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Book reviews

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- 1 Chinese urbanities, generally studied top-down, reveal interesting spatial configurations produced by successive reforms – from planning to market economy. Many studies have dealt with contemporary China's urban change and the political economy of urban planning (Hsing 2010; Wu 2015). But few study economic reforms bottom-up and in “detail” (p. 18) in order to consider the “great transformation” of metropolises. This is what makes interesting the “urban loophole” concept adopted by architect Ying Zhou, assistant professor at the University of Hong Kong: while rooted in urban political economy, the study drawn from her doctoral thesis is based on solid fieldwork in Shanghai between 2011 and 2013. She focuses on rather microscopic processes that have modified the city-centre's urban and social fabric at the street level, such as housing commodification,

heritage conservation, and gentrification. Exchanges, compromises, or conflicts have come about in flexible and undetermined physical as well as legal, economic, political, and social spaces, leading to major evolutions of the city. Flaws, absences, and exceptions in urban space are in fact vectors for change in the city's production. Ying Zhou starts from micro-contexts of space production and goes against a homogenous and linear image of the cityscape to tease out the diversity of interactions between local space and its actors but also forms of adaptation, resistance, and resilience during the reform of China's real estate.

- 2 "The urban loophole, as the mechanism that gives rise to socio-spatial opportunities in the city, is the physical manifestation of adaptive governance and institutional amphibiousness" (p. 26). The loophole concept implies a contextual, fluid, and ephemeral approach to the urban fabric, identifying "opportunity moments" that key actors seize at different periods of economic reforms. The dual-market in property, local public authorities' adaptive governance towards new entrepreneurs, or irregularities in public policies thus constitute loopholes, i.e. exceptions that precede, escape, or contradict rules dictated from above, for instance public policies. This approach is especially illuminating for Chinese studies. In fact, the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s opened a slew of "windows of opportunity" and "gaps" in urban space. Not only did these loopholes lead to numerous practices and experimentations, but these exceptions, particularities, and irregularities also oriented and favoured the reforms and urban projects that ensued.
- 3 The book's chapters are structured around four keenly studied cases in a dual approach, micro-localised and genealogical, letting the reader follow changes in the residential areas of Anfu Lu, Wukang Lu "cultural" lane, Jing'an villas, and the new economies of art districts.
- 4 Chapter 2 plots the evolution of the Anfu Lu residential area with the gradual introduction of a market for housing sold to foreigners from the late 1980s (p. 84). The author shows that this first experience in modification of the urban fabric by introducing commercial residences has spawned "loopholes" orienting housing demand and market through the transfer of architectural and procedural know-how, attracting public sector work units to develop real estate franchises and commercialise the usage of urban land. This has given rise to a dual profile of habitation: new commodity housing properties targeting expatriates coexist with *lilong* 里弄 housing, the local vernacular architecture of Shanghai. The sociological profile of *lilong* inhabitants offers a special contrast between older residents and new wealthy ones, given the diversity of adaptations and modifications of former housing subdivided in the context of "ambiguous" use rights inherited from the socialist era (pp. 111-7). The author calls it "preservation via inhabitation." Similarly, the area's commercial gentrification came about through the commercialisation of use rights rather than direct land sale, leading to small entrepreneurs from the early 2000s opening consumer and service brands aimed at the new public in commercial residences enshrining Shanghai's "cosmopolitan" and "trendy" development image. Such gentrification began through the implantation of door-front trade spilling over to the street on spaces previously occupied by state enterprises thanks to the discretionary power of district level cadres (pp. 122-3). Anfu Lu block was transformed through the less formalised real estate path facilitating the emergence of creative entrepreneurship as shown by the

effervescence of design and architecture practices, their photo studios, as well as workshops and exhibition galleries.

- 5 The bottom-up urbanisation process characterises the Wukang Lu area in a case of heritage protection studied in Chapter 3 as the product of different actors' interests: from intellectuals and scholars calling for cultural history promotion, to municipal authorities seizing the opportunity to open "exceptional spaces" managed adaptively by local authorities. The latter could in fact allow a margin for action by entrepreneurs and capitalise on culture through the renovation and protection of historic structures while retaining the power to shut down such spaces. Conservation policies, initiated through both top-down and bottom-up processes, have led to the paradigm of elements characterising the historic value of heritage or *fengmao* 风貌 through attention to façades of buildings and maintenance of pavements to the detriment of housing interiors (pp. 198-206).
- 6 Chapter 4 considers the commercialisation of Jing'an villas and a precursor experiment, Tianzifang. In fact, Jing'an District favoured public-private partnerships in ambitious real estate promotion right from early in the last decade, including the "Global Jing'an" campaign competing with the Lujiazui commercial area (p. 252). Alongside the district's urban marketing, more micro-local forms of appropriating the heritage concept emerged and impelled the gentrification of the Jing'an villas collection, which has gradually shed its older inhabitants, sub-letting their public housing units to cultural and commercial businesses. These "endogenous" evolutions (p. 272), unrelated to any property or administrative entity, reveal the growing discretionary power of local-level public authority representatives and the district's bottom-up gentrification. It was only subsequently that the district government redefined the area's function, imposing a strict residential usage rule in 2013, to the detriment of local entrepreneurs' proposals for coexistence among residents and businesses.
- 7 The last chapter focuses on the making of "creative industries" as products of reutilisation of abandoned and under-valued state industry sites, especially along the Suzhou River. The example of Anken Green in Jing'an District shows that creative cluster development came about through the use of an urban dual land market loophole authorising the transfer of land without changing the industrial usage rights, towards the promotion of "cultural industries," thus generating income for troubled state firms and helping them fulfil social missions for their workers. Commercial development of these industrial wastelands was thus effected on administration-allocated land.
- 8 This book's contribution lies in the author's ability to retrace the evolution of case studies with regard to Chinese authorities' official public policy regulations, helping grasp nuances and revealing the role of "loopholes" in urban planning temporalities. Fieldwork attentive to details of the areas and beautifully illustrated with several photographs and charts is the book's second strength. Each case buttresses the importance of a historically contextualised study taking precise and concrete note of the changing spatiality and morphology of Shanghai's districts but also attentive to the crystallisation of apparently divergent interests at different levels. The analysis takes into account the implications of a multitude of actors – residents, entrepreneurs, architects and urban planners, scholars, and administrative officials and cadres – whose action strategies depend on each district's socio-economic context.

- 9 Especially persuasive is the author's approach, consisting of very fine and micro-situated fieldwork analysing economic reforms at the level of the street and built-up materiality, in order to clarify a larger problem. Unfortunately, the study has not gone further in its characterisation of the reform era urban economy qualified by the vague notion of "transitional economy" and by "ambiguity," whereas "loophole" studies in fact characterise this urban economy. A more ambitious conceptualisation in this domain would contribute to the sociology of public policies as well as Chinese real estate political economy.
- 10 To conclude, this research confirms the heuristic power of Shanghai City, an urban as well as conceptual laboratory for studies in human and social sciences on China (see for instance Li 2015). Meanwhile, we acknowledge the contribution of recent architectural studies to social sciences on urban China by introducing new perspectives in reflections on space production. The recent bilingual work of Géraldine Borio and Caroline Wüthrich, also excellently illustrated by solid fieldwork, takes on the paradigms of Hong Kong's ultra-density and verticality by advancing the "in-between" notion – undefined zones becoming spaces for occupation and interaction in the public space of streets and lanes – rarely studied as vector places of identity and social links (Borio and Wüthrich 2015). The dynamism and creativity around "urban loopholes" and "in-between" spaces thus confirms that they constitute necessary concepts for rethinking Chinese urbanities.

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