Chinese City and Urbanism Evolution and Development

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Victor F S SIT

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

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CHINESE CITY AND URBANISM

Evolution and Development

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Introduction

The purpose of the volume is to treat the progress of history, civilization and urban development of China together in order to demonstrate the unique qualities of Chinese civilization.

The author used historical dynasties as the vertical dimension, starting from the pre-urban origin of round-moat village settlements of the Yangshao Period, until the most recent transitional city under the present “socialist market system”. There are a total of 13 chapters, covering a time-span of roughly 6,000 years.

In the long process of historic evolution, China’s civilization had been strengthened and enriched to become a system of values and behavior generally known as Confucianism. The system is based on the primary goals of striving to maintain harmonious man-land, or man-heaven as well as man to man relationships, with a pragmatic inclination on application through administrative means, the rule of law, and widespread education. The system had been extended to a large territory from its core in central China, even reaching Korea, Japan, central Asia and Southeast Asia, in addition to the nomadic peoples in China’s periphery. The Chinese city had served as the container and service platform of the system and an incubator for its new additions and modifications in later dynasties. Thus, the nature, function and structure of the city and the entire city-hierarchy in China and these spatial arrangements, were, in reality, a material reflection of the progression of Chinese civilization and its territorial extension.

The volume also discusses the theoretical context of the uniqueness of the Chinese urban evolution and compared it with experiences in the West. It treated major events, economic development, territorial changes, and developments in technology, art and culture,

military as well as administrative system in the dynasties as urban change dynamics. It therefore has succinctly put together in this volume 6,000 years of Chinese cultural history.

Besides using a large amount of Chinese literature, including materials on recent archeological finds, the volume has explored substantial Western literature on relevant issues with the purpose of putting the Chinese experience in a global context.

The author has included in the volume over 100 maps and line drawings selected from his collection accumulated over 30 years as a university teacher and researcher of urban geography and the Chinese city. They provide vivid and readily apprehensible illustrations for illuminating key points on the structure of the Chinese city and the geopolitical situation of China in major historical periods. They too add details through graphic techniques to the text treatment of the subject matters, and are themselves visually valuable, forming another unique feature of the volume.

The volume targets at a wide spectrum of readers, including all who are interested in culture and civilization, cities, urban planning and economic, philosophic, political and historical developments of China.

Preface

Chinese civilization is the only surviving ancient civilization and Confucianism has been its predominant value system throughout the ups and downs in China's long history. Starting from the Zhou Dynasty, China had experienced a total of 13 dynasties or about 3,000 years. Archeological evidence, however, indicated that China had emerged as a civilization long before that. When the Shang and its earlier pre-history period are added, then China's process of civilized development has stretched over a length of 5,000 years.

As two commonly used terms, "civilization" and "culture" have often been taken to mean the same thing. In this volume, I have adopted a narrow definition of "culture" by referring it to a local region, i.e. a local culture, or a situation before the emergence of civilization. Hence, I have implied that "culture" is under and within civilization. That is to say, there may be an urban culture, or urban culture of the Song within Chinese civilization, or that there existed several regional cultures in the Yangshao Period before the emergence of civilization in China in the Longshan Period.

Chinese civilization rests on the pact of values generally known as Confucianism which had its roots in Late Neolithic and was systematized and codified by Confucians in Eastern Zhou. It was contained in the Confucian collection of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. In brief, the Confucian ideology is about man-land relations, or the relationship between Man, Earth and Heaven. Such a model of relations is extended to Man and his past world (ancestral worship), and men with men (the *five relationships*). Its main principles are

harmony, respect and rank orderliness. Confucianism had supported a thriving agricultural economy in China, leading to its material progress, expansion and relative stability. It had also been the basic principles behind the evolution of institutions and policies of the Chinese government in various dynasties, as well as the code of behavior of ordinary citizens. These principles had also been reflected in the role, planning, and structure of the city in traditional China, as the city was the most important container, platform, and seat for administration, education, and services for the vast Chinese countryside. In this volume, the central role of the Chinese city in spreading and implementing Confucianism has been given repeated treatment. It serves to underline that, to a large extent, the evolution of the city in traditional China may be equated with the evolution of Chinese civilization.

It is generally accepted that Chinese civilization is distinct from many other civilizations, particularly the Western civilization. Thus, logically, the Chinese city is dissimilar to the Western city. It is futile to claim either the Chinese or Western city as “true” city, the same way as one should not treat either Chinese or Western civilization as “true” civilization. In fact the Chinese city is a subset of cities and possesses unique features and roles to reflect the uniqueness of Chinese civilization.

As Chinese civilization had emerged from a village based agricultural economy, the Chinese city has all along been left aside in the study of Chinese civilization. The Chinese city as a container and node of Chinese civilization has not been adequately understood nor studied. However, in the study and understanding of a civilization, to approach and analyze related issues through its major containers or most concentrated nodes is an effective means. Indeed, to apprehend Chinese civilization and Confucianism from the rural side is inadequate and indirect. In the city where the traits of civilization are dense, numerous, and highly concentrated, one can track the evolution and identify the traits of civilization much more effectively.

For the above reasons, the present volume has adopted the city-approach in viewing and analyzing the evolution of Chinese

history and its civilization. I have also used a large amount of maps, particularly city landuse maps, of different historical times in China to portray more vividly the evolution and special features of Chinese civilization.

It has been my long cherished ambition to thoroughly examine the nature of the Chinese city and its evolution, against the context of basic concepts in urban geography developed in the West since World War Two. Throughout my long teaching career in University of Hong Kong, I had taught the course of Urban Geography to Geography undergraduates. In the meantime, I researched on the Chinese city and broadened my reading on cities in other ancient civilizations. I later developed these into the specialist courses of "Chinese Cities", and "City in History". My efforts also yielded an edited work: *Chinese Cities*, published by Oxford University Press in 1985. Then, a detailed exposition and analysis of the Chinese city, using the national capital, was published by Wiley in 1993, entitled *Beijing: the Nature and Planning of a Chinese Capital City*. The present volume represents the culmination of my life-long interest and research on the Chinese City.

I am grateful to many of my colleagues and friends in the academic and non-academic circles who have been giving me encouragement all along, and to University of Hong Kong for providing me with an excellent research environment and support.

However, my most important support has come from my wife and children. My wife, in particular, has taken an important part in reading and improving the draft innumerable times and shared the pride in my work which formed a significant psychological boost that enabled me to engage steadfastly in the research and writing of this volume.

Since 1978, China has re-emerged as a global power. This volume may contribute a part in helping people to understand the complicated root system that has supported this gigantic "China tree" in millenniums since the "big house" in the middle reach of the Yellow River in Yangshao Period of Late Neolithic.

Finally, let me dedicate this volume to the Chinese people, and peoples of the world, in the hope that Heaven, Earth, and Man

(*Tian, di, ren*) will play their respective role properly, so that we may advance into the ideal world of the Great Unity (*Datong*).

Victor F.S. Sit

Director & Chair Professor of Geography

Advanced Institute for Contemporary China Studies

Hong Kong Baptist University

August, 2009

About the Author

Professor Victor Fung Shuen Sit is a Fujianist born in Guangzhou in 1947. He was raised and educated in Hong Kong since 1950, and obtained his B.A. (Hon.) and M.A. degrees from University of Hong Kong. During 1974–77 he studied in the London School of Economics in the UK and obtained a Ph.D. degree there. From 1947 to 2007 he had been a professor in the Department of Geography, University of Hong Kong. He is currently Founding Director of the Advanced Institute For Contemporary China Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University.

Professor Sit has authored and edited more than 40 books, and published over 100 papers in international academic journals, with city, regional development, infrastructure and economic strategy as their main themes. Books related to the present volume include: *Beijing: the Nature and Planning of a Chinese National Capital*, *Chinese Cities*, *China's Regional Disparities*, *The Geography of Hong Kong and Macau*, and *Hong Kong Development Atlas*.

His publications demonstrate the fusion of perspectives and methodologies of the East and West. Many are published bilingually in Chinese and English, one of the distinct features being the unique angle he takes in analyzing and interpreting the traditions and history of China.

Besides being a dedicated teacher and researcher, Professor Sit has also participated actively in politics. He had been a member of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Election Committee for the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR, and, in 1993–2008, served as a Deputy of the National People's Congress of China.

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