressions from the unimaginable. During our first urban scan of Zibo we, naturally, roamed rooftops. To us the panoramic view gives a first hint of the local reigning planning principles, of the landmarks, different urban and landscape topographies. The panoramic view blends the specific with the impossible; it combines a specific urban image of an unknown city with the impossible task to grasp the city from the ground level. First stop was the Zibo Hotel; second, the Fengjing Huatying Business Hotel. Our bottom-up bird's eye impressions? A sea of residential blocks, weird uncategorisable

Chinese 1980s architecture, non-distinct towers flanking the city's main axes and a horizon filled with smokestacks. All very old school orthogonally organised, the Russian way. Arriving in Zibo out of curiosity, we feared the city could easily get reduced to a nonentity; another city on a city-list. Cities, that only by their name (Heze, Jiamusi, Taian,...) are prone to remain unknown and float in abstraction. Their quality is that they resisted, so far, the demand of architectural internationalisation, of urban crystallisation. Here the large building is either a hotel, the local headquarter of a domestic company or a government building. There is no bigness beyond them and contrary to the large metropolitan areas the city seems to have a scale that can be architecturally and visually administered. These are cities placed outside the urban observers' fascination for megacities and the fading interest into the generic city. Zibo could be anywhere. But only in China.

After moving around in elevators and on foot, we explored Zibo by cab. First we went East. And that for a simple reason: from the rooftops we saw smokestacks and power plants in the West, while Zibo's Eastern horizon was dotted with con-struction cranes. On the Eastern fringe of Zibo, the urban development consists of large plots of residential houses, business parks and universities. Anticipation is a key word to describe this area of the city: anticipation of traffic, knowledge, people, and high-density suburban life. Today the infrastructure has been laid-out (a six lane infrastructural grid superimposed on farm land), and small peri-urban villages are waiting to be evacuated

and demolished in order to make place for an expanding city. Everything in Zibo feels both rundown and architecturally anonymous. If any of the initial impressions of Zibo conveyed an image of what it must feel like to live, travel, and work in this lesser-known Chinese city then it is one of a seemingly endless repetition and hard-core functional zoning. Repetitions of residential blocks, in Northern and Eastern direction, zoning of schools and business parks in the East and of industry towards the West and the North. In the South, the city expands over farmland and dilapidated small factories. We observed how sequential building booms in Zibo defined several architectural styles; the dogmatic Sino-Russian housing compounds, followed by facades composed out of a mix of bathroom tiles and blue glass that are exemplary of a yet undefined nineties Chinese style. Recent architectural developments showcase the locally interpreted global hotel style of the end of the nineties and today's non-descript high-density suburban residential style that is engulfing the suburbs of many of China's cities.

Conclusion

When chasing Chinese cities, one should not approach it as the leisurely and precise act of catching butterflies. One should rather be involved in the intelligent act of catching a falling knife: a phrase used in investing terminology to describe a risky investment strategy. According to definition, the danger in trying to catch a falling knife is that the stock will continue to drop, causing one to lose money on an increasingly worthless investment. In architectural terms, this would mean that urban and

architectural methods of investigation will prove irrelevant in the context of the development of Chinese cities, causing architects to lose time and energy on increasingly worthless research topics and design tasks. What is needed in China is an attitude based on assimilation and remoteness. With a dedication to mobility – and with the zeal, pragmatism, and naivety reserved for migrants, bohemians, and entrepreneurs – today is the time to totally redefine urbanity and urban places. We claim ourselves to be the citizens of the one million cities, but also outsiders to them; we are temporarily travellers caught into waves of non-stop urbanisation. We live in a world without insiders, one with too much information. A world with seemingly only two options; draw or drown.

While moving around in China, one understands that an effective Chinese model of urban development has yet to crystallise. Indeed, there might not be a guaranteed outcome, and it is hard to imagine everything going right, but that doesn't obscure the emergence of a new urban order over, under, inside, and above existing cities. In this new urban order, architectural and urban research and analysis are based on seemingly irrational decisions, arbitrariness, intuition, and coincidences coalescing critically. It is supported, once the opportunity arises, by a method intensifying the urban experience, by tagging, reading, writing, renaming, roaming, classifying, picturing, and making sense of the city through different forms of mobile field research, by train, cab, foot, from on top windshields, rooftops, and bicycles. And it is measured by speed and politics; China is the country where

Paul Virilio could be seen as a vernacular philosopher. 🔲

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(1) MovingCities is an independent research organisation led by Bert de Muynck and Mónica Carriço and dedicated to understanding the role that architecture and urbanism play in shaping the contemporary city. http://movingcities.org

Space and Public Realm: Transforming Beijing

Jinxi Chen

This essay is based on fieldwork in the existing historical districts of Beijing in 2003 and 2004 by the author and twenty other colleagues from Tsinghua University. We researched for two months into an area of over 13 hectares in Dashila District, one of the oldest, busiest and most famous business streets in Beijing. We thoroughly visited each place in the area, and recorded many aspects of the physical property, including land use, the form of the open space, its street life, the building styles, the building heights, and the functions. Besides, our team acquired information from local authorities, such as land property, demographic composition, and population density. By putting all these materials together, we noticed that the richness and randomness of social life in the Hutongs[1] showed a contradiction to the highly organized holistic urban structure of Beijing, which might

also be seen as the reason. As newly built fabric has designed fancy parks and open spaces, to find out how people use them, I took the university campus and its surrounding space as the focus of investigation. In 2009, I researched 120 campuses in Beijing. Not surprisingly, most social life remained either inside the modern courtyard of a campus or a residential unit, or is distributed in small-scale disordered streets. Here again, the question can be raised that, why the increasing "Western form" or seemingly Western public spaces haven't contributed to public life? Let us take a look at the public realm of Old Beijing city.

The Empirical Capital
Most commentaries on Beijing place too much emphasis on the central part of the grid, and neglect the everyday social spaces (David Bray, 2005). The urban theorist Zhu Wenyi concluded that the basic spatial unit of a courtyard[2] can be explained as a boundary prototype. From that point of view, regular public courtyards, as well as the Forbidden City, and the Beijing Inner-city, - all surrounded by walls - can be seen as homogeneous courtyards rationally built one out of another. Consequently, the wall and the moat of the Forbidden City, the Beijing old city wall (demolished in the 1950s), and even the Great Wall became the concentric boundaries that formed Beijing urban structure, until today. The Forbidden City was placed in the centre, geographically and politically. Thus, the structure is seen as the representation of reinforcing social order through the control of the physical environment (Li Xiao Dong, 2007). The hierarchic structure was institutionalised through planning by referring to an ideal spatial schema