

Session II: Modern Chinese History

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An Overview of the Chinese Urban History Studies (1986-2006)¹

Since the beginning of economic reforms and the policy of opening up, Chinese urban history studies entered a blooming period, characterized by the emergence of new researchers, wider research scope, fruitful achievements as well as diverse research methods. Through exploring separate cities, city agglomeration, inter-city relations as well as the links between the city and the countryside, these studies identified the functions, structures, status, roles and the "temperament" of the Chinese cities. Through communication and interactions with their international counterparts, Chinese scholars deepened their studies of the Chinese urban history and formed their own style.

This article introduces the research on Chinese urban history studies since the 1990s.

Introduction

Chinese urban history studies, a research field with a long tradition in China, can be tracked back to records and surveys of the ancient Chinese capitals and the cities by ancient Chinese people. From a broad perspective, both "*The Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang*" (Luoyang qielan ji) and "*Old Stories in Wulin*" (Wulin jiushi) can be catalogued as writings of urban history studies. Modern studies of urban history in China originated from the 1920s and the 1930s. The trailblazers included Liang Qichao, Tao Xisheng, Quan Hansheng and Hou Renzhi at that time. The actual start-up of modern urban history studies in China was initiated by Shanghai Museum of the General Historical Records (Shanghai tongzhi guan), with Liu Yazhi as its president and Hu Huaichen and Kuai Shixun as his aids. Later, the research on Chinese urban history was interrupted by the anti-Japanese war.

From the 1950s to the mid - 1960s, mainland scholars surveyed the relics from ancient Chinese capitals, selected and then preliminarily studied the data on urban functions of modern Shanghai, both of which were of high academic value. This research was interrupted by the 10-year-long Cultural Revolution.. Some Taiwanese scholars, represented by Xu Zhuoyun, explored the development of the cities and commerce in the Zhou dynasty.²

With the rapid urbanization process in China after the reform and opening up policies, Chinese scholars deepened their research on the Chinese urban history. As a new branch of the Chinese history studies, the research on urban history entered a blooming period, which featured the following three aspects:

Firstly, both the scope and scale of urban history study have been greatly expanded.

By a rough estimate, there are a total of 534 monographs, compilations and collections of theses on modern Chinese urban history from 1979-1994 published in China.³ Journals themed on urban history and urban culture emerged rapidly, such as *Urban History Study* (volume 1-23), *Shanghai Research Symposium* (Volume 1-17) and *Urban Cultural Studies* etc. Research articles on urban history increasingly appeared in such comprehensive historical journals as *Historical Research*, *Journal of Chinese Historical Studies*, *Modern Chinese History Studies* as well as *Historical Review* etc. From 1986 to 2006, there were 390 articles on urban history published in 8 major historical journals in China, which accounted for 3% of all articles in these journals. (Its concrete percentage in three comprehensive historical journals is as follows: *Historical Review*, 7%; *The Journal of Chinese Social and Economic History*, 4%; *Journal of Historical Science*, 3%).

Secondly, research centers of urban history came into being.

In the 1980s, research centers of urban history were established, such as the Institute of City Research in Sichuan University, Institute of History in Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Institute of History at Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, etc. By implementing national research projects on urban history, these research centers attracted lots of researchers specializing in urban history. Furthermore, all kinds of symposiums on urban history were held across the country. From 1988 to 2006, a total of 15 high-level symposiums on urban history were held in Shanghai, Chongqing, Wuhan, Tianjin and Qingdao etc.

Thirdly, the urban chronicles grew in popularity.

Urban chronicles are important part of the local chronicles. The project of re-compiling the local chronicles was implemented across the country in the 1980s. By the end of November 2005, more than 5,000 local chronicles have been published, including 2,176 chronicles on provincial level, 261 on city level and 2,371 on county level, respectively. Although urban chronicle should not be equated with urban history, the major components of urban chronicles, from a broad perspective, can be incorporated into the scope of urban history. As a result of efforts during the last two decades, every city in China has its own chronicles. In fact, even county level chronicles have focused mainly on urban history. Generally speaking, the urban chronicles are more specific, informative, consistent and are interdisciplinary.

Ming & Qing Cities and Jiangnan's Towns

Studies on the ancient Chinese cities, especially on city origins and characteristics, focus mainly on the urban history from the Qin to the Qing Dynasty. Shi Nianhai, Yang Kuan, Fu Zhufu, Fu Yiling and Li Bochong contributed a lot in this regard: Not only they responded to Marx Weber's conception of Chinese cities, but also combed the development history of Chinese ancient cities. The most noticeable research has been the study of the Ming & Qing cities and Jiangnan's (South China) towns became fruitful achievements⁴ and caused heated debates.⁵ Fan Shuzhi and Chen Xuewen paid much attention to empirical studies on Jiangnan's towns, producing profound and thorough case studies. Such researchers as Wang Jiafan, Chen Zhongping, Fan Jinmin, Chen Guocan and Zhang Haiying, etc., adopted a multi-perspective approach. They focused on rural life, social customs, charities, guild halls and commercial markets in Jiangnan's cities and towns. It is noticeable that they clearly responded to the Skinner's model.

American scholar G. William Skinner, once introduced the "Central Place Theory" to elaborate on the urban-rural relationship in China. Although it was accepted by the large majority of Chinese scholars, several of them theory replenished and adjusted it. For example, Wang Jiafan argued that the "radiation" does not always strictly follow low-to-high sequence considering town-city relations in Jiangnan, because the towns didn't initially appeared in the center of county in Jiangnan, spreading to periphery. Closely related with the development and demands of rural economy, they always appeared in the adjacent areas between the two counties. Taking Suzhou as a case, Fan Jinmin argued that both the quantity and scale of towns in different counties showed great disparity. In his view, Skinner's "radiation model", which assumed the county and prefecture as the center of radiation, can't be testified in the case of Suzhou. He argued that most counties were not economic centers due to their unfavorable geographic position. Thus, the town rarely centered about the local county. The distribution of Jiangnan's towns was influenced by water and land transportation conditions and local economic structure as well: the disparity did not exist only among the different counties or prefectures. It's also true even within a certain county or prefecture.

Individual City, Typical City and Regional City

Modern Chinese urban studies stemmed from research on individual city, which produced more than 90% achievement in this field.⁶

In 1979, the research on modern Chinese urban history was first discussed during the National Conference on Historical Research Agenda in Chengdu. The program of Shanghai urban history research was approved at that conference. Since 1986, the urban history got much prominence during the Seventh Five-year Plan of National Philosophy & Social Sciences. According to this plan, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing and Wuhan were selected as pilot cities of the urban historical research. Thereafter, the monographs on urban history of the four cities were successively published.

Against this background, the studies of history of individual city emerged across the country. The urban histories of the following cities were successively published: Beijing, Chengdu, Kaifeng, Luoyang, Jinan, Qingdao, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Nanjing, Suzhou, Wuxi, Nantong, Huai'an, Kunming, Shenyang, Dalian, Anshan, Baoji, Benxi, Zigong, Changsha, Handan and Baotou etc.

As an extension of historical studies of individual cities, urban history studies went through two stages after the mid-1990s. One is the inward orientation, which aims at exploring the sub-area, population, functions and structure within a city. For example, some researchers surveyed Ningbo immigrants (by Lijian), Guangdong immigrants (by Song Zuanyou), and Fujian immigrants (Gao Hongxia) in Shanghai. Another example is the study on Chengdu's tea houses by Wang Di. The other is outward orientation, which focuses on compiling general history of a city. Beijing and Shanghai took the initiative to compile their own general history, the *General History of Beijing* (10 volumes) and the *General History of Shanghai* (15 volumes). . Later on, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Wuxi and Chongqing also finished the compilation of their own general history. The general history of Tianjin, Suzhou, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan and Qingdao is also being compiled. General history of the cities, based on the administrative regional division of China, is undoubtedly different from urban historical research. However, its major parts overlap with the urban historical studies.

During "the 8th Five-year Project Period" (1991~1995), comprehensive studies of different types of cities as well as of the regional cities have been intensified. The following programs, sponsored by the National Philosophy & Social Sciences Project, have been completed: "Comprehensive Studies of Different Types of Cities in Modern China", "Coastal Cities in the Southeast and China's Modernization" and "Urban Systems in Modern Northern China". Therefore, since the early 1990s China's modern urban historical studies have entered the period of combined studies of the individual city, typical city and regional city .

Multi-perspective analysis was made about five port cities (Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen and Guangzhou) in the book of *Cities in Coastal Southeast and China's Modernization*. The book concludes that under the circumstance of China's opening up, the five port cities share some common features while keeping distinctive tasks as well.

By examining 14 cities along the Yangtze river (from Yibin to Shanghai), the book "*Cities along Yangtze River and China's Modernization*" explored the linkage between the development of Shanghai and other cities along the Yangtze River under the background of imbalanced development of society, economy and culture. It also analyzed the status and functions of cities along the Yangtze River in the modernization process of China.⁷

The program of "Urban Systems in Modern North China," presided by the researchers in Tianjin, paid attention to the evolution of urban system and urbanization process within a region. They concluded that the traditional urban system in modern north China (with Beijing as its center), gradually collapsed; a new city system, centered on Beijing and Tianjin, is emerging in north China. In the book of *History of the Relationship between Beijing and Its Circumjacent Areas*, Wangling viewed Beijing and its circumjacent areas as

an organic unity. In Wangling's opinion, the former and the latter are connected and depend on each other. In *The Historical Evolution of Modern Cities in Shandong Province*, researchers made systemic surveys of the layout, merits and interrelations between the cities in Shandong Province.

In the book of *Port, City and Hinterland*, Dai Angang examined cities from a regional point of view, demonstrating the efforts to integrate the urban and regional history. In *Chinese Urban Geography*, Gu Chaolin analyzed the development trend of some Chinese cities (towns) during the period from 1843 to 1936. By a long-time survey of regional area, the quantity of towns, intensity of town network as well as the ratio of urban population, Gu Chaolin demonstrated vivid images of city's raise and fall at different stages.

"Impact-Response" Model and Port City Studies

As for the study on the history of modern Chinese port city, John King Fairbank convincingly constructed the "impact-response" model. However, as surveys on different port cities showed, domestic "response" was not completely determined by the intensity of "impact"; it also depended on the economic structure, population features, cultural background and time factor of the regions where port cities were located. For example, the western impact resulted in different outcomes in Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan and Chongqing. In *The Studies of Modern Shanghai*, the author examined the complicated transformation process in Shanghai from several perspectives, including the time factor, geography, immigrant population and the relations between different groups/entities such as the Sino-Western relations and Shanghai-Jiangsu relations). In *Modern Urban History of Tianjin*, the author unfolded a unique picture of Tianjin city's development. On one hand, the concessions of nine counties coexisted in Tianjin after the opening of its port, which was unique in the 16 cities with foreign concessions at that time. On the other hand, Tianjin's subordination status to Beijing was broken after its port opened in 1860, which triggered off tremendous change both in the layout and the functions of Tianjin. By evaluating the consistency and variations of history, Tianjin-Beijing relations as well as changing foreign presence in Tianjin, the author presented a comprehensive analytical framework on urban transformation in Tianjin. In *Modern Urban History of Chongqing*, the author proposed a two-folded analytical framework, i.e. modern urbanization and urban modernization. In his view, ancient China was characterized by the ruralization of the city while modern China is characterized by the urbanization of the rural areas. In some regions, urban modernization and rural urbanization didn't take place at the same time, which indirectly influenced the "impact-response" model. It demonstrated that we must comprehend the transformation of modern Chinese cities from a historical, comprehensive perspective instead of simple perspectives such as "tradition versus modernity" or "China versus the West". In the *Modern Urban History of Wuhan*, the author presented the original views on the reasons why Wuhan became the regional (even national) center of revolutionary storm. The author particularly focused on Wuhan's geographical location, its structures and functions at pre-modern times as well as an impact of the political change in China and the world.

The above-mentioned explanatory frameworks on 4 port cities can, to some extent, be expanded to the analysis on other port cities (there were totally 59 "treaty" port cities in China at that time). For example, given the actual existence of concessions in many port cities, researches on concessions become a hot issue in port city studies. Taking democracy and revolution in late Qing dynasty and cultural exchange between the East and the West as starting point, Shanghai researchers examined the duality of concessions in modern China. On one hand, the western countries used concessions as instruments of colonialism, which fortified the semi-colony status of China. On the other hand, the western countries implemented a capitalism system in concession areas, spreading capitalist ideas and values and to some extent stimulated the awakening of China as well as pushing forward the capitalist modernization. Furthermore, political situation in urban areas, cultural differences between China and the West as well as

Shanghai's position in China, introduced the following assumptions to explain the reasons of contradictory effects of concessions: the gap effect, the example effect and the effect of an isolated island. These opinions started off a comprehensive analysis of concessions in the context of the social, economic and political background of specific cities. To some extent, it can also be seen as a supplement to the "impact-response" model.

Comparative Studies, General Studies and Academic Exchange

Comparative studies of different countries, different regions and different cities have all been carried out in China. For example, in the 1990s, Shanghai researchers conducted comparative studies of Shanghai and Hong Kong. Comparative studies of Shanghai and Yokohama were also implemented.⁸ Wang Xu, a researcher from Xiamen University, made comparative studies of the Midwest America and Northeast China.⁹ Comparisons were made between the neighboring cities or cities with similar functions.

The book *Comprehensive Studies of Different Types of Cities in Modern China*, edited by Kui Yintao, is a good example of general studies. By taking urban transformation as the basic paradigm and equating urban modernization with urban transformation, the authors concluded that the "market town" is the unique trait of the city development at pre-modern era while China's urbanization process has experienced tremendous shift since 1840s.

He Yimin is a distinguished researcher of the comprehensive studies of China urban history.¹⁰ In *The Compendium of China's Urban History*, he offers a comprehensive perspective on the urban history of China.¹¹ In the *Urban Development of Modern China and Social Transformation (1840-1949)*, he examined the urban development under the context of comprehensive social transformation process in modern China, exploring the social changes triggered by the urban development as well as the impact of social transformation on urban development.¹²

With the influence of French Annals School, more and more researchers are paying much attention to urban daily life. In this aspect, the series *Urban Daily Life in Ancient China* (edited by Zhao Shiyu et al., Hunan Publishing House, 2006) is an influential piece, examining the urban daily life during the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties.¹³

China's Urban Historical Studies are open to absorb the achievements made by international researchers. A big amount of studies on China's Urban History, conducted by international scholars, has been translated into Chinese such as Rhoads Murphey's study of Shanghai, William Skinner's study on China's urban-town system, Frederic Wakeman, Jr., Marie-Claire Bergère and Elizabeth J. Perry's study of Shanghai, William T. Rowe's study of Hankou, Tobie Meyer-Fong's study of Yangzhou, Linda Cooke Johnson's study of Jiangnan cities in late Qing dynasty as well as Wang Di's study of Chengdu. Chinese researchers established intimate academic exchange relations with their international counterparts. International scholars conduct their research in China. Although their different backgrounds, the Chinese researchers and their international counterparts have shared interest in public space and civil society of China, and such topics as the parks, tea house, the urban poverty, underground society, immigration groups as well as guild hall (or fellow-regional associations), etc. Opening to the world while retaining its own characteristics, China urban historical studies entered a new phase, integrating tradition with international academic cooperation. Chinese researchers' responses to "Skinner's Model" as well as "impact-response" model, as mentioned above, are two examples.

1. This article focuses on Chinese urban history studies conducted by Chinese researchers from 1986 to 2006. Neither Chinese urban history studies conducted by foreign researchers nor Chinese studies on foreign urban history are included in this paper.

2. Xu Zhuoyun, *Development of City and Commerce in Chou Dynasty*, June, 1977; Du Zhengsheng, *Development and Characteristics of City in Chou Dynasty and Qin Dynasty*, December, 1980.
3. Zhang Limin, "Index of Modern Chinese Urban History Study", in *Urban History Study*, Volume 13-14 (Tianjin: Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1997).
4. Fan Jinmin, "Examples of Jiangnan's Urban Culture Studies in Ming & Qing", *Cultural Forum*, 2003.
5. Hang Dacheng, *Study on Ming's Cities* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 1991); Liu Fengyun, *A Cultural Exploration on Urban Area in Ming & Qing*, Beijing: Central University of Nationality Press, 2001; Wang Weiping, *Jiangnan's City History Study in Ming & Qing: A Case Study on Suzhou*, (Beijing: People's Press, 1999).
6. He Yimin, "Overview on Modern China Urban History Study", *Forum on Chinese Culture*, no.1, 2000.
7. *Cities along Yangtze River and China's Modernization*, edited by Zhang Zhongli, Xiong Yuezhi and Shen Zuwei (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2002).
8. *Shanghai and Yokohama: Two Opening Cities in Modern Asia* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997).
9. Wang Xu, "Development Circles of Industrial Cities and its Stage Characteristics: A Comparative Analysis on American Midwest and China's Northeast", in *Urban History Studies*, Volume 13-14 (Tianjin: Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1997).
10. He Yimin, *Compendium of China Urban History* (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 1994).
11. He Yimin, *Compendium of China Urban History* (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 1994).
12. *Urban Development of Modern China and Social Transformation (1840-1949)*, edited by He Yimin (Beijing: Science Press, 2004).
13. Huang Xinya, *Lapsed Sun: Epic in Urban Daily Life in Tang Dynasty*; Li Chunrong, *Collapsed Square Wall: Epic in Urban Daily Life in Song Dynasty*; Shi Weiguo, *Nomadized City: Epic in Urban Daily Life in Yuan Dynasty*; Chen Baoliang, *Shattered Tradition: Epic in Urban Daily Life in Ming Dynasty*; Zhao Shiyu, *Ossified Miracle: Epic in Urban Daily Life in Qing Dynasty* (Changsha: Hunan Publishing House, 2006).