

THE DIALECTICS OF SEEING CHINESE URBAN MODERNITY:
A STUDY OF RICKSHAWS IN BEIJING AND SHANGHAI

ALPER YAVUZ CORTOĞLU

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

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Alper Yavuz Cortoğlu

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A Study of Rickshaws in Beijing and Shanghai

The thesis of Alper Yavuz Cortoğlu

has been approved by:

Assist. Prof. Barry David Stocker
(Thesis Advisor)

Assist. Prof. Zeyneb Hale Eroğlu Sağer
(Thesis Co-Advisor)

Assoc. Prof. Ahmet Ersoy

Assoc. Prof. Chryssi Sidiropoulou

Assist. Prof. Selda Altan
(External Member)

May 2024

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Alper Yavuz Cortoğlu, certify that

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- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature.....

Date

ABSTRACT

The Dialectics of Seeing Chinese Urban Modernity:

A Study of Rickshaws in Beijing and Shanghai

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the historical dynamics of Chinese urban modernity through the antinomies thus generated with a focus on rickshaws, which as a popular modern technology of urban transportation and a popular image of modern literature expressed them. The thesis consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, Benjamin's views on art and cultural history are examined. Benjamin's practice of cultural history opposes linear, progressive narratives based upon the temporal scheme of homogeneous empty space and aims to disrupt the sense of historical continuum through a shock effect produced in a reconstructed context in which historical fragments are juxtaposed by the technique of literary montage. In the second chapter, a theoretical approach towards examining cities is developed. Three senses of invisibility are distinguished: the cultural imagination embodied in the material morphology of the urban landscape, the counterpart of comparison in the background of the city under focus, and the historical background of the present existence of the city. In the third chapter, the concept of urban modernity in the context of Chinese history is discussed and the relevant transformations of Beijing and Shanghai are comparatively examined. Finally, rickshaws as the material embodiments and cultural expressions of the antinomies of Chinese urban modernity are analysed. Three antinomies are examined in detail: Modernity and archaicity, nativity and foreignness, sanctity and profanity. The fifth chapter concludes the thesis.

ÖZET

Çin Kentsel Modernitesini Görmek ve Diyalektiği:

Beijing ve Shanghai'daki Çekçekler Üzerine Bir Çalışma

Yaygın bir modern kentsel ulaşım teknolojisi ve popüler bir edebi imge olan çekçeklerin ifade ettiği Çin kentsel modernitesinin dinamikleri tarafından yaratılan antinomiler üzerinden, bu dinamikleri tahlil etmek mevcut tezin başat gayesini teşkil etmektedir. Bu uğurda, tez beşli münkasıma tâbi tutulmuştur. Birinci kısım, Benjamin'in sanat ve kültür tarihi üzerine fikirlerini incelemektedir. Benjamin'in icra ettiği biçimde kültür tarihi zanaati, homojen ve boş zaman tahayyülüne dayanan lineer, progresif anlatılara karşı çıkmakta, edebi montaj tekniği ile yeniden kurulan bir mübazere bağlamında tecemmu eden tarihsel parçaların vesilesiyle şok etkisi yaratarak tarihsel devamlılık algısını kırmayı amaçlamaktadır. İkinci kısımda, kent çalışması üzerine kuramsal bir yaklaşım geliştirilmektedir. Benjamin'in kültür tarihi tahayyülü ile Calvino'nun "Görünmez Şehirler" romanına binaen, üç farklı görünmezlik mânası izah edilmiştir: kentsel alanın maddi morfolojisinde cismanileşen kültürel tahayyül, mevzubahis şehrin arka planında bulunan mukayese eşi ve mevcutta varolan şehrin mâzisi. Üçüncü kısımda kentsel modernite mefhumu, Çin tarihi bağlamında müzakere edilip, Beijing ve Shanghai'in geçirdikleri alakalı dönüşümler mukayeseli biçimde tahlil edilmiştir. Son bölümde çekçekler, Çin kentsel modernitesinin antinomilerinin maddi tecessümü ve kültürel ifadesi olarak incelenmiştir. Üç antinomi detaylı biçimde ele alınmıştır: modernite ve arkaizm, yerellik ve ecnebilik, ulvilik ve nefsilik. Beşinci kısım ile çalışma sonlandırılmıştır.

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Although this thesis is concerned with Chinese history, the turning point in my intellectual life has occurred in Turkey. In the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes of February 6th, I have become increasingly interested in the question of urban modernity and what exactly it means for its citizens. If, drawing on Benjamin, I emphasise in this thesis such elements as shock effect and irreconcilable contradiction in the practice of historiography against linear and progressivist narratives of urban modernity, the starting point emerged not in the library books at our university but in the ruins of the earthquake zone.

The sense of antinomy, that feeling of irresolution in the face of contradiction, bore heavily upon me during my visit to Adıyaman. One among similar cases stands out in my memory most distinctly. As I, together with my

friends, was unloading the supply boxes we had brought for the local people, some children, observing us with curious eyes, snatched away one of the empty boxes. As it turned out, they were planning to play a game. Unsurprising, given that they were all children. One kid, trying to enter the empty box, suddenly called out for his friends: "let's play coffin-lifting [tabut kaldırmaca]!". "Coffin-lifting, coffin-lifting, yay!", children gathered around, trying to lift their friend in the empty box, imitating the burial processions of the city residents died during the earthquake. One local, upon learning that I was a student at such a prestigious university as Boğaziçi University, was surprised that a student who was under no obligation nevertheless had come all the way from Istanbul to this god-forbidden place. With a smile expressing happy disbelief, he inquired, “have *you* come all the way here to help *us*?”. Glancing at the empty boxes and filled with shame, I could not say yes. Trying to smile back, I left in shocked silence. Walking towards one of the few buildings still standing which we were provided with to spend the night, the wind was carrying the smell of the rotting flesh of those who, stuck in the ruins, had not been part of those burial processions children had made a game out of. What meaning could the word “help” possibly possess under such conditions as these when the smell of those, who must have screamed for help until they no longer could, was filling my nostrils? In that moment, the word and the world felt grotesque.

Later, I went to Antakya in Hatay. Antakya used to be known as a mosaic of culture, a unique jewel of history. This jewel has now been entirely broken, with just a handful of buildings still standing. Similar incidents followed me in this city. One local, speaking of burials and death, observed with acuity “that day, everyone died, though some were buried [O gün herkes öldü, bazıları gömüldü]”. Indeed, everyone in a sense died that day: the phenomenon we call life was so radically transformed by

this catastrophe that a state of non-living described their present condition better. The cultural mosaic was now a walking dead. Death and life, though apparently two polar opposites, co-existed in a moment of irreconciliation.

The destruction of cities and urban population is not a new phenomenon. Neither is it peculiar to Turkey. Gaza is a case in point. Yet, it was under the experience of such cultural and urban destruction in Turkey that I started writing my thesis. Culture and catastrophe ought to be seen as the twin pillars of this study. It is an attempt to read culture and history through contradiction that refuses to be subordinated to an affirmative function for society—*a society which buries the walking dead when they stop walking.*

Standing before the ruins of the city, I tried to see the happy scene before the apocalypse. Questions confronted me imperviously: What is life? What is death? What is it to help someone, anyone, perhaps even oneself? In the ruins, there was no border separating life and death. The living died with the city, their home. The dead were living through memories, still fresh, still soaked in blood. This scene cannot be right. This feeling cannot be right. My heart yearned for *redemption*. Standing there, I wanted to make the broken whole again, to bring the dead back to life. For, if this word, redemption, has any meaning whatsoever, it must be *resurrection*. Yes, I want to *resurrect the dead, not as a relic of the past but as a living part of the present*. But how? No longer able to stand on my feet, I sat down, bowing my head in bleak silence.

When asked whether he did any good to his patients, Frantz Fanon replied: “I have no idea but it transformed me”. In the end, I do not believe that I did any good to the locals in the region. However, the least I can do is to express my thanks for *their help for me*.

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INTRODUCTION

In an introduction at Harvard Kennedy School on Professor Tony Saich's latest book, *Finding Allies and Making Revolution: The Early Years of the Chinese Communist Party*, it was said that Tony Saich began studying Chinese history after a professor told him "no matter what happens in this place, it is going to affect all our lives" (Harvard Kennedy School, 2020). In the present state of world affairs, this statement has proven true. China today in the international arena occupies a central place, housing one of the strongest industrial economies and largest populations in the entire world. Yet, in China itself, one of the key transformations has been a staggering intensity of urbanisation. China at the turn of this century has transformed into an "urbanized economic juggernaut", "involving the world's greatest rural-to-urban migration, the highest-ever level of net exports fuelled by the largest single workforce, the most rapidly increasing economic inequality, and unprecedented investments in infrastructure, which have now created the most private debt ever in the history of the world, threatening a large-scale financial crisis" (Dilworthy, Clothey, Adams, 2019, p. 3). Given the magnitude of importance that this transformation signifies, not just for China but for everyone else in the world, it is of interest to attempt to explore the urban modern dynamics in Chinese society.

Chinese urban transformation is a social phenomenon, a phenomenon that occurs throughout society at large. Yet, all social phenomena are at the same time historical because they are spatially and temporally specific and situated processes. Since it would be meaningless to speak of urban life in modern China without spatial and temporal specifiers, as if it could exist in an abstract realm beyond space and

time, the transformation must be explored historically as its spatial and temporal specificers point towards the past. For this reason, urbanisation, modernisation, and other phenomena that affect society at large must be conceptualised as processes that arise out of particular historical conditions which create not just their context of emergence but also their context of development. The concepts used to comprehend these phenomena, on the other hand, must be dynamic in order to capture them as *ongoing processes*. Fluidity of social phenomena requires fluidity in the conceptual categories, including philosophical categories, used for comprehension.

That philosophy must establish a close relationship with history is a point often made in the history of philosophy. To mention two significant figures from the 19th century, both of whom would have a profound influence on the world, Marx and Nietzsche drew a close relationship between philosophy and history. To mention some instances briefly, Marx would protest against Proudhon for falling into the poverty of philosophy in his philosophy of poverty, whose poverty on Marx's view, in the main, consisted in not seeing the conceptual categories as transitory expressions of the social relations under examination but discovering in them "the impersonal reason of humanity" instead. Yet, the proper way to approach them would be to treat them as "historical and transitory products" (Marx, 2021, p. 101). Philosophy would, thus, be in need of historicisation. To fail to do so would create "violent" abstractions that cannot capture the complex and fluid texture of social reality, thereby doing violence to the object of knowledge. Repudiating Mikhailovsky's transhistorical interpretation of his sketch on the development of capitalism in *Capital*, Marx contends that such is "a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being supra-historical" (Sayer, 1987, p. 12). Yet, conceptual categories as results of spatially situated human practices

cannot be granted such supra-historicity. Hence, the poverty of philosophy deprived of historicity.

In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche, on the other hand, would criticise philosophers from a similar angle: “lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers...” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 13). Against this erroneous way of philosophising, “what is needed from now on is historical philosophizing, and with it the virtue of modesty” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 13). Later, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche would repeat the same criticism: “They think that they are showing *respect* for something when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*, - when they turn it into a mummy”. What lies behind this stance against history in philosophy, for Nietzsche, is a distaste for becoming: “what is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is not*” (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 167). Concepts are, thus, fixated into the static images of a reality that is exempt from the becoming of ever-flowing time as it stands *above* history. Philosophy becomes supra-historical, philosophical categories fail to recognise that they are historical and transitory products.

This study shares a similar view of philosophy and its relationship with history. Philosophy, bereft of history, operates with categories that are turned into the mummies of *being* that fail to capture the living movement of *becoming*. Yet, much as philosophy is in need of historicisation, so is history in need of philosophisation. The practice of history that does not draw upon philosophical reflection threatens to devolve into a kind of “empiricism” that rests upon a strict separation between the observer and the observed, the historian and the history that E.H. Carr warns against (Carr, 2018, p. 15-17). Not dissimilar to Edward Gibbon, Carr shares the belief that “the best history could be written by an ‘historian-philosopher’” (Davies, 2018 p. iv). “Facts alone are wanted in life”, once declared Mr. Gradgrind, a sentiment which

Quentin Skinner argues has been shared by many historians who regard history as the practice of writing the past as it really was. Yet, it is exactly this view of history that has come under criticism in recent philosophy (Skinner, 2002, p. 1-7). Contrary to “the cult of facts” (Carr, 2018, p. 5), which, as Ranke formulated it, strives to write a static past as it really was, critical reflection has brought to prominence the role of the historian. Against the Rankean dream of objectivity that fixates the past as an unmoving image to write about, critical historiography conceptualises both the past and the present in a dynamic relationship: “past and present are not necessarily successive but, instead, are simultaneously produced” (Harootunian, 2000, p. 17). This way, history no longer constitutes a long-dead corpse to be breathed life into by the historian but itself a living being in communion with the present generation. Benjamin calls this reversal of the temporal relationship “the Copernican revolution in historical perception” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 388).

Given this close relationship between philosophy and history, this study rests upon problematising the institutional demarcation between these two fields. The phenomenon to be considered of interest for study here, modern China’s urban transformation, will, consequently, be examined both historically and philosophically. This study attempts to conceive and develop the philosophical categories to be employed, such as antinomy, contradiction, dialectics, invisibility, and so on, through history; and the historical categories to be employed, such as modernisation, urbanisation, rickshaw puller, the city of Beijing, the city of Shanghai, architecture, railways, and so on, through philosophy. In criss-crossing these fields, usually demarcated by the institutionalised epistemic divisions, it hopes to approach the issues at hand from a critical perspective that goes beyond the established modes of comprehension.

In view of the complexity of the phenomenon of interest, this study limits its scope to a specific and narrow period in history. That is, although the study is *motivated* by the urban modern transformation of China in recent years, its *scope* is limited to the historical conditions out of which urban modern transformation, or to put it differently, urban modernisation emerged in China. This takes us back to the late Qing and Republican periods in Chinese history when China started modernising its cities and over time, as shall be seen later, cities as urban centres came to define what it meant to be modern. However, further study is required to connect the specific historical periods this study aims to explore as part of Chinese history to the recent state of affairs in China and in the world.

In line with the interest of this study to develop a critical perspective that draws both on philosophy and history, Walter Benjamin holds a central place in it. Benjamin, a prominent cultural critic of the past century, was preoccupied with the question of critique, and in pursuing this preoccupation, drew on a wide range of intellectual sources that strand the usual academic compartments. Early in his intellectual life, Benjamin had a keen interest in Kant, planning to write a doctoral dissertation on him. He would abandon this project later, not insignificantly due to the relationship between the First World War and the neo-Kantianism in Germany, deciding to write his dissertation on the concept of criticism in Romanticism instead. Still later, Benjamin would turn his attention from the earlier European art movement like Romanticism towards more contemporary movements like Surrealism, Dadaism, Constructivism, which was accompanied by a parallel interest in Marxist political revolution. This move towards revolutionary politics is not surprising. Germany, in the aftermath of the First World War, was tumultuous. As the traumatic experience of the First World War, which for many Germans had promised the triumph of *Kultur*

over *Zivilisation*, that is, the triumph of German spirituality over the vulgar civilisation of bourgeois liberalism that Britain and France represented, lost its meaning-giving momentum in the post-war period, political polarisation towards the radical left and the radical right took place (Eksteins, 2000, p. 79, 82, 295). The final result, in Germany, would be the rise and subsequent catastrophe of Nazism.

Benjamin had expressed gestures of solidarity with the working class, whose main representative at the time was still the Soviet Union after the October Revolution. Yet, as the USSR lost its revolutionary momentum, the hopes tied to the revolution would become increasingly frustrated among the intellectuals like Benjamin who had sided with the Left during the political polarisation in Germany. The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, signed in August 1939, came as a shock to Benjamin, who had been hoping for soviet help against Fascism in case of war. Hitler started the war the following month, *Blitzkrieg* ravaging Poland. Benjamin, facing the prospect of a full-scale new world war, no less bloody than the first, was still working in Paris. It was during the early days of 1940 that Benjamin would write his theses on history. Soon, the Germans would invade France, marching on Paris, and leave Benjamin with no choice but to escape the city. Vichy France was handing over the Jewish and Marxist German refugees to the Gestapo, whose treatment of Benjamin, who was both Jewish and associated with Marxism, in case they had caught him, would have been nothing less than cruel. In his attempt to escape France, Benjamin on the Spanish border, in the company of a small group, was told in the last moment that he could not pass the border. Losing hope of escape, Benjamin at the night of September 25, 1940, would inject a lethal dose of morphine to commit suicide (Buck-Morss, 1977, p.161-162).

The theses on history for Benjamin was a last intellectual attempt. The first reference Benjamin makes of the document is from a letter to Adorno, written in French on 22 February 1940, in which Benjamin explains the aim of this final intellectual effort before suicide:

They represent a first attempt at pinning down an aspect of history that must establish an irremediable break [scission] between our way of seeing and the survivals of positivism which, in my view, mark out so profoundly even those concepts of history which are, in themselves, closest and most familiar to us. (Löwy, 2005, p.120-121)

In view of all this, it is evident that the theme of critique, whether Kantian, Romantic, or Marxist, is a thread that runs throughout Benjamin's thought, all the way till his last moments in life. This importance Benjamin ascribes to critique in his thought is a major reason for the central place he is given in this study.

However, besides its critical impulse, the multifaceted nature of Benjamin's thought is also a significant cause of his place in this study. With its simultaneous engagement with apparently contradictory fields, theology and historical materialism being a glaring case, Benjamin's thought refuses to be constrained by the generally accepted epistemic divisions of knowledge that prevent establishing interrelations between them. This is in accord with the remarks made above on the interrelationship between philosophy and history that this study accepts. Benjamin's approach towards philosophical issues are historically informed as the "dialectics of seeing", the term Susan Buck-Morss uses to describe the *philosophical* method that Benjamin employs in the Arcades Project (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 6), is imbued with *historical* documentation and discussion.

The reason why Benjamin's thought would straddle such a diverge range of fields is because of his conviction that the world he was struggling to comprehend could be so comprehended only by developing a multifarious approach. Political

economy, aesthetics, historiography, theology, and still others were necessary in developing an epistemically sound perspective that would capture the world in its complexity which does not ‘politely’ keep to the analytic divisions we establish to make its investigation intellectually more manageable. Benjamin’s aim, in drawing on divergent intellectual sources, was not to come up with “a combinatorial or an eclectic synthesis” but “the invention of a new and profoundly original conception on the basis of all of these” (Löwy, 2005, p. 42).

This thesis is a first step in my broader intellectual project that aims at a critique of modernity by incorporating three axes: political economy, understood in a broad sense of the production and reproduction of material life, aesthetics and theology. These three axes hold an essential and constitutive place in what can be called the experience of modernity. Yet, despite their essential place, in investigations of modernity, these three axes are often not handled together. For example, a focus on political economy, not infrequently, would be accompanied by a disregard of theology as a weakening force in the modern world which, as it was rationalising social life, was at the same time secularising it. When Marx and Engels, who were both in significant ways influenced by the classical political economy whose major representatives were Adam Smith and David Ricardo, declared in the *Communist Manifesto* that the bourgeoisie “has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor... in the icy water of egosistical calculation” (Marx and Engels, 1988, p. 211), they were expressing a general opinion on the place of religion in an increasingly rationalising and secularising modern world whose real dynamic was demonstrated to be political economic, that is, the material base of society. Disregard of theology in explanations of modernity, however, has a long history that goes beyond the 19th century. For Gillespie, the conventional wisdom since the Enlightenment has been

that “modernity is a secular realm in which man replaces God as the center of existence and seeks to become the master and possessor of nature by the application of a new science and its attendant technology” (Gillespie, 2008, p. x-xi). Niyazi Berkes defines the process of modernisation as the becoming ineffective of the divine realm by the new and encroaching practices such as economy, technology, politics, sexuality, education, and so on (Berkes, 2012, p. 23). On such views, religion and theology remain external to modernity. “Our age is characterized by the rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world” (Weber, 2004, p. 30). If modernity is disenchantment, then such “irrational” elements as religious and theological inevitably remain external to it. Hence, on Weber’s view, irrational elements are either archaic reactions to or deviations from the rational (McCormick, 1999, p. 34). A number of figures, however, would develop a sceptical approach towards this conventional wisdom of modernity, secularity, and theology. Kantorowicz would explore the historical process in which a sacralised royal body of the king’s so called “two bodies” would be progressively secularised (Kantorowicz, 2016). Kantorowicz’s book, falling under the spell of the George Circle, whose centre was the visionary poet Stefan George, was in a tense dialogue with Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology*, who was at the periphery of this circle (Leyser, 2016, p. ix-xv). Schmitt had earlier declared that secularity was not so much the disappearance of theology as its transformation in a new form. This, on his view, established an intrinsic relationship between modernity and theology: “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts...” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 36). Modernity, thus, becomes, not a process of secularisation in which theology is replaced by reason but “a series of metamorphoses of

sacralization” which appears in the form of non- or even anti-theological secularity (Critchley, 2012, p. 10).

Benjamin’s interest in theology is both deep and evident. Yet, not few commentators, including his own friends, would tend to separate this interest in theology from the other two axes as they seemed to conflict. According to his friend Scholem, the theses Benjamin wrote was a break from historical materialism with its emphasis on political economy and a return to Jewish mysticism with its focus on theology and metaphysics. Yet, the first thesis in this text gives the reader the contrary impression:

There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf—a master at chess—sat in side and guided the puppet’s hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called "historical materialism," is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight. (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 389)

Here, Löwy argues, Benjamin establishes a delicate balance between two apparently opposite elements: historical materialism and theology (Löwy, 2005, p. 26-28).

Although theology is commonly regarded as a hunchbacked dwarf whose ugliness to the modern eye makes its appearance so unpleasant that he “has to keep out of sight”, theology and historical materialism are in fact intrinsically united. The victory of one is predicated upon that of the other as it is by enlisting the services of theology that the puppet in the Turkish attire can defeat the enemy. Hence, the unity of historical materialism and theology despite their apparent opposition.

One significant shortcoming of this study is that it does not explicate Benjamin’s interest in theology in the philosophical sections and does not investigate

Chinese urban modernity from the axis of theology in the historical sections. It, instead, confines itself to two other axes: political economy and aesthetics. In Chapter One and Two, the study develops a critical theoretical perspective from these two axes and in the ensuing sections applies it to Chinese urban history.

Although the relationship between aesthetics and modernity is a highly complex one, some remarks are needed to clarify why this study involves a study of Chinese modern literature in investigating Chinese urban modernisation. Since social phenomena, as said before, are historical, the relationship between history and literature needs to be clarified if literature as past of modern Chinese aesthetics is to be incorporated into the history of Chinese urban modernity.

All literary texts, though not reducible to them, are produced under definite historical conditions. They are all, as Edward Said puts it, “in the world, and hence worldly” (Said, 1983, p. 35). The worldly relationship between literature and history, the literary texts and the historical contexts, is anything but simple, but one can argue that their essential interpenetration, whatever its exact nature, makes it necessary to simultaneously draw upon literary criticism and historiography in exploring literary texts in history. Dominick LaCapra, sceptical towards such institutionalised divisions of intellectual labour as that between historiography on the one hand, which is supposed to provide mere background information for the external conditions under which literary texts come into being, and literary criticism on the other, which instead is believed to explore the interior realm of the literary text, invites us to experiment with modes of hybridization that would cross such dubious divisions (LaCapra, 1989, p. 6-7). Although these two are, in the end, non-identical categories, it would constitute a grave error to conceive their non-identity in terms of self-enclosure.

Firstly, in writing history, one must pay attention to those elements that compose the historical event. Kobayashi Hideo offers an illuminating criticism: Meaning does not come from the event as such but from those who feel its force. The death of a child is meaningful enough to be remembered as a past event because of the mother's love in the present. Without such love, death is doomed to oblivion. To explain this event historically would, thus, require invoking this emotional force that gives it meaning with which only it can be remembered and become historical in the first place. Yet, Kobayashi complains, it is exactly this meaning-giving element to history that explains what an event is supposed to be that is missed out by the easy references to historical concreteness and objectivity made by contemporary historians. Kobayashi believes that the significance of literature derives from its potential to produce in the reader the emotional force that gives historical event its meaning (Harootunian, 2000, p. 151-158). Kobayashi's point that the historical event is not in itself meaningful but is given meaning and remembered because of the emotional force it creates in the present moment is a point that resonates with Benjamin's description of the past as "an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognisability" against the positivist view of the past as that which, because it has already happened, can now be securely written about (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 390). History becomes recognisable only in a contingent moment of meaningfulness, which does not derive from the event in itself but from that who remembers under the compulsion of emotional force. Benjamin's interest in aesthetics, including literature, partially rests upon this connection with history because literary works as expressions of narratable experience provides Benjamin with access to the meaning-giving force by which the past becomes recognisable.

Secondly, one must take note of the porous borders between reality and fiction in human experience. Fiction is a powerful force that affects and intermingles with the perception of reality. This point, in the 20th century, was strongly made by Surrealism. Problematising the sharp distinction between dream and wakefulness, surrealists would also question the border dividing reality and fiction. Andre Breton, the leader of the Surrealist group, would emphasise this point in his literary works. Nadja, the mysterious female character in the first work of Breton's prose trilogy (Nadja, Communicating Vessels, Mad Love) (Cohen, 1995, p. 10), expresses the interfusion of reality and fiction in human experience: "You know, that's how I talk to myself when I'm alone, I tell myself all kinds of stories. And not only silly stories: *actually, I live this way altogether* [emphasis mine]" (Breton, 1960, p. 74). Indeed, Modris Eksteins argues that posing the question of where fiction ceases and reality begins is a false start: Where exactly could one draw a clear line in Thomas Mann who regarded reality as a source of fiction and Diaghilev who attempted to live the life of a fictional character like Rastignac or Charlus (Eksteins, 1989, p. 1-5)?

Benjamin, who was deeply interested in Surrealism, would pick up the blurring of reality and fiction in Surrealism and attempt to further apply it to historiography in search of a critical dialectic between forgetting and remembering, dreaming and reality.

To summarise the points made so far, the motivation of this thesis is the urban transformation of modern China, which remains a social phenomenon of great interest not just for those in China but for the rest of the world in view of its impact and significance. Since all social phenomena are spatially and temporally located, they are historical and ongoing processes. However, historiography, to better comprehend the object of investigation, must draw upon philosophical reflection just

as philosophy, to better capture the object of investigation in its fluid state of becoming, must draw upon historiography. Due to the complexity and enormity of the object of investigation, that is, urban modernisation of China, this study limits its scope to the historical beginnings of this process when China started undergoing the transformation of urban modernisation in its cities, namely, the late Qing and the Republican periods. The approach to be adopted will draw upon historiography and philosophy in order to develop a critical perspective that goes beyond the usual modes of comprehension that rests upon the institutionalised epistemic divisions in academy. Walter Benjamin is a significant inspiration in this project because his thought, in pursuit of a multi-faceted comprehension of the social phenomena, also traverses different fields such as political economy, aesthetics, historiography, theology, and so on. This study is part of a larger project that the author intends to work upon in the future: a critical study of urban modernity that incorporates three axes: political economy, aesthetics and theology. Benjamin was among the first to attempt to produce an innovative philosophical-historical approach, “the dialectics of seeing”, that incorporated all of these three axes. However, despite the importance of theology, in this study the author attempts to incorporate only two axes. Political economy, understood in a broad sense as the production and reproduction of material life, concerns the new dynamics of capitalist urban modernity introduced into China, whose demands of accessibility and mobility were embodied in the modern technologies of urban transportation such as railways and rickshaws, the former of which transformed the material morphology of Chinese cities, while the latter was one, if not the most prominent modern technology of urban transportation. Rickshaw both reflected in its concrete social practice the dynamics of Chinese urban modernity and engendered a new literary genre that would express these dynamics in

aesthetic form. However, these two fields were interpenetrated in that literature itself was part of the historical reality, “reality” understood in a dialogue with “fiction” that can reflect the meaning-giving emotional force. The exploration of literature in this study, in other words, is not an investigation of texts that are separate from contexts, of fiction that is separate from reality, but that are part of the historical reality itself because people’s experience is punctured both by reality and fiction.

Based on this general perspective, this study is divided into five chapters. In the first two chapters, it will discuss the more theoretical and philosophical issues, taking Walter Benjamin into the centre. With its concern for a critical perspective, this study focuses on what it means to be critical in the practice of history, culture and art in Benjamin’s thought. To this end, the first chapter discusses Benjamin’s understanding of cultural history and art together with some significant figures his thought was in a dialogue with. The central notion that relates to critique both in cultural history and art in this chapter is the concept of antinomy. Although Benjamin himself does not employ this term, this study makes the case that antinomy, defined as a form of unresolved contradiction, well captures Benjamin’s idea of “dialectics at a standstill” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 462). Dialectics can be described as a standstill because the forces at play stand in an unresolved state of suspension. Contradiction finds no resolution, the positively rational moment of synthesis in Hegelian dialectics is frustrated. Hence, dialectics becomes a standstill. In this regard, I will compare Benjamin’s thought with significant figures, including Hegel, Lukacs, and Nietzsche, to distinguish and emphasise its antinomic nature in Chapter One. The critical perspective on social phenomena that transcends usual epistemic divisions must be antinomic in order to avoid the pitfalls of what Benjamin calls historicism in his theses.

Chapter Two continues the discussion with Benjamin but shifts the topic from cultural history and art to urban studies. This shift occurs because, as will be explained in Chapter One, Benjamin's explorations of cultural and aesthetic works take into account their historical contexts. The context of the object of investigation in this study, Chinese urban modernisation, was cities. This study reads Benjamin and Calvino in order to describe and distinguish different senses of "invisible cities". The dialectics of seeing, applied to the urban context, encompasses a field of vision that involves both the visible and the invisible cities. In this regard, the practice of seeing that the dialectics of seeing rests upon rejects immediate vision. More precisely, the object in its immediate appearance is in need of integration with its invisible aspects in order to produce a genuine image through which to dialectically see it.

In Chapter Three, the study turns towards Chinese history and investigates Chinese urban modernity by drawing on the theoretical-philosophical categories developed in the earlier chapters. This chapter includes discussions on what urbanity, modernity, and urban modernity mean in the concrete context of Chinese history. However, no definition of urban modernity is offered. This is due to the nature of urban modernisation, which as a historically ongoing process cannot be fixated into one single definition. Rather than providing a definition, this study attempts to investigate the dynamics associated with urban modernisation by tracing them through the transformations that they produced in cities. However, this "seeing" involves both the immediate transformations such as the visible changes in the material morphology of cities and the invisible changes such as the transformations in the dream images embodied in the material morphology. Chapter Three focuses on two cities: Shanghai and Beijing. This is due both to the fact that China as an

enormously large geographical entity needs spatial specifiers in order to make meaningful assessments about its urban qualities and to the fact that Shanghai and Beijing are two peculiar cities whose comparison can create a fruitful field of study. The urban modern transformation of cities is investigated with a focus on the modern technologies of transportation because this study emphasises the transformation in the modality of movement as a central aspect of urban modernisation. Urban modernisation was experienced by people significantly as a radical change of the way in which people, goods and services could move. The different modality of movement was related to the new political economic dynamic of capitalism that required faster flow of capital, both constant in the form of the means of production and variable in the form of labour power.

As an essential modern technology of urban transportation that embodied this radical change in the modality of movement and the associated dynamics of Chinese urban modernisation, Chapter Four focuses on rickshaw. In this chapter, rickshaw is together with the discussion of Chapter Three contextualised and then investigated as the expression of the antinomies of Chinese urban modernity. Chapter Four connects with Chapter One in that the historical dynamics of Chinese urban modernity that rickshaw manifests are conceptualised in an antinomic way. However, these antinomies will be investigated from the two angles mentioned before so that the material social practice of rickshaw pulling and the literary genre associated with rickshaw pulling will be simultaneously studied. This way, this study aims to construct an antinomic, that is, a dialectical image of Chinese urban modernity as embodied in the material social practice and the aesthetic literary expression of rickshaw, which, as a modern technology of urban transportation that grew out of the peculiar historical conditions of Chinese urban modernity, was highly prominent in

the urban landscape in China. The political economy and aesthetics of rickshaw was a central part of the story of how China underwent urban modernisation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A final note on the method of this thesis: a criticism one commentator has made after reading the manuscript is that this study is in a way chaotic in that it attempts to discuss such a wide range of figures alongside, who belong to rather different contexts. Benjamin, Calvino, Cohen, Fairbank, Lao She, and the list goes on. The charge of this criticism that the thesis is chaotic in this precise sense is indeed true. However, such chaos, the author argues, belongs to the method of literary montage whose potential for chaos, confusion, and shock Benjamin believed could be incorporated into historiography. The technique of montage is the use of fragments that belong to different original contexts with the intention to construct a new context in which they are juxtaposed and given new meanings they lack in their original contexts. That this involves a misuse of these fragments is true. However, it is precisely by such “misuse” that the fragments can be seen beyond the usual modes of comprehension, that is, from a critical perspective. The technique of montage appears to be a misuse only if one accepts that the only proper way to use fragments is by confining them to their original contexts. However, such constraint would allow critique a narrow space as fragments can never go beyond the possible meanings set by their original contexts. Critique requires a certain degree of disorientation, a certain kind of violence that tears down the continuities in which one is buried with the usual way one perceives the world.

CHAPTER 1

CONTRADICTION AND HISTORY

Sade millet ve cemiyetlerin değil, şahsiyetlerin de asıl mana ve hüviyetini, çekirdeğini tarihlik denen şeyin yaptığı düşünülürse, bu iç didişme hiç de yadırganmaz. Mazi daima mevcuttur. Kendimiz olarak yaşayabilmek için, onunla her an hesaplaşmaya ve anlaşılmaya mecburuz.

[If we consider that, not only of nations and communities but also of personalities, historicity constitutes the kernel, such struggle within our heart is by no means curious. The past is ever present. To live with ourselves, we must at every moment struggle and settle accounts with it.]

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (Tanpınar, 2019, p. 10)

The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state.

Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2002, p. 471)

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the theoretical and philosophical concepts of my study. My study of rickshaws as the cultural artifacts through which to dialectically see Chinese urban modernity is influenced by Walter Benjamin's understanding of historical materialism and cultural history. The dialectics of seeing is a term Susan Buck-Morss uses to describe the philosophical historical method that Benjamin employs in the Arcades Project (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 6). As its title suggests, this study of Chinese history draws on this approach that Benjamin has developed. However, Benjamin, though interested in Chinese aesthetics and literature, especially those of Laozi and Daoism (Cheung, 2022, p. 13-14), did not himself write much on Chinese history and literature. Instead, he focused on European cities like Paris and Berlin and wrote on either older European cultural traditions like Romanticism or more contemporary ones like Surrealism, Dadaism,

and Constructivism. Methodological questions are dependent upon questions of content (Adorno, 2008, p. 5), so I do not propose to strictly stick to Benjamin's approach. Rather, my proposal is to draw on Benjamin's approach in order to deal with such similar themes as urbanism, modernity, the tensions and contradictions introduced by urban modernisation, and so on, which Benjamin studies in the context of European history and literature. In this chapter, I will explore Benjamin's historical materialist conception of cultural history and art.

In Section Two, I will give a general background for Benjamin's intellectual life. I select three important dates that constituted turning points for Benjamin's intellectual life: 1912-1913, 1917, and 1924. Although Benjamin's ideas undergo significant changes these years, it is important to note that there are some themes that still persist in his thought. The question of the relationship between culture and history is one of these. In Section Three, I will give the historical background of the emergence of the practice of cultural history in Germany and then explain Benjamin's criticisms of it. Burckhardt, Wölfflin, Riegl, and Warburg are all significant figures in the practice of cultural history. Nietzsche's relationship with Burckhardt and influence on the understanding of culture and art in Germany also need to be taken into account. Benjamin's own conception of cultural history and art is both influenced by and critical of these figures. The gist of the disagreement rests on Benjamin's view that cultural history and art are not the site of reconciling social tensions and contradictions that arise out of the historical conditions of culture and art but exposing and intensifying them.

In Section Four, I will discuss Benjamin's work on Baudelaire. Baudelaire for Benjamin was a representative artist of urban capitalist modernity, whose poems on the life in Paris under the radical transformations created by Napoleon III and

Hausmann both expressed and were complexly related to the new urban modern conditions introduced into the city. It was Benjamin's work on Baudelaire that transformed the image of Baudelaire into "the representative writer of urban capitalist modernity" (Jennings, 2006, p.1). Yet, his treatment of the relationship between Baudelaire's poetry and the specific historical context which engendered it was not unproblematic. Adorno in his letters offers relevant criticisms of Benjamin with regard to the question of the integration of history and art.

In Section Five, I will introduce the concept of antinomy to elucidate Benjamin's conception of art and cultural history as the sites of the irreconciliation of tensions and contradictions. The concept of antinomy, as irreconciled contradiction, refers back to Kant and Hegel who had different evaluations of this concept. After discussing Kant and Hegel, I will explain the work of Lukacs, which called for a Hegelian form of Marxism, and the discussion on Expressionism and Modernism Lukacs engaged in with Ernst Bloch. Relating this discussion to Brecht and Benjamin, I will try to elucidate Benjamin's relation with the Hegelian conception of contradiction and totality as found in Lukacs.

1.2 Benjamin and his context

This study is influenced by Walter Benjamin's approach. Yet, Benjamin's thought remains difficult to interpret and open to divergent readings. What exactly is it that constitutes Benjamin's approach? The width of his interests ranging from aesthetics to religion, from politics to history; the style of his writing, which not infrequently takes on a cryptic form; the intellectual journeys he has undertaken from "neo-Kantianism through German idealism, Freud, Surrealism, the kabbalah, Marx, and

Brecht” (Ferris, 2004, p. 2); and even the unlikely correspondents and friends he has made, whom Benjamin, as Jameson says, was careful to separate (Jameson, 2022, p.3), all make it difficult to pin him down and give an exact reading of his writings. This, of course, is not necessarily a flaw since it is out of this complexity and ambiguity that Benjamin provides a rich repertoire of tools to work on different materials. In this section, I shall explore three periods to give a general context for Benjamin’s thought: the years of 1912-1913 at the University of Berlin, the turn towards Romanticism in 1917, and the turn towards avant-garde and Marxism beginning in 1924.

Benjamin, born in 1892 in Berlin, went through several phases in his intellectual life. In exploring these phases, however, we must avoid two possible errors that Michael Löwy warns against (Löwy, 2005, p. 4-5). The first is the splitting off of apparently inconsistent elements in Benjamin’s thought. His simultaneous interest both in Jewish mysticism and historical materialism is a case in point. In interpreting Benjamin, there has been a tendency among some commentators to dissociate him from either of these themes. His old friend, Gershom Scholem, whose scholarship on Jewish mysticism influenced Benjamin significantly (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 21), comments of Benjamin’s theses on history that this text shows a clear break from historical materialism and a return to the theological and metaphysical concerns of his early thought (Beiner, 1984, p. 423). As for his turn towards Marxism, on the other hand, Benjamin would still maintain an interest in theology which cannot be be erased (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 141). The second error is to conceive Benjamin’s intellectual life as a homogeneous whole with no deep upheavals, no essential breaks or transformations. It is true that one can find some

themes in Benjamin that last a lifetime, yet it is no less true that Benjamin's thought undergoes radical changes along the way.

In the winter semester of 1912-1913 at the University of Berlin, young Benjamin attended Georg Simmel's lectures which would make a deep influence on him (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 50). Simmel was a prominent sociologist and highly influential on urban studies. In his classic study on the metropolis and mental life (Simmel, 1950, p.409), he argues that the metropolitan city life produces a distinct type of individuality that displays such qualities as cannot be seen in small towns and villages. Cities, as the dynamic sites of so many phenomena, bombard the nervous system of the individual with stimuli. The intensity of this bombardment, which does not exist in small towns and villages, creates a type of individuality based on a new form of experience which Simmel calls "the metropolitan type". The metropolitan type is a rational and calculating personality because the intensity of nervous stimuli demands the city residents to be much more discriminating. However, Simmel argues, this rationality is intrinsically connected to the fact that the metropolis is the seat of money economy. Just as the dominant economic form in the metropolis is a complex system of commodity exchanges, money playing a key role in them, requiring exact calculations, so does the mental life of the city residents embedded within such a system become more rational and calculating. The emotional and personal detachments begin losing their centrality in social relations since subjective attachment is replaced by objective rational calculation, similar to the way money is not concerned with the individual use values but with the common exchange value of the commodities it mediates as the means of exchange.

The rationalisation of urban life based on the money economy produces a blase attitude in the metropolitan type. The concern with exactitude and calculability

in a way strips the individual goods of their uniqueness, reducing them all to exchange value that money as the centre of all things now represents. Despite the demand of intense stimuli for discrimination, there occurs a blunting of discriminatory powers of the metropolitan type. Objects losing their uniqueness now all appear “in an evenly flat and gray tone”, all replaceable because all exchangeable. As for the individuals, they can acquire a high degree of individual freedom based on the rational and objective tempo of the city life, released from the irrational and personal attachments of rural life, but the complex economic system of the city, which demands ever minute division of labour, threatens to reduce the individual to a cog in a machine. This is the paradoxical duality of the metropolitan type and urban life: the impersonal forces of rationalisation, calculation, and objectification that make possible rational and free individuality at the same time threaten to smother it.

Young Benjamin, attending Simmel’s lectures and getting involved in the student activities at the University of Berlin, would write a small piece in 1913, published by *Der Anfang*. There, Benjamin, concerned with the crisis of experience and individuality, makes an important distinction in the opening paragraph:

In our struggle for responsibility, we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called "experience." It is expressionless, impene trable, and ever the same. The adult has always already experienced [*erlebt*] everything: youth, ideals, hopes, woman. It was all illusion.-Often we feel intimidated or embittered. Perhaps he is right. What can our retort be? We have not yet experienced [*erfahren*] anything. (Benjamin, 2004c, p. 3)

Here, Benjamin distinguishes between two modes of experience, *erlebt* and *erfahren*.

This distinction has a long tradition in the German philosophical tradition.

“Erfahrung is the tradition-bound experience that unfolds over time”, “inseparable from the representation of a continuity, a sequence”, whereas “Erlebnis is the immediate, isolated experience of the individual” (Plate, 2005, p. 4). The importance of this distinction for Benjamin is that in the intellectual atmosphere of the time he

lived in, there were two major camps favouring different modes of experience. The period from late *Kaiserreich* through the Weimer Republic in Germany was characterised by an intellectual divide between forms of neo-Kantianism and forms of what was called *Lebenphilosophie* (McCormick, 1999, p. 9). This divide owes its existence to Immanuel Kant's philosophical examination of the nature of experience in his critique.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant aims to make metaphysics a scientific enterprise and legitimise pure cognition by establishing the limits and sources of a priori knowledge (Hogan, 2010, p. 21). Kant distinguishes between two different forms of knowledge: a priori and a posteriori. Experience, for Kant, "is without doubt the first product that our understanding brings forth as it works on the raw material of sensible sensations" (Kant, 1998, p.127 [A2]). However, although all knowledge in the end derives from experience, different forms of knowledge hold different epistemic relations with experience. A priori knowledge is the form of knowledge which Kant initially defines as being derived "independently of all experience" (Kant, 1998, p.127 [A2]). This is a somewhat misleading definition, given that all knowledge in the end depends on experience. In the second section, Kant gives a better description in terms of pure cognition. Pure cognition is distinguished from empirical cognition in that the former produces knowledge that shares two traits: necessity and strict universality (Kant, 1998, p.128 [A2-B6]). A priori knowledge, produced by pure cognition, then are necessary and strictly universal, whereas a posteriori knowledge does not share these qualities.

Kant legitimises pure cognition by grounding all knowledge, whether a priori or a posteriori, in human experience. In this regard, Kant rejects the possibility of a priori knowledge that transcends the limits of possible experience. A priori knowledge

of objects is possible only if we have experience of those objects. Thus, the second aim of Kant's *Critique* is to refute those a priori knowledge claims about the objects that we can have no experience of. This would go against such philosophers as Spinoza, Descartes, and Leibnitz who had employed arguments based on a priori knowledge claims about objects humans can have no experience of, such as God and immortality of the soul. Due to this, Kant would earn the nickname "all-destroying" (Hogan, 2010, p. 21), because Kant's critique of pure reason delegitimised many of the popular knowledge claims about metaphysics and theology. Kant's critique would instead "institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions." This would be achieved "not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws" (Kant, 1998, p.101 [Axii]).

Kant argues that a priori knowledge that does not transcend the limits of possible experience is possible because it concerns the pure intuitions such as space and time and pure concepts such as causality, all of which structure our cognition of the world. The sensory data that we acquire undergo a synthetic process which provides us with intelligible experience. A priori knowledge concerns the pure intuitions and concepts that in this process of synthesis structure the sense perceptions we acquire and turn them into intelligible experiences. The knowledge of this process is strictly universal and necessary because all possible experience must undergo this process of synthesis. In this regard, Kant points out that, we can cognise of objects a priori because what we cognise a priori is already "what we ourselves have put into them" (Kant, 1998, p.111 [Bxviii]).

The two modes of experience, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, concern this discussion. Kant uses the term "Erlebnisse" to refer to the "manifold of empirical

intuition” that has not yet undergone the synthetic process of pure intuitions and concepts to become experience, that is, *Erfahrung* (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 53). This distinction also has an evaluative aspect for Kant: his concern is to discover “eternal and unchangeable laws” of reason since it is out of these laws that universality and necessity arise. For this reason, Kant prioritises *Erfahrung* with its implications of regularity, necessity, homogeneity, and universality, over *Erlebnis*. This evaluation would later on be retained by the neo-Kantians but challenged by a group of thinkers such as Dilthey and Husserl, associated with *Lebensphilosophie*. *Lebensphilosophie* towards the end of the 19th century arose as a radical transvaluation of this Kantian dualism, prioritising *erlebnis* as concrete, inner, and lived experience as opposed to *erfahrung* as the abstract, shallowly formal and objective mode of experience (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 53).

Simmel’s sociology and examination of urban life as well as Benjamin’s thought were influenced by this dualism and intellectual atmosphere. However, Benjamin would not side with either camp, because on his view both *erlebnis* and *erfahrung* were compromised modes of experience. Benjamin had a “disdain for both the alleged immediacy and meaningfulness of *Erlebnis* and the overly rational, disinterested version of *Erfahrung*” (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 72). Although Benjamin would use and favour the term *Erfahrung*, the meaning he ascribed to this term was rather different than that of Kant and neo-Kantians. Whereas for Kant, *Erfahrung* had a sense of universality that results from the synthesis of the particularity of *Erlebnis*, Benjamin saw in *Erfahrung* a sense of generality that was situated between universality and particularity, which he associated with narratability. In narrative, one goes beyond particularity because communication as a social practice transcends particularity, but, restricted by cultural and historical

conditions, one does not stand at a level of transhistorical universality (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 72). Later, Benjamin would associate the reduction of the value of experience with the disappearance of narrative and storytelling. In *The Storyteller*, Benjamin argues that beginning with the First World War, the process of a reduction in communicable experience was undertaken. Since storytelling was based upon communicable experience, this reduction led to the disappearance of storytelling. What was rising against storytelling was novels: “The earliest indication of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times” (Benjamin, 2006c, p. 143-146). The novelist, in contrast to the storyteller, is a secluded figure: “The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none” (Benjamin, 2006c, p. 146).

Young Benjamin still had a strong interest in Kant and was planning to write his doctoral dissertation on him. Yet, in 1917, Benjamin changed his subject and decided to write on the Romanticism of Schlegel and Novalis at the University of Berne. This change of his dissertation topic was no arbitrary choice. Despite his criticisms of Kant, Benjamin had nevertheless been struggling to rescue Kant and his philosophy from the kind of normative formalism they were reduced to at the hands of the neo-Kantians at the time. Yet, as he wrote in a letter to Scholem, Benjamin in the end came to see Kant’s ideas on progress and universal history more as a problem than as something to be rescued. As some neo-Kantians like Hermann Cohen used Kant’s ideas on progress to justify Germany’s war effort, Benjamin’s turn away from Kant towards Romanticism was also an implicit rejection of such beliefs in linear progress (Comay, 2004, p. 134).

Romanticism left a deep influence on Benjamin's understanding of art and cultural history. Benjamin wrote his doctoral dissertation on the concept of criticism in German Romanticism. The term critique, Benjamin points out, had multiple senses. In ordinary usage, it carried a sense of well-founded judgement but with Kant's critique the term was elevated to an "epistemological method and philosophical standpoint". With the Romantics, especially Schlegel's theory of criticism, the term focused on art criticism (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 117-118).

Kant's critical project for many could not realise its goals. In the aftermath of Kant's critique, some philosophers tried to realise these goals by building on Kant's critical project. Johann Gottlieb Fichte was a highly influential figure of this sort, who was dealing with the post-Kantian context of German philosophy. Kant, as we saw, in his critique hoped to establish and legitimise the proper limits of reason within which one can discover universally necessary principles of knowledge. Against such thinkers as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, Kant tried to ground the a priori knowledge of pure cognition within the limits of possible experience and legitimise the possibility of pure cognition against sceptical thinkers like David Hume. Yet, in the end, this project did not seem to be very successful. Spinoza, through Jacobi, was revived and Humean scepticism did not seem to lose its power. Fichte's own project was to defeat what he called the dogmatism of Spinoza on the one hand and the scepticism of Hume on the other. His aim was to find a solid foundation to base the critical philosophy that Kant had started with his critique. This foundation for Fichte was an absolute ego.

In *Wissenschaftslehre* (Science of Knowledge) in 1794, Fichte argued that the fact of an absolute ego was an intuitively true first proposition beyond any doubt. Based on the postulate of an absolute ego, Fichte attempted to show that the Kantian

dualisms such as ego and non-ego, subject and object, and so on were all aspects of this unity. Such unified absolute ego could, this way, be the immediate foundation of critical philosophy against dogmatism and scepticism (Beiser, 2005, p. 29).

This self-constructing self is none other than his own. He can intuit the aforementioned act of the self in himself only, and in order that he may intuit it, he has to carry it out. Freely, and by his own choice, he brings it about in himself. (Fichte, 1991, p. 35)

To think of oneself is to make oneself the object of reflection. The reflecting self by reflecting upon oneself makes oneself the object of reflection. However, since the reflected object is the same as the reflecting self, that is, oneself, Fichte argues that self-reflection gives us an immediate intuition of oneself, which he takes to be the epistemic foundation of knowledge (Horstmann, 2005, p. 126). In the intuitive immediacy of this ego, the reflecting and the reflected consciousness, both as aspects of the same ego, would be united.

It was this type of a unified ego that could provide an absolute foundation that Novalis and Schegel problematised. The kind of immediacy that Fichte relied on in establishing the absolute ego as the “fundamental proposition” is problematic because the very representation of identity involves mediation (Comay, 2004, p. 136-137). The ego or the “I” thus cannot provide an immediate ground that can work as an unconditioned starting point for absolute knowledge. Novalis, in fact, rejects the possibility of finding such a ground that Fichte seeks: “We *seek* the unconditioned everywhere and always *find* only conditioned things” (Novalis, 2024, p. 67). The absolute ego of Fichte is also a conditioned thing that cannot be the fundamental proposition of knowledge, because it lacks the kind of self-transparency that Fichte believed it possesses in its immediate accessibility to self-consciousness (Larmore, 2005, p. 154).

It is, however, crucial to understand that neither Novalis nor Schlegel draw from the impossibility of *finding* that which is unconditioned, that which as unconditioned is without limitation, that is, that which is infinite, the conclusion that the search for the infinite itself is futile. The self, despite the impossibility of finding the infinite, is still driven by the desire to find it. This creates an ironic situation in which the self, though knowing the impossibility of fulfilling their desire, still seeks to satisfy it. Schlegel's preferred name for his writings, "fragments", is in this regard a conscious choice: fragment in contrast to classical maxim or epigram is meant to be not only incomplete but also incompleteable. The Romantic self with their ironic situation both affirms their desire for fulfilment and recognises the impossibility of fully satisfying it (Larmore, 2005, p. 156-157). Schlegel compares self-cultivation with the process of becoming God: "Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become God, to be human, to cultivate oneself are all expressions that mean the same thing" (Schlegel, 1998, p. 55).

The Romantic idea of criticism rests on this paradoxical situation. Benjamin points out that "thinking that reflects on itself in self-consciousness is the basic fact from which Schlegel's and, in large part, Novalis' epistemological considerations take their start" (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 120). However, unlike Fichte, reflection in the absence of a unified ego that can find the unconditioned tends towards infinity in Romanticism. With Fichte who identifies the immediate consciousness of thinking with self-consciousness in which subject and object coincide, "reflection is transfixed, arrested, and stripped of its endlessness, without being annulled" (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 125). However, since in Romanticism there is no such coinciding moment that produces a unified subject whose self is immediate, the

activity of self-reflection turns into “an unending mirror play of doubles and negatives” (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 135).

The Romantic view of reflection gives the concept of criticism a significantly different meaning. Since the reflecting subject cannot find a point in which the activity of reflection reaches a foundation that can satisfy it, reflection becomes an inexhaustible process that multiplies “as if in an endless series of mirrors” (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 150). Critique, on the other hand, is no longer the practice of finding foundational and universally valid principles as in Kant’s or Fichte’s critical philosophy but an inexhaustible process of mirror plays in which reflection, not finding such a foundation, constantly multiplies itself.

It is important to see the connection between Benjamin’s turn towards Romantic critique and his abandonment of studying Kant’s ideas of universal history and progress. The Romantic idea of endless critique that rests on the inexhaustible process of reflection is contrasted with the Enlightenment idea of inevitable progress, that can be found in a range of ideologies from Social Democracy to Liberalism, that projects a historical trajectory along a unilinear temporal line (Comay, 2004, p. 145). Whereas the idea of progress Benjamin rejects shares a belief in “the infinite extent of time” and “thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress” (Benjamin, 2004e, p. 37), the Romantic conception of history instead rests on what Benjamin calls “qualitative infinity”. The qualitative infinity, contrary to the temporality of progress, does not hierarchically link different epochs to one another in a scheme of universal evolution, but regards the life of humanity itself as an infinite process of fulfilment without such hierarchisation (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 168).

After his engagement with Romanticism, Benjamin would enter another phase of his intellectual development, which, though, would not replace the Romantic influence. 1924 was a turning point for Benjamin for three important reasons: firstly, through the personal influence of the Latvian Communist theatre director Asja Lacis, Benjamin would begin engaging with Marxist politics and, through Lukacs's seminal *History and Class Consciousness*, with Marxist thought (Jennings, 2004, p. 20-21); secondly, Benjamin would abandon his hopes for an academic career and instead work as a freelance writer and would have a considerable influence on the cultural discussions at the time; finally, Benjamin would turn his attention from German Romanticism to contemporary European culture, especially to avant-garde (Jennings, 2004, p. 19).

These reasons, of course, had overlapping effects on Benjamin. His turn towards Marxism, for example, was both motivated by and fed his engagement with the avant-garde movements, which were no foreigners to the idea of revolution (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 187). Avant-garde, on the other hand, provided Benjamin with new intellectual sources to reinterpret Marxist categories and the Romantic influence on his thought, Surrealism being very prominent in this regard.

Benjamin accepted and employed some key Marxist categories like the material base and the superstructure in his analyses but the Romantic influence on him made his understanding of these categories both original and, more importantly, highly sensitive to the evolutionist schemes that were prominent within the many currents of Marxism at the time (Löwy, 2005, p. 8-10). Historical materialism at the time defined itself in terms of revolutionary or reformist expectations for the future. In a grand narrative of epochal successions, socialism would in the end emerge victorious just as capitalism defeated feudalism and feudalism defeated what came

before. With the productive forces developing and revolutionising the existing relations of production, humanity would move constantly towards a better future. The historical past was, thus, examined in terms of what is to come. However, Benjamin's originality to a significant degree consists in reversing this perspective: historical materialism now is defined in terms of a particular relationship to the historical past. The task of historical materialism on Benjamin's view, is not to make the future but to save the past (Beiner, 1984, p. 424).

Benjamin would further develop these ideas in a more mature form in his theses on history. However, as Susan Buck-Morss points out, Benjamin's theses on history were meant to be read as an introduction to the Arcades Project. If so, Benjamin was writing his theses as a cultural historian (Beiner, 1984, p. 424). In order to understand Benjamin's practice as a cultural historian, we need to examine the intellectual context in which cultural history developed in Germany and the criticisms Benjamin raised against it.

1.3 Benjamin and cultural history

Benjamin wishes to develop a practice of cultural history which he describes as dialectical in a non-Hegelian and non-progressivist sense (Caygill, 2004, p. 74). In his Theses on History, he contrasts historical materialism as the proper practice of cultural history with what he calls historicism that commits the errors he associates with the dominant practices of cultural history at the time. In order to understand Benjamin's view of the practice of cultural history, we ought to first examine the particular historical context in which cultural history developed in Germany.

Jacob Burckhardt's period of study at the University of Berlin during the early 1840s can be identified as the beginning of cultural history in Germany. The intellectual climate of the university at the time was revolting against the Hegelian philosophy of history, which created a grand narrative of progress in a scheme of a succession of epochs. Burckhardt's historiography, contrary to the Hegelian progressive links between epochs, instead established lateral links across a period. For Burckhardt, the task of the cultural historian is not to subordinate historical events to a given scheme of progress, like the self realisation of Geist in Hegel, but to coordinate them under three headings: the state, religion, and culture. Although Benjamin admired Burckhardt's contributions, especially his non-progressive historical narrative, still the place of art history was problematic in his cultural history with no distinct treatment (Caygill, 2004, p. 74-76).

Heinrich Wölfflin, who succeeded Burckhardt to the Chair of Art History in 1893 at the University of Basel, would return to a Kantian philosophy and develop a formalist method of art history which, unlike Burckhardt, would separate it from cultural history. This approach had the benefit of making the art objects a study field that could not be reduced to other fields, but suffered the problem of formalism. The works of art examined by the formalist method were reduced to the historical exemplifications of timeless patterns. This was problematic for Benjamin both because such patterns were themselves historical constructs and because the focus on the formal qualities of art objects ignored their concrete and unique details (Caygill, 2004, p. 77-78).

Alois Riegl was a significant influence both on Benjamin and cultural history. Benjamin took an interest in Riegl likely before 1916. This makes his interest in Riegl almost coincide with his disenchantment with Wölfflin, whose lectures he attended in

Munich in 1915 and left with disillusionment (Levin, 1988, p. 78-79). Riegl's method was in complete contrast with that of Wölfflin. "The latter developed his aesthetic categories by means of comparing works of art with each other while Riegl's categories are developed by situating works of art with respect to the expression of an "artistic will"" (Caygill, 2004, p. 80). Benjamin identifies Riegl and not Wölfflin as "the precursor of this new type of art scholar" who focuses on the individual artwork that pays attention to its individual details rather than placing it within a formalist scheme (Benjamin, 2005a, p. 668).

Last but not least, Aby Warburg. Warburg and Benjamin had significant points of convergence on the question of cultural history. Both argue that although the artwork should not be reduced to a passive product of history, still a kind of dichotomy between art history and cultural history as in Wölfflin needs to be overcome by integrating these two fields of study. They both believed that this could be achieved by the close analysis of individual works rather than formalist methods. However, the points of divergence are significant, too. For Warburg, art and culture provide a means of reconciling the social and psychological tensions a society and its members are subjected to. This gives Warburg's view of culture an affirmative function of healing the social and psychological tensions that pose a threat to society. Cultural history on this view is given the task of conveying a consoling vision to its audience to produce healing and positive effects against the social and psychological tensions they suffer from (Caygill, 2004, p. 85).

Benjamin's understanding of historical materialism and cultural history have no such task of reconciling opposing forces. On the contrary, Benjamin's historical materialism and cultural history demonstrate the very irreconcilability of the social and psychological tensions through art and culture (Caygill, 2004, p. 87). In his

theses on history, Benjamin rejects the consoling view of art and culture by defining culture in terms of its very opposite, that is, barbarism:

According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called "cultural treasures," and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 391-392).

Here, Benjamin combines his critical stance towards the notion of unilinear progress in history with the historical materialist methodology of cultural history he was pioneering. Culture and cultural artifacts cannot simply be taken as the legacy of the past generations "transmitted" to the present as its historical treasure, not only because the past does not present us with a homogeneous group of ancestors with no differentiation among them, but also because these ancestors were differentiated into such antagonistic groups as to give cultural artifacts a barbaric aspect. The social and psychological tensions that Warburg seeks to reconcile through the medium of culture had its victims whose very existence makes it impossible to give culture such a reconciling role. The affirmation of culture without recognising its negative aspect, thus, leads to a partial understanding of cultural history because this history is not simply "the efforts of the great geniuses" but also "the anonymous toil of others". Since these are both part of the past, a practice of cultural history that focuses on the former at the expense of the latter is bound to be partial.

Benjamin's understanding of cultural history as a unity of irreconcilably opposing aspects, of course, is not meant to negate one aspect in favour of the other. The appreciation of the negative aspect of culture does not lead to the rejection of its

positive aspect. If one were to negate its positive aspect, then this would simply produce a reverse model of progress: history as the accumulation of barbarism would turn out to be unilinear regress. However, it is exactly such a unilinear mode of thought that is the object of Benjamin's criticism. Historical materialism should not create a grand narrative of regress along a single historical trajectory in which all cultural artifacts lose their positive aspect and become purely barbaric artifacts. The point of Benjamin's criticism of the kind of cultural history that affirmed history as a series of "cultural treasures" is to rid us of unilinear historical narratives and appreciate the cultural artifacts with their ambiguous and contradictory opposing aspects.

This conceptualisation of culture and history rests on a different mode of temporality than that which grounds the progressive narrative of history. Earlier, we saw that the Romantic idea of critique and reflection contains a different mode of temporality, which Benjamin calls "qualitative infinity". This mode rejects the other mode of temporality that the Enlightenment idea of progress in its various forms relies on. In his theses on history, Benjamin would call the latter "homogeneous empty space":

Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. It may be that materialist historiography differs in method more clearly from universal history than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 396).

In this complex passage, Benjamin makes several key points. Firstly, he criticises the temporal mode of homogenous empty space which historicism rests on. This mode of temporality regards the course of history as an empty temporal space in which

historical events are added to one another. With such additive method, unilinear progress becomes possible because with each event added to the history of humanity, the state of humanity moves forward. This, Benjamin points out, leads to an idea of universal history in which historical events succeed one another in a historical narrative which they cannot disrupt because they already have a place in its temporal scheme. All events, no matter what they are, are capable of being situated within this homogeneous space. Hence, the temporal space itself stands above all the historical events and structures them with a metanarrative of unilinear progression. Benjamin contrasts this temporality of historicism with the constructive principle of historical materialism. Historical materialism does not add past events to a historical narrative based on an already constructed temporal scheme but attempts to construct, or more precisely, first deconstruct the existing and then reconstruct a new temporal scheme which makes different historical narratives possible. The notion of a monad is, here, a reference to the Romantic idea of endless reflection and critique. A monad, a term Benjamin takes from Leibnitz, both contains the totality as a picture of the world and constitutes a unique individual fragment that cannot be reduced to other fragments (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 76). Benjamin implicitly links the unending and inexhaustible reflection and critique in Romanticism, the constant mirror-play, to the idea of a monad that infinitely reflects on and critiques history based on a different temporality than homogenous empty space (Comay, 2004, p. 146). Finally, the critique of history based on this temporality creates an arresting shock effect.

The idea of shock is important in Benjamin's understanding of cultural history. It is through shock that the historical narrative of homogenous temporality is arrested: in Benjamin's words, the continuum of history is blasted open (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 396). Since the historical materialist practice of cultural history does not

hold an affirmative understanding of culture by turning it into the site of reconciliation, the demonstration of the irreconcilability of opposing forces produces a shock effect. Thinking “”saturated with tensions” comes to “a standstill” in which one experiences a shock that jolts one out of the temporal scheme which adds historical events into a smooth narrative of progression. This shock effect grants one a new appreciation of the past and the present: “Historicism offers the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past” (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 396).

The constructive principle of historical materialism is related to the montage technique. History, on Benjamin’s view, ought to be constructed similar to the technique of montage. As Benjamin writes in the *Arcades Project*, his method is “literary montage” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 460). The practice of montage is essential to Benjamin’s understanding of historical materialism: he proposes “to carry over the principle of montage into history”(Benjamin, 2002, p. 461). As a new aesthetic technique, montage was employed by the avant-garde movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism. Benjamin’s proposal means to borrow an aesthetic technique from the literary avant-garde and apply it to the practical of historiography. The constructive principle of historical materialism against the additive principle of historicism, then, finds its expression in the technique of literary montage.

Montage was a new technique of ripping fragments out of temporally and spatially diverse contexts and then reassembling them in a new configuration of juxtaposition (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 39). This way, the fragments that had been situated within a harmonious familiar whole would be defamiliarised in their new constructed context of juxtaposition and enable new interpretations that had been impossible precisely due to their previous familiarity. It is, however, important to

note that in their new context of juxtaposition, the fragments remain unreconciled because as juxtaposed pieces they express their tensions rather than reconciling them (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 67).

Applied to historiography, Benjamin argues that historical materialism, in order to create the sense of shock that would blast the continuum of history and create a new mode of temporality that would enable historical narratives that go beyond the metanarrative of progress based on the temporal scheme of homogeneous empty space, must, following the technique of montage, reconstruct the historical fragments in a context of juxtaposition so that they can display tensions and contradictions without reconciling them either with an idea of progress as in Kant or Hegel or with an idea of culture as rehabilitation as in Warburg. This is Benjamin's understanding of cultural history.

The Arcades Project, though containing an enormous body of material, was in the end an unfinished book. Another work, which Benjamin could finish, shows a similar approach: *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (the Origins of German Tragic Drama). Here, Benjamin delves into the cultural history and aesthetics of the Baroque dramatists in the 16th and 17th centuries. Written in the period between May 1924 and late March or early April in 1925, the work reflects Benjamin's understanding of critical cultural history, though, without the avant-garde themes like the technique of montage. However, before exploring this work, there is another German thinker who had much influence both on the practice of cultural history in general and on Benjamin in particular that must be introduced: Friedrich Nietzsche.

The place that Nietzsche holds in the practice of cultural history in Germany is significant. Jacob Burckhardt's period of study at the University of Berlin during the early 1840s was a key moment in the development of cultural history in

Germany. Burckhardt's study on the Renaissance, *the Civilisation of the Renaissance*, had a profound influence on the cultural history of this period in Germany. Nietzsche belongs among the most original intellectuals who would bring about a new evaluation of both the cultural and historical relationship of the present to the Renaissance and Greek antiquity and the current state of Germany where Bismarck's Nationalstaat had recently been established in 1871 (Ruehl, 2015, p. 70-71). Prior to Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance*, the fundamental historiographical approach to the Italian Renaissance as a distinctive period for Western civilisation of secular individualism and neo-classical taste for beauty had rested on the Enlightenment ideals of liberalism and republican values. In the 1820s and 1830s, Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, a highly influential art historian in Germany, had accordingly drawn a historical linkage between civic liberty on the one hand and the 14th century Italian city-states with their passionate defence of independence against the encroaching Holy Roman Empire on the other (Ruehl, 2015, p. 62-63). On this view, the Renaissance was heralding the liberal ideals of independence and civic liberty together with the educated bourgeois ideals of individuality and creativity. Hence, the flourishing of arts in the Renaissance.

Burckhardt's intervention in this popular narrative on the Renaissance in the early 19th century is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, Burckhardt both agrees with and enhances the liberal idealisations of the Renaissance as a truly significant period in the development of Western civilisation and culture. On the other hand, Burckhardt, with the anti-Hegelian thrust of his cultural historical approach, problematises the progressivist interpretations of the Renaissance in these liberal idealisations. As a result, Burckhardt identifies the liberal ideals of the new secular individualist spirit that the early liberal historians had idealised not with the

merchants, scholars or artists as the latter had done but with the ruthless military men and despots like the Sforza and Visconti, who, in a Machiavellian milieu of politics, had embodied this spirit by tearing down the traditional fabric of feudal politics based on Christian moral values (Ruehl, 2015, p. 65-66).

Historians such as Sismondi and Rumohr had stressed the link between liberty and letters. Burckhardt's intervention in the cultural history of the Renaissance changed the image of the political context this cultural history had rested on: it was not in a peaceful state of political co-existence, but, on the contrary, the ruthless jungle of competition in which tyrants were vying for power that the Renaissance artists flourished. It was this political context that was tearing apart the Christian veil, freeing the Renaissance individuals from the feudal shackles for a secular pursuit of such values as "rationality, pragmatism, individual talent, competitive struggle". The effect of Burckhardt's intervention was to cut off the link the earlier historians had established between the Italian Renaissance and the 19th century "Biedermeier propriety" of central Europe (Ruehl, 2015, p. 68). It was not the harmonious humanism of Goethe and Schiller, uniting humanity as a global community of letters, but the violent politics of the Italian tyrants that played the key role in this fascinating period of history called the Renaissance (Ruehl, 2015, p. 70).

Nietzsche was familiar with Burckhardt's work on the Renaissance. His library contained two copies of this work. Probably, one of these copies had been given to Nietzsche by Burckhardt as a gift since its title page contains the inscription "to Prof. Dr. Nietzsche" by the author. Yet, despite this affinity as well as intellectual influence, Burckhardt's interpretation of the Renaissance does not seem to have had much influence on Nietzsche's first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy*, in fact, gives a negative image of the Renaissance

that was in fundamental contradiction with the interpretation of Burckhardt. Under the influence of Wagner, Nietzsche regards the Renaissance Italy as a corrupt world mired in aestheticism whose movement to the North had been detrimental to German culture. It was not the cultural legacy of the Renaissance but the ancient Greeks that the Germans needed to draw on (Ruehl, 2015, p. 73). However, Nietzsche would radically change his evaluation of the Renaissance over time: with *Human All Too Human*, he would explicitly break with Wagner and his negative view of the Renaissance (Ruehl, 2015, p. 78).

Benjamin's interest in Nietzsche is rather complex. Three of Benjamin's close friends (Adorno, Brecht, Scholem) all recognised a Nietzschean aspect to his thought, though their evaluation differed (McFarland, 2013, p. 4-7). Benjamin's study of Baroque drama, like the Arcades Project, is no exception. However, in these works, though influenced by Nietzsche, Benjamin is also rather critical of Nietzsche's views on tragedy, history, and culture. In the *Origin of German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin praises Nietzsche's study of Greek tragedy for rejecting the transhistorical humanism with which the subject matter had been dealt, reducing the ancient and modern experiences into an undifferentiated assimilation. The experience of tragedy, however, is historically specific. The way tragedy was conceived and experienced by the ancient Greeks cannot be subsumed under a general category of tragic experience supposedly shared by all humanity because this would be tantamount to blotting out the radically different conditions in which the ancients and moderns experience the world around them (McFarland, 2013, p. 76). Benjamin, in agreement with the historicisation of tragedy and experience, argues that this is the "the Archimedean point" that Nietzsche provides in *the Birth of Tragedy* (Benjamin, 1998, p. 100-102). However, for all his historicisation, Nietzsche on Benjamin's view

fails to properly contextualise tragedy and experience, disregarding the role of morality in life and misreading all tragic manifestations as deriving from the aesthetic struggle between Apollo and Dionysus (Benjamin, 1998, p. 76-77), the two forces which on Nietzsche's view "appear coupled with one another and through this coupling at last give birth to a work of art which is as Dionysian as it is Apollonian—Attic tragedy" (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 19).

Contrary to Nietzsche's positive evaluation of Greek tragedy, Benjamin contrasts German Baroque "mourning" (*Trauerspiels*) with Greek tragedy. The Trauerspiel of the German baroque, indeed, seems to be "a caricature of classical tragedy". The German dramatists failed to produce the kind of tragedy that the ancient Greeks were revered for. The theme of "Haupt-und Staatsaktionen" was regarded as a distortion of the ancient royal drama, the bombast in the plays as far inferior to the dignified pathos of the Greeks, and the bloody finale as a failed attempt at the proper tragic catastrophe. Compared with their ancient Greek counterparts, the dramas of the German Baroque seemed "offensive or even barbaric to refined taste" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 50). Against this apparent inferiority of the German Baroque, Benjamin argues that these perceived deficiencies actually provided these works of drama with a critical function which Benjamin, in accordance with his view of cultural history, tries to bring out. Benjamin summarises the perceived deficiencies of the Baroque drama against the background of Greek tragedy in terms of an absence of eschatology: "The baroque knows no eschatology, and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 66). An eschatology organises "the objects of the world both in spatial and temporal ways" with a sense of inevitable eventuality, that is, fate (Martel, 2012, p.

55). The absence of such an eventuality in the Baroque drama, as manifested in the distortions of ancient royal drama into the theme of Haupt-und Staatsaktionen, of the dignified pathos into dramatic bombast, of the eventual catastrophe of tragedy into bloody finale, prevents the reconciliation of tensions and contradictions played out in the tragedy into an eschatological scheme.

In *Critique of Violence*, Benjamin distinguishes between two forms of violence: mythic violence and divine violence. Whereas the former form of violence establishes an eschatological scheme in which people come to believe in the ultimate legitimacy of a law that organises the objects in the world in spatial and temporal ways, the latter serves to undermine the eschatological scheme (Martel, 2012, p. 51-52). Mythic and divine violence, in this regard, are related to Benjamin's conception of different temporalities upon which historicism and historical materialism rest: "If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates..." (Benjamin, 2004f, p. 249).

Contrary to Nietzsche's view of the Greek tragedy, Benjamin's positive evaluation of the critical aspect of the Baroque drama that subverts the spatial and temporal organisation of the objects in the world into reconciliation in the form of inevitable eventuality, that is, fate, is also reflected in the latter's rejection of the affirmation of life the former offers: the eternal recurrence of the same. Nietzsche in the *Gay Science* offers his idea of the eternal recurrence as a thought experiment in which if one is to affirm life one must have the strength to say yes to the eternal recurrence:

The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave

nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?
(Nietzsche, 1974, p. 274)

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche would later describe his idea of eternal recurrence of the same as “the highest possible formulate of affirmation” (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 123). The acceptance of all that has happened, is happening, and will happen in the same way for eternity, on Nietzsche’s view, is the ultimate affirmation of life. The reconciliation with absolute necessity, in this regard, plays an important role in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Yet, it is exactly such notions of inevitability that Benjamin finds problematic, both in his evaluation of the Baroque drama against Greek tragedy and in his cultural historical enterprise in the Arcades Project. In the Arcades Project, Benjamin explicitly criticises Nietzsche’s fatalistic conception of temporality, drawing a connection between the eternal recurrence of the same and the temporal scheme of homogeneous empty space that the Enlightenment idea of progress as in Kant’s “infinite task” was based upon:

The belief in progress-in an infinite perfectibility understood as an infinite ethical task-and the representation of eternal return are complementary. They are the indissoluble antinomies in the face of which the dialectical conception of historical time must be developed. In this conception, the idea of eternal return appears precisely as that "shallow rationalism" which the belief in progress is accused of being, while faith in progress seems no less to belong to the mythic mode of thought than does the idea of eternal return. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 119)

Cultural history as Benjamin conceives it, then, must develop a dialectical conception of historical time which does not fall either into the temporal scheme of homogeneous empty space in which historical events are simply added in a pre-ordained order of space and time and form a unilinear flow of progress or into the temporal scheme of the eternal recurrence of the same in which the objects in the

world are so organised by an eschatology in spatial and temporal ways that their tensions and contradictions are reconciled in the form of an acceptance of inevitable eventuality that fate is.

1.4 Benjamin, Baudelaire and the question of the integration of history and art for urban modernity

Baudelaire's collection of the poems on Paris, *Paris Spleen*, opens with a letter to Arsene Houssaye, where Baudelaire makes a comment, connecting lyrical prose and the urban life in Paris:

My obsession with this ideal was born primarily out of frequenting vast cities, out of the intersections of their infinite connections. You yourself, my dear friend, weren't you tempted to translate the strident shouts of the glazier into a song, to express in a lyrical prose all the sorrowful hints those shouts threw upward to the garrets, rising up through the street's highest fogs? (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 4)

This connection between the poetry, both in form and in content, of Baudelaire and the urban experience of modern life in Paris is what makes Baudelaire great on Benjamin's view. It is the "representativeness" of his poetry that "laid open the structure and mechanisms of his age" that Benjamin finds attractive. Yet, it was also Benjamin who, with a series of essays from the 1930s on, transformed our view of Baudelaire as the representative writer of urban capitalist modernity (Jennnings, 2006, p. 1). *Paris Spleen*, in fact, draws on a long tradition of urban writing that goes all the way back to Villon through Montesquieu, Diderot, Restif de la Bretonne, and Sebastien Mercier in the 17th and 18th centuries and through Balzac, Hugo and Eugene Sue in the 19th century. However, though situated within such a long tradition of urban writing, Baudelaire also shows a break with this tradition along with the radical restructuring of the city of Paris. Baudelaire belongs to that precise

moment of history in which under the authority of Napoleon III and the direction of Haussmann, the city was being torn apart and rebuilt systematically (Berman, 1988, p. 147).

By 1870 the transformation of Paris had become the wonder of the world. Napoleon III, sitting at his desk at the Tuileries with a map of the remodelled Paris covering the wall before him, Persigny, his minister of finance, and Baron Haussmann, his Prefect of the Seine, had achieved what all previous governments and monarchs throughout Europe had failed to achieve, and driven a network of straight and broad roads through a crowded and ancient city, remorselessly demolishing everything which stood in their way. London's Regent Street, considerable achievement though it was, paled into insignificance compared with what was done in Paris (Girouard, 1985, p. 286).

This radical restructuring of the material morphology of Paris was accompanied by a drastic transformation in the mode of experience that the city residents had as well as the social figures who strolled about in the city. Boulevards outside, now dominating the material morphology of Paris, were connected to the shopping arcades. Benjamin draws a close link between the new street system of Paris and the emergence of arcades which city residents would engage with:

The arcades are something between a street and an interior. If one can say that the physiologies employ an artistic device, it is the proven device of the feuilleton-namely, the transformation of the boulevard into an interior. (Benjamin, 2006d, 19)

Arcade is Benjamin's central image for the 19th century - hence, "the arcades project"- because the arcades were the material manifestations of the new experiences which the city residents were having as part of urban capitalist modernity. "All of the errors of bourgeois consciousness could be found there (commodity fetishism, reification, the world as "inwardness"), as well as (in fashion, prostitution, gambling) all of its utopian dreams" (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 39). The arcades were both street and interior at the same time, simultaneously serving as markets and amusement places. This ambiguity in the role of arcades is, on

Benjamin's view, characteristic of the bourgeois experience of that era (Jennings, 2006, p. 8): "The arcades as dream- and wish-image of the collective" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 905) was Benjamin's evaluation of these constructions whose outward side was the boulevards.

Benjamin's search for urban modernity is not so much to do with finding out the large-scale modifications in the societal totality but rather in the transformations of the concrete societal artifacts and the way they are experienced (Jennings, 2006, p. 8). He focuses on the arcades both as the expression of and the spatial area of these transformations. Baudelaire's poetry, on the other hand, produced in that critical period in Paris, expresses these transformations in aesthetic form. However, the relationship between the aesthetic expression and the social processes in which the work of art is situated is a complex question. Benjamin does not reduce artworks to passive objects created by historical dynamics in which they are produced. In this regard, though suffering the abstract formalism of Kantianism, Wölfflin's approach introduced an advance in the study of art objects. As said before, Warburg and Benjamin had significant points of convergence on the question of cultural history. Both argue that although the artwork should not be reduced to a passive product of history, still a kind of dichotomy between art history and cultural history as in Wölfflin needs to be overcome by integrating these two fields of study. They both believed that this could be achieved by the close analysis of individual works rather than formalist methods. On the question of artistic autonomy against the reduction to a passive historical product, Benjamin's essay, *The Author as Producer*, where Benjamin provides the artwork and artist with a kind of autonomy, is illuminating. Benjamin opens his essay with the observation that the autonomy of the artist has come into question in many circles: "you believe that the present social situation

compels him [the artist] to decide in whose service he is to place his activity” (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 768). The bourgeois author, whether he is aware of the objective function of his artistic activity or not, serves the bourgeois class interests whereas the politically conscious artist must now stand by the side of the proletariat and further its own class interests. This atmosphere creates a difficult situation for the artists: “on the one hand he is demanded on the one hand, the correct political line is demanded of the poet; on the other, one is justified in expecting his work to have quality” (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 768-769).

Benjamin’s solution for this conundrum is to define the political line and the artistic quality of the artwork in terms of one another: “I would like to show you that the tendency of a literary work can be politically correct only if it is also literarily correct” (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 769). Benjamin employs this new approach by changing the question upon which the debate of political line and artistic quality rest. Whereas the earlier question is “what is the attitude of a work *to* the relations of production of its time?”, focusing on the relationship that the artwork establishes with such classes formed by relations of production as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the new question Benjamin asks is “What is its position in them?”. This way, Benjamin orients the question of political line towards “the literary techniques of works” (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 770). The relations of production that the political line and the artistic quality of artwork are concerned with are not purely economic relations that stand outside the artwork but the artistic techniques of production. “These techniques are part of the productive forces of art, the stage of development of artistic production; and they involve a set of social relations between the artistic producer and his audience” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 57). With this change in the meaning of relations of production that the artwork is concerned with, Benjamin provides

artistic activity with autonomy which now has its own forces and relations of production such as the literary techniques of works, which cannot be reduced to forces and relations of production in the economic field. Accordingly, the issue of political line in artwork becomes a question concerning the position the artwork holds towards the forces and relations of artistic production, not economic production.

However, the acceptance of this autonomy of artwork and artistic activity does not mean an absolute separation from their historical conditions. Artwork must be integrated into the historical conditions, out of which it grows, without turning it into a passive product with no autonomy of its own. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, Benjamin is clear that the historical conditions out of which artwork emerges profoundly affect its nature. Under the peculiar conditions of technological reproducibility, the artwork tends to lose what Benjamin calls its “aura”, that is, the sense of distance the spectator feels towards the artwork as a unique creation. However, now that artworks can be replicated under the conditions of technological reproducibility, two conditions strip the artwork of its aura: “the desire of the present-day masses to “get closer” to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness” (Benjamin, 2006e, p. 105). Artworks, though enjoying a sense of autonomy that marks them not just as historical products but as artistic creations, are still historically produced. Historicity, for this reason, is an essential category in aesthetic perception on Benjamin’s view: “the way in which human perception is organized -the medium in which it occurs- is conditioned not only by nature but by history” (Benjamin, 2006e, p. 104). Hence, Warburg’s and Benjamin’s rejection of the dichotomy between art and cultural history in Wölfflin. The question of cultural history is not just to search for new

formal patterns that emerge with new historical epochs, as with Baudelaire's poetry during the Haussmannisation of Paris, but also their integration. As Panofsky once noted in a critique of Wölfflin "tying a formal pattern to an historical epoch "is not an explanation but requires explanations"" (Caygill, 2004, p. 77). The question, then, becomes how to integrate the poetry of Baudelaire with the urban capitalist modern environment in which he lived and produced his poems without reducing them to a passive product of external historical forces?

On this question, Benjamin does not provide a clear answer in his texts. Benjamin treats Baudelaire's poetry "as a social object, not a literary one" (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 57) so that he establishes an expressive connection between Baudelaire and the urban modern city of Paris. Yet, he does not write a theoretical text to clarify how he conceptualises their integration. Due to this, Adorno would criticise Benjamin upon receiving the manuscript of his work on Baudelaire. Adorno's critical letters mainly concern the three works of Benjamin: *The first draft of Paris - the Capital of the Nineteenth Century* (1935), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) and *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* (1938) (Jameson, 1980, p. 100). The Institute for Social Research, significantly due to the way Adorno handled the matter, refused to publish *The Paris of the Second Empire*, which, as perhaps the most crushing rejection of his intellectual career, left Benjamin in bleak mood (Jennings, 2006, p. 19). Worried that the Institute might cut off his funding, which as the main source of income for him at the time, he started to rewrite his work on Baudelaire. The mood, understandably was, depressive as he confessed to Scholem that the winter of 1938-1939 was "a period of protracted depression" while he was revising his work under the sense of "alienation from the present subject of my work" (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 159).

Adorno's letters contain detailed criticisms of Benjamin's work on Baudelaire. The most relevant in the context of this section is the charge of the use of mechanical, rather than dialectical, causality. Adorno argues that Benjamin still works within the framework of an undialectical materialist approach which, very much like the orthodox conception of the base and the superstructure, traces the elements of the superstructure immediately to the base with no dialectical mediation (Adorno, 1980, p. 128). One specific example Adorno gives is the way Benjamin treats the economic issue of wine duties and Baudelaire's poems on wine. Benjamin's passage goes:

This was the atmosphere that gave rise to the great poem entitled "Le Vin des chiffonniers" [The Ragpickers' Wine], which can be dated to the middle of the century. At that time, motifs which appear in this poem were being publicly discussed. One thing under discussion was the tax on wine. The Constituent Assembly of the Republic had promised its repeal, the same promise that had been made in 1830. In his *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* [Class Struggles in France], Marx showed how the repeal of this tax represented both a demand by the urban proletariat and a concurrent demand by the peasants. The tax was equally high on everyday wines and on the finest wines, and it decreased consumption "by setting up octrois [toll houses] at the gates of all cities with more than 4,000 inhabitants and changing every town into a foreign country with protective tariffs on French wine." ³² "Through the wine tax," wrote Marx, "the peasants tested the bouquet of the government." But this tax also harmed the city-dwellers and forced them to go to taverns outside the city limits in their search for cheap wine. There the tax-free wine which was called *le vin de la barrière* was dispensed. If one can believe H.-A. Fregier, section head at police headquarters, workers who imbibed that wine displayed their enjoyment-full of pride and defiance-as the only enjoyment granted them. (Benjamin, 2006d, p. 7)

Here, Adorno argues that Benjamin in a mechanical way relates the poem on wine to the socio-economic conditions which the taxes on wine were related to. However, instead of relating these two directly, what a dialectical materialist approach should do is to mediate their relationship through "the total social process" which involves an analysis of the commodity form (Adorno, 1980, p. 129). Even if some specific poems of Baudelaire may have indeed been motivated by the changes in wine duty,

“the recurrence of these motifs in his work can only be explained by the overall social and economic tendency of the age. . .” (Adorno, 1980, p. 129). Benjamin does not discuss the commodity form as a general phenomenon in the era. Instead, he goes from the specific commodity of wine to the specific poem of Baudelaire without the mediation of the general commodity form in the total social process.

Benjamin rejects Adorno’s claim that he constructs such immediate connection between the base and the superstructure. “Therefore, it seems a misjudgement of the matter to me if you find in my study ‘a direct inference from the wine duty to L’Ame du Vin’” (Benjamin, 1980a, 137). Instead, Benjamin here has recourse to another concept, namely, monad: “Thus the object constitutes itself as a monad” (Benjamin, 1980a, 137). Monad, as said before, is a concept that Benjamin took from Leibnitz (Nagele, 2004, p. 152). A monad is a unique fragment which, though containing an image of the whole, is not reducible to other fragments and so cannot be considered “a case of the general” (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 76). This image that the monad provides is a dialectical image that contains and intensifies the oppositions one experiences: “The dialectical oppositions or force-fields at whose frontier the commodity is forged— subject and object, history and nature, consciousness and material being— are developed into their most extreme form: at the intersecting axes of subject and object, nature and history, time and repetition, the dialectical image springs forth as a “stop” or a freeze, as the monadic crystallization of the supposedly implacable progression of historical time” (Pensky, 2004, p. 188).

Adorno, however, is not convinced. The immediate connection from the social fact of wine duties to the aesthetic expression of wine poems is problematic because it does not pose the question of integration as a complex process that mediates these two aspects, social and aesthetic, without reducing one to a passive

state. Benjamin does not accept that his work rests on such an assumption. Given his approach to cultural history and artworks, Benjamin must be aware of this problem on a theoretical level, but how far he could overcome it in the concrete practice of writing cultural history and literary criticism is another question. Whether Adorno is correct or not, Benjamin offers little discussion in his texts on Baudelaire on this particular issue.

In this thesis, I explore the general social process of urban modernisation in China in Chapter 3 but do not discuss in detail the complex question of the integration of modern Chinese literature and the dynamics of urban modernity. I argue that the changes in the Chinese cities, especially in Shanghai and Beijing, were the conditions out of which a genre on rickshaw pullers emerged as a part of modern Chinese literature, especially the May Fourth literature in the wake of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. However, the complex interactions between these material conditions on the one hand and the literary expressions on the other require further study. Due to this, I often cite literary texts along with social texts as if they belonged to the same textual stratum. Yet, one must further explore the emergence of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “the literary field” (Bourdieu, 1996), through which Chinese literary texts are mediated. Bürger, in examining the avant-garde art movements, points out that “works of art are not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks and conditions that largely determine the function of their works” (Bürger, 1987, p. 12). In this thesis, I do not investigate the institutional frameworks, the literary field, within which the literary works of modern Chinese literature come to be perceived. Although this is a major deficiency, I attempt to avoid the error of reducing literary texts to passive products of their historical conditions which they merely reflect. This, for example, can be seen in the

examination of the first antinomy. Although, I argue, there was a close connection between the historical conditions of urban modernity in which Lao She found himself and his novel, *Camel Xiangzi* (骆驼祥子), the literary expression of the first antinomy in the novel does not passively reflect its concrete social form. Homo economicus may not have been the actual ideal of the real rickshaw pullers in Beijing but it was through the deployment of this trope that Lao She mediated and gave the first antinomy of Chinese urban modernity a literary expression. In this regard, Lydia's criticism of Strand on *Camel Xiangzi* is worth keeping in mind: the treatment of the novel as a realist representation of its own conditions of production both obscures the performative aspect of the novel itself and his own interpretative stance (Lydia, 1995, p. 111).

1.5 Historiography and antinomy

So far, it has been shown that on Benjamin's view cultural history has no such task of reconciling opposing forces produced out of the social tensions and contradictions. On the contrary, the task of cultural history is to demonstrate their irreconcilability through culture and art by employing the technique of literary montage to organise historical fragments into a configuration of juxtaposition. Although Benjamin is not so clear on the question of the integration of history and art, still the same principle of historical montage that rests on juxtaposition guides them both. The demonstration of the irreconcilability of contradictions and the technique of historical montage as the reassembling of various fragments in a reconstructed context of juxtaposition are essential to cultural history. Given the element of irreconcilability in contradictions, I argue that the concept of antinomy is useful to further elucidate this issue.

Antinomy comes from Kant's Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant argues that there are some statements with regard to which "the affirmative and the negative can be defended with equally valid proof and logically correct arguments" (Carus, 1915, 627). These contradictions arise on Kant's view when reason does not accept the distinction between the phenomena and the noumena, that is, the world as it appears to us and the world in itself. As we saw, Kant believes that our experience is of necessity a synthetic product which undergoes a process that structures our sense perceptions. The world that we can know through our experience, then, is already the world that is in a way structured by our pure intuitions and concepts. This is the phenomenal world, the world as it appears to us. The world in itself, the noumena, on the other hand, is the world that has not undergone this synthetic process. This world, on Kant's view, is not accessible to rational knowledge, though for practical reasons we may choose to hold some beliefs about it. Kant argues that when reason does not limit its field of applicability by accepting this distinction between the noumena and the phenomena, it runs into antinomies (Guyer and Wood, 1998, p. 16).

Hegel, though in agreement with Kant on some points, shares significant disagreements, too. Firstly, Hegel agrees with Kant that antinomies necessarily emerge when reason attempts to go beyond the limits of possible experience, that is, transcend the phenomenal world. The general structure of antinomies in Kant is a contradiction between the conditioned and the unconditioned. When reason seeks to find out the unconditioned by going beyond the phenomenal world that is conditioned by the limits of possible experience, there emerges a contradiction between the unconditioned and the conditioned. For example, the first antinomy in Kant's transcendental dialectic concerns the infinity and finitude of space and time.

This antinomy emerges from the conditioned view of space and time that “the world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries” as the thesis and the unconditioned view of space and time that “the world has no beginning and no bounds in space, but is infinite with regard to both time and space” as the antithesis (Kant, 1998, 470-475 [A427—A433]).

Kant argues that there are in total four such antinomies. Hegel, however, disagrees with this. On Hegel’s view, there is a multiplicity of antinomies. Secondly, Hegel disagrees with Kant that antinomies concern reason only: these contradictions are not merely located in thought but in the world itself (Forster, 1999, p. 142).

Thirdly, Hegel draws radically different conclusions than Kant from the existence of antinomies. Whereas Kant argues that, since understanding when it attempts to go beyond the limits of possible experience runs into antinomies, the solution to this problem is to limit our reason, Hegel rejects such limitations. Instead, understanding must transcend itself by going beyond its finite limits. This is to be done not by accepting an absolute distinction between the noumena and the phenomena but by uniting them, by showing the noumena and the phenomena, the unconditioned and the conditioned, are all necessary parts of a single indivisible whole (Beiser, 1999, p. 165-166).

In the Encyclopedia, Hegel distinguishes between three different moments. The first one is the moment of understanding that posits an unconditioned: “thinking as understanding does not budge beyond the firm determinateness [of what is entertained] and its distinctness over against others” (Hegel, 2010, p. 126). The next moment, which Hegel calls the dialectical moment, “is the self-sublation of such finite determinations by themselves and their transition into their opposites” (Hegel, 2010, p. 128). In the dialectical moment, thought negates the self-assured firmness of

the moment of understanding by creating plausible scepticism. These two moments are similar to Kant's view of antinomies in that the moment of understanding initially produces an unconditioned statement and then the dialectical moment contradicts it by introducing a conditioned opposition. The final moment, "the speculative or the positively rational", resolves this contradiction by grasping "the unity of determinations in their opposition, that is, the unity of the unconditioned of the moment of understanding and the conditioned of the dialectical moment (Hegel, 2010, p. 132). This unity, now positing itself as the positively rational, is open to further development as the next dialectical moment problematises it as itself conditioned (Beiser, 1999, p. 168).

Because Hegel locates antinomies in the world itself rather than in thought alone, contrary to Kant, he does not regard antinomies as mere illusions. Antinomies arise out of the historical dynamics in the world itself and are real contradictions that go beyond the realm of thought. Seen this way, antinomies point us towards the world and its real dynamics which inevitably create tensions and contradictions. These tensions and contradictions do not create a transhistorical number of antinomies such as four as in Kant. Their number is context-specific as they are produced under definite historical conditions. Historicity is an essential part of Hegel's view: unlike Kant, Hegel employs a historical approach towards philosophical categories. Whereas Kant is concerned with the a priori principles of a transhistorical pure reason, Hegel historicises philosophy and reason. This is true for antinomies, too: "Rather than claiming that they were the product of pure reason, as Kant had done, the philosopher should see them as the result of history" (Beiser, 1999, p. 273). What appears to us as given, eternal, or natural, must be conceived as

the product of human activity within a specific historical and cultural context (Beiser, 1999, p. 272).

Lukacs's seminal *History and Class Consciousness* was a highly influential work that would emphasise the Hegelian roots of Marxism. Opposing the mechanistic and deterministic Marxism of the Second International (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 25), Lukacs would call for a Hegelian Marxism against Kant and Kantianism. For Lukacs, "Kant's work epitomized the bourgeoisie's inability to transcend the dualism of its concrete existence and achieve a totalistic grasp of reality" (Jay, 1984, p. 44). Kant's dismissal of dialectics as a legitimate mode of cognition resulted in the ahistorical transformation of historically specific contradictions of bourgeois society into the eternal categories of universal pure reason. The separation of the world into the knowable phenomena on the one hand and the noumena on the other is a symptom of this: "The transcendental dialectic with its sharp distinction between phenomena and noumena repudiates all attempts by 'our' reason to obtain knowledge of the second group of objects" (Lukacs, 1972, p. 115). Yet, the elevation of this distinction to a universal status obscures the historical material roots out of which it emerges. Hegel's importance for Lukacs significantly derives from his drive for historicity. As Hegel regarded all philosophical categories as historically produced, so he attempted to overcome the dualisms Kant had established as eternal through the historical processes that engendered them in the first place. Just as history creates dualisms, so can it also resolve them in a higher synthesis.

Lukacs's arguably most original contribution, which influenced a range of Marxists from the Frankfurt School to Benjamin, was to treat the contradictions in different spheres such as philosophy, art, and so on, as sharing in the same structure

of social totality without reducing them to the economic sphere (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 26):

The theoretical point we are anxious to emphasise here is merely the structural fact that the single aspect is not a segment of a mechanical totality that could be put together out of such segments, for this would lead us to see knowledge as an infinite progression. It must be seen instead as containing the possibility of unravelling the whole abundance of the totality from within itself. (Lukacs, 1972, p. 170).

The different aspects of society which constitutes a whole, on this view, can be examined in terms of their own tensions and contradictions without reducing them to the epiphenomena of a single aspect (e.g. the economic). Just as in the economic aspect, there are tensions and contradictions arising from the commodity form, so are there different tensions and contradictions in the other aspects of society. This way, Lukacs counters the mechanistic and deterministic Marxism of the Second International that took the economic aspect as the causal source of all phenomena in the other aspects of society. Instead, phenomena belonging to different aspects than the economic can be examined on their own because they share a similar structure of social totality that is manifested differently in different aspects.

This approach Lukacs provides grants culture and art a sort of autonomy that resists being reduced to the economic phenomena. As said earlier, Benjamin's conception of the author as producer positions the author not towards the economic but towards the artistic relations of production. This allows Benjamin to explore the tensions and contradictions of an artwork from the point of the artistic relations of production. However, because different aspects of society still share in the same structure of totality, The aesthetic aspect must be related to the other aspects of society. Hence, the need to integrate art and history, the artwork and the supra-artistic conditions that give rise to it.

However, one significant difference between Lukacs and Benjamin concerns the question of totality. In the debate on Expressionism and modernism between Ernst Bloch and Lukacs, the two sides expressed their disagreements on some key issues. One issue in the debate was the question of totality. Lukacs argues that objectively speaking “the life of the people is a continuum” so that the proper practice of art must capture “the progressive tendencies of people” in an accurate realist representation of the social totality in which people live (Lukacs, 1980, p. 55). Bloch, against Lukacs, argues that his approach is the truly realist one because the way Lukacs conceptualises reality which the social totality consists of does not account for the fact that reality itself is discontinuous. Bloch contends that:

Whether such a totality in fact constitutes reality, is open to question. If it does, then Expressionist experiments with disruptive and interpolative techniques are but an empty *jeu d'esprit*, as are the more recent experiments with montage and other devices of discontinuity. But what if Lukacs's reality - a coherent, infinitely mediated totality - is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity? (Bloch, 1980, p. 22)

If, Bloch reasons, the reality that the social totality consists of is itself discontinuous, then the kind of smooth continuity that Lukacs' conception of totality rests on leads to an unrealistic representation of the social totality because it ignores its discontinuous character. Unconvinced by this argument, Lukacs maintains that the discontinuous view of reality actually rests on an unrealistic conception of the social totality. Lukacs criticises Bloch and modernist art for regarding “the history of the people as a great jumblesale”. Denying the real living force of culture, modernism instead treats cultural legacy as “a heap of lifeless objects in which one can rummage around at will, picking whatever one happens to need at the moment” (Lukacs, 1980, p. 54). Hence, the importance of montage in modernist art:

Montage represents the pinnacle of this movement and for this reason we are grateful to Bloch for his decision to set it so firmly in the centre of modernist

literature and thought. In its original form, as photomontage, it is capable of striking effects, and on occasion it can even become a powerful political weapon. Such effects arise from its technique of juxtaposing heterogeneous, unrelated pieces of reality torn from their context. A good photomontage has the same sort of effect as a good joke. (Lukacs, 1980, p. 43)

Although Benjamin does not directly join the debate, he expresses his views through conversations with Brecht. Brecht argues against Lukacs that his understanding of realism does not take into account the real changes that society has been undergoing, whose accurate representation may require new literary techniques to be employed. Instead, the meaning of realism together with the proper literary techniques for Lukacs are fixed by a narrow range of realist novelists like Balzac, Thomas Mann, and Tolstoy. Yet, modernist techniques such as montage, inner monologue, and so on, can as well be used to accurately represent the world we live in. In his great modernist novel, *Ulysses*, James Joyce employs the technique of inner monologue to represent a petty bourgeois woman who “lies in bed in the morning and meditates”. “Her thoughts are reproduced disconnectedly, criss-crossing, flowing into each other” (Brecht, 1980, p. 73). To reject modernist methods as Lukacs does in favour of continuous totality fails to accurately represent the life of such a petty bourgeois woman whose discontinuous form is better represented by the modernist technique of inner monologue. These different evaluations of discontinuity and different conceptions of totality have consequences on the way Lukacs and Brecht approach the question of contradiction:

Lukács, as we have seen, regards the literary work as a ‘spontaneous whole’ which reconciles the capitalist contradictions between essence and appearance, concrete and abstract, individual and social whole. In overcoming these alienations, art recreates wholeness and harmony. Brecht, however, believes this to be a reactionary nostalgia. Art for him should expose rather than remove those contradictions, thus stimulating men to abolish them in real life... (Eagleton, 2003, p. 65)

In other words, the emphasis on continuity in the conception of totality on Lukacs's part leads to an affirmative understanding of art and culture in which the proper practice of artistic activity reconciles the social contradictions the artist experiences in reality. This reconciliation leads to the affirmation of what Lukacs calls "progressive tendencies of people". This, however, leads to a conservative understanding of culture on Brecht's view, because the task of culture is not to affirm the existing "progressive" forces of society but rather to expose the existing contradictions of society to create forces which as yet do not exist. Brecht, like modernism, in this regard puts his emphasis on the new: As Benjamin writes in his conversations with Brecht: "A Brechtian maxim: 'Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones'" (Benjamin, 1980b, p. 99).

Benjamin's understanding of culture and history is closer to Brecht's than Lukacs' on this issue. The use of montage, which Benjamin, taking it from the modernist avant-garde movements, aims to apply to cultural history, is meant to disrupt the sense of continuity in historical time. The continuum of history is blast open by the historical materialist practice of cultural history. Thus, although Benjamin is influenced by Lukacs' approach on the different aspects of social totality as irreducible to the economic aspect alone, still his own conception of cultural history and aesthetics rests on a radically different evaluation of continuity and a different conception of social totality.

On this point, a connection can be made with Hegel's treatment of antinomies. Lukacs was defending a form of Hegelian Marxism against the Kantian versions of Marxism which he regarded as mechanistic and deterministic. Antinomies on Hegel's view become contradictions that await their resolution in a positively rational moment. This view is problematic because, as we saw with

Benjamin's understanding of cultural history, it subordinates tensions and contradictions to an eventual reconciliation. Hegelian dialectics, with its emphasis on reconciliation and progress, fails to break from the Enlightenment idea of progress which Benjamin criticises with a Romantic influence. Lukacs's approach, drawing on Hegel's dialectics, is influenced by this affirmative aspect. Benjamin's understanding of dialectics, on the other hand, displays a critical aspect against such affirmation:

But Lukacs, relying on Hegel's philosophical legacy, was led ultimately to a totalizing conception of metaphysical transcendence, whereas Benjamin, schooled in the very different tradition of the Baroque allegorical poets, remained focused on the fragmentary, transitory object. (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.160)

With his focus on fragmentation, Benjamin does not employ an affirmative notion of totality in the practice of cultural history. On the contrary, historical materialist practice, he believes, must dismantle constructed totalities by exposing the tensions and contradictions with the technique of historical montage which creates juxtapositions and intensifications rather than reconciliations and higher syntheses.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the general intellectual context Benjamin was in and explained his understanding of art and cultural history. Having gone through several intellectual phases, Benjamin's thought both underwent transformations and came back to some similar themes from different perspectives. The Romantic influence on Benjamin was significant in his criticism of the progressivist conceptions of history together with the temporal scheme they were based upon. As Benjamin turned towards Marxism and avant-garde movements, his interest in developing a method of studying art and history which did not fall into the errors of historicism would

continue to develop. His studies on the German mourning during the Baroque era, Baudelaire's poetry and the new urban modern city of Paris, and so on were in one way or another positioned against a kind of cultural history that would create a homogenous empty space to add the historical and art objects into in a progressive narrative of the course of history or a cyclical narrative of life. For Benjamin, the practice of cultural history must expose the tensions and contradictions social dynamics create without offering a reconciliation.

The point of irreconciliation of contradictions on the part of Benjamin is an essential point of divergence with a wide range of figures from Warburg to Nietzsche, from Hegel to Lukacs. Although Benjamin does not in a satisfying way solve the question of integration of art and history without reducing art to a passive product of history, on which point Adorno criticises him, his conception of cultural history still aims to explore both art and history through their contradictions without falling into an ultimate moment of higher synthesis. The concept of antinomy, defined as unreconciled contradiction, in this regard is useful to think about the way tensions and contradictions cultural historian encounters ought to be conceptualised.

CHAPTER 2

INVISIBLE CITIES

I think we are always searching for something hidden or merely potential or hypothetical, following traces whenever they appear on the surface... The word connects the visible trace with the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a frail emergency bridge flung over an abyss.
Italo Calvino (Calvino, 1988, p. 77)

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, it is argued that history is the general context of art and culture. Artistic and cultural practices, though not reducible to them, emerge under definite historical conditions which make their existence possible. In this thesis, I will treat Chinese urban landscape, especially the cities of Shanghai and Beijing, as the general historical conditions of possibility for the emergence of rickshaws both as a modern technology of urban transportation and as an aesthetic phenomenon of Chinese modern literature. As urban material objects, they need to be contextualised in the larger urban landscape within which they are situated. This requires theoretical discussions on the way to examine Chinese cities as the general historical context out of which rickshaws in the material as well as in the literary sense emerged.

In this Chapter, I will offer such discussions. Drawing on Italo Calvino's view of urban existence in his novel, *Invisible Cities*, and Walter Benjamin's conception of cultural history, I will examine Shanghai and Beijing by distinguishing between three different senses of invisible cities. I discuss each sense of invisibility in the subsequent sections.

The first sense of invisibility concerns the relationship between material morphology and cultural imagination in the cities. This sense of invisibility bears relevance for the Marxist categories of the base and the superstructure. After 1924, as Benjamin was increasingly drawn into Marxism and Surrealism, his view of the base and the superstructure was heavily influenced by Surrealist ideas, especially those of Andre Breton. I argue that material morphology and the dream images in cultural imagination, which contain the desires and dreams of the urban inhabitants, are intrinsically interrelated. The visible material morphology embodies the invisible dream images which become materialised through it.

The second sense of invisibility concerns the question of comparative analysis. Cities are not distinct, self-enclosed and pre-existing entities that await comparison but their identities are constituted within an interactive context. I argue that this interaction can be seen in the textual representations of cities. Cities are textual beings which produce textual fields in which they are represented.

The third sense of invisibility concerns the question of historicity. Cities have their histories and their visible present form emerges out of their past that now stands invisibly in the background. By drawing on Benjamin's discussion of historicity, I try to conceptualise the relationship between the past and the present, the old and the new, in a dynamic way.

2.2 Cities: visible and invisible

In examining Beijing and Shanghai as the urban historical context in which rickshaws were situated, I will employ three senses of invisibility for cities. The term, invisible city, comes from Italo Calvino's novel. I draw on this novel's themes

as a general background to introduce the three senses of invisibility. Then, in the ensuing sections, I will explain each sense further by relating them to Benjamin's historical materialism and cultural history.

Calvino's novel is structured as a dialogue between Marco Polo and Kubla Khan, in which the former recounts to the latter the cities he has been visiting in his travels. Calvino points out in the lecture he gave on the novel, *Invisible Cities* does not deal with recognisable cities (Calvino, 1978, p. 37). The invisible cities of Calvino share real and surreal elements. Calvino, however, argues that the idea of the city in the novel "is not outside time" as it rests on a discussion of the city in general, which aroused the interest of a number of town planners (Calvino, 1983, p. 40). For Calvino, "a city is a combination of many elements: memory, desires, signs of a language; it is a place of exchange, as any textbook of economic history will tell you—only, these exchanges are not just trade in goods, they also involve words, desires, and memories" (Calvino, 1983, p. 41).

This description is a useful starting point. Cities are combinations of many elements, which include memories and desires. This aspect of cities in the novel brings Calvino to the metaphor of dreams:

With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else. (Calvino, 1978, p. 44)

This is the first sense of invisibility in cities I will discuss. Cities, like dreams, express some desires and fears of its inhabitants but these desires and fears are not apparent at first sight. In fact, when given this description, Kublai denies that his dreams express any desire or fear but are instead made either by his mind or by chance and Marco Polo responds that cities, too, believe they have no desire or fear

but are the work of a mind or a result of chance, yet “neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls” (Calvino, 1978, p. 44).

The visible material morphology of cities reflects the invisible dream images of their inhabitants. The material morphology of the urban landscape, in other words, embodies certain desires and dreams that themselves become materialised through urban constructions. The bare materiality of cities that is immediately visible does not “suffice to hold up their walls.” This is true of Chinese cities, too. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the material morphology of Chinese walls was essentially embedded within the traditional Chinese cosmology that had certain dream images.

Besides this sense, however, Calvino expresses another sense of invisibility in the novel. In a dialogue between Kublai and Marco Polo, Kublai observes that despite all the numerous cities Marco Polo recounts to him, there is one which he never speaks of. That is the city of Venice, the place from which Marco Polo had come. Yet, Marco Polo with a smile tells the great Khan that he in fact has been speaking of Venice all along in recounting the other cities. Upon this, the Khan demands that he be told about Venice when he asks about Venice and about other cities when he asks about other cities. Why would Marco Polo tell him about Venice when what he wishes to hear of is other cities? Marco Polo responds: “To distinguish other cities’ qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice” (Calvino, 1978, p. 86). This is the second sense of invisibility that we find in the novel. When we try to apprehend a city, we do so on the basis of comparisons: we translate the new urban fabric that we encounter into the pattern we are familiar with. However, in this process we transform what we are familiar with, too:

“Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” Polo said.
“Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little. (Calvino, 1978, p. 87)

To speak of other cities, one needs a sense of city-ness, of what a city consists of, which remains implicit in the background as an organising model, without which one would not be able to recognise other cities as cities in the first place. If one wishes to interrogate this invisible city on the basis of which one recognises other cities, one can do so only by losing its role as one's organising model because now as the city in question, one needs another invisible city as the new organising model by which one recognises this invisible entity as a city. However, things are not so mechanical like this, as Marco Polo's final remark suggests. The invisible city is not in total isolation from the numerous other cities one observes. In engaging with them, one already starts losing little by little the invisible city in the background as it is transformed with each new experience that adds a new meaning to what it means to be a city. This second sense of invisibility raises the question of comparative analysis.

There is a final sense of invisibility that Calvino expresses by addressing the relationship between the past and the present:

All this so that Marco Polo could explain or imagine explaining or he imagined explaining or succeed finally in explaining to himself that what he sought was always something lying ahead, and even if it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced on his journey, because the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed, not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the more remote past. Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.
(Calvino, 1978, p. 28-29)

The third sense of invisibility concerns the temporal relationship between the past, the present, and the future, that is, historicity that goes beyond the immediate visibility of the present. However, by the historicity of the city, one should not conceptualise the past as a self-enclosed area which exists apart from the present and the future. Instead, as in the passage cited above, the past and the present are situated

within an interactive relationship so that they both affect each other rather than being compartmentalised into different self-enclosed regions. As the traveller advances on his journey in the present, his past changes alongside: the past of the traveller is constantly rewritten as the traveller in the present is no longer the same traveller. All the experiences, events, and places take up a different hue as they now belong to a different person. Drawing on what Benjamin calls “the Copernican revolution in historical perception”, I conceptualise the relationship between the past and the present as situated in the question of “now-recognisability” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 389). It is for this reason that the traveller, as he travels and meets new people, finds again a past of his that he did not know he had. This moment of recognition, like Proust’s involuntary memory, captures the past “as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognisability” (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 390). Thus, Benjamin is concerned with memory and dreams as well as forgetting. The urban objects for Benjamin are the relics of the past that bear the traces of what has been. “A city is like an archive of involuntary memory, and Benjamin approaches it as a collector entering a museum of mirrors” (Patke, 2003, p. 292). The urban objects through their historicity have the power to invoke involuntary memories of collective consciousness. In this regard, Benjamin draws a close parallel between the experience of awakening and that of remembering: “Therefore: remembering and awaking are most intimately related. Awakening is namely the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 389).

2.3 Material morphology and dream images in cities: the first sense of invisibility

As we saw, starting in 1924, Benjamin would increasingly turn from Romanticism towards Marxism and the contemporary European cultural concerns, especially the avant-garde movements. Benjamin in 1923 began to intermingle with a different group of Berlin intellectuals. This group would later be called the “G-Group”. In late 1922 and early 1923, when refugees from different nations and aesthetic directions began to gather in Berlin, a new avant-garde started to form (Jennings, 2004, p. 21). Benjamin here experienced a kind of “proto-Surrealism” and his contact with the ideas from a Paris Dada together with his visits to Paris after 1924 would produce a deep influence on his thought (Jennings, 2004, p. 31). In his 1929 essay on Surrealism, Benjamin would give a very positive and incisive evaluation of the Surrealist movement. The text also shows Benjamin’s interest in Marxism and Communist politics, which Surrealists themselves were also interested in.

Andre Breton, the leader of the Surrealist group that notably involved Louis Aragon, Theodore Fraenkel, Paul Eluard, and Philippe Soupault (Hopkins, 2004, p.14), insists that Surrealism is not a body of doctrines, nor a definable idea, but instead an activity, a practice, which had been heavily shaped by the war time experiences (Clifford, 1981, p. 539-541). This activity, like an ethnographer, would problematise the given ‘natural’ familiar environment by employing defamiliarising strategies to turn it into an object of question (Clifford, 1981, p. 542). In these strategies of Surrealism, dream occupies a central place. Its founder, Andre Breton, heavily influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and interpretation of dreams, which he was first introduced while serving in the First World War as a medic, would later express his interest in dreams as an essential part of our lives in the First Manifesto of Surrealism. Breton argues that dreams are still often neglected by the

excessive attention we pay to “our waking events” (Breton, 1999a, p. 434) in reality. instead, he calls for a reconciliation of these two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, which we often take to be absolute opposites, into a synthesis that he calls surreality: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, a surreality, if one may so speak” (Breton, 1999a, p. 436). Nadja, the mysterious female character in the first work of Breton’s prose trilogy (Nadja, Communicating Vessels, Mad Love) (Cohen, 1995, p. 10), gives a glimpse into such a resolution: “You know, that’s how I talk to myself when I’m alone, I tell myself all kinds of stories. And not only silly stories: *actually, I live this way altogether* [emphasis mine]” (Breton, 1960, p. 74).

This Surrealist interest in dreams moved in a political, more precisely, a Communist revolutionary direction like Dada (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 187) and involved an attempt to combine Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist historical materialism. In the Second Manifesto of Surrealism, having rejected the Hegelian-Idealist type of dialectics, Breton declares Surrealism’s allegiance with Historical Materialism “completely, without any reservations” (Breton, 1999b, p. 447).

In his attempt to combine historical materialism and psychoanalysis, Breton would problematise the strict separations that the more orthodox versions of Marxism employed in the form of a chasm between the material base and the non-material superstructure. The differentiation of society into a material base and a non-material superstructure can be traced back to Marx. However, its proper meaning has been a matter of dispute, even when Marx was still alive. Against the economic-determinist readings of Marx, on which the material base unilaterally and absolutely determines the superstructure, Engels in his letter to Joseph Bloch on 21 September 1890 offers a different reading:

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final analysis, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, namely constitutions set up by the ruling class after a victorious battle, etc., forms of law and, the reflections of all these real struggles in the minds of the participants, i. e. political, philosophical and legal theories, religious views and the expansion of the same into dogmatic systems — all these factors also have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles of which, in many cases, they largely determine the form. (Engels, 2010, p. 34-35)

Against the economic deterministic reading of Marx's base-superstructure causality, Engels proposes a two-way causal interpretation in which, though the economic base still preserves its primacy, it is not the only causal factor in the formation of social phenomena. The superstructural elements that are not economic, have a causal power of their own, by which they act upon the economic base. This way, the relationship between the base and the superstructure becomes a kind of interaction: both the base and the superstructure have the power to influence the course of history.

However, on this new interpretation of the base and the superstructure, though clearly more flexible than the strictly economistic reading, Engels still shares a common ground with it. This common ground, as Colletti observes, is the separability of the economic and the non-economic relations into self-contained spheres. This had the result that social production, now conceptually separated from all its socio-historical content which is ascribed to the superstructure as a different sphere, is turned into "production techniques". The base, this way, becomes the realm of technology whose social aspect is banished to a different realm even if it is admitted that this realm still has the power to affect it (Colletti, 1974, p. 65). Derek Sayer, in agreement with this criticism, argues that the right conceptual move should not be to maintain the imagined separation of the material and the social while

ascribing them interactive causal powers but to deconstruct this very separation itself by showing how the social is implied in the material and the material in the social (Sayer, 1987, p. 25-28). E.P. Thompson points out the erroneous historical practices such a separation can lead to (Thompson, 1981, p. 8). Following Thompson's argument, Ellen M. Wood calls for "a refusal of any analytic distinction that conceals the social character of the 'material' itself", instead of separating these two into the base and the superstructure and, in order to avoid economic determinism, ascribing to them relative causal autonomy (Wood, 2000, 74).

Breton's Surrealist alignment of the base and the superstructure as the categories of historical materialism with reality and dream as the categories of psychoanalysis has a similar deconstructive effect on these distinctions. He argues both that psychoanalysis shows the error of separating the state of sleeping and the state of waking as two entirely distinct modes of consciousness and that historical materialism shows the error of separating the base and the superstructure as two entirely distinct realms of social existence (Cohen, 1995, p. 126-127). The second book of his trilogy, *Communicating Vessels*, contains relevant passages.

The very title of the book gives the sense of crossing boundaries. "Communicating Vessels" comes from a scientific experiment where "in vessels joined by a tube, a gas or liquid passing from one to the other rises to the same level in each, whatever the form of the vessels", thereby giving the impression of "passing back and forth between two modes" which is "the basis of Surrealist thought, of Surreality itself" (Caws, 1997, p. ix). In this process of communication, dreams occupy a central place. For this reason, the book contains long discussions on the different views of psychoanalysts, intermingled with Breton recounting his personal memories and interpretations of them as well as his remarks on more collective

issues like revolution and love. Freud, unsurprisingly, is discussed, too, but not uncritically. That which is essential to retain from Freud's work, Breton argues, is "the method of interpretation of dreams" (Breton, 1997, p. 20), but Freud's concrete applications or more general conclusions he has drawn from them are open to criticism. One error that Breton detects in Freud is the slippage into a kind of dualism between the "psychic reality" and "material reality" despite the monist orientation of his approach (Breton, 1997, p. 13). For Breton, the task at hand, which is also the project of Surrealism, is to overcome such dualisms by casting "a *conduction wire* between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life for life and the revolution, and so on" (Breton, 1997, p. 87).

Breton at this point draws on Marxism to carry out this task (Cohen, 1995, p. 124-125). In the fourth thesis on Feuerbach, Marx remarks on the duplication of the world into two distinct realms, into a religious realm and a secular realm, that Feuerbach regards as an effect of religious self-alienation. However, Marx continues, "that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis". (Marx, 1998, p. 570). That is, Marx argues that the root causes of the religious fantasies in the clouds need to be sought in the material basis of life, whose contradictions and tensions create such fantasies in the first place. The absolute separation of a secular and a religious realm thus collapses as one sees the causal relationship between them. Breton applies this thesis to the separation of dreams and reality:

But in the same way [as the religious realm in Marx's thesis] that the dream draws all its elements from reality and implies beyond that the recognition of no other or new reality – so that the splitting of human life into action and

dream, which people try equally to make us consider as antagonistic, is similarly a purely formal division, a fiction. . . (Breton, 1997, p. 115)

The reality of wakefulness and the dream of sleeping are not two distinct realms for Breton. Instead, the dream realm, like the religious realm, takes its elements from the reality of wakefulness. However, because people do not see the causal relationship between them, they mistake dream and reality to constitute two independent areas, just as people, unaware of the material roots of religious beliefs, imagine that there is a divine realm beyond the earthly realm, each with their own distinct existence. This, for Breton, results in a split of dream and action. As dream and reality suffer an insurmountable split, the will that interprets the elements that we experience in reality into our dreams and the will that pushes us to carry out such and such actions in the practical affairs of the real world after we wake up remain radically opposed to each other (Breton, 1997, p. 115). The task of Surrealism is to unite dream and reality into surreality by “combining the need to transform the world radically and to interpret it as completely as possible” (Breton, 1997, p. 127). This, however, is possible only if one is armed with a materialist philosophy that dispels dualist mystifications that raise insurmountable walls in human life. “It is only when we really acquire the notion of their identity that we will be able to take advantage of their difference, so as to reinforce the material conception of the real world by their *unity*” (Breton, 1997, p. 107-108).

It is, however, not just a matter of tracing dreams mechanically back to their material causes in real life, because, and in this Breton follows psychoanalysis, our perception of reality itself is already heavily shaped by our dreams and desires. We do not have a direct access to a dream-free material reality, which can serve as a certain index for elucidating our dreams. To believe that one can have such immediate access would itself tacitly have to rely on a separation of dreams and

reality (one can have access to a reality *totally as separate from dreams*), which separation Breton rejects as a false dualism. Thus, the rejection of dream-reality dualism cuts both ways: on the one hand, dreams are no longer the phenomena of a distinct realm that is inexplicable in terms of our experiences in the real world when we are awake; on the other, reality is not the realm of sober wakefulness that is not affected by the dreams and desires that we experience in our dreams when we sleep. Breton, by arguing that both dreams and reality are essential parts of the one and the same human life, problematises their absolute separation while still maintaining their difference. Dreams are not reality and reality is not dreams, just as sleeping is not waking and waking is not sleeping. These categories are clearly different but now their difference contextualised within “the notion of their identity” as essential parts of the same individual’s life, one can take advantage of their difference for a new materialist conception of “the real world by their unity”.

Surrealism was a significant influence on Benjamin and his use of dreams and wakefulness in his own historical materialist studies bears this influence. In the Arcades project, Benjamin, like Surrealism under the influence of psychoanalysis, rejects an absolute separation of dream and real consciousness. Instead, human consciousness “yields before an unending variety of concrete states of consciousness conditioned by every conceivable level of wakefulness within all possible centers” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 389). This conceptualisation of consciousness as discontinuous and interpenetrated allows Benjamin to problematise the stark dualities that more orthodox interpretations of Marxism rested on. In a key passage where he elaborates his formulation of the base and superstructure, this can be seen clearly:

On the doctrine of the ideological superstructure. It seems, at first sight, that Marx wanted to establish here only a causal relation between superstructure and infrastructure. But already the observation that ideologies of the superstructure reflect conditions falsely and invidiously goes beyond this.

The question, in effect, is the following: if the infrastructure in a certain way (in the materials of thought and experience) determines the superstructure, but if such determination is not reducible to simple reflection, how is it then-entirely apart from any question about the originating cause-to be characterized? As its expression. The superstructure is the expression of the infrastructure. The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure-precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the contents of dreams, which, from a causal point of view, it may be said to "condition." The collective, from the first, expresses the conditions of its life. These find their expression in the dream and their interpretation in the awakening. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 392)

In this passage, Benjamin first acknowledges that if one considers the formulations that Marx himself uses to expound his conceptualisation of the relationship between the base and the superstructure, it indeed does seem as if he wished to establish a mechanical causal link between them. It does not matter whether this mechanical causal link rests on a one-way view as in the vulgar economic readings where the base totally determines the superstructure, reducing it to a simple effect of its own dynamics, or a more sophisticated two-way view as in the corrective letters of Engels. However, even though there is a degree of causal autonomy of the superstructure in the latter view, it still does not dispense with the absolute separation of the superstructure from the base. Benjamin, on the other hand, like Breton, wishes to explore how these two categories flow into each other, blurring their distinctness.

The two different terms Benjamin uses here, reflection and expression, respectively correspond to these two different conceptions of the base and the superstructure. Reflection conceptualises the superstructure as an absolutely distinct sphere from the base, which it may, however, causally affect in turn. Expression, on the other hand, regards the category of the base as already distorted by the superstructure whose causal determination by the base Benjamin as a materialist does not deny. The base on this view turns out to already contain a superstructural aspect since its identity is already shaped by the superstructure and the superstructure turns

out to contain a basic aspect because as the material foundation the base causally shapes the superstructure.

This means that for Benjamin there is no pure history of the different aspects from which the history of a society can be written. Whether economic, social, cultural, political, or some other aspect, they intermingle with each other:

Historical materialism aspires to neither a homogeneous nor a continuous exposition of history. From the fact that the superstructure reacts upon the base, it follows that a homogeneous history, say, of economics exists as little as a homogeneous history of literature or of jurisprudence. On the other hand, since the different epochs of the past are not all touched in the same degree by the present day of the historian (and often the recent past is not touched at all; the present fails to "do it justice"), continuity in the presentation of history is unattainable. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 470)

Given this intermingling, cultural history on Benjamin's view cannot take the cultural artifacts of a given society as purely cultural. They are at the same time imbricated with the material processes in society. However, these material processes, in turn, never exist in a purely material form. Matter as it exists within a particular social configuration is already imbricated with cultural conceptions.

2.4 Cities within cities: the second sense of invisibility

The second sense of invisibility is related to comparative analysis as it conceives cities under examination as already related to some other cities as their invisible counterparts. By comparison in this context, I do not simply mean one method among others but what Colin Mcfarlane calls "a mode of thought that informs how urban theory is constituted", which is central to knowledge production and learning about cities (Mcfarlane, 2010, p. 726). However, comparison, as it is understood and applied in traditional comparative urban studies, usually suffers from three weaknesses: firstly, traditional comparative urban studies tended to treat the

geographical levels such as nation, region, and city as ontologically and epistemologically fixed givens rather than relationally connected sociospaces; secondly, it conceptualised cities as discrete, self-enclosed and analytically separate objects which only by the act of comparison came into a context of interrelations; thirdly, their view of cause and effect rested on a view of law-like causality which attempted to derive from empirical observations general statements rather than focusing on the causal powers and liabilities out of which these causal links emerged in the first place (Ward, 2009, p. 8-10).

Cities in a comparative approach should not be conceptualised as distinct, self-enclosed and pre-existing entities that happen to enter into interrelations: Rather, they are themselves constituted by a system of interrelations. Although different cities belong to different urban contexts since their geographical and historical conditions differ, these contexts themselves should not be absolutised. Contexts, like cities, interpenetrate and mutually constitute each other. “Stressing interconnected trajectories – how different cities are implicated in each other’s past, present and future – moves us away from searching for similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contexts and instead towards relational comparisons that uses different cities to pose questions of one another” (Ward, 2009, p. 10).

The comparative approach that I adopt in this study is two-fold. Firstly, I conceptualise cities as textual entities. This is not to argue that cities are merely textual entities but besides their other aspects such as material, political, economic, and so on, they involve imaginative productions through textual representation. Cities produce and then are represented in textual fields which make it possible to utter statements about cities. Secondly, by drawing on Benjamin’s ideas on language and translation, I argue for an intertextual approach that examines the textual fields

cities are situated within from a comparative perspective that emphasises the role of intertextuality in determining the significations in these textual fields. As words and statements acquire their meaning from a system of differences and relations, so are cities as textual entities intrinsically interrelated. This way, I conceptualise interrelationality as constitutive of cities.

In his classic study, *Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre declares “Yes, the city can be read because it writes, because it was writing” (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 108). On his view, although cities do not produce simple texts that can be understood without taking into account their context, that is, the other texts that exist below the city (e.g. “daily life, immediate relations, the unconscious of the city”) and those that exist above it (e.g. “institutions, ideologies”), the city still “has this singular capacity of appropriating all significations for saying them, for writing them (to stipulate and to ‘signify’ them), including those from the countryside, immediate life, religion, and political ideologies” (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 108). Cities as areas of writing and being written about produce textual representations of themselves as well as those outside them.

In *The City as Text*, James Duncan criticises those cultural geographers who assume an unmediated relationship between the landscape and the observer, which privileges vision as the source of knowledge. As Martin Jay points out, vision has traditionally held a privileged position in epistemology: “long accounted the ‘noblest’ of the senses, sight traditionally enjoyed a privileged role as the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and world” (Jay, 1986, p. 176). Yet, with the critical atmosphere that started forming in France from the 20th century on, this privileged status of vision came under criticism. What the observer sees is not an unmediated landscape that is accessible to their

discriminating eye but is already situated within “an epistemic field, constructed as much linguistically as visually” (Jay, 1986, p. 182). This inevitable mediation of visual observation of the landscape by linguistic elements requires that one conceptualises the urban landscape of the city itself as textually represented. Hence, Duncan’s conclusion: “to understand the relational nature of the world we need to “fill in” much that is invisible” (Duncan, 2004, p. 14).

Cities are textual entities as they produce and are represented through textual fields. However, because texts are related to each other within an intertextual context of discourse, cities as textual entities are also interrelated. By the interrelation of texts, I mean that texts do not form distinct, self-enclosed and pre-existing spaces of signification which come into contact incidentally. Instead, texts refer to other texts and acquire meaning in an interplay of significations. Translation in this context is essential because it takes place between different textual fields. If comparison is not incidental but constitutive of cities, then translation must also be constitutive of the textual fields they create and are represented through.

By granting translation in languages a central place, Benjamin opposes the view that texts are incidentally translated and the process of translation leaves the original text unchanged while producing a replica of its meaning in the foreign language. Benjamin accordingly argues for founding “the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory” because “translation attains its full meaning in the realisation that every evolved language (with the exception of God) can be considered a translation of all the others” (Benjamin, 2004a, p. 70). Repeating Stresemann’s dictum that “French is spoken in every language”, (Benjamin, 2006b, p.251). Benjamin sees the nature of linguistic signification itself as a form of translation because language is dialogical. Neither French nor another language exist

in a self-enclosed space but they are all already situated within a dialogical field of communication.

In *the Task of the Translator*, Benjamin in greater detail explains his theory of translation and meaning. Benjamin counts two types of change that shows the meaning of the meanings in the target and the original languages ought not to be taken as fixed. Firstly, the meaning of the original text is not immune to the changes to the language in which it is written: "For just as the tenor and significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well" (Benjamin, 2004b, p. 256). However, besides this diachronic aspect, there is a synchronic aspect to Benjamin's thought, too (Gutting, 2001, p. 216-217). This is the second type of change. Towards the end of his essay, Benjamin cites Rudolf Pannwitz to bring out this synchronic aspect of translation as constitutive of signification:

Pannwitz writes: "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a mistaken premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. (Benjamin, 2004b, p. 261-262)

With this change in perspective, translation comes to the fore in determining the meaning of languages. Whereas the traditional view of translation begins with the mistaken premise that the text to be translated in the original language possesses a fixed meaning and the task of the translator is to reproduce it in the target language, the genuine task of the translator is, in fact, to allow translation to transform such "fixed" meaning. Translation offers the original text to open itself up to new questions of meaning posed by the foreign language and in the process of answering them transforms the original text itself. This allows the target language to be

transformed, too, because the practice of translation requires the target language to answer questions of meaning posed by the original language. In this translanguaging practice of posing and answering questions of meaning, the two languages are conceived as engaged within a dialogue rather than confined to their own monologues. “Where monologic language excludes, distorts and confines the other within its own limits, dialogic language is itself transformed by the language of the other. Monologue is German making Hindi German. Dialogue is German being powerfully affected by Hindi” (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 108).

Applying this perspective to cities as textual beings, a comparative approach to cities should examine them as engaged in a dialogic relationship, out of which their identities are formed, rather than treating them as as distinct, self-enclosed and pre-existing entities with their own monologues. With a dialogic perspective that centralises translation between texts, we can make “relational comparisons that uses different cities to pose questions of one another” about cities situated within otherwise different historical and geographical contexts. The textual field which mediates the visible urban landscape of a city by way of translation makes other cities of comparison its invisible ones that are implicated in it.

2.5 Cities and the now-recognisability of history: the third sense of invisibility

The final sense of invisibility concerns the temporal relationship between the past and the present. The history of a city is in this sense the invisible city behind its present visible form. This rests on a dynamic conception of the past and the present that Benjamin explores.

In the Arcades Project, Benjamin speaks of a Copernican revolution in historical perception which reverses the usual view of the relationship between the past and the present:

Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in "what has been;" and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to become the dialectical reversal-the flash of awakened consciousness. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 388)

Here, Benjamin criticises a view of historiography that takes the past as a fixed and self-enclosed entity which the historian in the present investigates and writes about.

On this view, history is "what has been" and what has been is strictly separated from what is now as the two belong to ontologically different temporal orders, namely, the past and the present. The historian in the present is a passive recorder of the events that actively took place in the past. Benjamin, instead, reverses this view: now the historian in the present acquires a sense of activity since history is not just a record of an ontologically separate temporal order but rests on active remembrance in the present. In the theses on history, Benjamin specifically targets the historiography of Ranke and his followers, who regarded the task of the historian as writing the past "as it really way", for erasing the active side of the present in the practice of history writing:

Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it "the way it really was." It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 391)

In Benjamin's reversal, the past is accessible to the historian only in the fleeting moment in which she remembers it. Conversely, history that is written is the past as it can be remembered by the historian. Given this active role the memory of the historian plays in the recognisability of the past, Benjamin emphasises the element of

danger that threatens the past events to be sent into oblivion. Thus, beyond the mere practice of recording, the historian as an active subject is now given the task to remember the past as its image unexpectedly appears in a moment of danger. This demands that the historian sharpen his awareness against the danger of loss. Yet, the historiography of Ranke and others who give us a secure image of the past that as what has been never changes and can always be written about “as it really way” dulls the sense of awareness on the part of the historian: “the history that showed things “as they really were” was the strongest narcotic of the century” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 463).

However, since the past constitutes the present as its preceding conditions out of which the present state of affairs emerges, the dependence of the past on the present establishes a dialectical relationship between them. The past depends on the present for its accessibility while the present depends on the past for its existence. Furthermore, as the past as history is accessible in a particular form of memory to the historian, so is the present only recognisable in a particular form of consciousness. Neither the full past nor the full present are accessible to us. We recognise them only partially in fleeting moments and our recognition changes over time. Benjamin calls this aspect of the past and the present the “now of recognisability”:

For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding "to legibility" constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 452-453)

With the appreciation of the dependence of both the past and the present on the now-of-recognisability, Benjamin provides us with a dynamic understanding of the past and the present. With his emphasis on memory and consciousness, Benjamin rejects

the positivist understanding of history as a separate realm to be investigated by a neutral and objective observer from the present. However, for Benjamin, memory and consciousness have their counterparts which are no less essential for his understanding of cultural history. Because the past and the present are only partially accessible to us, we remember and are conscious of them in fragments. We remember some fragments of the past and are aware of some fragments of the present. However, because memory and consciousness are not constants that are immune to change over time, we are prone to forgetting and becoming unconscious of these fragments. Due to this, Benjamin's emphasis on memory and consciousness produces an equally powerful emphasis on forgetfulness and unconscious. The practice of history must be concerned with these forgotten and unconscious fragments, too.

On Benjamin's view, memory and forgetting are not two antithetical categories but they interpenetrate each other. On this point, Benjamin draws on Proust's idea of involuntary memory, whose work, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Benjamin had translated with Hessel (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 38). In *On the Image of Proust*, Benjamin argues that the work of Proust described life not as "it actually was", an allusion to Ranke's historiography, but "as it was remembered". However, what Proust understands by remembrance here is intrinsically connected to forgetting (Benjamin, 2005, p. 238). The person who remembers a fragment of his life in Proust remembers what he has forgotten. The forgotten fragment involuntarily and suddenly flashes up in his memory. Benjamin argues that the historian needs to apply this view of memory that remembers the forgotten fragments of the past to the collective memory of the society whose history he is writing at the present: "What Proust intends with the experimental rearrangement of furniture in matinal half-slumber, what Bloch recognizes as the darkness of the lived moment, is nothing other than

what here is to be secured on the level of the historical, and collectively. There is a not-yet conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 389).

Benjamin in this regard links memory to awakening. Since memory now is conceived as the involuntary recollection of the forgotten past fragments, it resembles awakening because in awakening one gains conscious of the past dream one was submerged in. In the state of dreaming, one forgets that one is asleep and enters into a state of consciousness that rests on forgetting the sense of reality. Upon waking up and remembering that one was dreaming, one regains this forgotten sense of reality, which sheds a new light on the dream experience one had while asleep. Similar to this transformation of individual consciousness when one wakes up and regains what one has forgotten, Benjamin argues that the historian must similarly attempt to awaken the present from the dream in which it is submerged and has forgotten the past fragments in its conceptualisation of its own history. History as it is conceived at the present rests on forgetting some fragments of the past. Benjamin’s cultural history intends to remind the present of these fragments to disrupt the current conception of history:

Just as Proust begins the story of his life with an awakening, so must every presentation of history begin with awakening; in fact, it should treat of nothing else. This one, accordingly, deals with awakening from the nineteenth century. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 464).

In the context of the urban landscape, this means that Benjamin wishes to explore the history of the cultural artifacts in this setting so that he can provoke involuntary memories in the urban residents, which their collective memory already possesses but now has forgotten. Susan Buck-Morss succinctly summarises Benjamin’s project for cities:

Yet he retained the notion that the Arcades project would present collective history as Proust had presented his own-not "life as it was," nor even life remembered, but life as it has been "forgotten." Like dream images, urban objects, relics of the last century, were hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past. Benjamin's goal was to interpret for his own generation these dream fetishes in which, in fossilized form, history's traces had survived. (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 39)

The third sense of invisibility brings out this forgotten historical aspect of the cities.

Invisible city in the third sense is made up of the forgotten past fragments of the visible city at the present moment. However, since the past and the present are always only partially accessible, the critical materialist historical practice cannot gain full possession of the entire past. Instead, it engages in constant critique against the ever present threat of forgetting, which, like the endless mirror play of the Romantic critique, is both inexhaustible and, by producing involuntary memories, disrupts the temporal schema of homogeneous empty space the present conception of history rests on. "A city is like an archive of involuntary memory, and Benjamin approaches it as a collector entering a museum of mirrors" (Patke, 2003, p. 292). In this critical dialectical conception of history, the past and the present are dynamically interrelated with each other to be endlessly brought into a critical relationship.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, some theoretical issues concerning the approach to be adopted towards the study of cities have been discussed. By drawing on Calvino and Benjamin, I distinguish between three different senses of invisibility: the invisible cultural imagination in the form of dream images embodied in the visible material morphology of the city, the invisible comparative counterpart of the visible city in question, and the invisible past of the visible present of the city. These three senses of

invisibility allows us to see dialectically through the visible material morphology, the visible subject and the visible present. The dialectics of seeing, by uniting the visible cities with the invisible ones, expands our vision, allowing greater scope of investigation.



CHAPTER 3

CHINESE CITIES

No two cities in China could be more unlike than Shanghai and Beijing. It is not uncommon to hear visitors to China sing praises about Shanghai and speak grimly of Beijing. . . . For all its congestion, shabbiness, and pollution, Shanghai remains China's most interesting and vibrant city.
Jack F. Williams (Wasserstrom, 2007, p.199)

Thus appears Peking to me, the holy city of the Emperors, the Sons of Heaven, tarnished by the snobbery of white globe-trotters and loafers, who have forced themselves by the fuming, screeching train through its sacred ramparts, which can no longer shield its virginity. And outside to the right and to the left, louder than the buzzing of voices, just overhead, I hear the hammering and knocking going on for ever—as if the Modern had conquered, and were triumphantly erecting a new, vulgar, cosmopolitan town in the ancient holy fortress of the Tartars of the North.
Henri Borel (Borel, 1912, p. 35-36)

世界上没有哪一个城市，像上海这样同时拥有那么多的美名与恶名：繁华都市，东方巴黎，富人的天堂，穷人的地狱，文明的窗口，罪恶的渊蔽，经济中心，黑色染缸，冒险家的乐园，帝国主义侵略中国的桥头堡，中国工人阶级的大本营……。所有这些，都是指的上海，也可以说都是上海的别名。 [In the world, there is no other such city as Shanghai, with so many beautiful and ugly names attached simultaneously: the city of prosperity, the Paris of the East, the Eden of the rich, the Interno of the poor, the window into civilisation, the den of crime, the heart of economy, the black pot of corruption, the garden of adventurers, the bridgehead of imperialism against China, the headquarters of the working class...All these point to Shanghai, that is to say, all are Shanghai's alternative names.]
熊月之 [Xiong Yuezhi] (Xiong, 1996, p. 139)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will deal with the notion of urban modernity in the context of two cities: Beijing and Shanghai. In Section Two, I will examine the concept of urban modernity in the context of Chinese history. To this end, I will discuss two interrelated issues: firstly, the meaning of urbanity in Chinese context, and secondly,

the relationship between urbanisation and modernisation. I argue that although the notion of urban modernity can be divided into two sub-categories, namely, urbanity and modernity, their relationship ought to be conceived in a mutually transformative way. That is, neither the category of urbanity nor that of modernity can be reduced to the other, but, while preserving their non-identity, we must acknowledge that they are not two entirely separate categories in the context of urban modernity. Modernisation transformed what urbanity meant and it was the urban existence that over time came to dominate the meaning of modernity in China. To explain these points, I discuss the relevant literature on the category of urbanity in the cities in Chinese history.

Afterwards, I discuss Cohen's China-centered approach in order to better engage with such concepts as modernity and modernisation.

In Section Three, I discuss Shanghai and Beijing in the general context of Chinese urban modernity. I first situate Beijing and Shanghai in the macroregional urban systems that they belong to. For this, I discuss and employ Skinner's regions system approach. Then, to further differentiate these cities, I draw on Esherick's discussion of urban modern types in China. I accordingly situate Shanghai and Beijing in these two schemes to give an overall context for them.

In Section Four, I discuss Chinese cosmology and the tradition of city planning in Chinese history. In Chapter Two, I discussed three senses of invisibility for cities. I employ these three senses in my discussion of Shanghai and Beijing in this and the ensuing sections. Chinese cosmology was embedded in the material morphology of the city of Beijing. That is, the visible material morphology of the city implied an invisible cosmology which contained corresponding dream images. I discuss the evolution of this morphology and cosmology for Beijing.

In Section Four, the second and the third senses of invisibility come to the fore. As Beijing and Shanghai were being transformed under the dynamics of urban modernity from their traditional forms which in their visible material morphology implied invisible dream images contained in Chinese cosmology, they were also being constantly compared, contrasted, and judged. Beijing, first as the national capital and then as a cultural city after 1928, came to represent the traditional Chinese identity whereas Shanghai, which became a treaty port with the Treaty of Nanjing, was regarded as a cosmopolitan commercial centre. However, despite their polarisation in the eyes of many, these cities acquired their identities only in the specific comparative textual context which they produced and in which they were conceived. Shanghai, in other words, was the invisible city of Beijing and Beijing was the invisible city of Shanghai in the second sense. We should, thus, be aware of the error of reproducing a dichotomy between them.

In Section Five, I continue the discussion of this comparison. Although dichotomising Shanghai and Beijing is an error, it is true that both in their morphologies and their dream images, these two cities did not follow the same historical trajectories. I attempt to explain their differences together with the urban modern transformations they underwent. In this regard, the third sense of invisibility is important because it conceptualises the relationship between the old and the new, the traditional Chinese cosmology together with its material morphology and the urban modern changes taking place, as a dynamic relationship. These new changes always contained something of the past in them, just as the past made it possible for these new changes to take place. With the third sense of invisibility, the modernising Shanghai and Beijing contained in invisible form the old urban morphology and cosmology as the context of emergence. To this end, I draw on Dong's notion of

recycling: “History and modernity are mutually constitutive“ (Dong, 2003, p. xvi). In the recycled material, the past is implied in the present as the visible present points towards an invisible past.

In Section Six, I focus on the railways. Railway as a new technology of transportation belongs among the most prominent embodiments of Chinese urban modernity as it was through railways that urban morphology would be transformed, especially in the form of dismantling city walls, and the traditional cosmology would be replaced by the new principles of accessibility and mobility of goods, services, and people, in a global capitalist context into which Chinese cities were being increasingly pulled. Railways, I argue, are important for three reasons: firstly, railways, due to the specific historical context of their development, were already implicated with the questions of national sovereign and foreign influence; second, railways both due to their physical requirement of straight lines and ideological requirement of speed and progress would radically transform the physical morphology and the symbolic space of Chinese cities; finally, railways would connect hitherto unconnected masses of land and people, binding them into an increasingly unified landscape of urban modernity. It was through the railways that the apparently opposite cities like Shanghai and Beijing would further be connected, giving the second sense of invisibility historical reality.

Railways are one among several modern technologies of transportation. Another was rickshaws. I establish some connections between these two new technologies of transportation as both are related to Chinese urban modernity. It was within the context of urban modern landscape that was significantly created by railways that rickshaws would become a popular technology of transportation and a popular image of literature, reflecting the antinomies of Chinese urban modernity.

3.2 Urbanity, modernity, and urban modernity in China

How do we understand urbanity, modernity, and urban modernity? The first point to be made is that urbanity and modernity are not reducible to one another. This is due to two reasons: the category of urbanity can exist without that of modernity and the category of modernity can exist without that of urbanity. The first reason compared to the second is easier to demonstrate, given the prevalence of complex urban formations in history long before the usual dates given for the emergence of a new modern dynamic in human communities. From those ancient Greek city states with the agora at their centre, which “became the center for meetings and jurisdiction as well as a place of worship and trading” (Ehrenberg, 1973, p. 9), to the intensely urban and monetised areas of late antiquity, both Roman and Sasanian, that the Arabs inherited and integrated into a cosmopolitan system (Banaji, 2010, p. 264), social formations that can be called urban can be found in historical periods that stand in a long distance from the later dates that are associated with modernity. Lefebvre, distinguishing between urbanisation and industrialisation as two different processes, argues that city, having overcome the decline it suffered after the disappearance of antique city and the decay of Roman influence, had already become a powerful reality in Western Europe when industrialisation started taking place (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 66). Cities were, thus, already a powerful reality. One can make a similar assessment of China, too. In fact, the Chinese cities were already a powerful reality not just in China but on an international scale: Nanjing overtaking Cairo as the largest city in the world within about one decade after it was rebuilt by the Ming founder, followed somewhere in the 15th century by Beijing which until London’s rise around 1800 would remain the largest city on earth (Skinner, 1977a, p. 31). Esherick observes that “until the modern era, Chinese cities were the largest and

most populous in the world, and early European travelers marveled at their prosperity and order” (Esherick, 1999, p. 1).

The other point, that is, modernity need not be urban is a harder point to make, not only because as a historically specific phenomenon it is dated much later than the emergence of urban formations, but also because its dynamics are often traced back to the urbanity of these formations. Cities are centres of commerce so those theorists who regard the new modern dynamics as emerging out of the development of market economies would place special emphasis on the urban origins of a new modern society. Adam Smith, with a dichotomy between town and country, would locate the seeds of a new and dynamic modern society based on large-scale commerce in the towns. Countryside was, instead, the place of feudalism that emerged as a result of the barbarian invasions of the Western areas of the Roman Empire, this way ruralising the urban population and trapping them into a static mode of social existence (Mumy, 1978, p. 464-468). This “commercialisation model”, as Ellen M. Wood calls it, exists with differing degrees of refinement in a wide range of sociologists and historians from Max Weber to Fernand Braudel (Wood, 2002, p. 17-21). Although she argues that the late Marx would break off from this model (Wood, 2002, p. 35-37), still Marx for a very long time, despite all his criticisms of the “bourgeois economists”, would share this common agreement with them, seeing in the subjugation of the country to the town the rescue of a significant portion of the population from “the idiocy of rural life” (Marx, 1988, p. 213). Significantly influenced by Simmel’s sociology (Beasley-Murray, 2007, p. 50), Benjamin’s approach shares a similar urban bias towards modernity, seeing in the city, especially in its urban architectural objects such as “arcades, winter gardens, panoramas, factories, waxworks, railway stations and the like” “a showplace of

modernity” (Frisby, 2013, p. 224-225). Given the influence of Weber, Simmel, Benjamin (Savage, 1995, p. 204), and Lefebvre on urban studies and our understanding of what Mumford calls “the culture of cities” (Parker, 2015, p. 4), one could argue that there is a similar general bias in urban studies.

In a sense, this thesis shares a similar bias as it makes its subject of study urban modernity. However, this is not to argue that modernity has to be urban. Of the urban and rural difference, a different combination is possible: rural modernity. Kate Merkel-Hess argues that despite the eventual neglect of the countryside even by the triumphant Communists who came from rural areas (Merkel-Hess, 2016, p. 5), one can see in Chinese history reformers who genuinely sought a form of rural modernity. In the 1920s and 1930s, the New Rural Reconstruction Movement (新农村建设运动) is a noteworthy episode that “sought to create a rural alternative to urban modernity that would mobilize and strengthen the nation, eventually coalescing around the idea of “rural reconstruction” (xiangcun jianshe) [乡村建设]” (Merkel-Hess, 2016, 2-3). This different path not taken does not constitute the subject of this thesis. However, it is still worth noting as it demonstrates that modernity cannot be reduced to urbanity and the link between them is historically contingent.

Urban modernity constitutes the subject matter of this thesis. Urban modernity is a category that implies a sense of urbanity as well as a sense of modernity. Thus, in order to employ the category of urban modernity, we first need to clarify these two sub-categories. To this end, I shall discuss the relevant literature on the question of urbanity and its relation to rurality in Chinese history. Then, I shall discuss modernity and modernisation in Chinese historiography.

In his contribution to a collective volume on Chinese cities in the late imperial era, William Skinner raises the following question: “was there a distinctively urban culture in traditional China?” (Skinner, 1977a, p. 267). The different contributors to the volume provide different responses. On the one hand, Mote most forcefully and Skinner in a more qualified way argue that the differences that could be drawn between the rural and the urban in traditional Chinese cities were not really that significant. Mote compares Chinese cities with a number of Western cities to bring out “some peculiarly Chinese attitudes about the city”. No great city in the history of China has come to dominate a phase of Chinese history as Rome and Constantinople did Roman history or typified Chinese civilisation as London and Paris did the English and French civilisations. Was there a Chinese Rome or Chinese Paris? No, Mote replies. One cause he identifies of this phenomenon is that China has been “too vast a cultural and political area for 3.000 years or more to have been dominated by one city” (Mote, 1977, p. 101-102). The other cause is the lack in China of such a significant differentiation between the rural and the urban as can be found in many other areas in the world, whose application to Chinese history he criticises as Western-centric:

The idea that the city represents either a distinct style more important, a higher level of civilization than the countryside is a cliché of our Western cultural traditions. It has not been so in traditional China. In early Chou times the kuo, which in modern Chinese means “state,” was actually the walled or stockaded town seat of the head of a fief. From the social history of the period we can gain some awareness of the kuo town as an island of civilization surrounded and threatened by a sea of less-civilized and often hostile peasantry. Yet that sharp division into distinct urban and rural civilizations disappeared very early in China, although it remained characteristic of much of the rest of the world until recent times and produced distinct urban attitudes in other civilizations. The conditions allowing such attitudes in China seem to have vanished by the beginning of the imperial era, so long ago that a sense of that kind of urban superiority has not remained. (Mote, 1977, p. 102-103)

As for the late imperial period, Mote adds, although there were such attitudes and characteristics which were associated with the city, the so-called “urban attitudes”, their specific content together with their intensity and significance for the whole culture of China radically differed from those in the West (Mote, 1977, p. 106).

Grimm, on the other hand, in perusing the data on Guangdong academies, concludes that early *shu yuan* (书院) (the generic term for the academic institutions) tended to be located outside cities and to share an anti-urban “mountain recluse” ideal, which together with the growing importance of the examination system and the transformation of official school temples into institutions of ritual and administration in late imperial China, would undergo a process of urbanisation (Grimm, 1977, 496-497). This conclusion is in support of Mote’s argument that a sense of urban superiority has not remained in China: “Chinese civilisation, for many reasons that lie beyond our focus here, has not granted the same importance to typically urban activities that other civilisations have. Thus Chinese values did not sustain a self-identifying and self-perpetuating urban elite as a component of the population” (Mote, 1977, p. 102).

Skinner gives his qualified acceptance for Mote’s position. Although, Skinner states, he has no serious issue with Mote’s position that “such differences [between the rural and the urban] as could be identified were inconsequential”, and so that “the basic cleavages in China were those of class and occupation (complexly interrelated) and of region (an elaborate nested hierarchy), not those between cities and their hinterlands”, still this ought not to lead one to ignoring the cultural importance of cities for cultural material exchange that produced and reproduced the characteristic differences of each territorial system while preserving the cultural hierarchical differentiations (Skinner, 1977b, p. 267-269). Merchant influence was a significant

factor to take into account in this regard: although in China, no comparable merchant culture emerged as in chonin in Tokugawa Japan or the bourgeoisie in late medieval Europe, due to lacking effective barriers to translating commercial wealth into gentry status, thereby preserving their distinctness, the constant incorporation of merchants into the urban elite definitely affected the cultural tone of the cities (Skinner, 1977b, p. 268-269).

Others, though, express a different position. John R. Watt in his study of the yamen institution (衙门), the principle vehicle of political administration, argues that it had a major role in the lives of Chinese people as “the most immediate and frequently encountered form of imperial authority” (Watt, 1977, p. 353). Given its importance, the county yamen, located within the walled cities (城), was intricately linked to the process of urbanisation in Chinese society. Watt argues that the urban character of the yamen had several sources. Firstly, there was the Confucian tendency to regard the countryside as the less civilised realm since civilisation was associated with the government. Principally developed by Mencius, Confucianism considered the natural realm to be chaotic and destructive, and as a result, those people living closer to nature in the countryside, more prone to disasters and brutality. The goal of the government was, accordingly, to civilise people by lifting them out of their natural precarious condition. “No doubt, the centralisation of political authority during the late period of Chou period reinforced this philosophical differentiation of the human and natural orders” (Watt, 1977, p. 356). The exclusiveness of the imperial state was another factor: the state, as the Confucian commentators always pointed out, did not belong to the social order but was superimposed upon it. Thus, the dichotomy between the city as the centre of the imperial state and the countryside as the centre of society was reinforced (Watt, 356-

357). Thirdly, there was a steady trend towards concentration of land ownership in the late imperial period, which contributed to the urbanisation of administration by undermining the functionality of rural-based administrative institutions. Despite the earlier factors, the late imperial period saw determined efforts to develop effective rural administration, but these efforts were frustrated by the unwillingness of successful families to work with commoners who were not related to them and the increasing economic differentiation, manifested in the monetisation of political administration, which the concentration of land ownership was a part of (Watt, 1977, p. 356-357).

Feuchtwang, on the other hand, shows the interaction of rural and urban dynamics in the complex temple and ritual structure of China. The founding of an administrative city would involve city walls, a temple to the City God (城隍神) and a school-temple (学宫) (Watt, 1977, p. 356-357). In Chinese religious practices, one can observe a contrast between the popular forms and official forms of religious practices. Even when the commoners and officials shared temples, the official rituals were marked out by their ceremonial, by the absence of priests, and by the strict hierarchical ordering of participation based on official ranks and degrees. Sharing of temples, though, was by no means common. The county capital was the lowest level both for yamens and official temples, so in non-administrative cities and towns together with all lower places, temples of popular cults proliferated. In administrative capitals, the popular and official temples together produced a stark contrast: “the theatre, noise, color, urgency, and bustle (in short, je-nao) of the popular temple contrasted with the dignified and ascetic seclusion of the official shrine; the market contrasted with the yamen” (Feuchtwang, 1977, p. 588). Although performing the rites correctly was considered essential to the maintenance of order and security,

there was also a determined attempt on the part of the official bureaucracy to control popular religious practices (Feuchtwang, 1977, p. 591-592). The City God temples and school-temples as institutions situated within cities were means of controlling the countryside: “the City God was the focus of a religion based on natural forces and ghosts, and thus was the god for the control of peasantry, as it were; the school-temple was the center of worship of sages and exemplars of official virtues, for the spirits of bureaucracy” (Feuchtwang, 1977, p. 607).

Esherick calls the position held by Mote and Skinner the conventional view on Chinese cities, which instead of a sharp distinction between the rural and the urban sees “an urban-rural continuum” (Esherick, 1999, p. 11). Drawing on works that have criticised this conventional view, such as those of William Rowe and Susan Mann, he argues that whatever the case in late imperial China, in the modern period there had developed a highly distinct urban culture: “a culture expressed in novels and in urban merchant or literati lifestyles of bookstores and antique shops, brothels, and teahouses- a lifestyle quite divorced from the life of the soil” (Esherick, 1999, p. 11). Rowe in his study of Hankou argues that based on the evidence of Hankow, the conclusion that “there did exist a strong consciousness of a shared identity as “city people” and a distinctive urban mentality” is inescapable (Rowe, 1989, p. 16). This, of course, is not to say that narrower identities based on native place, religion, or trade were unimportant, but alongside these identities, there was also a sense of urban identity and mentality that the urban residents lived in. Exuberant worldliness, stoicism, pragmatism, and a kind of commercial mentality were among the characteristics that the visitors to Hankou would attribute to its urban residents (Rowe, 1989, p. 16-19).

The cultural differences during the modern period would reach such heights that the rural and the urban population would at times not even recognise each other as belonging to the society: “Domestically, Chinese society was undergoing such rapid changes in everything from personal deportment to the introduction of technology that it created new gaps in society; rural Chinese people met urban ones, with their bowler hats or bobbed hair, and called them “foreigners” (yang) rather than recognizing them as compatriots of a shared culture” (Merkel-Hess, 2016, p. 4).

A sort of distinctive urban culture would transform the existing classes, too. The case of the urbanisation of a section of the rural gentry and its significance for the course of Chinese history, especially for the revolution of 1911 is telling. After the crushing of the Ping-Liu-Li uprising in 1906, where the radical student movement and a rebel force of workers and peasants, though for different causes, came into a brief but meaningful alliance, the provincial politics would be dominated from 1905 to 1911 by a new class: the urban reformist elite (Escherick, 1976, p. 65-66). Escherick’s choice for the term “urban elite” rather than “urban gentry” or “bourgeoisie” is conscious here. The reformist urban elite was not distinguished from the conservative gentry by such a juxtaposition that whereas the former was totally urban, the latter was all rural. The gentry group, led by Wang Xianqian, a former Hanlin compiler and Jiangsu education commissioner, in the reform movement of 1897-1898 in Hunan, which would, though, later be regarded as the conservative faction of the provincial politics, was also urban (Escherick, 1976, p. 13-14, 66). Although the process of urbanisation of the rural gentry in China is a long and significant process, which can be traced back to the Ming period, one should be aware of a distinctive aspect in the urban transformation of a section of the gentry into the urban elite as a different group than the urban gentry: in the nineteenth

century, increasing commercial development together with the growth of a new urban culture manifested in literature, drama, theatres, bookstores, antique shops, tea shops, restaurants, brothels and so on, the landlord-tenant relations became loose, turning the former rural gentry into absentee landlords living in cities (Esherick, 1976, p. 67). Residence in cities, however, was not a factor that affected only the urban elite, it affected the urban gentry as well: hence, its urbanity. However, despite their similar residence, the urban elite had a significantly different orientation than the urban gentry. The urban gentry was a product of the Tongzhi Restoration, when Zeng Guofan preserved a Confucian concern with agriculture, similar to Physiocrats, and the militia led by this gentry still retained its organic roots with the countryside. The new urban elite, on the other hand, focused on the New Army rather than the rural militia and modern industry rather than agriculture. This difference in their focus shows the different threats these different groups faced: the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) forced the gentry to turn its attention on the peasant unrest and countryside whereas the increasing imperialist encroachment at the turn of the century, significantly embodied in the form of port treaties and port cities, in the urban centres pulled the urban elite's attention towards cities. Thus, despite their similarity in residence, which was cities, these two urban groups were radically different in orientation: the urban elite was more urban in this aspect than the urban gentry (Esherick, 1976, p. 68). However, this difference, Esherick continues, does not justify using the term bourgeoisie for this urban elite group, because, though significantly isolated from its gentry origins, the urban reformist elite was not committed to such bourgeois ideas as industrial development, free enterprise, and economic rationality in order to be justifiably called a bourgeois class (Esherick, 1976, p. 69).

Susan Mann in her analysis of Chinese modern urbanisation compares three models from American historiography on China and relates them to three attitudes towards the relationship between the city and the countryside among the Chinese intellectuals. The first model, drawing on Rozman's comparative analysis on patterns of urbanisation, sees a kind of "bottom-heavy" uneven distribution of people and resources as characteristic of Chinese urban structure (Mann, 1984, p. 80-83). The second model comes from Skinner's macroregional framework, which by emphasising the necessity for spatial and temporal qualifiers in order to make meaningful assessments of Chinese urbanisation sees a more balanced development of urban spaces in China (Mann, 1984, p. 83-85). The third model, contrary to Rozman and Skinner, instead focuses on the special role of the treaty port sector in the process of urbanisation and the increasing pressures of foreign imperial presence in China. Murphey's *The Outsiders* is an example of this model (Mann, 1984, p. 85-86). Mann then reads the different Chinese intellectual attitudes in the 1920s and 1930s along these models (Mann, 1984, p. 93-94): some like Yi Jiayue, expressing the kind of alienation that Murphey examines against the background of encroaching foreign presence in cities, would see cities as the cause of China's collapse and seek a return to a rural heaven in China's past (Mann, 1984, p. 94-100); some others like Dong Ruzhou would, similar to Skinner's model, advocate a more balanced approach towards the relationship between the city and the countryside, linking them to the healthy growth of each other (Mann, 1984, p. 100-105); still others like Wu Jingzhao, echoing the unevenness of urbanisation in the model of Rozman, would defend a rigorous programme of urban modernisation as a radical departure from China's rural past so that China could become like, for example, England (Mann, 1984, p. 105-107). However, despite these parallels in the ways the Chinese intellectuals of the

20s and 30s and American historians saw between the patterns of urbanisation and the larger processes of social change, there was one essential difference between them with respect to the question of the relationship between the countryside and the city:

Western accounts tend to emphasize the vitality, energy, productive capability, organizational strength, and autonomy of rural Chinese society before the twentieth century. In Chinese accounts of the 1920 and 1930s, however, the countryside has become a mere object in a discourse controlled by urbanities. The countryside, denied its own autonomy and productive capability is reduced to dependence on cities for sources of dynamism and change. In fact, the most positive characterization of the country side cited here, by Yi Jiayue, invoke the countryside of the past as a lifeless historic idyllic symbol of a lost Chinese culture. (Mann, 1984, p. 108)

Mann's observation is an important point about the relationship between the modern and the urban. Although, as argued before, the two categories of urbanity and modernity do not logically imply one another, since modernity could exist without urbanity in the form of rural modernity, and urbanity could exist without modernity as urban centres existed long before the emergence of modern social dynamics, still the category of urban modernity does not in fact designate a simple combination of two unrelated categories. Instead, urban modernity shows that urbanity and modernity historically transformed each other in such a way that within the urban modern discourse these two categories came to be associated with each other. In other words, urban modernity is not the chance combination of two categories that bump into each other at some point in history: it is instead the discursive field in which, despite their differences, urbanity and modernity came to imply one another. This is to say that, whatever discontinuities may have existed between the rural and the urban in the traditional Chinese cities, which, in agreement with Esherick and Mann who point out that "for a country peasant, visits to the city where a cultural adventure" (Mann, 1984, p. 89), I maintain were still significant contrary to the

conventional view, these discontinuities themselves would be redefined in radical ways as modernisation came into the picture. Esherick writes: “as cities modernised, the modern became associated with the cities” (Esherick, 1999, p. 11). Chinese urban modernity refers to these transformed conceptions of urbanity and modernity.

Modernity, in short, was a transformative factor in the conception of urbanity. The modern conception of urbanity, that is, urban modernity, was not the same as the traditional conception of urbanity, whether it was no different than that of the rural or not. If modernity is in this sense a significant force, then how should we conceptualise modernity and modernisation of China? How should we apply our concept to writing Chinese history?

In engaging with these questions, we should be aware of some common pitfalls of their application in historiography. Paul Cohen’s critical engagement with American historiography on Chinese history is an important contribution in this regard. In America, Cohen argues, the historiography in the 20th century on China can be divided into several periods. At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese history in America was written mostly as a documentation of the diplomatic relations. H.B. Morse’s book *International Relations of Chinese Empire* is one example of this phase with its excessive focus on the external factors at the level of diplomatic relations (Cohen, 1984, p. 102). Then, with a few Chinese specialists in the 1930s led by Fairbank, a new atmosphere began to develop, now scholars raising questions concerning the Chinese side of this story. Out of this milieu grew the impact-response model represented by Fairbank and the modernisation model represented by Levenson. Both models, contrary to the earlier phase, now emphasised the internal factors in writing Chinese history (Cohen, 1984, p. 102). Towards the end of the 60s, however, the war in Vietnam being a watershed moment,

these two models would be challenged by a third model that paid special attention to the effects of imperialism on the course of Chinese history. The initial moment of this phase was James Peck's *The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America's China Watchers*, targeting the earlier models and especially Fairbank in a critique of the historiographical framework in which American scholars would write on China in a way that would justify America's political, military and economic interventions in Asia (Cohen, 1984, p. 98). With the publication of *Japan, China, and the Modern World Economy*, Frances Moulder would provide this model with the first systematic, book-length treatment, drawing on Wallerstein's World Systems approach (Cohen, 1984, p. 112). This model, contrary to the other two models, emphasised the external factors for the course of Chinese history, which it deemed in a largely negative way as a sort of imperialist and exploitative impact on China.

Cohen proposes a new approach to Chinese history which he calls "the China-centered approach". However, before delving into it, I shall expand on the two models that Cohen criticises, namely, the impact-response model and the modernisation model. The reason why I focus on these two models is, firstly, because they are not really two entirely different models: "the modernization or tradition—modernity paradigm is essentially an amplification of the impact—response paradigm", so although "It contributes to the latter a much more sophisticated theoretical scaffolding", "it is [still] suffused with the same basic assumptions about China and the West (Cohen, 1984, p.151). What the impact-response model sees as impact, the modernisation model sees as the challenge of modernity; and what the former sees as response, the latter sees as tradition, or more precisely speaking, a traditional society struggling to respond to the challenge of modernity from the West. Secondly, the category of modernity is explicitly and extensively used in the

modernisation theory as its name suggests. So, with a focus on these two models, we can see some of the common pitfalls in the application of the terms like modernity and modernisation to Chinese history.

The modernisation model assumed its first shape in the post-World War 2 period as an alternative to the Marxist-Leninist explanations of “backwardness” and “underdevelopment”, serving the ideological needs of the Cold War milieu (Cohen, 1984, p.58). However, its intellectual roots go as far back in history as the 19th century general Western perceptions of China (Cohen, 1984, p. 61). These were, namely, that China is a traditional society whose culture essentially remained unchanged, that China could be jolted out of this static state of tradition only by an external shock, that only the modern West could produce such an external shock effect, and finally that the result of this external shock effect would be to make China in the image of the West, that is, a modernised China would fundamentally be the same as the West (Cohen, 1984, p. 61-67).

Drawing on these historical roots, the modernisation model serves as a framework in which to examine Chinese history. However, the problem Cohen detects in it, together with the other models, is that it rests on such assumptions as to inevitably distort Chinese history. Distortion here does not mean total negation. Cohen does acknowledge that these models to differing degrees can explain different parts of Chinese history. Hence, dividing Chinese history of the 19th century into three distinct zones, the outermost zone comprising such areas as to be most influenced by the Western impact like diplomacy and military areas, “it is here that the conventional impact—response paradigm seems most clearly applicable” but “it must be used with all caution” (Cohen, 1984, p. 53).

What are some of the common distortions that the modernisation model introduces into Chinese history? The model firstly assumes that there is a strict distinction between modernity on the one hand and tradition on the other, classifying societies accordingly as modern societies and traditional societies. There are three major problems with this distinction. Firstly, historically one cannot speak of the kind of absolute antithesis between modernity and tradition. Drawing on Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph's work, *The Modernity of Tradition*, Cohen argues that, far from being total antitheses, some traditional elements can enhance modernisation and some elements of modernity can have parallels with tradition (Cohen, 1984, p. 80-81). Edward Friedman's book, *Backward Toward Revolution*, is a notable study on Chinese history in this regard, examining the complex historical relationship between radical revolutionary change for modernisation and the possible sources of the traditional past that can aid this change (Cohen, 1984, p. 83). Schram's study of the Cultural Revolution is also along these lines. The attempt to overcome the traditional past in a cultural revolution, as Mao Zedong conceived it, would not be carried out from outside the Chinese tradition but from within it: "Only iconoclasm from within the Chinese tradition, in a form immediately accessible to the Chinese people, would make it possible to dissolve and transcend the Confucian heritage" (Cohen, 1984, p. 84).

The second problem with this distinction concerns what Cohen, quoting H. E. Hexter, calls "the assumption of the conservation of historical energy". Based on this assumption, one believes that a decrease or increase in the one pole of the dichotomy would lead to a corresponding reaction in the opposite pole. Hence, with the rise of tradition, modernity falls and as modernity emerges, tradition breaks down. Yet, this is not what Hexter observes in his study of secularism and religion in the 16th century

England. If one accepts the aforementioned assumption, one should observe that with an increase or decrease in secularism there emerges a corresponding reaction in the pole of religion as its opposite. Yet, in the historical reality of England in the 16th century, this was not the case at all: instead, there was an increase both in secular activity and in religious activity (Cohen, 1984, p. 92-93).

The third problem more specifically concerns the question of categorisation. Without further specifications of these two categories, modernity and tradition are highly problematic tools to categorise societies that are in reality radically different. Since modernity is more narrowly defined, tradition poses more severe problems because it lumps together such radically different societies as, for example, the 14th century France and the 10th century China as the same type of society, for whose members, however, it would have been inconceivable to regard themselves as belonging to the same type of society. Since, on the modernisation model, tradition is defined in terms of not being modern, it commits the error of assuming similarities between radically different entities based on their non-identity with a third entity, that is, modernity. “This, however, is a little like saying that fish and birds are alike in not being monkeys” (Cohen, 1984, p. 94). The category of modernity, in its turn, can also pose a similar problem by assuming a total “west” that is both modern and uniformly impacts traditional societies such as China, ignoring “the enigmatic and contradictory nature of the modern West” (Cohen, 1984, p. 12).

Another assumption of the modernisation model is the associations of dynamism and statism with modernity and tradition. Parallel to the antithesis between modernity and tradition, the modernisation model assumes that modernity is characterised by dynamism and tradition by statism. Thus, in those societies that are designated as traditional, the model either does not see any change at all or

understates the changes that are taking place. China on this model often seems to be a Confucian society with little to no meaningful change before the impact of the modern West during the Opium War of 1839-1842 and afterwards. Levenson, for all his contributions to historiography, falls into this error when he characterises the Chinese past from the establishment of the imperial bureaucratic state all the way up to the 19th century as one big Confucian society with strict harmony that allowed no meaningful change, not at least until the contact with the West in the 19th century (Cohen, 1984, p. 66). Such a view ignores not only the complexity of the Chinese history that itself cannot be reduced to Confucianism defined as the cultural characteristic of China, but also the significant changes and transformations within Confucianism itself.

The third assumption geographically divides the dynamic and the static parts of the world. Dynamism, on this model, is associated with the West because that area is the birthplace of modernity. The West, due to its unique historical circumstances, could overcome the statism of tradition and produce the dynamics of modernity on its own. However, the rest of the traditional world can come out of their statism only by coming into contact with the west. This assumption, like the one above, either downplays the significant changes within the so called traditional societies before they came into close contact with the West or tends to misread all the changes occurring there as effects or attempts to respond to the Western impact. It is true that the reform minded Chinese officials and intellectuals began to respond to the west as early as the Opium War but it was not until the 1870 and the 1880s that the question of the West became paramount. Yet, even then, this paramountcy held true for a tiny minority of intellectuals and scholars (Cohen, 1984, p. 21).

Finally, the modernisation model rests on a teleological worldview in which the West holds a mirror to the rest of the world, showing them that its presence is their future. China or any other so called traditional society is in the end supposed to resemble the West as closely as possible because in order to qualify as modern and dynamic, which originates from the West, they must become Westernised (Cohen, 1984, p. 94-95). Modernisation on this account becomes indistinguishable from Westernisation. Yet, Cohen argues, historical trajectories should not rely on closed-systems that pre-define where a specific place in particular and the world in general are heading. “Only with open models of change, accompanied by open-ended questions, will historians be able to form a more empirically sensitive picture of the recent Chinese past” (Cohen, 1984, p. 95).

To avoid these pitfalls, Cohen proposes a new approach to Chinese history which he calls the China-centred approach. It consists of four components:

The approach to Chinese history described in the preceding section possesses four distinct characteristics: (1) It begins Chinese history in China rather than in the West and adopts, as far as humanly possible, internal (Chinese) rather than external (Western) criteria for determining what is historically significant in the Chinese past; (2) it disaggregates China “horizontally” into regions, provinces, prefectures, counties, and cities, thus making regional and local history possible; (3) it also disaggregates Chinese society “vertically” into a number of discrete levels, facilitating the writing of lower-level history, both popular and nonpopular; and finally (4) it welcomes with enthusiasm the theories, methodologies, and techniques developed in disciplines other than history (mostly, but not exclusively, the social sciences) and strives to integrate these into historical analysis. (Cohen, 1984, p. 186-187)

Cohen further elaborates each of these components. The China-centred approach starts the history of China in China and adopts as far as possible Chinese criteria to determine the historically significant elements to be written in Chinese history. Here, the category of “experience” is key to Cohen’s idea. The China centred approach explores the Chinese experience in order to find out what was historically significant for them: “. . . they are *Chinese* problems in the double sense that they are

experienced in China by the Chinese and that the measure of their historical importance is a Chinese, rather than a Western, measure” (Cohen, 1984, p. 154). Thus, Cohen, echoing Susan Mann Jones and Philip Kuhn, advocates writing the 19th century not by looking back from the mid-19th century with such events as the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion but by starting from the 18th century and moving onwards by exploring chronologically how the internal dynamics of China led to the 19th century (Cohen, 1984, p. 154-155).

The second component divides China horizontally into different regions, provinces and so on, in order to be sufficiently sensitive to the regional dynamics of Chinese history. Because China is in its size such a vast geography, speaking of the historical events and developments without dividing China into analytically more manageable pieces can lead to abstract overgeneralisations at the expense of the real regional dynamics. William Skinner’s regional systems analysis is a prominent example Cohen cites (Cohen, 1984, p. 163-165). One of the key assumptions of Skinner’s approach to Chinese urbanisation is, as we already saw earlier, the necessity for spatial and temporal qualifiers in order to make meaningful assessments of Chinese urbanisation. Given the vastness and complexity of the geography that China encompasses, urbanisation rates provided for China as a whole are not precise enough to make the analysis sensitive to the actual dynamics of urbanisation going on in the macroregions of China.

Thirdly, China should also be divided vertically, meaning that China needs to be differentiated into the different hierarchical strata that together compose its social fabric. Prior to the 1970s, Cohen argues that American historiography on China focused, with few exceptions, on its top echelons such as the imperial state officials and policies, the powerful provincial rulers and warlords, and so on. The new

tendency, now, however, is to focus more on the lower reaches of society and explain the historical dynamics accordingly. This, however, Cohen warns, does not signify a simple division of society into the rulers and the ruled, or the elites and the nonelites. The point, instead, is to be more sensitive to the vertical differentiations in the course of Chinese history. This means, among other things, that every strata can still have its own rulers and ruled, that “merchants, religious specialists, lower gentry, militarists, and even local bullies and bandits” can be rulers in their own leagues (Cohen, 1984, p. 172-173).

Finally, the China centred approach is at its core interdisciplinary. Cohen positively cites scholars like Elizabeth Perry and Philip Kuhn for their successful combination of anthropology and history. Andrew Nathan, on the other hand, draws more on political sciences to explore the warlord politics in Beijing (Cohen, 1984, p. 180-186). Cohen, by pointing to such examples, advocates the importance of an interdisciplinary effort in writing Chinese history because history in its concrete actuality goes well beyond the disciplinary boundaries we draw. Without fruitful dialogues between these boundaries, it is difficult if not impossible to write a history of China while doing justice to its complexity.

Cohen’s contribution represents a significant corrective to the three models that he rightly criticises for being western-centric and provides a fruitful space for debate on how to approach Chinese history. With this acknowledgement, however, I argue that Cohen’s own approach in the end fails to provide a viable alternative. This judgement may be countered by pointing out, as Cohen himself acknowledges, that the China centred approach was never meant to be a new model in the way the impact-response model, the modernisation model, and the imperialism model were. In fact, Cohen himself at one point suggests that what he proposes is not really “a

single, well-defined approach” but “a set of tendencies” (Cohen, 1984, p. 153).

Given this, it is to be expected that Cohen’s approach may contain problems.

However, some problems may point towards larger issues that provide a space for further discussion and critique.

Lin Tongqi (林同奇) in his Chinese translation and preface to Cohen’s book provides important clarifications as well as criticisms. Cohen in proposing the China centred approach does not sufficiently expound the theoretical sources he draws on in historiography. The category of experience, for example, that plays such a central role in the first component of the China centred approach, Lin argues, comes from British Empiricism and American Pragmatism, the latter playing a more important role: “It is especially with William James’ treatment of ‘experience’ that this term transcended the narrow content of English Empiricism and the excessively rationalised understanding of the European Continent, producing a deep influence on the way American historians thought [特别是“经验”一词经过詹姆士的发挥，超过了英国经验主义的贫乏的内容和欧洲大陆过分理性化的理解，对美国史学思想产生了深远影响。]” (Lin, 2002, p. 15).

Lin argues that there is a fundamental tension between the first component and the other two components in Cohen’s approach. Firstly, while speaking of the importance of interiority for Chinese experience, an emphasis that puts Cohen closer to the impact-response model and the modernisation model rather than the imperialism model, he does not clearly enough distinguish between different senses of interiority. In the text, however, Cohen employs three different senses: the first one is about the content or topic of the historical investigation (“历史研究的内容或课题”), the second concerns the direction which the forces to produce the historical

changes under examination come from (推动历史演变的动力来自何方); the third sense, finally, poses the question of perspective (角度) (Liu, 2002, p. 10-11).

The third sense of interiority links Cohen's China centered perspective closely to the notion of empathy in historical investigation. Lin points out that empathy (移情) in historiography does not mean sympathy (同情) but rather a particular approach that tries to understand the history of a place by starting from its own specific conditions and its own historical agents ("力图对任何特定的非西方社会的历史, 从自身的情况出发, 通过自身的观点加以认识") (Liu, 2002, p. 11). Given the centrality of the category of experience in Cohen's approach, the starting point of history for Cohen is the specific experiences of the historical agents of the place whose history the historian is intending to write. The third sense of interiority, in other words, requires that the historian shares empathy with the specific experiences of the historical agents he is investigating. This way, he can adopt the Chinese perspectives to develop the proper criteria on what is historically significant and what is not.

There are some criticisms that can be made of this view, some of which Lin himself points out. Firstly, such a strong emphasis on interiority in the form of empathy may blur the significant advantages of having an outsider's perspective in history writing. The perspectives and experiences of the historical agents are, of course, essential in writing history, but no less essential is the outsider perspective and experience of the historian who can look at the period and place he is investigating with the benefit of the hindsight. For this reason, Lin argues that rather than focusing on the insider perspectives and experiences to the point that Cohen does, the historian needs to go back and forth between insider and outsider

perspectives and experiences in order to capture most comprehensively the history he is writing (Liu, 2002, p. 20). A second problem is the very possibility of the kind of empathy that is required by Cohen's approach (Liu, 2002, p. 21). The historian is of necessity an outsider: he stands outside the time and place he is studying. If so, then one must produce a convincing response to the questions of whether and to what extent the historian as the necessary outsider can really write the history of insiders. Cohen himself is actually aware of this problem and he addresses it towards the very end of the book:

The fact is, all historians—not only Americans approaching Chinese history from without but also Chinese historians approaching it from within—are, in some sense, outsiders. All of us are to an extent prisoners of our environments, trapped in one or another set of parochial concerns. And the truth we retrieve is inevitably qualified by the intellectual and emotional preoccupations each of us, through our vocabulary and concepts, brings to bear on the study of the past. (Cohen, 1984, p. 197-198).

Following this acknowledgement, however, Cohen optimistically underemphasises the challenge this problem poses to the historian. The only answer he gives in the final paragraph of the book is “but all of us, to the extent that we are conscious of the problem and take it seriously, can find ways to moderate its impact” (Cohen, 1984, p. 198). Although I do not disagree with this answer, given the complexity of the challenge, I find Cohen's response unconvincing. It is unconvincing because Cohen provides virtually no argumentation for this answer. Most historians would indeed agree that being aware of one's epistemic limitations can help one to better appreciate the object of historical knowledge, yet how exactly this is to be done is in need of explanation.

However, there is a third problem with Cohen's view, which I find more relevant to this study. This is the fundamental tension that Lin speaks of between the first element and the other two elements of the China centered approach. As we saw

that the first element emphasises interiority, especially in the form of empathy on the part of the historian with the perspectives and experiences of the historical agents he is writing the history of. The second and the third elements, on the other hand, emphasise the vertical and horizontal complexity of China. China can and must be divided further into vertically and horizontally different segments in order to capture the actual specific historical dynamics going on in them rather than blotting them out by employing a homogeneous concept of China in which all such specificities dissolve. Yet, if this is the case, then this problematises the historical agent with whose perspective and experience the historian is supposed to feel empathy in writing history. What exactly is the Chinese experience and perspective in this regard? If China is so vertically and horizontally differentiated that the employment of a homogeneous notion of China is problematic, then how is it not equally, if not more, problematic to speak of the way the Chinese experience the historical events? Lin, thus, raises the question of what individuals and collectives in history the historian should feel empathy with (“史家究应移情于哪个人物，集团呢?”) (Liu, 2002, p. 20-21). It is exactly on this question Cohen remains silent because, although the second and the third elements of his approach emphasise the complexity of China, the first element rehomogenises this complexity by employing an undifferentiated notion of Chinese experience and criteria in determining what is historically significant and what is not.

One possible response to this criticism would be that Cohen is obviously aware of the different ways in which Chinese people belonging to different groups come to experience the historical events. So, it is not so much that there is one Chinese experience or one Chinese criteria the historian can rely on but a complex cluster of experiences and perspectives which all together are relevant to Chinese

history. Some of these experiences and perspectives are shared by some Chinese people and others by some others, but so far as they are Chinese experiences and perspectives, the historian can and should feel empathy with them in writing Chinese history.

I do think that Cohen is indeed aware of the obvious fact that different conditions that different groups of Chinese people lived under would also produce different experiences and perspectives which cannot all be lumped together under a single experience and a single criterion of historical importance. However, even if this is acknowledged, I still find Cohen's reliance on "Chineseness" the way he does problematic. The reason for this is because the quality of being Chinese is itself a historically produced and contingent phenomenon, not having a uniform content across different groups as well as different historical places and periods. To argue that Chinese history must be written from the point of the Chinese people is to underemphasise the challenging fact that different groups had different notions of Chineseness, which may have excluded others.

To give some examples, earlier we saw the New Rural Reconstruction Movement (新乡村建设运动) during the 1920s and the 1930s as a noteworthy episode in Chinese history. During this period, Chinese society had been undergoing radical changes, which often created gaps in the older social fabric. The mass of rural Chinese people moving from the countryside to the cities met the urban ones. Yet, these rural people seeing the urbanites "with their bowler hats or babbed hair" "called them "foreigners (yang)" rather than recognising them as compatriots of a shared culture" (Merkel-Hess, 2016, p. 4). Here, the question arises: with whose perspectives and experiences is the historian supposed to feel empathy with? If the urbanites, then one would have to work with a different notion of Chineseness and as

a result have a different standard of what is historically significant and what is not. Yet, if one feels empathy with the rural people coming into the cities, then this would problematise the very Chineseness of the urbanites. Here, one cannot simply argue for a complex cluster of experiences and perspectives that different groups of Chinese people possess which are all relevant to Chinese history, because some of these exclude others from the very category of Chineseness. The problematisation of Chineseness in this way requires a more sophisticated understanding of the Chineseness than Cohen provides in his China centered approach.

It is not just the exclusive notions of Chineseness within China that problematises the category of Chineseness the way Cohen uses. The constitutive influence of the non-Chinese people on what it means to be Chinese is another factor. One can make this argument both for the identity construction of the Chinese people and the spatial construction of China. That is, the invention of a people called Chinese and the production of space that is called China. For the former, one can give the concept of “national character” (国民性) in Chinese discourses as an example. Lydia Liu, who argues for a translingual examination of the significant concepts in Chinese discourses, which were strongly associated with the historical dynamics and political movements taking place in China, shows how the concept of national character which played a key role for a wide range of Chinese people, such as Liang Qichao, Sun Yat-sen, Lu Xun and many others, was actually a product of translingual practice by which the concept travelled from the German Romantic thinkers, especially Herder, through the Christian missionaries into China (Lydia, 1995, P. 47-51). Chineseness in this regard was produced in a discursive field of translingual practices which would go well beyond China and Chinese people. One can make a similar argument for the production of space as part of Chinese space.

Peter Purdue, in his analysis of the Jesuit missionaries who went to China and helped the Kangxi emperor produce maps of his empire, points out how the new representations that maps introduced would transform the imagination and management of space and people. These maps would “construct a definite image of the imperial realm in the minds of the elites”, which later would be “transmitted to the public with few changes through the technology of print capitalism by nationalist ideologues in order to mobilise mass movement” (Purdue, 1998, p. 286). That is, the Chineseness of a particular space is not given but rather produced through a complex interplay of historical factors, both political and scientific, translingually and transregionally.

The key problem in Cohen’s approach, in this regard, is that he does not discuss what exactly it is that makes a particular identity, experience, or space Chinese. Chineseness is not so much problematised by considering it as a contingent historical construct as taken for granted to guide the historian to write Chinese history from an insider’s point of view. However, if Chineseness itself is problematised as part of Chinese history, that is, as a *historical* problem, then one cannot simply invoke Chineseness to determine what is to be included in Chinese history because the question of what counts as Chinese is itself in need of an answer in the first place. This, of course, does not mean that one cannot employ any sense of Chineseness in writing Chinese history. After all, the very concept of a *Chinese* history already presupposes some sense of Chineseness. However, the way Cohen formulates his approach, there is no discussion, and as a result no convincing answer, for the question of how to problematise the sense of Chineseness in the course of historical investigation, that one inevitably starts with in writing Chinese history. As a result, the distinctions that Cohen observes in American historiography on China

and discusses in his book, such as the West and China, the external and the internal, remain rather rigid distinctions with no deconstructive exploration.

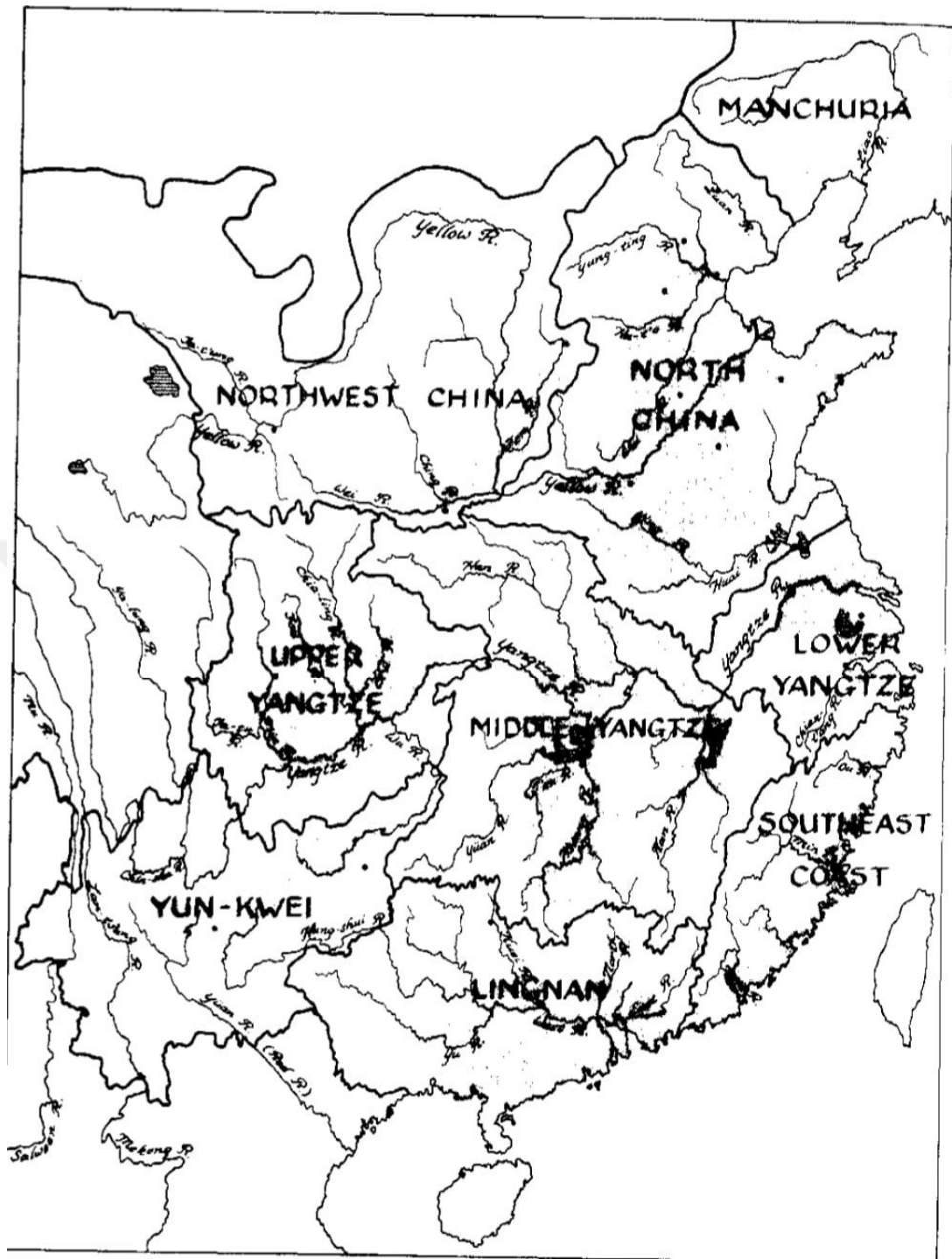
I shall try to deal with these two problems of Cohen's approach- the tension between the first (interiority) and the other two components (horizontal and vertical differentiation), and the question of Chineseness- this way: for the first, I shall focus on a specific group of people, that is, rickshaw pullers, situated within specific urban spaces (Beijing and Shanghai); as for the second, I raise the question of Chineseness in discussing Shanghai and Beijing as well as rickshaws rather than assuming they are ipso facto Chinese.

3.3 Beijing and Shanghai in the context of Chinese urban modernity

In examining Chinese urban modernity, it is essential to appreciate the complexity of the spatial entity called "China" and to divide it into analytically meaningful smaller pieces. Beijing and Shanghai first need to be situated within these pieces, much greater than them but much smaller than China itself. As we saw above, Skinner employs a regional approach in order to examine Chinese urbanity and urbanisation in a meaning way that appreciates the local dynamics and the complexity of China. Skinner rightly points out that in late imperial times, Chinese cities hardly formed a single integrated urban imperial system but rather several regional systems, each connected with the rest only tenuously (Skinner, 1977c, p. 211). Skinner defines a region as "any partition of activity-space made according to one of two criteria: (1) the homogeneity of things to be considered, producing a set of *formal or uniform* regions; or (2) the interrelatedness of things to be considered, producing a set of *functional or nodal* regions" (Skinner, 1977c, p. 216). By employing the second

criterion of this definition, Skinner divides China into nine macroregions: North China, Northwest China, Upper Yangtze, Middle Yangtze, Lower Yangtze, Southeast Coast, Lingnan, Yun-Kwei, and Manchuria. These macroregions can be seen in figure 1 below:





MAP 1. PHYSIOGRAPHIC MACROREGIONS OF AGRARIAN CHINA IN RELATION TO MAJOR RIVERS, WITH REGIONAL CORES INDICATED BY SHADING

Figure 1. (Skinner, 1977c, p.214)

Each of these regions is defined in terms of drainage basins, so the regional boundaries often follow watersheds (Skinner, 1977c, p.212). With the exception of

Yun-Kwei, the regional cores are river-valley lowlands. This is significantly due to the fact that the low unit cost of water transportation compared to the unit cost of land transportation gave such places with access to water transportation advantages against the regional peripheries (Skinner, 1977c, p.216). As we shall see in section 6, railways would play a significant role not only in the transformation of land transportation but also in the imagination of modernity and urbanity. In fact, the treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 was a turning point for China's urbanisation as it hastened the development of modern mechanised industry in an increasing number of treaty ports and introduced an era of railroad construction (Skinner, 1977c, p.220).

Beijing and Shanghai belong to different macroregions. Beijing is a Northern city whereas Shanghai is a Southern one. In Skinner's scheme, Beijing belongs to North China whereas Shanghai belongs to Lower Yangtze. The deep difference between Northern and Southern parts of China is historically well known. This difference was, in fact, so prominent to the Mongol rules during the Yuan dynasty that they put the Northern and Southern Chinese in different ethnic groups and subjected them to different administrations (Ebrey, 2010, p. 182-183). It is no surprise, then, that these cities followed different historical pathways. Beijing rose to importance after the decline of Kaifeng, which had risen during the Medieval cycle of urbanisation, ended by disruptions in commercial and transportation activities and Mongol invasions in the region (Skinner, 1977a, p. 16). In the Southern region, during the Tang (618-907) and Northern Song (960-1127), it was Yangzhou that was the central metropolis. Hangzhou, on the other hand, benefiting from being designated as the capital of the Southern Song, would become the regional metropolis until the fourteenth century when the Ming founder initiated significant changes, which would place Nanjing, the new capital of the Ming, in a central place.

During a new development cycle that began in the 16th century and ended in the 19th century with the Taiping rebellion, Suzhou had the opportunity to become the region's metropolis. In the aftermath of the Taiping rebellion, which would witness the rapid development of industrialisation and modernisation, Shanghai became a highly significant commercial urban center (Skinner, 1977a, p.17).

Though situated within different regions, different Chinese cities may, however, belong to similar or dissimilar city types. That is, cities of different macroregions, which difference is important for the macroregional context of urbanity and urbanisation of these cities, are not absolutely separate; nor do cities of the same macroregion, by this very fact, belong to the same city type. Cities still can, in other words, be classified in a way that can bring cities of different macroregions closer and cities of the same macroregion further apart. Joseph Esherick's classification for modern Chinese cities is useful for our analysis. Whatever uniformities they may have had prior to the 18th century, Esherick lists a number of distinct urban types by the 20th century. These are treaty ports, capital cities, interior cities, tourist cities, railway cities, industrial cities, and frontier cities. Each urban modern city type, whatever macroregion it belonged to, would still display significant similarities and different ones, whatever macroregion they shared, would similarly display significant differences.

The first type is the treaty ports. These cities were urban areas that were opened up to foreign trade and influence through port treaties which would concede significant autonomous areas to mainly Western and Japanese authorities. Chinese sovereignty, as a result, would be highly curtailed in the treaty port cities. Tianjin, Canton, Hankou, and Shanghai are important examples of this modern urban type. With the autonomy granted to the Western and Japanese authorities in the certain

zones of these cities, a high degree of economic, political, cultural and journalistic activity was attracted and encouraged in the port cities. Much of China's modern industry together with almost all modern banking, besides most of the key newspapers, publishers and film studios, were all situated in the concession areas of the port cities. This provided the urban life in these cities with a very cosmopolitan hue. However, given the imperial ambitions and conflicts both among the Western and Japanese actors and those and the Chinese, would also mark these cities as sites of foreign means of imperialist exploitation and oppression (Esherick, 1999, p. 2). Furthermore, since different concession areas were given to different foreign authorities, the administration of the port cities would suffer fragmentation, which would make comprehensive city planning very difficult, citywide mobilisation of resources impossible, and the use of criminal gangs as an informal institution to enforce contracts across different concession areas inevitable. Thus, the growth of criminal gangs as well as the easy spread of such activities as prostitution, gambling, dance halls, and narcotics in Shanghai (Esherick, 1999, p.3).

The prevalence of concession areas would give the port cities what Linda Johnson calls a "dual city" structure. On the one hand, the concession areas would generally face the water and be oriented towards commerce, and architecturally display Western colonial and neoclassical styles, the windows facing the street. The Chinese areas, on the other hand, were oriented towards hierarchy of status that rested upon the official Yamen and a City-God temple. The Windows, though, would face interior courtyards in a housing structure that resembled a honeycomb pattern, in which streets and alleys were lined by walls (Esherick, 1999, p. 4).

The primary urban counterpoint of the treaty port was the capital city as the administrative centre. The traditional city structure would include "cardinal

orientation, rectilinear streets and walls, fortified gates, focus on the palace or official yamen, internal division into distinct quarters, market areas away from the center and near gates” (Esherick, 1999, p. 4). With the intensification of modernisation, the republican capitals would attempt to produce dramatic breaks from this traditional imperial morphology. I shall examine this traditional morphology at length in the next section as it provides us with a good example of the first and the third senses of invisibility- that is, the implication of dreams and desires in the materiality of the urban structure as well as the intricate dialectical link between the past and the present, history and memory. I shall do so comparatively with Beijing as the capital and Shanghai as the treaty port and, employing the second sense of invisibility, bring out their features into relief.

Treaty ports and capitals hold an essential role not just in Chinese urban modernity but in that of many other areas. The juxtaposition of Beijing and Shanghai, in fact, shows resemblances with that between Ankara and Istanbul in Turkey, Islamabad and Karachi in Pakistan, New Delhi and Calcutta or Bombay in India, Brasilia and Rio in Brazil, Canberra and Sydney in Australia, Abuja and Lagos in Nigeria, and finally Washington, D.C. and New York in the United States (Esherick, 1999, p. 5). In each case, the new capital of the country would stand in opposition to the more cosmopolitan urban centre as its national counterpoint that would better embody the national identity and so deserve to be the capital. However, as we shall see in the next section, such dichotomous thinking between a cosmopolitan foreign city and a native national capital is flawed and is in need of deconstruction.

Despite their centrality, however, these two modern urban types do not encompass Chinese urban modernity. A third type of city is the interior city. Interior

city stands in contrast to the coastal city, mostly the treaty port, and often represents the traditional backwardness of the inland as opposed to the modernised or modernising commercial or political centres along the coast. This was the common perception of so many Chinese who especially during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) fled from the coast cities into the interior cities, such as those who fled into Chongqing during the war and those who fled from Shanghai to cities like Yangzhou. During the war, there were significant efforts to modernise such cities as Chongqing, Chengdu, Kunming, Guilin, Lanzhou, and Luoyang, whose population increased rapidly by 50 to 100 percent due to the flood of people escaping the devastating war, but because these efforts would constantly be measured by the unattainable standards of the coast, especially Shanghai, so they would always be labelled as backward traditional inland urban formations (Esherick, 1999, p.5).

The fourth type of modern city is the tourist city. Tourist cities would also be called cultural cities after the 1949 revolution. These cities would be preserved and promoted for tourist consumption as the physical and cultural vestiges of Chinese tradition and history. Hangzhou and Suzhou are famous examples but Beijing would also assume this role after 1928 when the Guomindang moved the capital to Nanjing and renamed Beijing as Beiping. These cities are significant both for “the invention of tradition” on the part of Chinese tradition and history and the careful combination of modern facilities such as railroads, buses, restaurants, souvenir shops, and so on, and cultural sites that embodied the authentic Chinese tradition (Esherick, 1999, p. 5). Urban space would thus both be commodified and consumed as the container of authentic cultural representations and be construed as the laboratory to invent such ‘authentic’ cultural representations in the first place.

The fifth type is the railway city. What distinguishes a railway city from others is not the presence or even the importance of railways. It is a historical fact, as we shall see in section 5, that railways significantly affected most major Chinese cities both physically and symbolically. However, no matter how deeply affected by the introduction and development of railways, these cities still existed or could have existed without railways. Railway cities such as Changchun, Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou and Xuzhou, on the other hand, owed their very existence to railways, built almost from the ground up this way (Esherick, 1999, p. 6). These cities were also means of imperialist control over infrastructures and plundering natural resources from China. Shenyang (沈阳市) is a prominent example. After the War of Juawu (1894-1895), the Qing viceroy Li Hongzhang went to Russia to attend the coronation of Nicholas II and then toured Europe, America and Canada. In Moscow, Li signed the Li-Lobonav Treaty on 3 June 1896, whereby Nicolas II promised to help maintain the territorial integrity of China against Japan but in return China allow a Russian gauge railway through Heilongjiang Province and Jilin Province to Vladivostok, financed and controlled by Russia. During his tour in Britain, Li would envision a railway construction project for China, out of which would grow the Chinese Eastern Railway. However, after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and the conclusion of the Treaty of Portsmouth, most of the southern branch of the Chinese Eastern Railway would be tranferred to Japan, in 1906 becoming The South Manchuria Railway. By 1907, visitors to Fengtian station at Shenyang had risen as high as to 500.000 whereas the population of the city of Shenyang was only 300.000. In 1910, a new area for the Shenyang railway station was chosen and in the ensuing period the city of Shenyang would be expanded (Xi and Villatoro, 2023, p.7-8).

A relatively rare type, rare because of the pace and form of the economic development of China, was the industrial city as the fifth urban modern type. During the republican era, these cities were mostly railway cities such as Changchun, Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, Baotou, but more purely industrial centres like Anshan, Luoyang, Taiyuan, and Lanzhou can also be counted as industrial cities, most of which underwent industrial transformation during the war against Japan or under the Japanese in Manchukuo. Early in the 20th century, industrial production of China was actually concentrated in the treaty port cities, Shanghai in the South with its dominating figure of 31 percent of the factories in 1937 and Tianjin as the industrial centre of the North. However, these treaty ports, despite the concentration of industrial production, was foremost centres of commerce, finance, and services, so they cannot be classified as industrial cities. The closest model of the industrial city we can observe during this period is those cities that focused on mining, such as Tangshan in Heibei, where Kailuan coal mine company, the Qixin cement company, and a railway shop were located (Esherick, 1999, p. 6).

The final urban modern model is the frontier city. Frontier cities, mostly along the Northwestern frontier of China, would display ethnic divisions and urban dual structures that reflected these divisions. The Han administrators who built these cities followed the traditional rectilinear urban morphology but this morphology was separated into ethnically differentiated urban spaces. In Inner Mongolia, the separation took place along the lines of a Han commercial city and a Manchu Garrison. In the northwest, on the other hand, the separation took the form of a Han administrative centre and a Muslim suburb that had walls. In the northeast, we observe the non-Han settlements following a similar urban pattern: “Russian settlements in Harbin and Japanese settlements in Changchun and the southern

Manchurian cities providing an intriguing colonial variation on this dual city theme” (Esherick, 1999, p. 6).

To sum up, then, Beijing and Shanghai in the complex Chinese urban landscape, which, up until the 1949 revolution and its consequences, did not constitute a single integrated urban system, were situated in different urban macroregions. Based on Skinner’s scheme, Beijing is located in North China and Shanghai in Lower Yangtze. Due to this macroregional difference, Beijing and Shanghai shared significant differences in the historical trajectories they followed. However, macroregional differences and similarities do not tell us the whole story about different cities. For this reason, I employ Esherick’s scheme of modern urban types for Chinese cities. Based on this scheme, Beijing fits the capital city model from the Ming era all the way to 1928 when Guomindang decided to make Nanjing into the new capital. Afterwards, Beijing’s cultural identity came to the fore. Shanghai, on the other hand, is a treaty port and shares a number of the characteristics of this urban modern model. However, it is important to keep in mind that these models should not be conceived as absolutely mutually exclusive. Beijing, for example, though sharing the characteristics of a capital city, would also resemble a tourist city, especially after 1928. Shanghai, on the other hand, was a treaty port, but because the treaty ports had fragmented urban spaces, which belonged to different foreign or Chinese authorities, treaty ports had some similarities with the frontier cities in their urban structure.

The uniting theme that runs through all these models, however, is urban modernity. These are all, that is to say, modern city types. To explain their modernity, thus, requires us to delve into the complex urban transformations they underwent. To this end, in the next section, I will explore the traditional Chinese cosmology and

how it shaped urban morphology, both physical and social. The modernisation of the urban landscape, and the consequent rise of urban modernity, where urbanity and modernity as we saw before do not mean a simple combination but mutual transformation, required a radical break both from this cosmology and from the urban morphology that embedded it. However, it is important to note that, since, as argued in Chapter 2, the past as the invisible aspect of the present is not ontologically separate from it, urban modernisation did not mean a simple replacement of the old by the new. Instead, the new was born out of the new and was heavily influenced by it. Despite the new dynamics of mobility and accessibility, the Chinese cities could not simply replicate the projects for urban landscape the planners imagined because they were situated within a different historical context than the European cities. Strand observes that the European city was exported to the third world, including China, (Strand, 1989, p. 5), a term he takes from Girouard's discussion on the city as export (Girouard, 1985, p. 233-254), but this could not produce a faithful replica for historical reasons. The urban modern transformations, in other words, were a rupture from the traditional cosmology and its material morphology but at the same time was still marked by it as it grew out of it. In the next section, I will explore these transformations.

3.4 The Chinese cosmology and historical origins of the urban morphology of Beijing and Shanghai

Arthur Wright in explaining the development of the cosmology of Chinese cities points out that because it was a cliché view of imperial Confucianism that rural life promoted virtue while cities were places of corruption and vice, although the

behaviour of the elite contradicted it as the cities were the bases of their wealth and power, still this view is responsible in part for the relatively insignificant place of city theory in the Chinese literary tradition (Wright, 1977, p.34). This said, though, the practice of city building did have cosmological elements in it, the visible materiality of the urban structure reflecting the invisible desires and beliefs about the cosmos of its residents. The legendary beginnings of Zhou city, as recounted in the Book of Songs, was carried out by Gong Danfu (公亶父), also known as King Tai of Zhou (周太王), the grandfather of King Wen of Zhou (周文王), who led his people “to the foot of Mt. Ch’i on the north bank of the Wei river” (Wright, 1977, p. 35). Taking the oracle by tortoiseshell, King Tai decided that this was the proper place to build houses. The ritual elements worth noting in this recounted instance are “the taking of the oracle, the building in straight lines (this was also practical), the ancestral hall, and the great earth-mound” (Wright, 1977, p.35).

Over time, King Wen moved southeast across the Wei river to found Feng as his capital. Feng, in contrast to Zhou, may have been a conquered city because there is no indication or mention of divination that precedes its establishment, which possibly is because Feng was a city that already existed rather than built anew. The next stage, when there was established a second capital of Zhou at Lo, of city building is an important development in the transformation of the system of rituals and symbols because the territory previously belonged to Shang and the establishment of a new capital provided a precedent for a means of controlling territory and population in the newly conquered land (Wright, 1977, p. 36). This was also a significant stage for the intermingling of the Shang and Zhou rituals and symbols, producing a merger of Zhou and Shang practices (Wright, 1977, p. 37).

During the Zhou period, one of the most important innovations of urban planning was the separation of city plans into functional zones, which, though perhaps prefigured in the Shang capitals, was only realised in the Zhou cities. The Eastern Zhou cities possessed a central area that usually had walls around and contained the palaces and other significant buildings resided by the aristocracy. Surrounding this walled area was a second walled area which contained “industrial and artisan quarters, residences of the people, some farmland, commercial streets, and markets.” This double enclosure of the city with two walled areas would later on have important influence on the theories of city building (Wright, 1977, p. 38-39).

The Eastern Zhou cities shared a number of ancient cults such as the cult of the god of the soil, representing fertile forces and self-renewal, ancestor worship with its accompanying ancestral temple, and the worship of Heaven (天) which as a cosmic force would distribute rewards and punishments so that if the ruler was not right in his rule, then he would lose the mandate of heaven (天命) to a better and more virtuous ruler replacing him (Wright, 1977, p. 39-40).

Although these cosmological elements did exist as the invisible city behind the visible material city of the Shang and the Zhou periods, they were not systematised. Towards the end of Zhou, some other schools appeared and to a degree influenced urban imagination and planning. The school of the Dual Forces, that is, yin-yang (阴阳), and the school of the Five Elements (五行学说), were closely related and developed a model of the universe in which organicism played a central role. The former school saw the cosmos as an interplay of two complementary energies, which if controlled properly would make all phenomena smoothly occur. The latter, on the other hand, divides the universe into five basic elements which

would succeed one another in a repeating cycle of occurrence (Wright, 1977, p. 41-42).

The Han period was a watershed in the development of urban cosmology. Although, when the first emperor of the Han decided to establish his capital in the Guanzhong (关中) Plain across the Wei River across the Qin capital of Xianyang (咸阳) and close to the east of the early Zhou capitals of Feng and Hao, the Han capital displayed few of the earlier unsystematised rituals and symbols from the Shang and the Zhou and did not really conform to the cosmological symbolism developed by the School of the Yin-Yang and the School of the Five Elements, half a century after its establishment, the Han would experience a process of systematisation and synthesis (Wright, 1977, p. 43-44). Building on many of the ancient books partially restored and reconstructed and scholars engaging in debates about their relative authenticity and different versions, the Han practitioners under the rule of the Emperor Wu (汉武帝) started producing a synthesis that offered both a coherent worldview and a corresponding urban imagination (Wright, 1977, p. 45). This synthesis has four important components.

The first component is Archaism, which was dominant in the Han builders and Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒), taking Confucius's idealisation of the early Zhou as the ancient model to follow and transforming it into a detailed scholastic system in which the ancient ideas and institutions would be invoked to justify the present decisions. The second element is organicism, in order to form which the Han synthesisers had to pull together many texts and ideas that were not in fact related in a systematic way to one another. Organicism at its core explains the interactions of the human and natural world in terms of cosmic harmony, which need to be maintained and protected. Since the Han synthesis aspired to a hegemonic place,

dominating other traditions, its organicism element had to surpass the earlier more moralistic field of the Confucians. Thus, for example, the Book of Changes, which was originally a manual for the interpretation of milfoil auguries, was made into a Confucian classic by the Han synthesisers because the images it used could be employed to account for the interrelations among diverse phenomena. Not only this, but different ideas from different traditions such as the School of the Five Elements, the School of the yin-yang and the School of Dao were drawn into this synthesis (Wright, 1977, p. 45).

The third component was centralism. Centralism for the Han synthesisers meant a parallel between the centrality of China in the world and the centrality of the emperor among people. This was also highly related to the fourth component, moralism, which was the belief in the moral centrality and superiority of the ruler, the social hierarchy, and the classically educated literati (Wright, 1977, p. 46). The classical source of city theory from this period, Zhou li (周礼) gives a description of how this centralism would be reflected in the urban structure (Wright, 1977, p. 46). Zhou li tells the construction workers to build cities in the form of a square. A square or a rectangle was the traditional morphology of the Chinese city, but, for the men of Han, this had a great symbolic significance, because, since they believed that the earth was a perfect square, so should the city structure reflect this form. The city this way being a small replica of the whole world, the emperor would reside at the centre of the city just as he was at the centre of the human world. The Han urban ideology was reflected not just in the geometry of the city but also in its numerical construction. Zhou li states that the wall must measure nine li and each side of the wall must have three gates. The north-south streets, on the other hand, must accommodate nine chariot ways. Here, the numbers three, nine, and twelve as the total

sum of three and nine are important. Three represents the three sectors of the universe (heaven, earth and human); nine is three times three and also stands for the ancient Chinese world when the Emperor Yu established nine provinces; finally, twelve is the sum of three and nine but also the total number of the months in a year. By combining these three numbers in the urban structure, the emperor who resides at the centre of the city would symbolically unite the three realms of the universe, rules over the nine provinces, and does this during the sequence of twelve months of every year (Wright, 1977, p. 47-48).

This urban symbolic imagination created by the Han would, however, over time undergo significant changes. One important cause of this is the fact of territorial expansion. During and after the Han, the Chinese territory would expand beyond the North China plain, the nucleus of Chinese civilisation, and move into the Yangtze Valley and further south and east where the regions were mountainous and heavily watered. With these different material conditions, urban imagination would change, too (Wright, 1977, p. 51-52). Wright argues that a key development of the Southern experience for Chinese urban imagination was the emergence of some new ideas that would become the system of ideas known as feng-shui (风水), both reflecting the organicism of the Han synthesis and the construction of cities which had a close relationship between rivers, canals, and lakes on the one hand and hills, mountains, scarps and ravines on the other, which posed a contrast with the flat city sites of the North China (Wright, 1977, p. 53-54).

Of all the imperial capitals, Ming Beijing was the city that most closely accorded with this cosmological imagination of the Chinese city planners (Skinner, 1977a, p. 6). The foundations of the city that is today known as Beijing were first established by the Yuan dynasty. The capital of the earlier dynasty, Jin, was located in

the southwest region of Beijing. After briefly using the capital of Jin, which the Mongols had destroyed while conquering China, the Mongol rulers decided to build a new capital in 1267, naming it The Great Capital (大都), or Dadu, in 1272 (Dong, 2003, p. 24). It was Kublai Khan, ruling as the Emperor Shizu of Yuan (元世祖), who made this city the capital of all China. Kublai Khan, adopting the ceremonial and symbolism of the earlier Chinese rulers, entrusted the design of Dadu to a Chinese of wide knowledge, Liu Bingzhong (刘秉忠), the architecture of the city to a Muslim, and the supervision of the work to a high-ranking officer of his Mongol-Chinese army (Wright, 1977, p. 66). Dadu was built in accordance with the instructions that are laid out in Zhou li that we saw above. However, due to geographical limitations, the construction was somewhat compromised. For example, Zhou li stipulated that the city must be built as a square surrounded by four walls, each 9 li long, representing the symbolic importance of number 9, but the walls of Dadu were longer than 9 li on each side. Such slight deviations notwithstanding, this new capital would nevertheless be the closest model envisioned in Zhou li.

The Ming dynasty that replaced the Yuan initially established Nanjing as its capital by the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), whose temple name was Taizu of Ming (明太祖), ruling as The Hongwu Emperor (洪武帝) (Ebrey, 2010, p. 190). Dadu's name was accordingly changed, now called Beiping (北平), meaning Northern Peace. Although Taizu instructed his descendants to follow his example and preserve the institutions he had established, this wish would not always be honoured. Nanjing, as an instance of this, would be demoted and Beiping would be made the new capital of China by Chengzu (成祖), the fourth son of Taizu, who seized the throne from the legitimate heir of Taizu, his deceased eldest son's 15 year

old son (Ebrey, 2010, p. 193). Arguments for and against Beiping as a capital side had been going on since the very beginning of the Ming, which would mainly focus on such issues as “supply problems, construction costs, defense considerations, climate, historical precedent, and feng-shui principles” (Wright, 1977, p. 67) but Chengzu, now Yongle Emperor (永乐帝), would override the opposition and set the city as the new capital, changing the city name to Beijing (北京), meaning the Northern Capital. Beijing was formally inaugurated as the new capital of China in 1421.

1421 was the final reassertion of the many elements of the classical urban cosmology in Chinese history (Wright, 1977, p. 67). The urban structure of Beijing was carefully designed to conform with the urban imagination that this classical cosmology contained. Below is a picture that compares Beijing with three other capitals from the Han, Tang, and Song period:

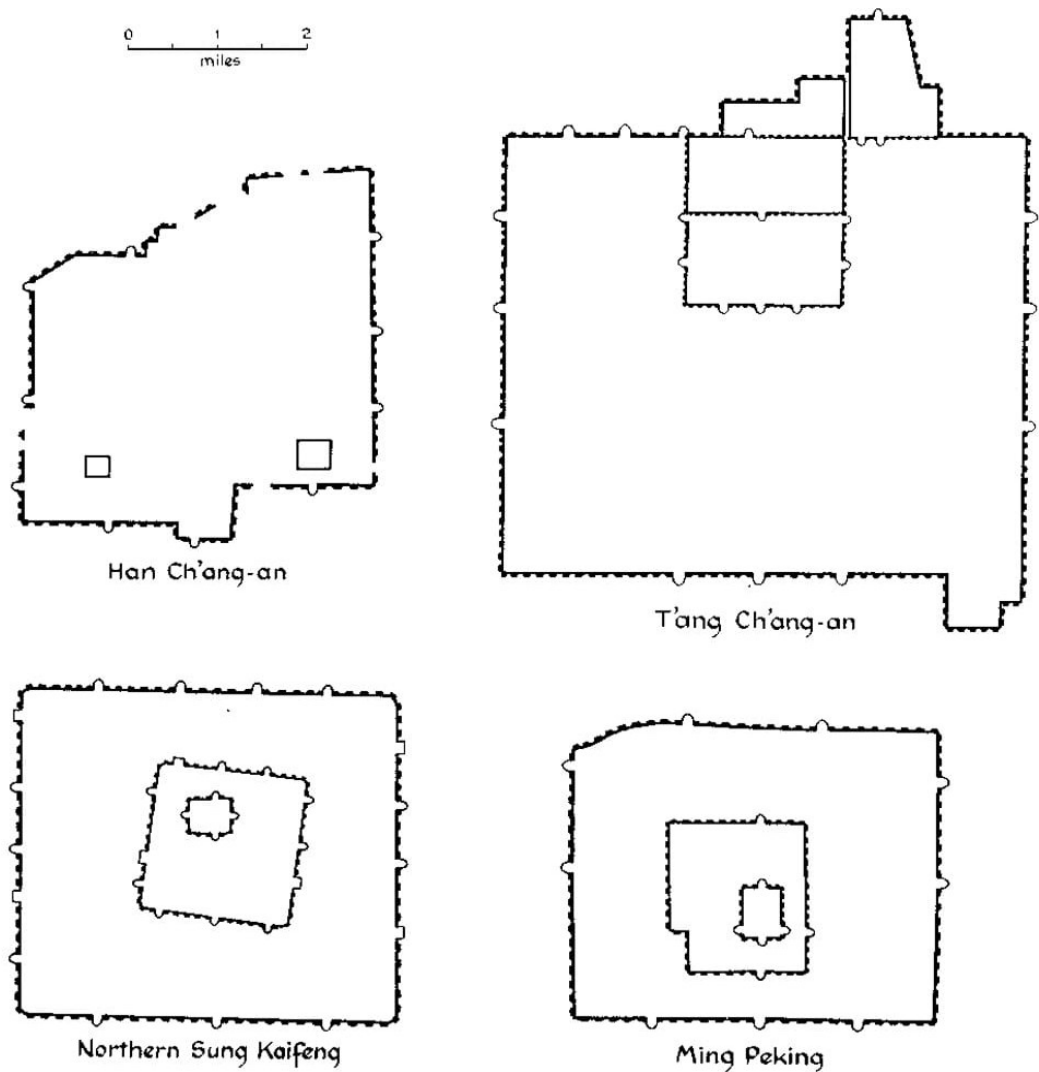


Figure 2. (Wright, 1977, p. 72)

The Yongle Emperor and other Ming rulers would embellish the city lavishly. The Yongle Emperor built a majestic palace compound together with largest buildings and courtyards, finest temples, bridges, and gardens in Chinese history up to that point. The Ming palace was constructed in the same site as the Yuan palace but the north wall was moved southward and all the walls were now built again with bricks rather than dirt. In 1553, under the reign of the Jiajing Emperor, there was added an oblong section along the south wall of the city. This oblong section would be called the Outer City (外城), and the original section the Inner City (内城). The Qing

dynasty, the last imperial dynasty of China, inherited this urban structure and did rather few changes to it. Figure 3 shows the urban structure of Beijing during the Qing Dynasty:

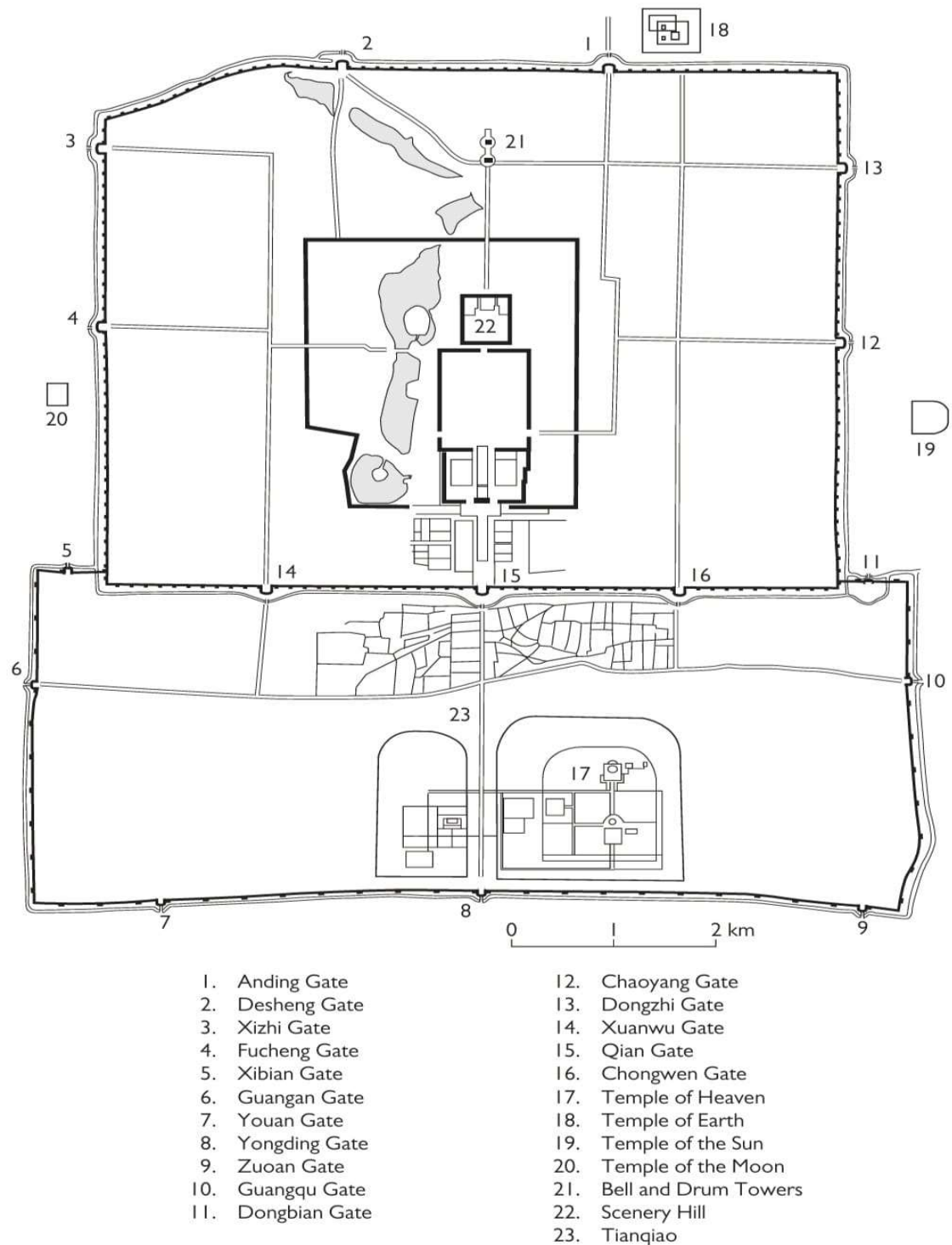


Figure 3. (Dong, 2003, p.26)

Beijing was designed to be seen from an imperial standpoint which could observe the rest of the city but the rest of the city could not see it. Scenery Hill in the map was this standpoint. It was an imperial privilege to look at the city of Beijing from the Scenery Hill, representing the penetrating vision of the emperor. One could see the three layers of the Inner City. At the very centre was the Forbidden City (紫禁城), where the emperor resided. The traditional city of Beijing had been constructed as a city of circles. “In the midst of a great circle lies a small circle. Within the small circle stands a yellow one.” Thus was the impression of the newspaper man, Li Chengyi (Strand, 1989, p. 1). The emperor, residing at the centre circle that was the Forbidden City, was the symbolic heart not just of the lay but also the cosmic order of the universe. 紫禁城 refers to colour purple (紫色), which symbolises the Pole Star that was believed to be the residence of the Celestial Emperor (Bracken, 2019, p.1). Surrounding it was the Imperial City (皇城) which was the residence quarter for Manchu aristocrats and high officials. Outside this, there was the Inner City with its nine gates, “three on the south side and two on each of the other three sides” (Dong, 2003, p.27). The Inner City, relatively speaking, had rather few businesses to satisfy the daily needs of its residents, so the Outer City was the commercial centre that provided the city residents with their material needs. Since the Han had been banished from the Inner City following the Manchu conquest of Beijing, the Outer City was where Han officials and merchants lived (Dong, 2003, p. 27). Finally, whereas, the walls inside the city divided its residents based on status and ethnic hierarchies, the walls outside strictly separated the city from the countryside, demarcating the urban centre from the surrounding rural environment (Dong, 2003, p. 28-29).

Shanghai poses a problem from a comparative urban perspective when one wishes to examine it in relation to Beijing. In fact, one of the best-known guidebooks of the 1930s refers to Shanghai as “Shanghai the Incomparable” (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 192). Even the question of at which historical point one ought to start the narrative of emergence for Shanghai is not without dispute. One approach that has received the official endorsement of the Chinese Communist Party is to single out 1291 as the founding point of origin, when during the Yuan Dynasty the place that stood by the Huangpu River (黄浦江) was named “Shanghai” for the first time. On the other hand, another approach, first promoted by the Shanghailanders, that is, Britons and Americans who established residence in Shanghai, emphasises the experience of the First Opium War (1839-1842) as the founding moment, before which Shanghai was no more than a fishing village. Thus, the founding moment of Shanghai for the second approach is not 1291 but November 17, 1843, when Shanghai and four other Chinese communities were turned into treaty ports through the Treaty of Nanjing (南京条约) (Wasserstrom, 2007, p. 1-3).

The geographical area that Shanghai is located, that is, the peninsula that extends into the sea south of the Yangtze River, north of the Qiantang River (钱塘江), and east of Lake Tai (太湖) was originally a swamp, which became habitable only through extensive hydraulic engineering and the construction of a seawall along its eastern edge. Once this was achieved, this area would soon count among the richest areas in China (Elvin, 1977, p. 441). In those regions where it was difficult to water or proximity to the sea made water salty, it was a more profitable enterprise to grow cotton rather than rice. Cotton cultivation in such near areas as Songjiang (松江) and Suzhou (苏州市) was accompanied during the Ming period by the

development and expansion of both a rural and an urban textile industry (Elvin, 1977, p. 444-445). The rural society was commercialised and depended on merchants and market towns to buy and sell raw cotton, ginned cotton, cotton yarn, cotton cloth, and basic foodstuffs (Elvin, 1977, p. 446).

Water conservancy was an important issue in Shanghai and the surrounding areas. Water transportation was essential to the maintenance of the commercialised rural economy as well as the vital connections between country and city and between one city and another (Elvin, 1977, p. 448). Shanghai and the surrounding area underwent three main phases of water control. During the fifteenth century and partially the sixteenth century, agricultural officials (治农官), also called water officials (水官), determined the general trajectory, commanding the constricted administrators who ran the tax collections, known as cantons and tithings (里甲). In the late 15th century, a new version of these cantons and tithings, specialising in water control, developed, replacing the regular system in the 16th century. In the course of the 16th century, the agricultural officials' role gradually diminished, with most of the posts abolished in 1559. In the first half of the 17th century, this led to a situation where the weaknesses of the new administrative system were abused and exploited by semi criminals called mud men (泥头) (Elvin, 1977, p. 449). In the figures below, we can see both the dike system in the region Shanghai was situated in

and a map of Shanghai in the late 18th century without its walls.

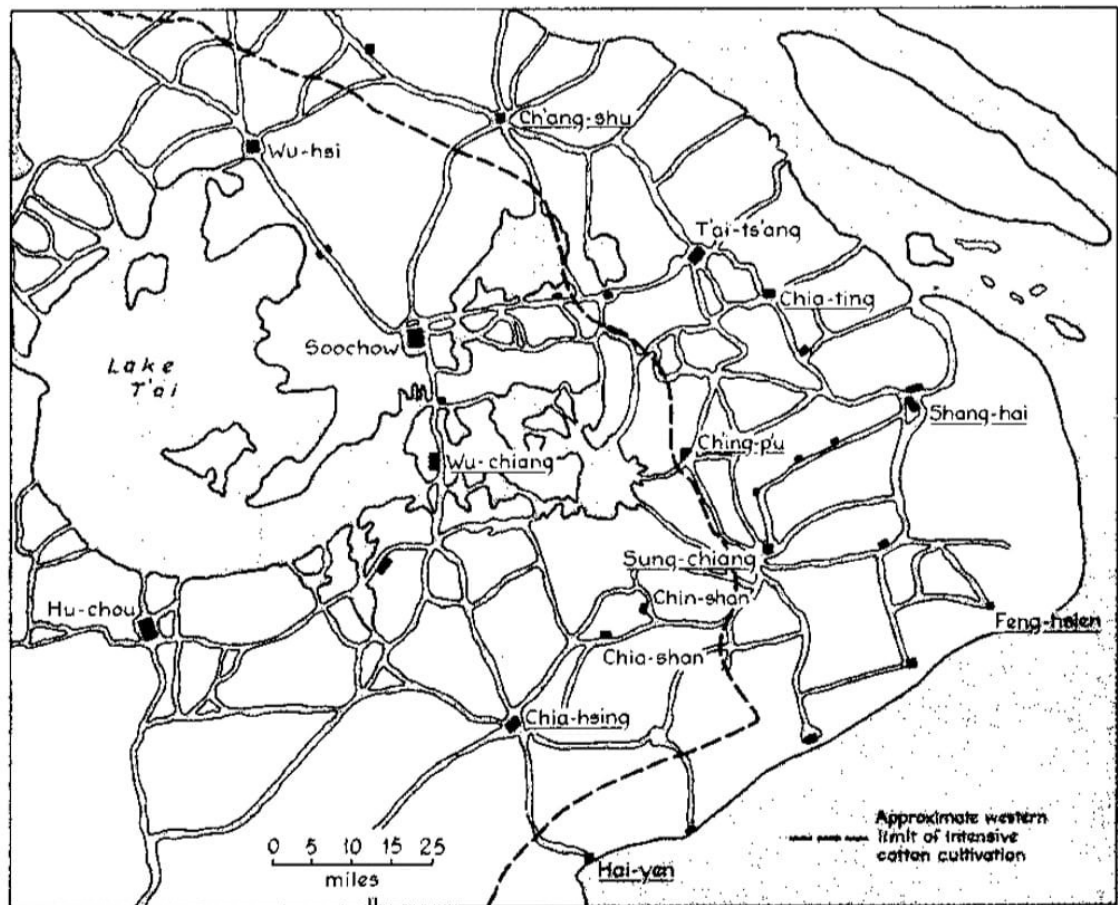


Figure 4

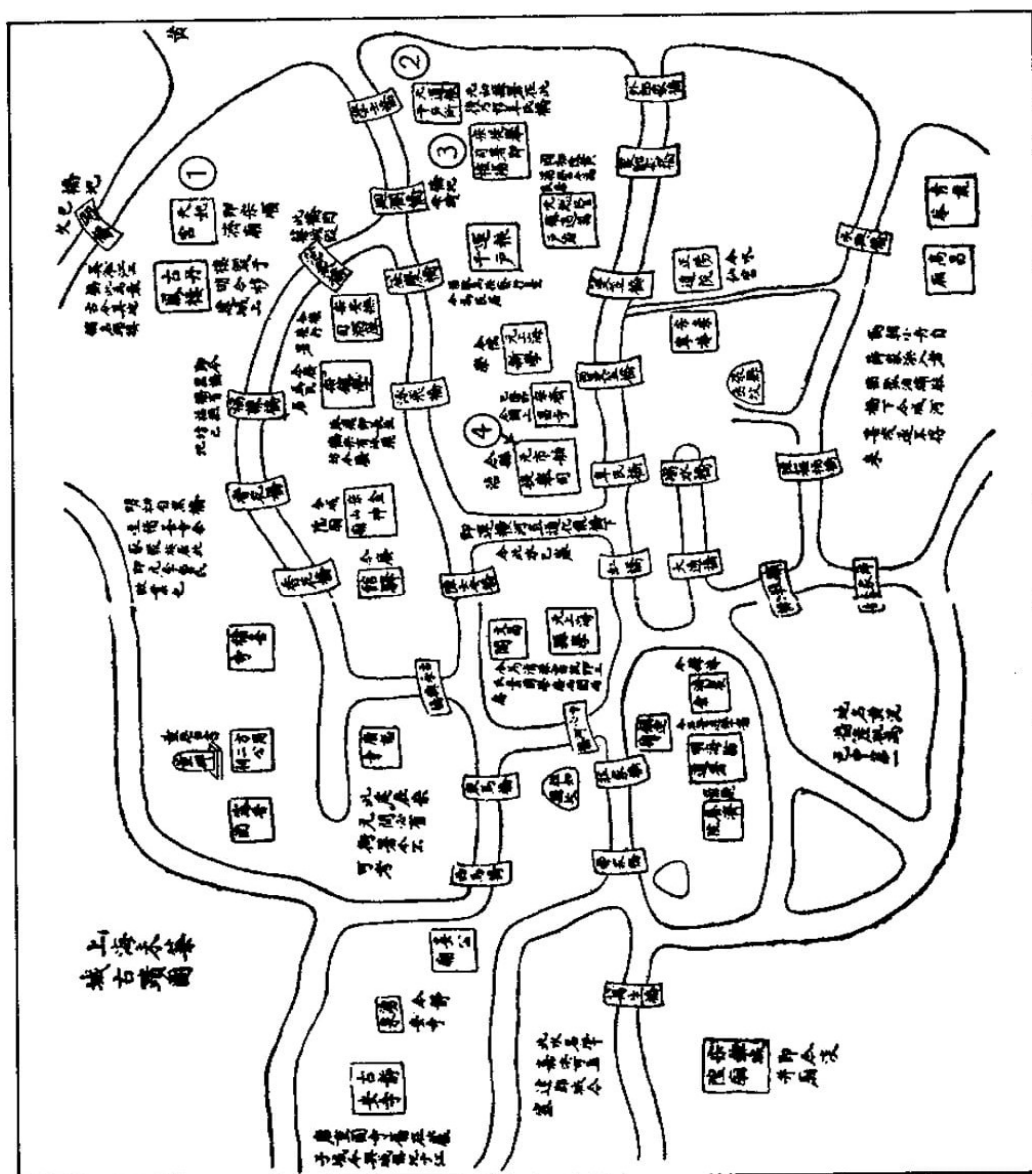


Figure 5

In view of these historical facts, one can conclude that Shanghai prior to becoming a treaty port was by no means just a fishing village. The city was already part of a significantly commercialising region, Jiangnan (江南), during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Thus, the second approach that we saw above on the origins of Shanghai is flawed in that there was already a considerable city that Shanghai was prior to the Treaty of Nanjing.

This said, however, Hanchao Lu points out the constitutive impact that turning into a treaty port had on Shanghai as we know it. Referring to Paul Cohen's China Centered approach, Lu argues that the impact-response model criticised by Cohen for the reasons we saw in the earlier chapter is in fact more relevant for Shanghai than any other region in China. The reason is because most of the changes that took place after 1843 in Shanghai, which would radically transform the city, were "an obvious consequence of the Western impact or were associated with the West" (Lu, 1999, 18). Given this, Lu urges a different methodological approach: "In analysing a historical phenomenon in China by examining it from "within" (which is what the China-centered approach attempts), we must choose whether to view that phenomenon as something especially Chinese in a Chinese context or perspective, or to view it as a Chinese counterpoint of things Western." Lu opts for the latter because "the latter has the obvious merit of putting Chinese history in comparative perspective and, for a practical purpose, making things Chinese easier to understand" (Lu, 1999, p. 18).

The advantage that Lu's approach has over Cohen's is that with a comparative approach, comparison not being the simultaneous evaluation of two self-enclosed historical entities but aiming to understand the system of relations that create such entities in the first place, it can problematise the Chineseness of Chinese cities rather than rely on a Chinese "insider" view that remains beyond the flow of historical changes. Why is it that Shanghai is a Chinese city rather than, say, a French or an American one? Jeffrey Wasserstrom points out that the Chineseness of Shanghai was open to question and some foreign groups, taking Shanghai's nickname "Paris of the East" rather literally, could think of the city as piece of France surrounded by China or a modern equivalent of the autonomous European

trade centres of an earlier epoch like Venice, a city Shanghailanders would like to compare Shanghai to. A similar situation existed for the other nickname “New York of the East” (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 197). By such problematisation, Wasserstrom believes that the historian can counter the nationalist teleologies which regard the piece of land that is now part of the national territory as historically predestined to be so. It was historically by no means necessary or obvious that the enclaves of Old Shanghai would eventually become parts of a PRC (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 206)..

The uniqueness, which implied a sense of foreignness as opposed to Chineseness, of Shanghai was an experience shared not just by non-Chinese but by many Chinese people, too. As we mentioned in the earlier chapter, Shanghai as a treaty port was perceived as the metropolitan other of the more authentically Chinese capital city that Beijing was, a similar situation existing with many other cities around the world. However, even if we assume that Shanghai was not really a Chinese city, its urban fabric transformed beyond recognition, to the point that, as we mentioned, a well known 1930s guidebook called Shanghai “Shanghai the Incomparable”, and Beijing was the truly Chinese counterpart, representing the authentic Chinese urban life, then a similar question can still be posed to the latter: what is it that makes Beijing a Chinese city that Shanghai lacks and fails to qualify as a Chinese city? Here, a simple reference to “the Chinese experience” or an insider’s view would not do, especially, given that it was also the insider’s view that saw Shanghai as a question mark on the Chinese identity and regarded Beijing’s identity in terms of not being like Shanghai.

Esherick, rightly, argues that despite this common dichotomous perception of an authentic national capital and a cosmopolitan commercial centre, the two are

inextricably linked. Firstly, modern means of communication linked all these cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, and political, economic, and cultural elite moved easily from one city to the other by railway or steamship (Esherick, 1999, p. 6). Railway should in this regard be taken as a token of modernity, technological transformation of transportation embodying the new modalities of existence that are associated with urban modernisation. Secondly, although the spread of capitalism required a more sophisticated differentiation between the economic and the political spheres than existed in the older empire, the modernisation of Chinese state as a political entity after all required close ties with the new industrial and financial forces. Thirdly, there was also an essential interaction between cosmopolitanism and cultural authenticity. Beijing opera was promoted as national theatre but without tours to the new theatres located in Shanghai, no one could rise to a star status in Beijing operas. Thus, “despite the underlying tensions between modernity and national identity, the two were inextricably linked, and that linkage was fundamental to the structure of modern Chinese urbanism” (Esherick, 1999, p. 7).

In the literature, there is a large body of scholarly work that demonstrates nations and national identities are historically constructed entities. Ernest Gellner in his classic study writes: “It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round. Admittedly, nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically” (Gellner, 1983, p. 55). Hobsbawm in his examination of nations and nationalism stresses this point Gellner makes and in agreement states “nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round” (Hobsbawm, 2013, p. 10). Anderson, somewhat critical of Gellner’s emphasis on “invention, fabrication, and falsity” instead brings into the fore

“imagining and creation”, hence nations as a type of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). These are all valid points but when it comes to the national-cosmopolitan dichotomy, as embodied in the perception of Beijing and Shanghai, I argue that the point of emphasis must be given to textual representation in a global theatre.

Rebecca Karl in her study of the Chinese national identity points out that national identity, whatever nativity or locality it claimed to possess, was itself situated on a larger political stage that was already global in its nature. On this stage, struggles over national identity and modernisation took place within a “historically specific representational structure or tendential totality” (Karl, 2002, p. 20). It was through this representational structure that inevitably went beyond the narrow confines of the national identity that a national identity could be assumed and propagated in the first place. This is one of the reasons why Rebecca Karl argues that “there is a necessity to reintroduce, rather than to elide, a material global dimension to local history” (Karl, 2002, p. 20), because, following Ranciere’s notion of politics, the local history does not exist as a self enclosed entity, standing against a global history, but both the global and the local are constructed together on a common stage through political struggle over this stage and over the existence and status of those present on it. Rebecca Karl, with this approach that defamiliarises the usual senses of the global and the local, intends to reconceptualise modernity and nationalism, which is part of modernity, as produced within an uneven global material:

Such a defamiliarizing approach and historical problematization not only complicates the more usual West (Japan)/China confrontation that forms the implicit or explicit paradigm around which inquiries on modern Chinese history are usually organized, but it also allows us to see modernity—of which nationalism is a central (albeit far from exhaustive) expression—as a global material and representational structure, whose tendential unities are underpinned by the expansion of capitalism in its imperialist forms. (Karl, 2002, p. 4)

This global material and representational structure was intimately tied to the emergence of a new textual field which created a new sense of national identity:

As such, these texts were not merely functionally produced in the service of different types of (power-centered) ideologies or institutions; instead, powerful social ideologies and discourses were being produced in and through the texts. Thus, as integral as they were to the new articulation of politics as an internal proposition, journalism and the new print media also simultaneously opened a global space of politics that fed and was fed by both internal and external upheavals (Karl, 2002, p. 13).

In the discussion in Chapter Two, I described cities as textual beings whose existence should be conceptualised in a comparative way as texts circulate, interact with each other and acquire meaning. Cities, as Tariq Jazeel points out, involve, besides the political and economic processes, imaginative productions. Imaginative productions take place through the textual fields cities produce. Textuality, that is, is essential to the formation that we name “the city” (Jazeel, 2021, p. 6). Such phenomena, so essential to the emergence of national identity, as print media and journalism would be impossible without cities producing textual fields in which they can operate. The practice of writing is intimately connected to the existence of urban life. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the new citizen who emerged in the late Qing period was as a political actor as well as a discursive construction (Judge, 1996, p. 10).

However, following the discussion from Chapter Two, these texts through which new identities are both represented and discursively constructed should not be taken to constitute self-enclosed fields that contain fixed and separate meanings. Instead, different representations in textual fields would interpenetrate in the context of increasing urban interconnections. Esherick’s third point on the falsity of a dichotomy between authentic national identity and cosmopolitan commerce involves the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts through the new print media

and journalism. These practices were essential to the emergence of a new national identity, yet it was the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai that dominated the national market with its journals and print media (Esherick, 1999, p. 11). “China’s major publishing houses, like the Commercial Press, were located in Shanghai” (Esherick, 1999, p. 12). Most major newspapers, publishers, and film studios were located in the concession areas located within the treaty ports, Shanghai being a key one (Esherick, 1999, p. 2).

It was not just in terms of the material production and dissemination of texts that a dichotomy between national identity and cosmopolitan commercial centres was false. Equally importantly, the meaning of authentic national identity was intrinsically connected to its perceived opposite. The new intellectuals in Beijing in the context of increasing urban modernisation that connected Beijing and Shanghai further and further would conceive the authenticity of national identity in Beijing in opposite terms of the commercial cosmopolitanism of Shanghai:

But unlike the scholars of old Beijing who considered the city and the values it represented absolute, the new intellectuals always saw Beijing in comparison and relation to other places, even when they were writing about Beijing as their *guxiang*. When they claimed Beijing as their hometown, Shanghai was always silhouetted in the background: Beijing was a *guxiang* because Shanghai could not be. . . . To the new intellectuals, Shanghai was too new, always renewing itself, too cosmopolitan, too industrial, and too foreign to be a *guxiang*, and Beijing, in their imagination, could be a *guxiang* for someone who had not been born there, precisely because its traits were the opposite of Shanghai. (Dong, 2003, p. 277-278)

This silhouette in the background is the invisible city behind the visible city of Beijing when Beijing was considered. Standing in the background, Shanghai granted Beijing a sense of national identity through the textual representations that new intellectuals and modern print media created. This close connection shows that the sense of authentic national identity Beijing was believed to embody did not constitute a self-enclosed meaning which came into contact with the cosmopolitan

commercial identity of Shanghai but was itself discursively constructed through it, both because Shanghai was a key treaty port in the industry of publishing and because the texts produced in this industry were conceived in a comparative context in which Shanghai was the invisible silhouette, projecting the figure of national identity on to Beijing. Beijing and Shanghai as textual beings were thus interactive entities.

This point has the merit not only of deconstructing dichotomous modes of thought that first divide history into clearly delineated and self enclosed parts and then try to comprehend them from an insider's perspective as in Cohen, but also of emphasising the representational textual aspect of modernity which takes place in a global stage where the historical actors who find themselves under the peculiar global material must, in this sense, truly be *actors*. This representationality can be observed in urban modernity, as well, since the urban modernisers who were making plans to radically transform the Chinese cities were also driven by a quest for recognition in the global stage. As Esherick points out:

Inherent to the search for national identity was the quest for international recognition: "one aim is to be noticed," Geertz observed, as "being somebody in the world."¹⁴ Since international recognition and approval came especially to those who proved their modernity, this quest for recognition produced another inherent link between national identity and modernity: one gained respect as a nation and people only by being modern. (Karl, 2002, p. 4)

For these reasons, it would be an error to conceive Shanghai and Beijing as different manifestations of cosmopolitan globalism with its central role in commerce on the one hand and authentic national identity with its central role in politics on the other. Economy and politics, nationality and globality, were themselves interrelated and mutually constructed categories, making a dichotomous division of Shanghai and Beijing an error. Yet, this error historically did exist. Both Chinese and non-Chinese indeed did consider Shanghai to be the cosmopolitan other which negated the

authentic Chinese identity that Beijing as the political centre represented against the flows of capital within a global imperialist economic system. To deal with this question, we should examine the transformation of Shanghai as a treaty port, which produced the urban modernity of this city as we know it.

3.5 Urban modernity and the transformation of the urban morphology in Beijing and Shanghai

As we said, although Shanghai was more than a mere fishing village prior to becoming a treaty port by the Treaty of Nanjing, signed after the Chinese defeat in the First Opium War, this was a watershed moment for the urban modern morphology that would come to be known as the Old Shanghai (旧上海). Old Shanghai refers to the treaty port period of the city, that is, from the Treaty of Nanjing through the Republican Period. Wasserstrom uses the term “Ur-Shanghai” to refer further back to the pre-treaty port period of the city (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 198). In fact, this terminology itself already tells us something about the significance of the Treaty of Nanjing and its consequences on Shanghai. Although, it is true, that Shanghai was more than a fishing village in the earlier period, however, it was through the deep impact of it being turned into a treaty port with three different regions that created Shanghai and the urban modernity that it came to represent. Even the “old” of Old Shanghai begins with this treaty. With this treaty, the city morphology assumed a tripartite administrative division, which evolved from 1843 on and assumed its final form about two decades later.

Shanghai is a treaty port, which contrasts very prominently with the capital city as the cosmopolitan commercial centre that threatens the political sovereignty of

the nation. However, even as a treaty port, Shanghai still presents some comparative difficulties with the other treaty ports, making Shanghai's urban modernity even more exceptional in China. Among these, it is essential that Shanghai's administrative structure is peculiar even for a treaty port. The main administrative structure in port cities were dual in that the treaty port cities had a single foreign power to answer to and a Chinese administrative authority coexisting with it. In case of Shanghai, though, we observe not two but three different authorities: The Chinese municipality, the French Concession (上海法租界), and the International Settlement (上海公共租界). The International Settlement as the economically most dynamic foreign section of the city was governed by a locally elected body, which was called the Shanghai Municipal Council (上海公共租界工部局) and was composed in an usually cosmopolitan way. Furthermore, the population of Shanghai, compared to the rest of the Chinese cities by the 1930s, had an exceptionally wide range of different places. Besides the non-Chinese immigrants, even most of the local population that constituted the majority of the three administrative districts were immigrants from the neighbouring provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. This diversity of population can be observed in the urban modern architecture of the city. The International Settlement's Bund housed some of the best known civic constructions which were rather similar to the urban landscape of Chicago during the 1920s and the French Concession contained Parisian style boulevards (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 192-193). Below, the first map shows the changing urban modern landscape of Shanghai from 1846 to 1914 and the second map gives us a picture of Shanghai during the 1930s:

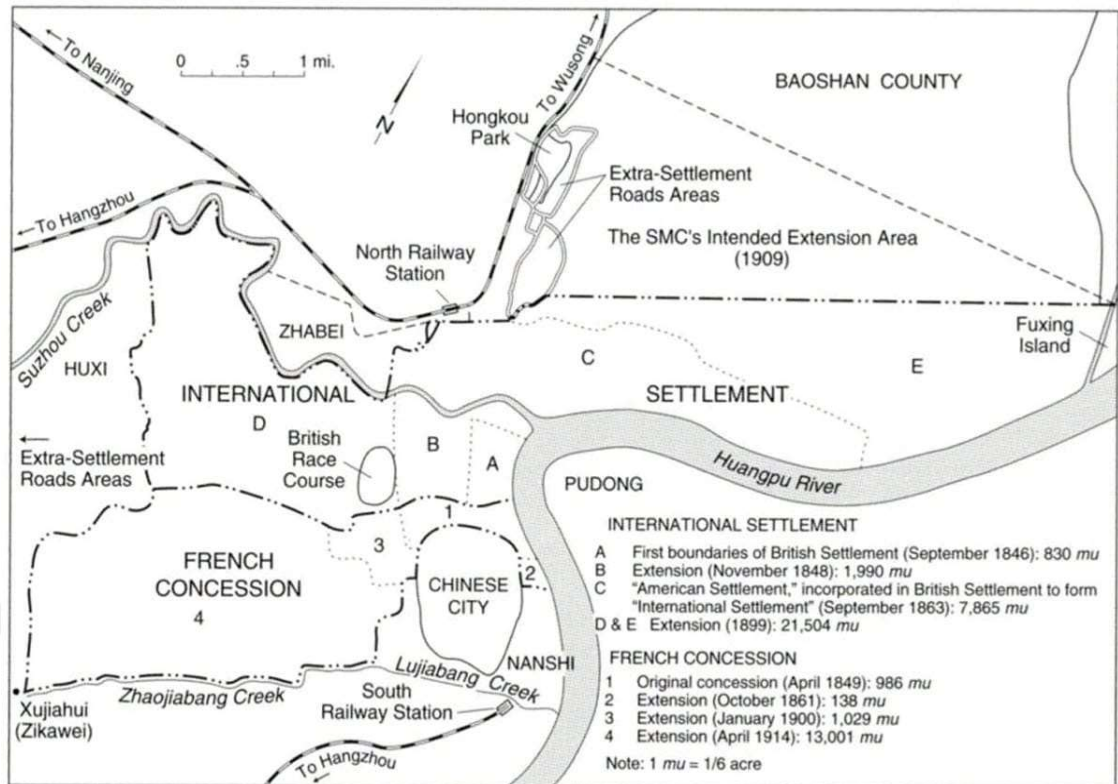


Figure 6. (Lu, 1999, p. 30).

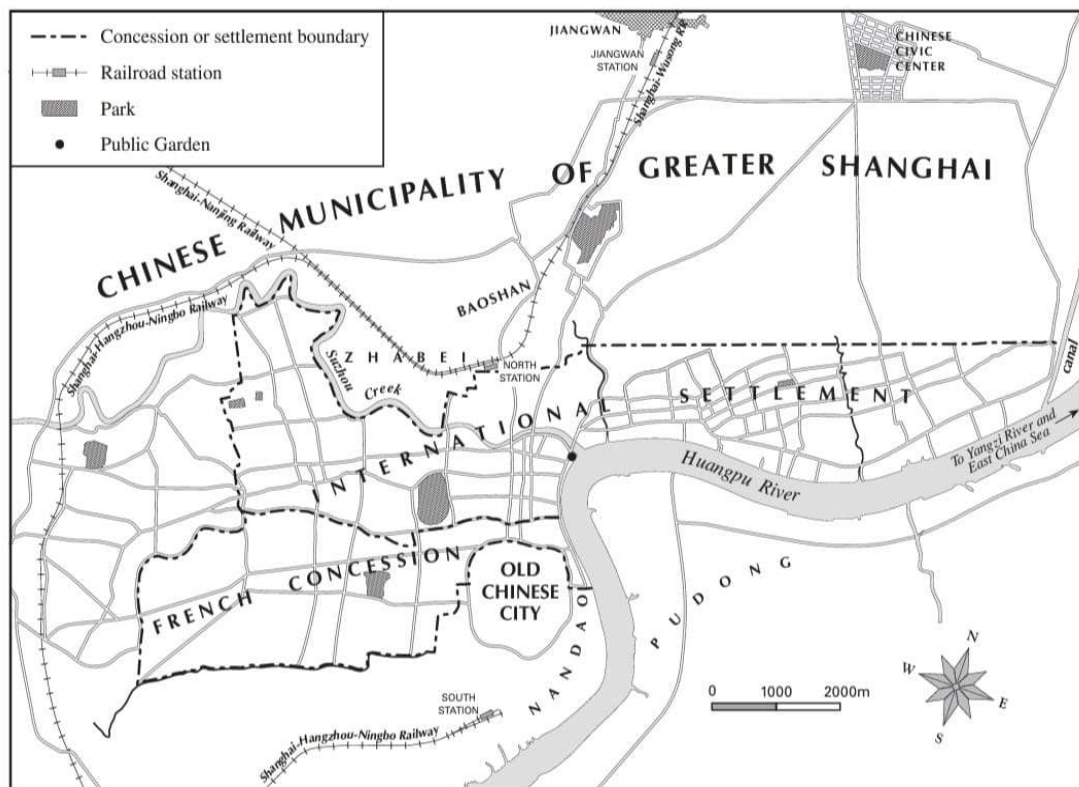


Figure 7. (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 194)

Chinese immigrants were a significant part of the diversity of the population because in most of the years only three percent of the city population was foreign born, though it is worth keeping in mind that this three percent came virtually from around the world. The majority of the Chinese immigrants, on the other hand, were of two types: the so called little urbanites (小市民) and the urban poor. Around 75 percent of the city's residence was made up by a type of lane (里弄). From the 1880s onwards, this lane type was the home of the little urbanites for about a century. The urban poor, on the other hand, who, like the little urbanites had mostly come from the countryside, occupied the shantytowns across the city (Lu, 1999, p. 2). The rickshaw pullers in Shanghai were part of this latter group.

These two factors, that is, the diverse population of the city and its tripartite administrative structure, set Shanghai aside even among the treaty ports. In this regard, although earlier we observed a dual division within treaty port as an urban modern type in Escherick's scheme, it requires some modification for Shanghai due to this tripartite structure. Wasserstrom points out for this reason that Shanghai ought not to be conceived as a dual but actually as a triple city (Wasserstrom, 1999, p. 196-197).

With this qualification concerning the unique place Shanghai occupies within the treaty port type, its urban modernity is inseparably connected to it belonging to this type. Although as we already said, Shanghai before the Treaty of Nanjing was already more than a mere fishing village, because, given the recent research on the commercialisation of the Ming and the Qing period within the Lower Yangtze, especially in Jiangnan, early in the nineteenth century, the walled town of Shanghai, classified as a third class county seat under the provincial capital of Nanjing and the prefectural capital of Songjiang, displayed commercial prosperity based mostly on a

booming cotton trade during the Qing period. This said, however, the northern section of the city, where the International Settlement and the French Concession would be constructed later, was indeed heavily rural in 1845 when Gong Mujiu (宫慕久), the Shanghai Daotai (上海道台), consigned the first piece of land to the British authority. The landscape of this area was overwhelmed by cotton and rice fields as well as uncultivated fields of reeds and footpaths which boats used along the waterways. The commercially prosperous part of the city, the walled county town, was a very small part of what Shanghai would become as it modernised its urban morphology: this commercial pre-treaty space constituted only one twentieth of Shanghai proper during the Republican Era (Lu, 1999, p. 26).

A similar drastic change of the population took place, too. The population initially was, relatively speaking, insignificant. The entire population of all of Shanghai county had reached 540.000 by the mid nineteenth century. Of this population, about half lived within the walled county seat and its surrounding outskirts, while the other half lived in villages and small towns that were sprinkled across the country. The northern area of the town, where in the future the International Settlement would be constructed, only had five hundred residents, such an insignificant figure that the contemporary surveys on Shanghai's population ignored it. Half a century later, however, this insignificant population jumped all the way up to half a million. Another century later the population that Shanghai had reached more than 5.45 million inhabitants. This is to say that the population of Shanghai in a span of a century increased tenfold. This enormous rise of population was accompanied by an extreme concentration of inhabitants. That sparsely populated northern area would over a century become densely packed with the inflow of the immigrants, both Chinese and foreign. So densely packed, in fact, that

it became one of the world's most densely populated places: population per square kilometer was as high as 43,570 in 1930, 50,032 in 1935 and 76,880 in 1940-1942. Due to this, by the mid nineteenth century, Shanghai had surpassed Guangzhou in population and became the leading treaty port of all China (Lu, 1999, p. 26-27).

This, of course, is not to say that Ur-Shanghai had no immigrant or foreign population. Given its commercial role, the city would be inhabited by the so called guest merchants (客商) who came from a wide range of areas such as the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, Anhui in the Yangtzi River valley and the provinces of North China. However, all this acknowledged, the fact of the matter is that the city population was in the end overwhelmingly local. By contrast, the overwhelming majority of the residents of Old Shanghai was not local. From the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, immigrants consistently constituted around 80 percent of the entire city population (Lu, 1999, p. 27-28).

As evidenced by these guest merchants, Shanghai was a commercially prosperous area before turning into a treaty port. However, it is important to note that the introduction of the new dynamics under the impact of urban modernity would transform the nature of commerce carried out by these merchants and others in Shanghai, too. As we saw earlier, the geographical region that Shanghai was situated was more viable for the production of cotton as a commercial crop rather than rice due to the salty water close to the sea or difficult to water the land. However, the new urban modern dynamic over time made this traditional commerce largely irrelevant to the development of Shanghai (Lu, 1999, p. 27).

These radical changes, however, would carry with them a sense of ambivalence, which can be observed in the literature at the time. The Countryman Revisits Shanghai (乡下人又到上海) by Bao Tianxiao (包天笑) is a case in point.

Serialized on October 30, 1931, the story contains a chain of events that a simple and straightforward old peasant goes through as he visits Shanghai and struggles with urban modern life there. Shanghai appears to him highly ambivalent and chaotic. At the railway station, he misinterprets the term Yue Tai Piao (月台票) which actually means “platform ticket” as “moon deck ticket”- 月 can mean moon and 台 can mean deck but together they specifically denote “platform” for a railway station-, imagining a garden car by which one can watch and enjoy the moon. A similar linguistic misunderstanding occurs when he mistakes “central committee member” (中央委员) as “sprout planting committee member” (种秧委员) due to them being near homonym (Link jr., 1981, p. 225-226).

These linguistic misunderstandings, of course, point to the radically different rhythms and meanings of urban modern life. The old peasant, not familiar with the meanings that are created in the specific social practices of urban modern life, cannot but misinterpret the words that stand for these meanings. The words spoken may remain the same in the countryside and in the city but now they acquire radically different meanings. The character’s troubles do not end here. He keeps running into many other instances that from a rural perspective he finds absurd. He goes to buy five fragrances and tea leaf eggs but the price seems absurdly high. He tries to find the home of a relative but soon discovers that in the city, unlike in a village where everyone knows each other, no one really knows anybody else. He discovers that to travel in the city he is in need of some means of transportation. Streetcars provide one means for him. Yet, he then discovers that streetcars have some sort of division: some are first class and some others are third class. Why there is no second class is another absurdity he can’t make sense of. The streets he passes through have strange foreign names. Once off the streetcar, he again runs into another absurdity. Whole

rows of shops are selling exactly the same stuff. To counter this absurdity, he approaches two sweets shops that stand right next to each other. He suggests, since they are selling the same stuff, they should get together. Upon this, the shop owner questions the old peasant's sanity. The poor man walks away. Shanghai is for sure an unkind city, but it is also an immoral one. Chancing upon a man reading an illustrated magazine with bathing figures, he reacts against this nudity. Learning later about silk stockings and sex appeal in the movies makes things only worse. Finally, a group of prostitutes accost the old peasant. He concludes that no country girl could be so shameless as these urban ones (Link jr., 1981, p. 226).

Bao Tianxiao writes in his reminiscences that people in Suzhou even as early a date as in the 1890s thought of Shanghai as a "big dye jar" (大染缸). This was a sentiment shared by many in popular fiction during the 1910s. Perry Link describes this popular mentality as "something like "anxious ambivalence"" (Link jr., 1981, p. 227). Hanchao Lu, in agreement with this description, points out that it was not just the outsiders who did not live in the city and so could not enjoy the benefits of urban modern Shanghai but even those who lived there and enjoyed such benefits felt this way (Lu, 1999, p. 10). This ambivalence would continue well beyond the Republican Era. The Communist regime, though valuing Shanghai for its modern industry and financial resources, would still have an anxious ambivalent attitude towards the city, as can be seen in the story of the "Good Eighth Company on Nanking Road" (南京路上好八连), where a People's liberation Army unit in downtown Shanghai provided an exemplary model to be followed nationwide in the 1960s (Lu, 1999, p. 11-12).

There are, I argue, two significant causes for this ambivalent attitude towards Shanghai. First and foremost, the developments that are associated with urban

modernity in Shanghai more often than not were concentrated in the concession areas that represented foreign powers. Esherick notes that “much of China’s modern industry, virtually all modern banking, most major newspapers, publishers, and film studios were located in the concession areas”, a phenomenon that provided the treaty ports with a unique modern and cosmopolitan colour but also marked them as centres of imperialist influence and exploitation (Esherick, 1999, p.2). The Nanjing Road and the Bund featured magnificent Western style architecture, including East Asia’s highest edifice (the Garden Hotel) and “the most sumptuous building from the Suez Canal to the Bering Sea”, that is, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and such modern facilities as China’s first Otis escalator in the Daxin Department Store as well as the world’s longest bar that the Shanghai Club was. Beyond these more economic and material factors, Shanghai was also a leader in culture, enjoying such prosperity in literature and fine arts, with, for example, the first female nude model for painting in Shanghai shocked the whole nation in 1913, western style higher educational institutions, developments of modern media and press, and last but not least, best movie theatres and studios, which gave the city the nickname “Hollywood of the East” (Lu, 1999, p. 13).

The second cause is related to the first but is not unique to treaty ports. This is the fact that, despite all the developments that could be called positive in one sense or another for improving living conditions, for the majority of the Shanghai people they were either irrelevant or not really positive in a straightforward sense. The diverse and rich cuisine that the city boasted would not enter the daily diet of ordinary people, whose standard breakfast fare remained tasteless paofan and pickles. Shanghai was Hollywood of the East and a leading force in high fashion but ordinary people rarely purchased clothes at a fashionable shop. Most of them wore either what

their wives wove for them or what their Ningbo or Suzhou tailor made, whose shop would most of the time be located right around the corner. Streets were bustling with automobiles, yet most people had never taken a taxi. In fact, for the great majority, getting in a sedan would have been an experience that could have occurred once in a lifetime. The city had excellent means of public transportation, but it was not a rare sight to see people walking, sometimes even for miles, to go to work, a practice known as taking the Number Eleven Bus. The living spaces in the city's shantytowns were deprived even of such basic facilities as electricity and running water. Paved ways were rare in these areas, too (Lu, 1999, p. 13-14). In view of such divergences, Wasserstrom proposes to conceptualise Old Shanghai as "a fragmented entity", that is, as a multiplicity of Old Shanghais, stressing "the need to think in terms of multiple spatial and symbolic Old Shanghais, as well as the need to distinguish between all of these and the temporally distinct Ur-Shanghais and New Shanghais that preceded and followed them" (Wasserstrom, 1999, p.201).

Such differential access to the fruits of urban modernity is not unique to Shanghai. Criticing what he calls the pro-reform view in American historiography of Asia, Mary C. Wright being a prominent representative as she writes "in the long run- if there had been a long run- China might have followed the Japanese pattern; she seemed at the time to be lagging no more than twenty years and to be capable of making up time", Esherick argues that such partial and sanguine views on reform and reformism ignore the common people: "The American partisans of reform betray the same tendency to ignore the masses as did the Chinese elite". Yet, it was a crucial fact that the urban poor and the peasantry not only failed to benefit from the reforms but also suffered significantly from the financial costs imposed upon them. They, thus, objected to these reforms that seemed only to benefit the elite and their

westernisation aspect appeared to them to be doing the work of foreign imperialists in the name of progress (Esherick, 1976, p. 106).

Given this common differential access in Chinese cities and their reform attempts, I argue that the point of focus in comparing Beijing and Shanghai should be the first cause of the anxious ambivalence that we have discussed. Although, as Esherick notes, the sense of foreign encroachment in case of modernising reforms in other cities than Shanghai was not entirely absent, the fact that urban modernisation was concentrated and most visible in the explicitly foreign concession areas of Shanghai would produce a different image of this city which could be contrasted with Beijing as the political capital of China. The urban morphology of Shanghai, to begin with, was never as strictly similar to that which corresponded to Chinese cosmology as the urban morphology of Beijing. Shanghai, as a city situated in the Southern part of China, could not provide the geographically viable grounds to follow this cosmological model of the city the way Beijing as the Northern capital could. Thus, Old Shanghai, which, as we already pointed out, refers to the treaty port period of the city, was already imbued with foreignness in its urban modernity because it was a treaty port. One cannot imagine such imbuelement with the term Old Beijing. For Shanghai to be “old” is already to be partially foreign controlled. Although Old Beijing (老北京) in popular imagination refers to the Republican city rather than the imperial city, it still has no comparable history in this regard. Foreign control does not constitute its defining moment. It is upon this critical difference that although the dichotomous thinking that divided both Old Shanghai and Old Beijing as opposites was flawed as both these cities were imagined within a larger global field of capitalist imperialist world economy and urban modernisation, it could still hold sway over so many people. We have seen the transformations in the urban

morphology of Shanghai in the process of urban modernisation from the pre-treaty Ur-Shanghai to treaty port Old Shanghai. Now, I will turn to the transformations in Beijing.

As we saw, Beijing's urban morphology strictly followed the urban cosmological view laid out in Zhou li when the city was built during the Yuan dynasty. In this morphology, the Forbidden City occupied the very centre of the urban space that was shaped in close affinity with this cosmology. However, as the city started undergoing modernisation, this urban morphology would alongside change. With regard to these changes, 1928 is noteworthy, since in the aftermath of Beijing losing its status as the capital city, it would be designated by the Nationalist government as a Chinese cultural centre.

Urban modernisation of the city of Beijing saw the principles of accessibility and mobility slowly but surely replacing the older principles based on the ethnic segregation and compartmentalisation of the urban space (Dong, 2003, p. 22). The ethnic difference was influential on the material morphology of Beijing. The ruling Dynasty during the Qing Empire was of Manchu origin. Earlier scholarship that was mainly based on the Chinese official documents from the Qing period believed that despite being of foreign non-Chinese origin, the Manchus would over time become sinified and become part of the Chinese culture, virtually indistinguishable from the Chinese. This, however, would later be challenged by a new wave of scholarship that focused on the Manchu documents that were never translated into Chinese, displaying an important sense of difference from the Han Chinese officials whom the Manchus could bypass by an early Qing communication network they'd established (Rawski, 1996, p. 829). Although this view would come under criticism by the defenders of the so called "Sinification School", of which Ping-Ti Ho is a prominent

member (Ping-Ti, 1998), what Mark Elliott calls “the Altaic School” would in response emphasise the Manchuness of the Qing ruling Dynasty (Elliott, 2001, p. 28).

Elliott argues that despite the significant changes to the Manchu identity over time, especially its bankruptcy under the Qianlong Emperor and the failure of the emperor’s attempts to preserve the racial and cultural consistency of the Manchu identity, the Manchu difference could still survive because of the maintenance of such institutions that the Manchu identity was imbricated with. The Eight Banners (八旗), created in about 1601, was the key institution here (Elliott, 2001, p. 12).

Although the Manchu court failed to preserve the racial and cultural consistency of the Manchu identity over time, through the timely reforms of the Eight Banners institution, it could still maintain the institutional bulwark upon which a sense of ethnic difference could rest. These reforms, lasting from the 1720s to the 1770s, enabled the Eight Banners system to survive the fatal financial burdens it had been suffering. By means of this institution, despite becoming acculturated in the Chinese cultural practices and losing their Manchu cultural practices, the Manchus could still maintain a sense of difference from the Chinese, most of whom were not members of the Eight Banners system. (Elliott, 2001, p. 13). One can argue that this means the Manchu identity underwent a transformation in a way that made the earlier ethnic identity of Manchuness extinct. This would be correct but the point of the discussion is not whether the Manchus could maintain their ethnic identity difference from the beginning when they conquered China all the way to the end but rather whether they could maintain some sense of ethnic identity difference at all, which marked them apart from the Chinese over whom they ruled as a *somehow different* ethnic group. This means that those people who were in the Banners but not Manchu in the earlier

sense, such as those Han Chinese who had joined the Banners and supported the Manchus prior to the conquest of China, also came to be associated with Manchuness, not because their difference absolutely disappeared, but because as part of the Banners they over time came to be treated in a very similar way to the Manchus. In short, to be a Manchu after the transformation of the 18th century increasingly came to mean to be a member of the Eight Banners (Elliott, 2001, p. 13-14). The association was so strong at the end of the Imperial Period with the Republican Revolution of 1911, the Manchus invented a new name to refer to themselves: “Banner Ethnos” (旗族) (Elliott, 2001, p. 15).

We can observe the persisting difference and the ethnic hierarchisation based on this in the material organisation of the city of Beijing. The Imperial City within the Inner City was a residence quarter for Manchu aristocrats and high officials. When the Manchu conquerors entered the city of Beijing in 1644 (Elliott, 2001, p. 1-2), the Manchus banished the Han Chinese from the Inner City into the Outer City, marking the latter as a residence for the Han officials and merchants (Dong, 2003, p. 27). However, this hierarchical ordering which placed the Emperor at the centre of the urban structure would begin unravelling by the late 19th century. By that time, the centre of the city where the imperial palace was located was no longer the unchallenged single centre of power in Beijing. With the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, foreign legations were established in Beijing. After the Boxer uprising in 1900, these legations were concentrated in the southeast corner of the city, which now came to be called the Legation Quarter (东交民巷). Some Western style tall buildings were also built, violating further the urban morphology which forbade buildings taller than the imperial palace (Dong, 2003, p. 32). The centrality of the palace would receive a further blow with the 1911 Revolution. Though not initially

introducing a radical physical change of the city structure of Beijing, the 1911 Revolution put an end to the cosmic symbolism of the urban morphology by dethroning the emperor and placing real or putative power in Zhongnanhai (中南海) (Strand, 1989, p. 8). As the strength of the 1911 Revolution declined, the Nationalists decided to move the Capital from Beijing to Nanjing in 1928, further violating the symbolic cosmological centrality of the palace.

The traditional hierarchical ordering would also be manifest in the architectural techniques employed in the buildings. The imperial constructions had a monopoly on the use of many bright colours: “bright yellow, green, and cobalt blue tiles for the roofs, a rich and velvety red for the walls and gates of the Forbidden City (Dong, 2003, p. 30). As we said earlier, the Scenery Hill located at the very centre of the city was a place where the emperor could observe the whole city but could not be observed by the others. This was due to the specific configuration of the walls in Beijing.

City walls are an essential part of the urban morphology of Beijing. It is the walls that shield the emperor from the commoner’s gaze. It is the walls that hierarchically divide the urban residents into an urban ordering which corresponds to the celestial order of Chinese cosmology. It is the walls that stop the free flow of goods, services, and people in order to create an imperial aura of superiority as Sun Fuxi and many others shared. It is the walls that with their rectangular organisation replicates the earth. It is the walls that separate the urban from the rural, the city from the countryside. Yet, as cities in China modernised, these walls were uniformly being taken down. Esherick points out that the first task of the urban modernisation reforms was “usually to tear down the city walls, invariably building a wide, paved ring road where the wall had stood, a road often travelled by tramways.” “The object of this

effort”, he continues, “was invariably to ease the flow of commerce, the same dynamic that brought down the walls of European cities”(Esherick, 1999, p.7). Yet, this radical transformation of the material structure of the city, which was accompanied by a new urban imagination in which the old cosmology no longer held the sway it had done before, would be realised by a transformation of the technologies of transportation.

The new urban modern principles of accessibility and mobility would have been impossible with a change in the technologies of transportation. More exactly, the new technologies of transportation embodied these principles, thus the introduction of new technology would shock and disrupt both the existing material morphology and the urban cosmological imagination. The most significant factor that would take down the walls was the introduction of a new technology of transportation: railways. Dong observes that “the cosmological order of the imperial capital was most decisively broken by trains” (Dong, 2003, p. 14). It was due to the trains and the need to restructure the city for them that the walls were dismantled. Given this centrality of railways in the urban modern transformation of Chinese cities in general and Beijing in particular, in the next section I shall explore the relationship between urban modernity and transportation technologies.

3.6 Chinese urban modernity and the technologies of transportation

Walter Benjamin in the Arcades Project writes:

There is no more insipid and shabby antithesis than that which reactionary thinkers like Klages try to set up between the symbol-space of nature and that of technology. To each truly new configuration of nature-and, at bottom, technology is just such a configuration-there correspond new "images!"
(Benjamin, 2002, p. 390)

Here, Walter Benjamin warns us against an error of reifying the materiality of technology by separating it from the symbol space which it occupies. Technology, that is, is never and can never be reduced down to its bare materiality. This materiality itself is always imbricated with corresponding dream images. A discussion of railways in Chinese urban modernity, thus, should pay attention to this symbolic aspect of railway technology as a new and invisible part of the modernising cities.

The easier, cheaper, and often faster means of transportation in the world prior to the industrial revolution in the 18th century was shipping: to possess a port was to be connected in this world (Hobsbawm, 1996, p. 9.). Yet, a new means of transformation with the industrial revolution from the late 18th century onwards would captivate people's imagination like no other: the railway. No sooner had the railway been proven profitable and feasible in England (1825-30), than plans began to be drawn to build them over most of the West: "the first short lines were opened in the USA in 1827, in France in 1828 and 1835, in Germany and Belgium in 1835 and even in Russia by 1837" (Hobsbawm, 1996, p. 9). From the 1830s on when the railway had become a phenomenon on a large scale, it became a vital presence in European literature since Dickens' *Dombry and Sun* (1846-48) (Berman, 1988, p. 159). The railway would connect large land masses, to travel which would have taken an enormously higher amount of effort and time, thereby drawing increasingly closer the coast and the interior. Fast travel was no longer the privilege of the sea.

There was a close connection between the emergence and the spread of railroads, the development of the industrial revolution, and the process of modernisation. Railroads were not just an industry that could combine the key aspects of a modern economy such as iron and steel sectors, heavy machinery, and

immense labour and capital investment (Hobsbawm, 1996, p. 45), it was also a symbol of modernity for many. Eric Hobsbawm writes:

No innovation of the Industrial Revolution has fired the imagination as much as the railway, as witness the fact that it is the only product of nineteenth century industrialization which has been fully absorbed into the imagery of popular and literate poetry. . . The iron road, pushing its huge smoke-plumed snakes at the speed of wind across countries and continents, whose embankments and cuttings, bridges and stations, formed a body of public building beside which the pyramids and the Roman aqueducts and even the Great Wall of China paled into provincialism, was the very symbol of man's triumph through technology. (Hobsbawm, 1996, p. 44)

If this was the triumphal side of industrial capitalism, connecting the hitherto unimagined masses of land and labour across the globe with a magnificent display of technology, there was another side, darker and perhaps more grotesque, not because it was the unmistakeable sign of regress, but rather because it appeared to many as a parodic twist of progress. Criticising Eric Hobsbawm's account of the 19th century for having a metropolitan perspective, Mike Davis points out that nowhere do the great famines of that century, especially in India and China, figure in his account (Davis, 2010, p. 8). Yet, it was along the railroads that millions of people, especially in British India, starved, not least because "the newly constructed railroads, lauded as institutional safeguards against famine, were instead used by merchants to ship grain inventories from outlying drought-stricken districts to central depots for hoarding (as well as protection from rioters)" (Davis, 2010, p. 26). A significant portion of these food supplies, desperately needed by the starving Indian peasants, would be transported to England: "'It seems an anomaly," wrote a troubled observer, "that, with her famines on hand, India is able to supply food for other parts of the world"' (Davis, 2010, p. 26). This other aspect, this "anomaly", which escapes Hobsbawm's metropolitan perspective, gives us a different understanding of the achievements of

industrial capitalism that indeed capture one's imagination, not in the way expected though.

Though not having the kind of railroad system that India had at the time as it feared, not without justification, foreign encroachment through the railroad industry, Qing China was not spared by the devastating effects of the 19th century famines (Davis, 2010, p. 64). However, with the attempts for building a new and modern China, its transportation system as well as its urban landscape eventually underwent radical changes. Railroads were a significant industry for China, too, yet the historical context of their development compared to the Western areas they covered first was rather different. Situated within a different historical context, the railroad industry in China was framed by the interests of such foreign powers as "Russia, Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, that maintained and protected presence in the treaty port concessions after China's loss in the Opium Wars of 1842 and 1860" (Köll, 2019, p. 87-88). The first great period of railroad development in China, which took place from 1895 to 1911, increasing country's rail network from 410 to 9,300 kilometers of track, consisted of mostly foreign capital investment, roughly 90 percent (Zheng, 2018, p. 87-88). 1895 was a watershed moment in this regard because it was following the devastating defeat of the Sino-Japanese war that the Qing court decided to hasten railway development in China (Köll, 2019, p. 29).

This historical political context of the railway development in China was important in triggering political movements. It was the discovery that a Belgian syndicate funded by French capital had acquired a majority interest in the American China Development Company, with which the Chinese ambassador in Washington in 1898 signed an agreement to construct railways in China, that sparked the Railway

Recovery Movement. The discovery was significant in that the balance of power strategy that the Chinese pursued required no single imperial power acquire a monopoly over the railways, leaving them no room for diplomatic manoeuvre. Yet, with the Franco-Russian alliance, one power bloc would now control the railways both in the north and in the south if this American company were controlled by the French capital funding the Belgian syndicate (Esherick, 1976, p. 82-83). This close relationship between the foreign influence over railroads and their significance as a new modern technology of transportation would prove to be one effective cause for the outbreak of the 1911 revolution in China (Zheng, 2018, p. 252-253).

The railroad technology, thus, went well beyond its bare materiality. The materiality of the railroad technology was already implicated with the dream images of national sovereignty and foreign influence. These, however, were not the only images. Railways also conjured up images of speed and progress. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, "Railroads were the referent, and progress the sign, as spatial movement became so wedded to the concept of historical movement that these could no longer be distinguished (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 91). The speed of railway, in other words, came to be associated with the progress of modernity. To be modern is to be fast, to move goods, services, and people fast across regions. This means that railroads as a modern technology of transportation that both has a material and a symbolic aspect requires radical changes to the urban morphology of the cities which they start penetrating. Benjamin in this regard notes the transportation of the urban landscape in Paris:

Connection of the railroads to Haussmann's projects. From a memorandum by Haussmann: "The railway stations are today the principal entryways into Paris. To put them in communication with the city center by means of large arteries is a necessity of the first order." E. de Labedolliere, *Histoire du nouveau Paris*, p. 32. This applies in particular to the so-called Boulevard du

Centre: the extension of the Boulevard de Strasbourg to Châtelet by what is today the Boulevard Sebastopol. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 126)

David Buck points out that “wherever railroads were built in China, they modified existing cities” (Buck, 1999, p. 68). If so, then in case of Beijing, what relationship do we observe between the urban morphology of the city and the introduction of railways? Firstly, railways would make the flow of people and goods across different cities easier. In this regard, William Skinner argues that 1895 was a turning point for Chinese urbanisation because with the Japanese victory and the resultant Treaty of Shimonoseki, “for its terms encouraged the development of modern mechanized industry in an expanded number of treaty ports and initiated an era of railroad construction” (Skinner, 1977c, p. 220). Secondly and more relevant to our discussion, the railroads would transform the physical and symbolic structure of the urban space, most prominently by demolishing the city walls. City walls are an essential part of the city’s urban landscape. Yet, the material configuration of the Chinese city walls, which implicated different dream images that could be found in the traditional Chinese cosmology, stood against both the material organisation of railways and the dream images of speed and progress. Not only this but they could easily cause traffic congestion for other means of transportation. Hence, their destruction to make way for railways.



Figure 8. (Dong, 2003, p. 28)

In urban imagination, Beijing was symbolised by the body of a dragon. Xuanwu and Chongwen Gates were its two eyes and Qian Gate was its mouth. The Jade Canal flowed through the city and into the moat situated outside the south wall of the Inner City through a tunnel known as the Water Gate. This was the wall where the first hole was made for railroad tracks. The first railroad tracks entered through this hole and it seemed in the urban imagination that “When a rift was made in the body of the dragon by the cutting of the Water Gate, the wealth of Peking—‘the dragon blood’—oozed out through it, says a local legend” (Dong, 2003, p. 32).

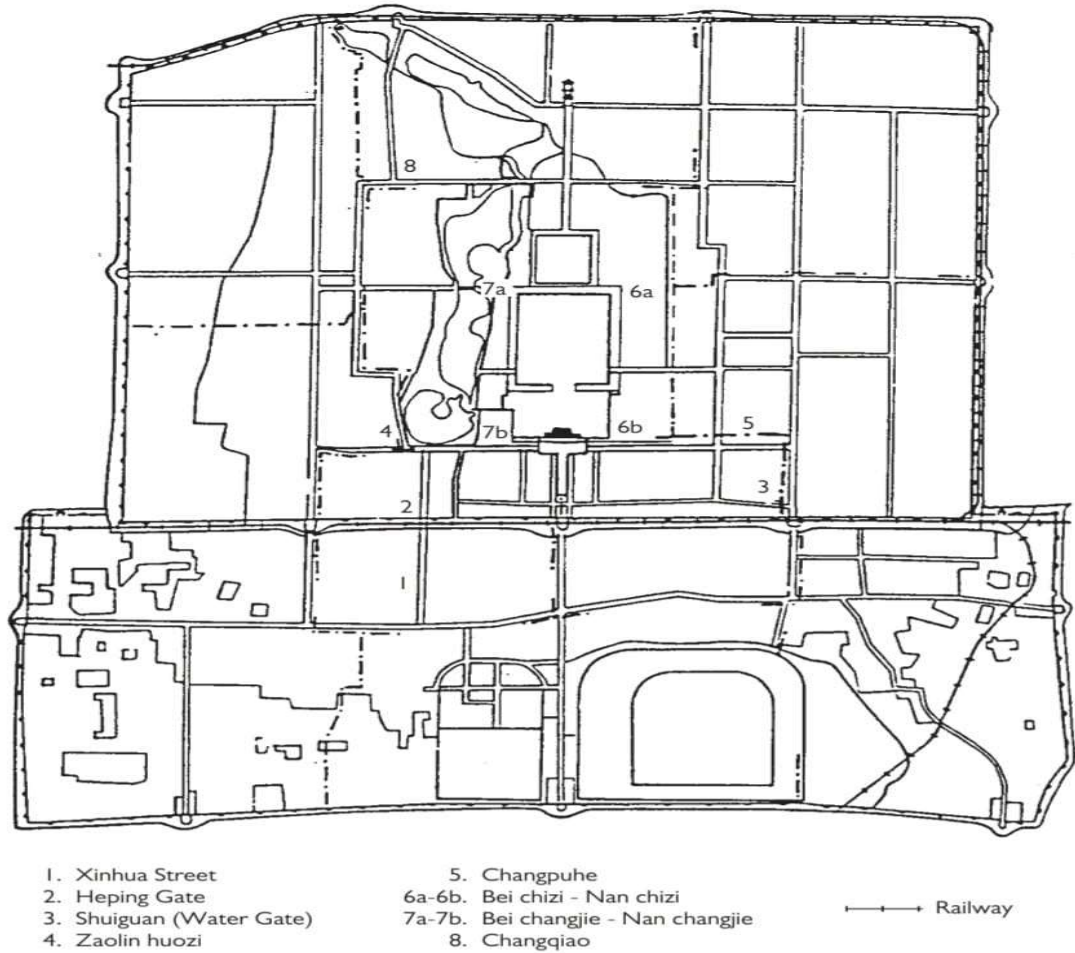


Figure 9. (Dong, 2003, p. 39)

The first railway in Beijing was constructed in 1865 by a British merchant named R. J. Durante, who intended to demonstrate to the Qing court the benefits of having this modern technology of transportation. Built outside of Xuanwu Gate and about 0.3 miles long, this railway had a brief existence as the Qing court soon ordered its demolition. The introduction of railway in this ancient capital of China was too shocking for the Qing court to easily accept it. Yet, it was still the Forbidden City that saw the first successful railway project in Beijing. The court still was concerned that railway could harm the dragon's vein (龙脉) but in 1888 the leader of the reform faction, Li Hongzhang, presented Empress Dowager Cixi with a small train from Germany as a small gift in order to construct a short railway in her garden. The six

cars of this train were decorated based on the imperial style: yellow silk for the empress, red silk for imperial family, and finally, blue silk for officials. Concerned that the noise of the train could disrupt the feng-shui of the Forbidden City, Empress Cixi demanded that the train be pulled by eunuchs rather than operated by an engine. This railway would take the Empress from Yiluan Hall to Jingqing Zhai, her dining hall. After this event, although the Empress did not travel outside the Forbidden City, she was no longer opposed to building railways in Beijing or in China. This toy train that convinced Empress Cixi of the need to build railways in China would, ironically, be dismantled not by the Chinese but by the troops composed of soldiers from Japan, Russia, Britain, the United States, and France in 1900 as a result of the the Boxer rebellion (Dong, 2003, p. 34-35).

This event, again, shows the dialectical relationship between the past and the present in the third sense of invisibility. Railways, which both embodied the new principles of accessibility and mobility and broke down the traditional city walls of Chinese cities which had for centuries represented the traditional dream images of Chinese cosmology, would be conceived in the recycled symbols of Chinese history. The first railways entering the city were conceptualised as the cutting of a dragon's body. The train presented to the Empress Dowager Cixi would follow the imperial style decorations. Urban modernisation was, in this regard, both a discontinuity with the past as well as a continuity with it: it both maintained and changed traditional dream images.

This was, however, a toy train within the Forbidden City after all. The first real railway reached Beijing from outside. In 1896, the railroad between Tianjin and Lugou Bridge terminated at Majiapu. In 1900, however, foreign expeditionary troops would change this state, moving the terminal of the railroad first to Yongding Gate

and then to Zhengyang Gate. This was the first time the railway broke down the city walls which had actually stayed intact throughout the entire period of the Ming and the Qing dynasties up till that point. In 1901, as a new short branch was added to the Tianjin-Beijing Railway leading to Tongzhou by foreign troops, they broke through Dongbian Gate. Another railway which was brought into the city walls at Zhengyang Gate was the Lu-Han, that is, Lugou Bridge-Hangyan Railway, whose name would change to Jing-Han in 1905, achieved by the famous reformer Zhang Zhidong. The east and the west sides of the walls of Chongwen Gate would be torn down in 1907 to make room for the trains coming by the Jing-Feng Railway from Shenyang, which had been being intermitently constructed for about 27 years. A station was raised at Dongbian Gate (Dong, 2003, p. 35-36).

The demand for straight lines for the trains to operate properly would continually come into conflict with the city walls which were designed to hinder exactly such straight lines carrying goods, services, and people fast and easily in order to create and maintain the traditional hierarchies based on imperial privilege and ethnicity. The steam and steel of the railway which embodied the urban modernity in a physical form that Beijing was undergoing would both physically demolish the city walls and destroy the earlier images they represented. In the 1930s, in order to straighten the Jing-Han Railway, the protective walls of Xuanwu Gate were taken down. It was at this moment that the most prestigious three front gates, that is, Chongwen, Zhengyang,, and Xuanwu lost their original integrity completely. They were now superfluities of an obsolete past that no longer fit the new dream images of urban modernity in China (Dong, 2003, p. 36-37).

However, it was not just the urban morphology of the city that the railways transformed. They also connected vast and distant lands and people. Walter Benjamin, again, observes a symbolic aspect in this reduction of physical distance:

Last echo of the idea that inaugurated Saint-Simonianism: "One can compare the zeal and the ardor displayed by the civilized nations of today in their establishment of railroads with that which, several centuries ago, went into the building of cathedrals If it is true, as we hear, that the word religion' comes from "religare, "to bind" . . . , then the railroads have more to do with the religious spirit than one might suppose. There has never existed a more powerful instrument for. . . rallying the scattered populations." Michel Chevalier, "Chemins de fer/" in *Dictionnaire de l'economie politique* (Paris, 1852), p. 20. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 598)

With a similar binding force, railroads in China would connect the cities that were otherwise regarded as polar opposites. The Tientsin-Pukow (Tianjin-Pukou, or Jin-Pu for short) line is a key construction in this regard. When the line was finally opened in December 1912, people could for the first time in history could travel by rail from Tianjin, a major commercial city roughly eighty miles southeast of Beijing to Shanghai (Köll, 2019, p. 1). In fact, the modern Beijing-Shanghai high-speed train parallels the old train corridor of the Jin-Pu line (Köll, 2019, p. 2). By establishing such connection between the cosmopolitan commercial city of Shanghai and the political capital city of Beijing, the Jin-Pu line would problematise a simple polarisation of these two cities. This relates to the earlier criticism of Esherick that we saw. However, it is also important to note that the Jin-Pu line both in its construction and in its administration epitomised the specific historical tensions of political struggles and foreign influence in China. The line was built under Chinese management by two highly competitive European powers with rather different colonial agendas, namely, Britain and Germany (Köll, 2019, p. 21). Below are two maps of China that show the railway lines that brought different regions together:

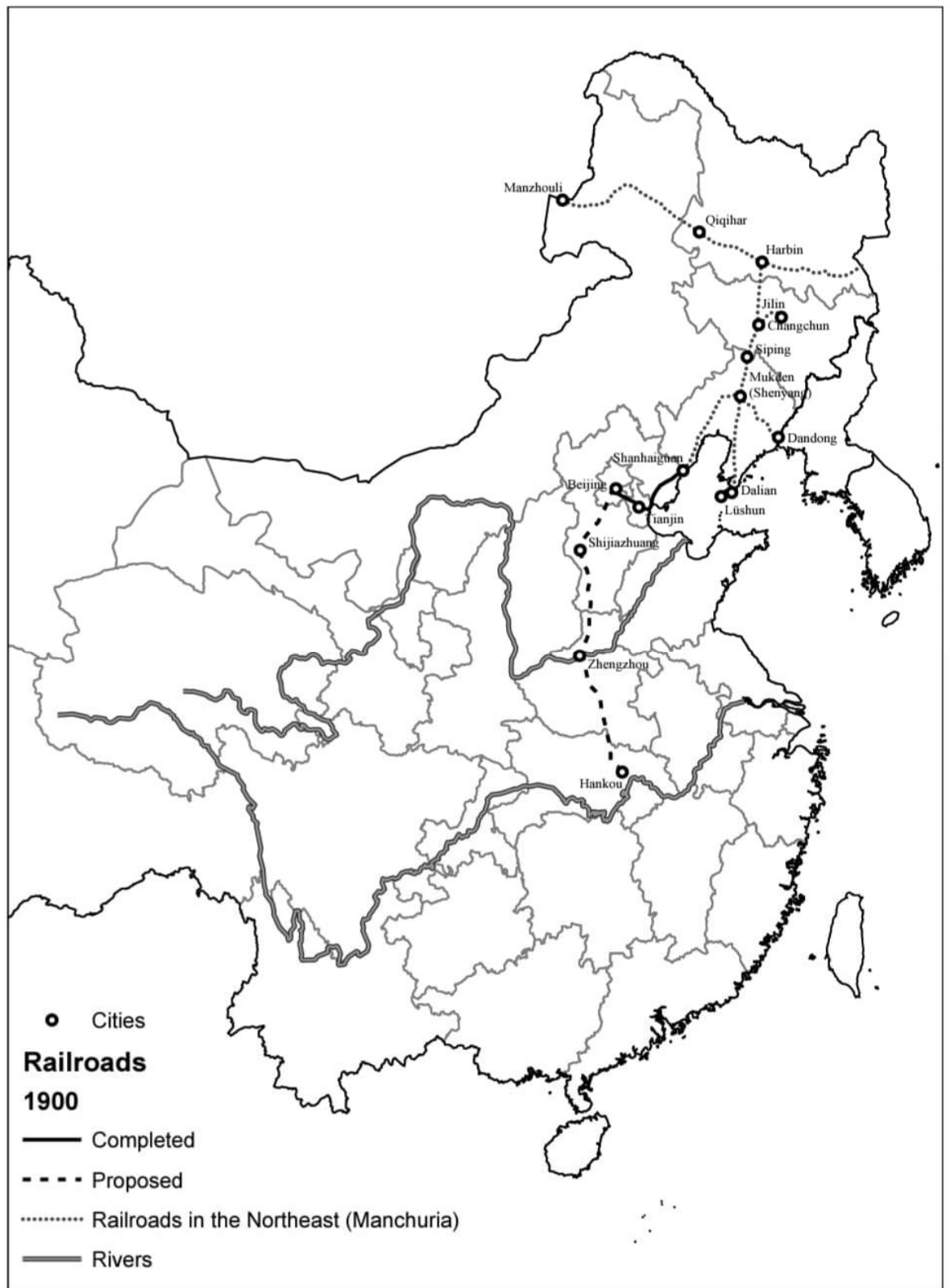


Figure 10. (Köll, 2019, p. 5)

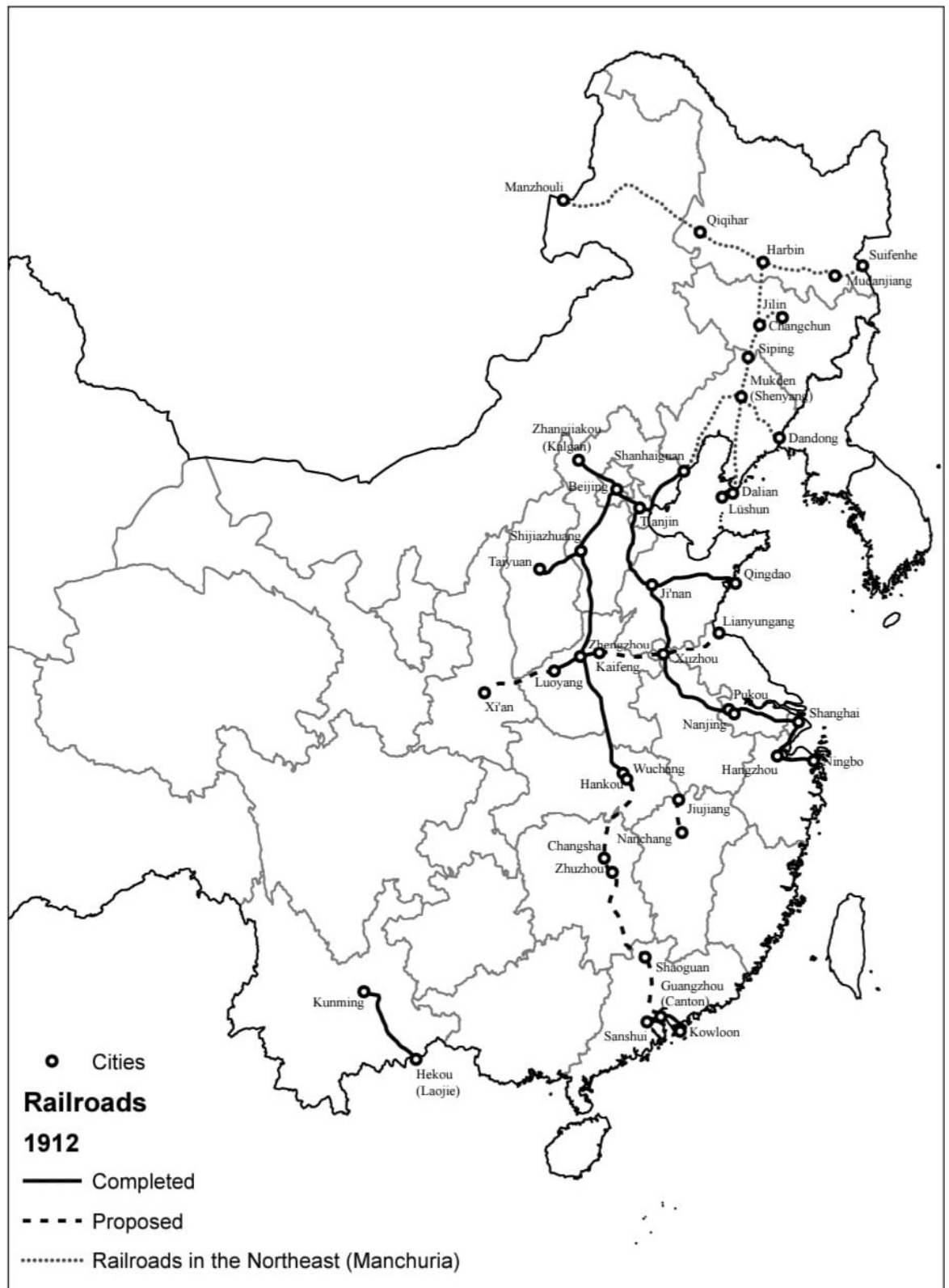


Figure 11. (Köll, 2019, p. 22)

Railways as a technology of transportation thus transformed Chinese urban morphology in three respects: as a vastly foreign funded and controlled sector, railways produced a space of competition over national sovereignty and foreign influence, inciting political movements such as the Rights Recovery Movement; secondly, railways transformed the urban morphology as its materiality as well as the dream images of speed and progress associated with urban modernity would contradict the traditional Chinese cosmology that the older urban morphology embodied; finally, by uniting the vast and distant lands and people, railways would produce a network that would over time spread across China, binding different sorts of people and different cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. As a new technology of transportation, however, railways were connected to another new technology of transportation that would grip the Chinese imagination for so long: rickshaws.

James Flath in his examination of the woodblock print, known as *nianhua* (年画), argues that the representation of the new technology of railroad transportation was locally appropriated, reproduced and redefined through the native media forms (Flath, 2004, p. 169). A key piece of art is *Ten Beauties Parading Lanterns*, produced in the city of Tianjin in 1915, displays a range of beauties. Ten Beauties is a common Chinese theme in popular art, often depicting women engaged in genteel activities as playing music, doing crafts, or parading lanterns. However, in this updated version that was produced under the processes of urbanisation and mechanisation after 1910, innovative transportation themes were added to the picture. Now we can observe “steamship, locomotives, hot-air balloon, rickshaw, steam-power carriage, and automobiles” (Flath, 2004, p. 184).



Figure 12. (Flath, 2004, p. 184)

Based on this and other popular representations of technologies of transportation in China, Flath concludes that “change is pictured as a literal contradiction in modes of transport and also in the figurative contrast between linear and fluid graphic structures” (Flath, 2004, p. 175). Both rickshaws and railways as the new technologies of transportation, thus, were associated with new dynamics of change that would fall under the category of urban modernity. The key point to note in these representations is that they provide a picture of rickshaws and railways, “depicting a sphere of coexistence rather than of hostile competition for passengers” (Köll, 2019, p. 27). This coexistence is possible because, though quite different in their concrete application for transportation, as new technologies of transportation they refer to a common problematic that China was dealing with, that is, urban modernity. As technologies, rickshaws and railways diverged, but as new they converged on this common ground. Hence their coexistence in the popular depictions of these new

technologies which used them as a background “to illustrate changes in Chinese society in terms of class, gender, and space” (Köll, 2019, p. 26).

This connection of rickshaw with railway through the problematic of modernity is not unique in China. One important example can be found in the birthplace of rickshaw, that is, Japan, as well. The Japanese artist Shōsai Ikkei in his woodblock print titled *Mirror of the Rise and Fall of Enlightenment and Tradition* portrays a tumultuous scene where the people who represent old and new items fight each other.



Figure 13

The western umbrella against the Japanese paper parasol, a chair against traditional stool, a pen against a brush, brick against tile, hair cut shorter against the traditional *chonmage* hairstyle, and so on. On the right side of the print, there is a man whose label reads “人力車” which means rickshaw in Japanese, trampling on an oxcart, the traditional and preferred conveyance of Tokugawa elites. Rickshaw in the Japanese imagination of this artwork represents modernity and is conceived in a common fight

with other items who engage in the same fight. That is, modernisation is the same struggle that is represented by different items. However, this whole scene is driven by a train in the background, which itself is a modern technology of transportation. Thus, the new items seem to be the winning side of this fight of modernity and tradition, railway representing the overarching symbol of progress. (Conrad, 2012, p. 1001-1003)

Railways transformed the urban landscape and it was within this transformed urban landscape rickshaws became a central modern technology of transportation, reflecting the antinomies of Chinese urban modernity that this landscape embodied. They were tied through the same problematic of urban modernisation.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored several issues. Firstly, we discussed meaning of urban modernity with regard to the two sub-categories of urbanity and modernity. Although these two categories do not imply one another, in the context of urban modernity they have a mutually transformative relationship. I dealt with two questions: what is the relationship between urbanity and rurality in the context of Chinese history and what is the role of modernity and modernisation in Chinese history. With respect to the first, we summarised the academic literature on this question and then concluded that whatever peculiarities may have existed in the relationship between urbanity and rurality in Chinese history, as the process of modernisation began undergoing, so did emerge a new and modern category of urbanity. To appreciate the role of modernity here, we, then, engaged with Cohen's important contribution to Chinese historiography, where he criticises several uses and

abuses of the categories of modernity and modernisation in writing Chinese history. Although I agree with Cohen on the need to be horizontally and vertically specific about China, I find two main problems with his China-centered approach. Firstly, the first component and the other two components create a tension, in which an insider notion of historical experience to feel empathy with clashes with an emphasis on the complexity of history, problematising the possibility of such empathy. Secondly, the way Cohen formulates his China centered approach does not allow the problematisation of Chineseness as itself a historical construct. To avoid these errors, I focus on a specific group of people in two cities, rickshaw pullers in Beijing and Shanghai, and try to problematise the Chinese identity both in the comparative analysis of Beijing and Shanghai and, in the next chapter, in the examination of rickshaws.

In exploring Beijing and Shanghai, I draw on several perspectives. Skinner's regions system approach and Esherick's urban modern types are important in this regard. However, I further draw on scholars such as Wasserstrom to further refine these perspectives. Beijing and Shanghai as two cities located in different macroregions and belonging to different urban types provide us with rich material to comparatively explore how urban modernity played out in different urban historical contexts. Beijing as the political capital until 1928 and Shanghai as a treaty port pose contrasts, but these contrasts take place within a larger global material context, making dichotomous approaches problematic. They also provide opportunities to problematise the Chinese identity that was also formed within a larger global context of representation.

I examine Beijing and Shanghai by drawing on the three senses of invisibility explained in Chapter Two. Cities share invisible dream images which can be seen

through a dialectics of seeing in the visible material morphology of the city as their embodiment. Cities also imply each other as their invisible comparative contexts in which they acquire their meaning and identity. Finally, cities as historical entities contain the past as the invisible aspect of their visible present, both in the sense that it is out of the dynamics of the past the present emerges and that the present should be seen not so much as an unprecedented invention as a recycling of the past. This recycling forges the past in a different shape, making it new and different, while at the same time establishing essential connections between the past and the present. The transformation of urban morphology and the replacement of traditional cosmology in Chinese cities by the modern principles of accessibility and mobility should be interpreted in this context of recycling.

The material morphology of the urban landscape was expressive in the sense that Benjamin understands the term of the dream images of urban life. We can see this in the symbolic significance of the architectural designs of both the traditional and modern Chinese cities. The visible material morphologies of these two cities expressed the traditional dream images which could be found in Chinese cosmology and the transformation of morphology was accompanied by a corresponding transformation of the dream images under the dynamics of urban modernisation. These two aspects held an expressive relationship in the sense of Benjamin's notion of expression, so changes in one aspect had corresponding changes in the other. Thus, with the different geographical surrounding in the Southern areas, there was a corresponding change in the dream images, introducing feng-shui (风水). Similarly, the material dismantling of the city walls was accompanied by new dream images of accessibility and mobility. These two aspects should, thus, be conceived in a

simultaneous way: the visible material base provided the immaterial superstructure of dream images with the capacity for expression.

The transformation in the technologies of transportation is an essential aspect of urban modernity. In this regard, I focus on the railways, how they introduce the new dynamics by reshaping the urban morphology that stands for dream images. I placed the emphasis on walls and railroads as a highly visible area of this process. I conclude that railways were significant in three respects with regard to urban modernity: firstly, railways, beyond their bare materiality, were also a symbolic space in which questions of national sovereignty and foreign influence were posed; secondly, railways transformed both the material morphology and the dream images it embodies in cities by introducing new material configurations and dream images; finally, railways, by reducing the vast physical distance between lands and people, created a unified space in which goods, services, and people travelled faster and more easier, facilitating urbanisation and modernisation as well as connecting the different urban modern contexts like that of Beijing and Shanghai. I, then, related railways to rickshaws by examining some popular representations of the new technologies of transportation. It was within the context of the urban modern landscape that railways vastly contributed to that rickshaws would become a highly important modern technology of transportation. This new technology would reflect the antinomies of Chinese urban modernity, captivating so many people as it became more and more popular. It is now this issue that I shall turn to.

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE URBAN MODERNITY AND RICKSHAWS

独有这一件小事，却总是浮在我眼前，有时反更分明，教我惭愧，催我自新，并且增长我的勇气和希望。

[Yet this small incident keeps coming back to me, often more vivid than in actual life, teaching me shame, spurring me on to reform, and imbuing me with fresh courage and hope.]

Lu Xun (Lu Xun, 2006, p. 124-125)

可是，希望多半落空，祥子的也非例外。

[But most hopes come to nothing, and Xiangzi's were no exception.]

Lao She (Lao She, 2006, p. 24-25)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall examine three antinomies of Chinese urban modernity that were expressed through the technology and image of rickshaw: the antinomy of modernity and archaicity, the antinomy of nativity and foreignness and the antinomy of sanctity and profanity. After giving a introduction to the historical context of rickshaws in China and relating rickshaws to the discussion on the concept of antinomy in Chapter One, I will turn to the first antinomy. Rickshaw under the conditions of Chinese urban modernity was seen both as a modern and an archaic phenomenon. It was modern because it introduced technological progress in urban transportation both against its traditional predecessors like the sedan chair and, to a more limited degree, against its modern competitors such as trams and busses. Answering the urgent need for cheap and convenient transportation, rickshaws over time became the most visible means of urban transportation in Beijing and Shanghai. However, despite these qualities, rickshaw was also regarded as archaic because the

role of human beings in it seemed to contradict the expectations from technological progress in terms of the quality of human life, and rickshaw pullers, under the compulsion of livelihood, hindered and not infrequently attacked motorised vehicles as their modern competitors in urban transportation. Secondly, rickshaws produced a contradictory unity of nativity and foreignness. Although both in social and in literary practice, rickshaws became a highly popular image in China, to the point that Chinese intellectuals like Hu Shi directly identifying Chinese national identity with rickshaws, however, because they were invented in Japan and the rickshaw companies initially were dominated by foreign capital, they also carried an antagonistic sense of foreign encroachment on Chinese nation. The third antinomy is that of sanctity and profanity. Rickshaw pullers as a significant section of the urban poor labourers were associated with a sense of sanctity that derived from the idea of sacred labour-labourer (劳工神圣) and common people (平民) in the May Fourth literary movement. However, they were also associated with profanity. This was mainly due to the contradiction between the abstractness of the image the literary figures formed of the pullers and the concreteness of the social life in which the pullers lived. The unresolved contradiction between abstract image and concrete life took two forms: on the one hand, the May Fourth intellectuals could associate pullers with sacred labour and project their ideals on to them whereas the concrete reality they lived was far more profane due to lack of education, literacy, and the corrupting influence of the city life; on the other the intellectuals abstractly imagined the pullers as reduced to an abject state of bestiality whereas in their concrete practice the pullers could be boastful of their masculinity and physical prowess on public display. The abstract image was positive in the first case and negative in the second while the concrete reality was negative in the first case and positive in the second.

4.2 Rickshaws: the general context

Rickshaw as a new technology of transportation held a significant place in the urban modernity of many Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. However, the technology and literary image of rickshaws by no means implied an unambiguous meaning. Instead, rickshaw was a highly ambiguous image, full of tensions and contradictions. I argue that the reason why the rickshaw image in the Chinese expressions, literary or otherwise, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, was so full of tension and contradiction was because the material existence of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers produced a space in which the contradictions of Chinese urban modernity played themselves out. The materiality of the rickshaw provided the historical agents living under the conditions of urban modernity with a paper upon which to express themselves on what exactly urban modernity meant in the Chinese context.

In Chapter One, we defined an antinomy essentially as an irreconcilable contradiction. Contrary to Kant's conception, however, it was argued, along with Hegel, that antinomies are in need of historicisation because they arise not out of the transhistorical realm of pure reason but out of the concrete dynamics at a historically specific place and time. Antinomies are historically context-specific. Yet, in Hegelian dialectics, antinomies, though sharing a sense of opposition in the form of thesis and antithesis, are subjected to eventual reconciliation in a progressive narrative of the course of history, that is, synthesis. In the discussions on culture and aesthetics, this aspect of Hegelian dialectics could be seen in Lukacs' position against Ernst Bloch. Despite the anti-Hegelian current against the progressive narratives of history, the element of reconciliation still generally existed in the practice of cultural history in

Germany. Nietzsche, influenced by Burckhardt, for all his opposition against progressive narratives, still saw a reconciling element in art and culture. Warburg, on the other hand, regarded art and cultural history as sites of reconciliation and healing against the tensions and contradictions that social and historical dynamics create.

Benjamin offers a different vision. His dialectics of seeing rejects progressive narratives of history as in Hegel and Lukacs together with reconciling conceptions of art and culture as in Nietzsche and Warburg. Benjamin, instead, attempts to examine art and cultural history in such a way as to create a reconstructed context of juxtaposition, based on the technique of literary montage, in which historical tensions and contradictions are exposed and intensified without eventual reconciliation. Thus unreconciled, the contradictions under examination become antinomies.

From this point of view, approaching the tensions and contradictions, produced under the historical conditions of Chinese urban modernity, I attempt to examine rickshaws which, as a modern technology of urban transportation and as a popular genre of modern Chinese literature, reflected the conditions of Chinese urban modernity, as material and cultural objects embodying modern urban antinomies. The contradictions they embody, in order to avoid a progressive or reconciling sense of cultural history, are thus suspended. The first antinomy, for example, concerns the question of modernity and archaicity. Although it was imagined that modernity and archaicity, the new and the old, were two opposites and the task of modernisation was to remove the old traditional “residues” of Chinese society, rickshaws created a highly ambivalent impression: on the one hand, it was clearly a modern technology of urban transportation, providing much better services than its traditional predecessors such as sedan chair and animal-drawn carts, in accordance with the new principles of mobility and accessibility, yet it also produced an unmistakeable sense

of backwardness and archaicity, creating deep disturbance among the Chinese intellectuals who were witnessing people pulling other people as if they were beasts of burden. This historical contradiction was reflected in the literature, a well. The question, then, arises: was rickshaw modern or archaic? The answer I provide in this study is “both”. It was both modern and archaic because it both reflected and was situated within the conditions of Chinese urban modernity whose dynamics were never so pure as to give an unambiguous answer for this question. To provide a definite answer in favour of either side of this contradiction would be tantamount to reconciliation. Carr observes that “final analysis”, “final resort” and the like are the favourite phrases of historians because they point us towards the final cause, “the cause of all causes” (Carr, 2018, p. 85-86). “Rickshaw was in the final analysis modern”, Rickshaw was in the last resort archaic”: it is by avoiding such answers that I attempt to examine rickshaws without a final cause that deprives history of its contradictory multiplicity.

Rickshaw became a popular theme and genre. Especially in the period following the May Fourth Movement (五四运动) of 1919, which, overlapping with the New Culture Movement of 1915 (新文化运动), grew out of the way China was treated at the end of the First World War and the failures of the Republican Revolution of 1911, many Chinese intellectuals deployed the image of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers to discuss the contradictions of urban modernity they were experiencing and undergoing: “By depicting rickshaw men as figures driven by larger social forces and trapped with passengers in a social conundrum devised by a not always rational or reasonable process of modernization, writers could use the lives of rickshaw men to illustrate and explain how these forces and processes worked” (Strand, 1989, p. 37). A brief look at the literary works during the

Republican Era demonstrates the obsession of Chinese intellectuals with the image of rickshaw. To mention a few: in drama, 陈绵的《人力车夫》、欧阳予倩的《车夫之家》; in poetry, 沈尹默的《人力车夫》、胡适的《人力车夫》、顾颉刚的《春雨之夜》、叶圣陶的《人力车夫》、陈南士的《走路》、刘半农的《车毯》《拟拟曲》(共两首)、周恩来的《死人的享福》、徐志摩的《谁知道》《先生! 先生!》、闻一多的《天安门》; in novels and short stories, 鲁迅的《一件小事》、刘一梦的《沉醉的一夜》、郁达夫的《薄奠》、老舍《骆驼祥子》(Wang Jinshuang, 2014, p. 154-155). Referring to Camel Xiangzi [骆驼祥子] in this list, David Strand observes that “no one understood the central place of the rickshaw in Republican cityscapes and in the popular imagination better than Beijing novelist Lao She” (Strand, 1989, p. 21).

There are three main causes of the popularity of rickshaw as an image. Firstly, as already said, rickshaw provided the Chinese historical actors with a space in which they could perceive and discuss the urban modern antinomies they were dealing with. David Strand, who chooses the title “Rickshaw Beijing” for his study of the city people in Beijing with a focus on the 1920s argues that in spite of the peculiarity of their job, rickshaw pullers can actually be seen as representative of the urban labouring poor (Strand, 1989, p. xiv). In this, he follows Lao She who employs in his famous novel a rickshaw figure, Camel Xiangzi, to explore the urban modern dynamics of Beijing. By foregoing other possible urban figures such as “rebellious students, iconoclastic intellectuals, ambitious politicians, ruthless militarists, petty bureaucrats, and profit-minded entrepreneurs”, Lao She paints the urban landscape of Beijing in terms of the effects which the urban modern dynamics produce on an ordinary person, that is, the rickshaw puller. By placing the perspective of an

ordinary rickshaw puller at the centre, Lao She makes the urban poor, the not-so-silent majority of the city, a source of writing the story of Chinese urban modernity as it was experienced by the labouring poor (Strand, 1989, p. 22-23). Hanchao Lu, on the other hand, in his study of Shanghai, takes the everyday presence of rickshaw pullers in the city as a powerful and illuminating example of what life was like for the urban poor, pullers constituting a large section of them (Lu, 1999, p. 66).

Secondly, rickshaws became a prevalent means of transportation in many Chinese cities. Introduced to China in 1874 during the Guangxu Emperor's (光绪) reign (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 119), the first rickshaws appeared on the streets of Beijing in 1886 (Strand, 1989, p. 24), by the 1920s, they became "the "most numerous, or at least, the most conspicuous thing" in the city" (Strand, 1989, p. 21). It is difficult to give an exact number for the population of rickshaw pullers across all of China. This difficulty arises due to several reasons. Firstly, there is no nationwide survey during the Republican Era that could provide us with the data on the number of rickshaw pullers nationwide. Surveys were carried out in specific places such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hebei and so on, but there was no nationwide attempt to determine the number of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers. Another difficulty is the nature of rickshaw pulling. As a technology of transportation, rickshaw pullers were mobile urban labourers, which made it more difficult to pin down their work place and produce reliable surveys about them. The third difficulty is that many rickshaw pullers, depending on the season, would work in different sectors than rickshaw pulling. This made it more difficult to produce reliable data because a survey carried out in one season may not accurately reflect the number of rickshaw pullers in another season of the year. In Nanjing, for example, Fall and Winter saw a rise in the number of rickshaw pullers (e.g. in 1928, 5334 pullers during the spring, 5147

pullers during the summer, 6910 pullers during the fall, and 7352 pullers during the winter, 497526 in total; in 1933, 9277 pullers in the spring, 9196 pullers in the summer, 9340 pullers in the fall, and 10188 pullers in the winter, 726131 in total). Another difficulty worth mentioning is that although we have data on several cities, rickshaws did not exist only in cities or even towns. Even some villages had rickshaws as a means of transportation. Yet, these places did not produce any data concerning the number of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers (Wang Yinhuan, 2000, 193-198).

However, for Beijing and Shanghai we can produce some figures. For Beijing, Qiu Guosheng, based on the figures of a Japanese scholar, Fangfu Anyuan (房福安原), argues that at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the population of the rickshaw pullers in Beijing was 55,000 (5.5 万) and the total population of the city was 800,000 (80 万). Thus, at the time, the rickshaw pullers roughly occupied the 7 percent of the entire population. Of the male population, however, the percentage was 11 percent since rickshaw pullers were more often male than female. However, this figure, though high as one in every 9 male was a rickshaw puller, does not give us the full impact of rickshaw pulling on the population. The reason is because rickshaw pullers did not just support themselves but also their families. The estimate figure of those who depended on rickshaw salary is 250,000 (25 万). Thus, about one third of the city population by the end of the 1920s was dependent on rickshaws for livelihood (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 120). There are some other figures available. David Strand, based on Li Jinghan, estimates that in the 1920s, “about sixty thousand men took as many as a half million fares a day in a city of slightly more than one million people.” One out of six males in the

city between sixteen and fifty was a rickshaw puller, them and their dependents making up about 20 percent of the city population (Strand, 1989, p. 20-21).

Different, though, they may be, these figures show us the significant role the rickshaw pullers occupied in Beijing during the 1920s and afterwards. As for Shanghai, Rickshaw pullers were among the sizable groups of the urban poor. After the decision to introduce rickshaws into Shanghai in 1873 when a French merchant, named Menard, who came to China from Japan, petitioned the municipal council of the French Concession (Lu, 1999, p. 68), the number of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers increased, despite the efforts to curb them. In 1882, 1.500 rickshaws operated in Shanghai. By 1914, the International Settlement on its own had 9.718 public rickshaws. As for the private rickshaws, in 1907, 5.625 private rickshaws were registered in the International Settlement. The number of rickshaws in the International Settlement rose up to 19.882 by 1924, 9.882 now being private (Lu, 1999, p. 68-69). In the mid-1920s, Shanghai housed about 62.000 rickshaw pullers, 22.000 wheelbarrow and handcart operators and 35.500 dockworkers. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Shanghai now had around 100.000 rickshaw pullers. Given these figures, Shanghai's rickshaw sector, as in Beijing, housed a considerable portion of the city population (Lu, 1999, p. 65-66).

However, besides the relatively high population of rickshaw pullers, not only in Beijing and Shanghai, but also in many other cities, there is a third reason for the popularity of their image in Chinese literary and social discourses. This is to do with the new discursive field that the May Fourth Movement introduced in China. It was through the particular notion of the sanctity of labour, coupled with an idea of common people rickshaw pullers were a part of, that the image of rickshaw puller came to occupy a significant place in the discussions and literary works, especially

during the May Fourth Movement (五四运动) and afterwards. The intellectuals increasingly turned their attention towards labourers and, since rickshaw pullers were one, if not the most, visible group of urban labourers, rickshaw pullers provided them with an attractive theme to write and discuss on. This issue will be dealt with in greater historical detail in section 5.

These are the three reasons why rickshaw became a popular theme and image in the Chinese discourses: rickshaw's existence could provide a viable space to perceive and discuss the contradictions of urban modernity in China; the population of rickshaw pullers was considerable in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, making their existence inevitably a matter of public concern; and finally, in the intellectual atmosphere especially in the May Fourth Movement and afterwards, the question of labour that common people embodied became an acute concern.

I argue that the image of rickshaw expressed three main antinomies of Chinese urban modernity: the antinomy of modernity and archaicity, the antinomy of nativity and foreignness, and the antinomy of sanctity and profanity. Each will be examined in turn.

4.3 The first antinomy: modernity and archaicity

Rickshaw was a new technology of transportation in China. As a modern technology of transportation in the urban landscape, rickshaws provided the city residents with the opportunity for cheap and convenient means of travel. They became highly popular not only in Beijing and Shanghai but in many other cities in China in the course of the 20th century until the aftermath of the 1949 revolution. Rickshaw was technologically progressive and could offer such services that neither its traditional

predecessors nor its modern competitors could. Yet, this modern progressive aspect co-existed with an archaic aspect that made rickshaw into a highly ambivalent phenomenon in China. David Strand notes: “Rickshaw pulling was a prime example of the unexpected courses cut through local communities by technologically induced change” (Strand, 1989, p. 20). It is this unexpectedness, manifesting a contradictory unity of modernity and archaicity, that I will focus on in this section. These two aspects co-existed and were never fully resolved, turning their contradiction into an antinomy.

Rickshaw, invented in the 1860s in Japan, likely in order to help the disabled to move about, initially resembled “a sedan chair awkwardly mounted on an axle and oversized wheels” (Strand, 1989, p. 24). Despite its later popularity, rickshaws that were first introduced or planned to be introduced into China- into Beijing in 1886 and into the French concession area in Shanghai in 1873- did not gain popularity immediately. This was largely due to its technical deficiencies for comfortable transportation. The wheels of the first rickshaws, introduced into China in 1874, were made of wood and wrapped with iron rings. The handlebar was both high and short, carrying iron hooks. The appearance of the rickshaw was rough and had no tools to absorb the shock while pulling on the street. Thus, pulling on bumpy streets that could jostle the customer, the shock was quite uncomfortable, shaking him about. It was also easy to fall out of the rickshaw. Due to these technical conditions, the number of people who hired rickshaws was not initially high when the vehicle was introduced into China. 1909 is an important date when significant improvements were made on rickshaws. Thanks to these new technical improvements, both the puller could save more energy while pulling and the customer could enjoy a more comfortable travel. The replacement of iron with rubber was a noteworthy change

(Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 119). Hanchao Lu counts further changes: “discarding the original iron-shod wooden wheels in favor of solid rubber tires, then pneumatic rubber tires, adding a backrest for the comfort of the passenger, replacing the flat, hard seat with spring cushions, adding lights, and so on” (Lu, 1999, p. 69).

Prior to these technical improvements, rickshaws were already relatively prevalent in Beijing and Shanghai. In Shanghai, “by the end of the nineteenth century, rickshaws were already the most common conveyance in the city” (Lu, 1999, p. 69). In Beijing, “by the early twenties the rickshaw was the “most numerous, or at least the most conspicuous thing” in the city” (Strand, 1989, p. 21). In both cities, rickshaws and their pullers occupied a central place in the means of urban transportation. However, it is worth noting that in Beijing rickshaws occupied a more central role than in Shanghai. This has several reasons. Firstly, the introduction of motorised vehicles such as trams (电车) and busses (公共汽车), took place later in Beijing than in Shanghai, and their development was slower in Beijing than in Shanghai. The motorised vehicles were both rarer in Beijing and covered a shorter distance of travel. Secondly, Beijing as the capital city of China housed a group of people who responded more positively to a market of rickshaws. A wide range of people -officials, journalists, students, diplomats, merchants, tourists, and people who resided in the outer city or the inner city but had to move in between- all would be among the daily customers of rickshaw pullers. Finally, the price of rickshaw services in Beijing was cheap, making it more appealing than using motorised vehicles (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 119-120).

Their popularity, however, was not only due to the removal of its technical deficiencies which were eliminated once the aforementioned improvements were introduced to make the ride more comfortable. Rickshaws were also highly suitable

to carry people in the narrow and maze-like streets of the Chinese cities. The transformation of streets was, in fact, a high goal for many Chinese city planners who believed that without such transformation, cities could not be modernised. As seen in Chapter 3, the principles of accessibility and mobility slowly replaced the older, traditional cosmology and its corresponding morphology in Chinese cities. When the republic was established, though, there were no asphalt or concrete roads in Beijing, only 33.87 miles had macadam and between 1914 and the end of 1918, 121 roads were repaired, expanded, or constructed anew (Strand, 1989, p. 38). In accordance with the new principles, the city planners took it upon themselves to widen, straighten, and pave the main urban thoroughfares. “The macadamized streets permitted the introduction of the rickshaw, a new vehicle that spread rapidly throughout China at this time; and in the 1920s and 1930s, the larger cities would add tramways and bus lines” (Esherick, 1999, p. 8).

In contrast to the macadamised streets, asphalt streets were much rarer. The first asphalt streets in Beijing were constructed in the Legation Quarter in 1915 and their cleanly orderliness served as a model to be followed throughout the city. However, the transformation of streets as part of urban modernisation did not achieve the success that many Chinese planners had hoped for. Many construction or repair projects took a long time, not only because of financial troubles, but also due to political reasons. Although, for example, Xinhua Street, the most important north-south project in Beijing, was proposed in 1914, its completion and opening in its entirety did not take place until 1926 due to the political situation at the time (Dong, 2003, p. 40-41).

Due to these peculiar conditions of Chinese urban modernity, the models upheld for street planning never fully materialised. This is in accord with the third

sense of invisibility discussed in Chapter Two and Three. The city as export was never completely realised in different soil. The Legation Quarter may have served as the model in Beijing, but Beijing could not live up to that model. Although the European cities, their urban morphology, was exported in part or in whole into the Chinese cities, constructing modern avenues during the early 20th century, sometimes modelled on the modern avenues and boulevards in Paris created during the Haussmann period (Strand, 1989, p. 5), what emerged as the new urban space was neither the ideal model nor the old structure. It was something in between, somewhat unexpected. Rickshaws were the modern technology of transportation that could well carry out the principles of accessibility and mobility in this strange urban morphology, stuck between the old and the new.

Rickshaws were clearly a technological progress over their predecessors: the sedan chair and such traditional wheeled vehicles as the heavy and slow mule cart (Strand, 1989, p. 35). Sedan chair was rickshaw's major predecessor (Wright, 1991, p. 84). Compared to sedan chair, rickshaws were faster and more convenient, employing such tools as "inflatable rubber tires, ball bearings, and metal springs" (Vandertop, 2019, p. 376-377). Qiu Guosheng identifies three major advantages that rickshaws had over all the other traditional means of transportation. Firstly, rickshaw required one person to pull the device rather than two like the sedan chair, which made the price of riding rickshaw much cheaper. At the beginning of the 20th century in Chengdu, while the minimum price of a rickshaw ride was 20 wen (文), the sedan chair was as high as double this price. Besides the advantage of cheapness, rickshaw was also much faster than the sedan chair due to its physical design. The design of rickshaw made use of the passenger's weight by resting most of the weight down on to the rickshaw chair itself, which made the axle rotate forwards and required the

puller to pull only forwards. This way, the device was much more efficient as the puller did not have both to lift the passenger and to move forward. Rickshaw puller, unlike the sedan chair carrier, could even run ahead with the passenger, which made the travel much faster. With the technical improvements of the original design mentioned above, rickshaw travel was also much more comfortable. Thirdly, the scope of activity that rickshaws could carry out was much greater since rickshaws were more flexible than traditional means of transportation. Not only rickshaws could as well function on the new macadam roads as larger vehicles like busses, but could also operate on the still unimproved old-style roads. Rickshaws as a result could travel a much greater space in the city and provide door-to-door service (Qiu Guosheng, 2004, p. 15).



Figure 14. (Chinese photographers association official website, 2021, February 10)

Not only against its predecessors, but even against some new modern technologies of transportation rickshaws could have advantages. Speaking of the situation in Shanghai, though the point holds valid for Beijing, too, Hanchao Lu points out that flexibility was a major advantage rickshaws had over motorised vehicles. Without jostling and discomfort, rickshaws could easily carry their passengers whatever corner in the city they wished to go, irrespective of the irregularity or narrowness of the streets. Besides this flexibility, rickshaws were also available at many more spots and the pullers were willing to follow the passenger's schedules, which the bus or the tram could not provide due to their fixed schedules and stations. Their prices, as said above, were also not expensive.

Yet, despite these progressive factors as a modern technology of transportation, rickshaws were not hailed as the symbol of modern progress. On the contrary, many believed that they were the symbol of backwardness and archaicity. The rickshaw was, by many, regarded as "the irrefutable proof of the backwardness of China's material civilization" (Strand, 1989, p. 36). This, despite, the fact that rickshaw was a highly popular and convenient modern means of transportation. Hanchao Lu expresses the paradox: "The two-wheel rickshaw might be considered by some to be a symbol of Oriental backwardness, but it was an improvement over the wheelbarrow popularly used from the late Qing well into the Republican period" (Lu, 1999, p. 14).

The sense of backwardness associated with the practice of rickshaw pulling had two major causes: association with bestiality, depriving rickshaw pullers of their humanity, and the conflict with motorised technologies of urban transportation. Firstly, rickshaw pulling as a modern technology of transportation did not fit the positive image of progress associated with modernity. Whereas the positive image of

modernity gave people the impression that hard labour would gradually be replaced by machinery as the advances in technology would make humanity the master of natural forces, rickshaw pulling seemed to be a kind of twisted inversion of this image: it was human beings who replaced animals to do their hard labour. The description of human beings becoming beast-like through rickshaw pulling was commonly used. Li Jinghan (李景汉) in his 1925 survey of the rickshaw pullers in Beijing (北京人力车夫现状的调查) writes “besides beggary, these rickshaw pullers who turn humanity into bestiality belong among the poorest people (除了乞丐以外, 这些以人类代牛马的东洋车夫算是最穷苦的人了)” (Wang Jinshuang, 2014, p. 154). Hu Shi, a prominent intellectual of the New Culture and May Fourth movements, in *Roving Reflections* (漫游的感想) gives a very similar description of rickshaw pullers (Hu Shi, 2003, p. 35). A contributor to the journal *New China* in the immediate aftermath of the May Fourth movement in 1919 writes:

A rickshaw puller is a human being the same as we...We talk about democracy and humanism, about everyone being treated equally and having an equal opportunity. How can we then sit in a rickshaw with the puller working like an ox or a horse in the rain and the mud? (Strand, 1989, p. 34)

It was not just those sympathetic to the rickshaw pullers who likened them to beasts of burden to express pity and sympathy. Their competitors also employed the sense of bestiality with a more negative purpose. When rickshaws were introduced into Beijing, mule carters started immediate controversy. At this time, mule litters and carts together with horses and sedan chairs provided the only other means of personal transportation in the city of Beijing. They were opposed to rickshaws as a competitor in the market and couched their opposition to them in a concern for human dignity: they, thus, “threw the horrid foreign things, which degraded men to the level of animals” (Strand, 1989, p. 24).

The opposition to bestiality was not just an altruistic concern for the rickshaw pullers. It also concerned the status of those who rode rickshaws. Rickshaws as a popular means of transportation was highly visible in urban life in Beijing and Shanghai. However, their users were not always economically secure people who had no fear of becoming rickshaw pullers some day in the future. Rickshaw passengers in Beijing were drawn mainly from the middle class of “shopkeepers, teachers, and minor officials” of the city (Strand, 1989, p. 28). This seems to be a general situation for rickshaws as they were often used by those from the middle class who though not having high income cared about their outward appearance and social status (Wang Yinhuan, 2003, p. 100). In fact, for all their opposition to the reduction of human beings to bestiality, status-conscious individuals such as intellectuals and officials could still widely use rickshaws to avoid getting their dress dirty on the streets (Strand, 1989, p. 27). Yet, due to the economic precarity of these members of the middle class, the visibility of rickshaw pullers in the urban landscape as a popular means of transportation and the physical proximity between the passenger and the puller during the ride disturbed the passengers by reminding them that this profession might be holding a mirror to their future (Strand, 1989, p. 33).

This fear was greater in Beijing than in Shanghai due to the peculiar composition of the body of rickshaw pullers in Beijing: whereas those of Shanghai are mostly composed by peasants or those with peasant origins north of the Yangtzi River, who moved from the countryside to the city in order to find employment, in Beijing the majority of the rickshaw pullers are city residents themselves (Strand, 1989, p. 30). Beijing in this regard occupies a unique position in China because the urban ratio among the rickshaw pullers was higher in Beijing than in any other city. Some of the urban to rural proportions among the rickshaw pullers in different cities

are: 42.03 to 57.97 in Hangzhou, 43.04 to 56.96 in Nanjing, 29 to 71 in Shanghai, 76 to 24 in Beijing and 37.86 to 61.14 in Chengdu. Beijing in this list has the highest urban proportion of rickshaw pullers, more than double the proportion of Shanghai. This proportion would still increase over time. On the eve of the War of Liberation (解放战争), the urban ratio would have become as high as 90 percent, with only 10 percent of rickshaw pullers with rural origins (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 120).

The main cause of this peculiarity of Beijing was the fact that as the capital city of China Beijing was home to many members of the ethnic group of the ruling Qing dynasty: the Manchus. In Chapter Three, it was explained that the material morphology of Beijing expressed the ethnic divisions that existed under the Qing dynasty. With the Chinese expelled from the Inner City, the Manchus would occupy the central place as the new ruling ethnic group. However, over time, the ethnic identity of the Manchus started suffering a crisis, the Manchus no longer able to hold up the earlier values of their ancestors which were strongly associated with military (武) rather than literary (文) power. Culturally becoming more like the Chinese after living a long period in China as its ruling group, the Qianlong Emperor would reform the Eight Banners, which would become the key institution to define the ethnic difference of the Manchus although there were members of different ethnic groups in the same institution (Elliott, 2001, p. 12-13).

Being a member of the Banners provided privileges as well as duties. The Bannermen (旗人) were prohibited from “sowing the soil” (种地) “doing business” (经商), and “settling at will outside 40 mi of the city”(随便离京 40 里定居). They could only become officials (官) or join the military (当兵) (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 121). Prevented from doing business or agricultural activity and production

concentrated in the Outer City where the Han Chinese expelled from the Inner City lived, the bannermen needed sustainable income to live on. Prior to the conquest of China, the primary source of income for bannermen came from booties and landholding. After 1644, however, they needed to find a less disruptive means of supporting themselves. A regular system that was established was called “sitting provisions” (座糧) (Elliott, 2001, p. 191-193).

Through the silver and rice stipends provided by this system, the bannermen enjoyed a standard of living well above the average Han Chinese household at least for the first century or so of the Qing rule. However, this financial security provided by the Eight Banners would over time erode. The monthly salaries were fixed in the 1680s and would not be revised again, which, combined with the high inflation rate in the course of the 18th century, along with the growth of population and the substitution of grain for silver, would create financial difficulties (Elliott, 2001, p. 196). When the dynasty collapsed with the 1911 revolution, what was left of these monthly stipends further eroded, leaving the bannermen with the task of finding work. Yet, it was not an easy task to do. The bannermen faced similar difficulties and handicaps that troubled the peasants who came to Beijing for work. They would also face the stigma of having to find work after being members of the banner system. When they were forced to pull rickshaws, they would face the stigma of “the royal kinsmen now being reduced to pulling rickshaws” (原皇族现在落到拉车地步) (Qiu Guosheng, 2003, p. 21).

However, despite the stigma and difficulties, due to financial needs, many bannermen would have to pull rickshaws. As late as the 1920s, banner membership counted as employment and the members could claim a salary but the amount was nowhere enough for a living. They were now forced to do works like rickshaw

pulling to make the ends meet. Under these circumstances in Beijing, bannermen came to form the largest block of the rickshaw pullers with an urban background. This fact partially explains why the rickshaw pullers in Beijing in contrast to those in Shanghai were highly urban. The largest section of the urban rickshaw pullers was former bannermen. In a survey conducted in 1924, one out of every four rickshaw pullers in Beijing expressed their former banner membership (Strand, 1989, p. 30-31).

However, although the bannermen were the largest section of the rickshaw pullers with urban origins, the rickshaw population in Beijing was still a highly diverse group. In the opening chapter of his novel, *Camel Xiangzi*, Lao She gives a picture of this diversity: “The rickshaw pullers of Beijing fall into many different categories (北平的洋车夫有许多派)” (Lao She, 2006, p. 2-3).

When policemen, school janitors and cleaners are dismissed and bankrupt peddlers or unemployed artisans have nothing more to sell or pawn, they grind their teeth and with tears in their eyes take this desperate step, knowing it to be a dead end (被撤差的巡警或校役，把本钱吃光的小贩，或是失业的工匠，到了卖无可卖，当无可当的时候，咬着牙，含着泪，上了这条到死亡之路。). (Lao She, 2006, p. 4-5)

This situation of rickshaw pullers which associated them with bestiality due to financial difficulties was further aggravated by the failures to attempt to improve their conditions through resistance. In Beijing, compared to other Asian cities like those in Japan and Korea, rickshaw pullers were slow to organise for labour rights. In Japan and Korea, rickshaw pullers carried out the first labour strikes in their history. In China, they would carry out labour strikes in cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou, where they formed a “turbulent army” that was not afraid of strikes and resistance. However, rickshaw pullers in Beijing did not display a similar type of labour militancy. It is possible that this was in part due to the low rickshaw rents in Beijing,

which did not intensify tensions between the rickshaw pullers and the rickshaw owners. Furthermore, the small shoplike scale of the system of rickshaw ownership did not provide a basis for collective militancy and protest, instead personalising the troubles the rickshaw pullers were facing (Strand, 1989, p. 61).

Collective action for rickshaw pullers was a problem because there was no platform which they could use to articulate and advance their interests in city politics. The traditional merchant and craft guild representation, through which the rickshaw owners as their master could have represented and defended the pullers' interests was ineffective due to the inability for concerted action on the part of the rickshaw owners and their willingness to sacrifice rickshaw pullers to further their own interests in city politics. In 1913 in Beijing, owners gathered to form a "Metropolitan Rickshaw Federation" but soon disbanded due to lack of interest. The guild body of Beijing rickshaws was ineffective because about only 10 percent of the 900 rickshaw garages was willing to belong to a guild body. When the owners could carry out collective action, it benefited them more than the pullers. In 1924 in Beijing, garage owners together with rickshaw builders, mule-cart operators, and bicycle-shop owners succeeded in forming a guild to block the police administration from collecting vehicle tax in silver instead of debased copper coins. They achieved their goal thanks to the help of the rickshaw pullers in their collective opposition but since most rickshaw pullers were not rickshaw owners, the success of this opposition was enjoyed mostly by rickshaw owners (Strand, 1989, p. 62).

In Shanghai, rickshaw pullers posed as a more militant labour force but this, similar to the cases in Beijing, benefited more the rickshaw owners and the criminal gangs they cooperated with than the rickshaw pullers themselves. The International settlement in 1934, based on a comprehensive report by a committee founded by the

Shanghai Municipal Council decided to carry out a comprehensive reform plan to improve the working conditions of rickshaw pullers in Shanghai. This would be the most thorough reform attempt in Shanghai's history of rickshaw pulling. The reform package included limiting the rickshaw rent pullers paid to owners to 76 cents per day of two shifts from August 1934 and to 61 cents from 1 January 1935 onwards when the existing range was from 84 to 106 cents; the founding of an officially sponsored Pullers' Mutual Aid Association whose funding would come from the rents to provide social services like healthcare, education, and medicine for pullers; and requiring direct registration of rickshaws on the part of owners rather than relying on illegal intermediaries (Wright, 1991, p. 76-80). The main goal of these reforms was to break down the monopoly power rickshaw owners had established over the limited number of public rickshaw licenses and since rickshaw pullers, though in the early years of the century still able to own their own rickshaws, had by that time no means of owning private rickshaws and not relying on the rickshaw owners (Wright, 1991, p. 84-86). Yet, with the successful opposition led by Gu Songmou and a prominent member of the Green Gang, the reform attempt failed (Wright, 1991, p. 81).

During this year, following the call of the rickshaw owners, rickshaw pullers went on a strike in the French concession in Shanghai. Yet, after the strike was over, many pullers, fearing complications concerning rickshaw registration, temporarily fled back into the countryside. The paternalism between the rickshaw owner and the rickshaw puller made it more difficult for the pullers to resist the owners who did not extend this paternalism to the larger politics of labour struggles. The failure of the Shanghai rickshaw strike in 1934 shows that even when rickshaw pullers were active participants in labour militancy, they were still reduced to being a "victim played

between rickshaw owners and the authorities (沦为当局与车商之间博弈的牺牲品)” (Kang Xin, 2022, p. 147).

If the traditional guild representation did not work for rickshaw pullers, labour unionisation was no solution, either. Although rickshaw labour unions were emergent in the course of the 1911 revolution, later on the Guomindang during the Nanjing Decade would move against rickshaw labour unionisation. In 1931, the Guomindang rejected the union petitions of rickshaw pullers from a number of places including Shanghai on grounds that although rickshaw pullers performed labour services, these services did not qualify as a labour agreement due to lack of fixed place and fixed time of work and renting of rickshaw. The regulation regards the relationship between rickshaw pullers and rickshaw owners as more similar to the tenant-landlord relation than to the employer-worker relationship. Hence, the rejection of the petition for labour unionisation. Lacking an institutional platform like a labour union where they could articulate and negotiate their interests, rickshaw pullers were left to disorganised and scattered forms of struggle which often did not produce effective collective opposition and results (Kang Xin, 2022, p. 147).

The institutional structure of the rickshaw business was another important cause for the aggravation of the inhumane working and living conditions of rickshaw pullers. In Shanghai, “rickshaw pulling was an archetypical example of an industry using unskilled workers and attracting unlimited supplies of labor from rural areas” (Wright, 1991, p. 91). Although the source of labour was much more urban in Beijing, similar conditions of business also existed there. The structure of the business in which pullers rented rickshaws from owners and competed with each other in the context of an oversupplied and unskilled labour market made for political atomisation and ineffective or absence of militancy (Wright, 1991, p. 96).

The second cause of the sense of archaicity was the antagonistic relationship between rickshaw pullers and motorised vehicles of urban transportation, especially street cars. Although rickshaws had some technological advantages over street cars which were mentioned before, street cars held certain strong advantages over rickshaws. The first advantage of street cars was that they could transport passengers with greater speed over larger distances. According to an investigation at the time, it was determined that a rickshaw could carry a passenger with an average of 9.654 kilometers per hour whereas the number was 14.1592 kilometers per hour for street cars. Street cars with their reliance on mechanised movement could maintain this speed over much longer distances than rickshaws which relied on human power instead. In view of the fact that Chinese cities under urban modernisation would expand their territories, fast travel that was sustainable over long distance was of great value. The second advantage of streetcars over rickshaws was their price. Although rickshaws compared to the traditional means of transportation provided cheaper service, still streetcars could provide even cheaper service. This was also why rickshaw pullers would not infrequently appeal to the authorities to raise streetcar fees to better compete with them for passengers. Thirdly, regulations that provided fixed prices, schedules, and destinations for travel was an important component of mass transportation. For a large number of people to reliably use public transportation requires that there are standards that determine prices, schedules and destinations. The clarity of these standards would also greatly help those who were not familiar with the otherwise irregular and informal rules that governed rickshaw transportation (Qiu Guosheng, 2004, p. 15).

Because rickshaw, though a modern technology that provided effective service and was popular in cities, still relied on human power, rickshaw pullers

regarded those modern vehicles that replaced human power with machinery with hostility for depriving them of their means of livelihood. Due to this, the Republican period is filled with instances of rickshaw pullers opposing, and in some cases, physically attacking motorised vehicles such as busses and trams.

Rickshaw pullers followed different strategies to disrupt motorised vehicles. Usually the opening of a new motorised vehicle line would be preceded by a wave of protests by rickshaw pullers. These protests took various forms. Rickshaw pullers would try to communicate with the authorities about the threat to their livelihood that motorised vehicles posed. In 1930, when Beijing Electric Tramway Company (北平电车公司) finished the seventh tramway line, many rickshaw pullers appealed to the government “to postpone the operation of this tramway line to protect the lives of the rickshaw pullers of the city [缓令该路电车开行，以维持平市人力车夫之生命]”. Using one’s body to disrupt the vehicle line was another form of protest. In 1935, Cai Binxian recounts many instances of rickshaw pullers throwing themselves on the vehicle lines to disrupt the operation of motorised transportation: In Beijing, thousands of rickshaw pullers had till then used this strategy (Wang Yinhuan, 2003, p. 101).

However, the conflict between rickshaw and streetcar did not always take such relatively peaceful forms. Rickshaw pullers, if pushed to that point, were no strangers to using violence and destroying streetcars. The streetcar riot of October 22, 1929, in Beijing provides an example of striking magnitude. The riot of 1929 was the culminating point of the simmering tensions in the urban politics of Beijing. Rickshaw pullers on their part had tried different tactics to hinder the development of the streetcar system that threatened their livelihood by making their operation more difficult. In 1924, rickshaw pullers were willing to lie down on the streetcar tracks

but this attempt failed to hinder their development. The years 1928 and 1929 experienced a widening in the language and tactics of mass politics for different sections of people. On September, for example, five thousand suburban peasants and vegetable brokers marched in protest into Beijing to stand against the new practices of taxation. The trigger for the 1929 riot was a squabble that at first seemed like an ordinary event. A group of rickshaw pullers from the Xidan Arch were walking home when they saw a streetcar filled with passengers. At the sight of this “enemy” machine carrying so many passengers and stealing their livelihood, the pullers blocked the track to harass the driver and the conductor as had usually been done so many times before. One official came up to mediate between the two parties but the rickshaw pullers mistook him for a streetcar union official and beat him up. This was followed by wrecking the streetcar they had stopped. They were joined by several hundred municipal workers and the excited crowd started attacking every streetcar while marching south towards the streetcar company’s headquarters. The disorder spread like wildfire in the city and in the next three hours tens of thousands of rickshaw pullers joined it, wrecking every streetcar they could find in the process. By the time the rioters reached the headquarters of the company, they had wrecked sixty out of the ninety streetcars the company owned. The streetcar company declared that the damage done to the sixty cars was 400.000 dollars (Strand, 1989, p. 261-283).

The general strategy that the streetcar companies and government authorities followed towards rickshaw pullers was to be non-confrontational. This was mainly because of the fact that the rickshaw business was not simply one business among others but rather presented many of those who had lost their means of livelihood in other businesses with the opportunity to make money, which, though small, was enough to survive. Until the Guomindang’s attempt to abolish rickshaws in 1946, the

general policy in the provinces and the cities was to not get into a situation of confrontation with the rickshaw pullers because the Chinese state at the time did not possess the means of providing secure jobs for those for whom pulling rickshaw had become a necessity for survival. This would be done in the name of “caring about people’s livelihood” (顾惜民生) (Wang Yinhuan, 2003, p. 102-103).

These are the two major causes of the sense of backwardness that made rickshaws seem to belong to an archaic rather than the modern age with its promise of progress. Contrasted with the advantages it provided as a modern technology of transportation, this sense created an ambiguous image of the activity of rickshaw pulling which seemed both modern and archaic at the same time. This unity of contradictory elements made the image of rickshaw a highly tense and rich point of reference for the Chinese literary figures, who through it could engage with the antinomies it embodied. Of these figures, Lao She and his famous novel, *Camel Xiangzi*, hold a central place. In this literary text, Lao She both engages with the contradictory state of the practice of rickshaw pulling and employs textual strategies that prevent the text from being a source of reconciliation both in its form and its content. Lao She translates the social tensions and contradictions into a literary work which expresses literary tensions and contradictions. Although, since any work of literature is always historically situated, *Camel Xiangzi* shares some connections with the social tensions and contradictions, it does not copy them in a mechanical way. The text of the novel presents us with a different perspective on the social issues. It is from this point of view that the novel should be examined with regard to the first antinomy of Chinese urban modernity.

Lao She, the pen name that Shu Qingchun (舒庆春) chose for himself, belongs among the most widely read literary figures in modern Chinese literature.

Born into a Manchu family in 1899, Lao She suffered extreme poverty and hardship in his early life. After his father was killed during the Boxer Rebellion, house income relied on his mother washing clothes for soldiers, which often was not enough for satisfactory living conditions. The only literate member of his house, Lao She due to his experience of poverty and hardship developed a sense of awareness for the poor classes in society. This would reflect on his literary works where he would explore the real social injustices through fictional characters dealing with similar problems. After he graduated from Beijing Normal school in 1917, which had given him free tuition, Lao She got a job as a school principal. His thought would be heavily influenced both by the New Culture Movement of 1915 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Lao She's interest was not limited to the social and cultural problems of China. He was also a keen reader of European literature, especially English literature. Having taken English classes at the Christian Church which was sponsored by the London Missionary Society, he would avidly read Shakespeare, Dickens, Conrad, Swift, Joyce and others. Lao She went to England in 1924 and taught Chinese for five years, which also gave him an opportunity to better learn and observe the literary and cultural atmosphere over there. After he came back to China in 1930, he continued teaching at universities. In 1946, Lao She had the opportunity to go to America to give lectures. Although he had been awarded "People's Artist" earlier, during the Cultural Revolution he was beaten up by the Red Guards as a counter revolutionary, which led to his death by suicide in 1966 when he drowned himself (Rydholm, 2019, p. 59).

The body of Lao She's literary works presents us with a rich and complex site in which he would transform the social tensions and contradictions that he was experiencing in the course of China's urban modernisation into literary expressions.

The period starting from the publication of the *Philosophy of Lao Zhang* (老张的哲学) in 1926 to the publication of *Camel Xiangzi* (祥子骆驼) in 1936 was highly important for Lao She's literary career as a representative and realist writer of city residents (Chen Hongqi, 2010, p. 57). In these works, Lao She would display the interplay of complex influences ranging from the New Culture Movement and The May Fourth Movement to European, especially English, literary currents.

With regard to the May Fourth Movement, it is important to distinguish between three different aspects of this period: the student movement aspect, the new culture aspect, and the new literature aspect. Lao She had been a school principal for about a year (Witchard, 2012, p. 2) when the May Fourth Movement broke out as students across Beijing took to the streets to protest against the Chinese government's compliance with the decision of the Treaty of Versailles to grant the former German-controlled area of Shandong to Japan, despite the fact that China had helped France by supplying labour force to make up for the labour shortage there. Lao She, deeply sympathetic to this anti-imperialist popular uprising, still had his reservations about the student movement. Lao She in his later recollections of this period would write that although he had deep sympathies with the students protesting against the way China was treated in the Treaty of Versailles and the complicity of the Chinese government, he still saw "a crack" (缝子) in this student movement. This crack was that many students for all their high-sounding slogans like "liberation and freedom" (解放与自由), "new personality" (新人物) and so on failed to do the one thing that students ought to do: to learn. Instead, they would neglect their school learning ("学业"), would not think to improve themselves and others ("不思进取"), and would spend all day eating and drinking foolishly and ignorantly ("整天在吃喝

玩乐，浑浑噩噩中度日”). In this regard, Lao She shares similar concerns about student radicalism that can be found in a letter Cha Yuying (查毓瑛) wrote to Hu Shi on the condition of the student radicals at the University of Beijing: The students at the University of Beijing would ardently organise meetings, every year no fewer than a thousand times, yet the question of education and learning (学术) would not occupy one percent of these meetings (Xie Zhaoxin, 2019, p. 36-37). As for the cultural and literary aspects of the May Fourth Movement, Lao She wholeheartedly upheld the ideals of “science” (科学) and “democracy” (民主) together with the cultural and literary enlightenment goal of the movement that opposed traditionalism and old practices. Lao She believed that the old traditional practices were in need of radical reforms for the Chinese society to be based upon the principles of science and democracy but this could be achieved by popularising these ideals among the large masses of Chinese people (Xie Zhaoxin, 2019, p. 38-38).

This conviction still does exist in his novel, *Camel Xiangzi*, which, by drawing on the influence of the New Culture and May Fourth Movements, was a scathing social criticism of the current conditions of China. Yet, the textual strategies that Lao She employs in this novel do not rely on a didactic approach in which the masses are shown the path to social revolution. It is true that Lao She shares a concern for social change, which is visible in the choice of a rickshaw puller who belongs to the urban poor as the protagonist of his novel. Yet, Lao She expresses this concern for social change by employing textual strategies that problematise any easy solution that can be drawn from a didactic text. Instead, the text is so structured as to intensify the tensions and contradictions in the course of the novel without reconciliation. This is true both of the form and the content of the novel. They invite the reader as an active agent to engage with contradictions without a final solution.

Before engaging with the content of the novel, its literary form is to be examined. As said before, Lao She was deeply influenced by European novels in his own literary works. The use of free indirect speech as a new narrative form in modern Chinese literature was a result of this influence in Lao She. With this stylistic invention, Lao She could imitate the characters' language without speaking in their own voice. Free indirect speech allows Lao She to problematise and obscure the line between the narrating voice and the character's interior monologue (Lydia, 1995, p. 112). To give one example of the use of this technique, when Lao She in a moment of despair attempts to drink liquor, he eventually decides against this:

躺了半天，他的眼在被子边上又看了看桌上的酒碗。不，他不能为那点缠绕而毁坏了自己，不能从此破了酒戒。事情的确是不好办，但是总有个缝子使他钻过去。即使完全无可脱逃，他也不应当先自己往泥塘里滚；他得睁着眼，清清楚楚的看着，到底怎样被别人把他推下去。

After lying there for some time, he peeked over the edge of the quilt at the bowl on the table. No, he couldn't destroy himself over such a paltry affair, he couldn't break his resolution never to touch alcohol. He was in a mess, no doubt about it, but somewhere there must be some crack through which he could wriggle out. Even if there was no escape, he shouldn't first wallow in the mud himself. He must keep his wits about him to see just how other people shoved him down. (Lao She, 2006, 202-203)

Here, Lao She, instead of using the traditional technique of direct quotation to clearly mark the narrating voice from the character's thoughts, uses free indirect speech to express Xiangzi's thoughts in narrator's voice. However, this creates an ambiguity in that the reader cannot determine whether these thoughts belong to the narrating voice or Xiangzi or both, thereby avoiding a didactic narrator's voice that stands above the morally problematic characters.

Another textual strategy that Lao She employs is to add contradictory qualities to prevent straightforward identifications (Lydia, 1995, p. 108). The novel in fact ends exactly at a point of ambiguity intensified by this technique:

体面的，要强的，好梦想的，利己的，个人的，健壮的，伟大的，祥子，不知陪着人家送了多少回殡；不知道何时何地会埋起他自己来，埋起这堕落的，自私的，不幸的，社会病胎里的产儿，个人主义的末路鬼！

Xiangzi, so decent, willing, fond of day-dreaming, self-serving, solitary, strong and admirable, had been an attendant at countless funerals, but has no idea when and where he will be buried himself, where his despairing ghost, product of a sick society, degenerate, selfish, unfortunate and individualistic will finally be laid to rest. (Lao She, 2006, 538-541)

The rapid use of contrasting adjectives (decent and willing but also self-serving and solitary [个人 here can also be translated as individualistic], strong and admirable but also living with sickness and degeneracy) makes it difficult to give a determinate identification of Xiangzi's character. In this regard, although the fate of Xiangzi is connected with the particular social order in which he finds himself, the novel is more than a naturalist description of the way objective forces strictly determine individual lives, because, although the sense of individual despair at the power of social forces runs throughout the novel, the meaning of these forces as well as individual lives are open to multiple interpretations.

The third strategy that Lao She employs is the juxtaposition and undermining of both sides of binary possibilities. With this, Lao She opens the text to the possibility of active interpretation on the part of the reader because the text in failing to provide a resolution on its own calls on the reader to reflect upon this failure. Jameson in this regard draws a parallel between the ending of Brecht's play, *the Good Woman of Setzuan*, and Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi* (Jameson, 1984, p. 71-72). In Brecht's play, we are confronted with the duality of two characters: Shen Te and Shui Ta. Shen Te, who is a deeply kind and meek prostitute, helps three gods who have been searching for someone who can abide by their moral laws in the world. Upon helping gods and demonstrating her moral integrity, the gods grant her a certain amount of money, with which she rents a shop and starts a tobacco business.

However, since the world is full of people who are willing to manipulate and abuse her good character, it proves impossible to both keep up her good character and maintain her business. By chance, Shen Te's cousin, Shui Ta, comes to her rescue and, through his ruthless and shrewed character that violates the gods' moral laws, manages to keep the business alive against those who manipulate Shen Te. It, however, is later revealed that Shen Te actually does not have a real cousin, that Shui Ta is actually Shen Te's alter ego. Shen Te, to be able to remain a morally good and meek person, has to create a ruthless and immoral cousin who defends her. The play ends with the realisation that the moral laws the three gods demand that people abide by cannot be followed exactly because their practice requires their violation in order to be applicable in the real world. Neither Shen Te nor Shui Ta provide the reader with a viable solution to the tensions and contradictions that the play is exploring because they are one and the same person who is forced to create an alter ego to be able to maintain the facade of goodness. In the epilogue of the play, Brecht calls on the audience:

You're thinking, aren't you, that this is no right
Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight?
...
You write the happy ending to the play!
There must, there must, there's got to be a way! (Brecht, 1986, p. 113)

Brecht's play, by showing the audience that neither of the possibilities that Shen Te and Shui Ta represent are real solutions, leaves the audience with an "estrangement effect" (Jameson, 1984, p. 71), which by, making the audience realise that the play on its own cannot resolve the tensions and contradictions it puts forward, creates the possibility of active participation in the play. Lao She employs a similar strategy according to Jameson by demonstrating through the novel that both individualism and collectivism are dead-ends for the problems Xiangzi experiences as part of the

modernising city of Beijing. Because these two possibilities offer no solution, the readership is called upon with a strangement effect to actively participate in the text and find a solution on their own (Lydia, 1995, p. 125). This third strategy will be further discussed once the content of the novel has been explained.

Besides these three textual strategies, Lao She's novel explores the first antinomy of modernity and achaicity through the image of a rickshaw puller who represents a curious amalgam of both modern and archaic elements as the protagonist of the novel. In the novel, the protagonist Xiangzi, a former countryman, comes to Beijing in search of an independent and free life earned through hard labour. Xiangzi was honest and determined, "not afraid of hardships, nor did he have the excusable but deplorable habits of most other pullers [他不怕吃苦，也没有一般洋车的可以原谅而不便效法的恶习]" (Lao She, 2006, p. 8-9). In Beijing, Xiangzi works three long and painful years in order to collect one hundred silver dollars to buy his own rickshaw. Rickshaw for Xiangzi represents the material manifestation of his dreams for an independent and free life earned through hard labour. Xiangzi identifies rickshaw pulling with his life, to the point that he regards rickshaw more as a part of his own body than as a simple tool:

祥子，在与“骆驼”这个外号发生关系以前，是个较比有自由的洋车夫，这就是说，他是属于年轻力壮，而且自己有车的那一类：自己的车，自己的生活，都在自己手里，高等车夫。。。可是在这种旋转之中，他的眼并没有花，心并没有乱，他老想着远远的一辆车，可以使他自由，独立，像自己的手脚的那么一辆车。

Before Xiangzi became linked with the nickname "Camel", he was a relatively independent rickshaw puller; in other words, he was young and strong and owned his own rickshaw. Belonging to the category of those who owned their vehicles, he was master of his own fate, a high-class puller....In his mind's eye he could picture that distant rickshaw which was going to bring him freedom and independence' becoming a part of him like his hands and feet. (Lao She, 2006, p. 8-9)

However, it is exactly at this point that there emerges an unresolved, and in the course of the novel, unresolvable contradiction: Xiangzi, on the one hand, like a fully rational, modern day homo economicus strives for “independence, self-control, personal dignity, and livelihood through hard work and private ownership” (Lydia, 1995, p. 113), wishing to be “master of his own fate”, and on the other hand shares an archaic frame of mind that sees the material objects in the modern and capitalist urban society of Beijing through the symbolic world of the premodern rural economy (Lydia, 1995, p. 115), developing personal and emotional attachments to his means of production, to the point that he regards his rickshaw as “part of him like his hands and feet”. Lao She takes the behaviour of homo economicus from European novels where the characters are concerned, sometimes obsessed, with monetary transactions and bookkeeping. Balzac and Stendhal are famous examples from French novelists. As for English literature, Defoe and Dickens share similar themes. “All Defoe’s heroes pursue money”: Robinson Crusoe is a meticulous book keeper. As for Dickens, his novels are filled with “descriptions of banknotes, bonds, contracts, wills, and other property documents that figure significantly in the structuring of the plot and other symbolic realities in his fiction” (Lydia, 1995, p. 116).

Xiangzi, like these characters, wishes to gain control of his life through monetary calculation and hard work in an increasingly capitalist and modern society. Yet, due to his rural background, his character and mentality carry elements that come into conflict with urban modernity in Beijing. One such element is his personal and emotional attachments to his means of production, that is, his rickshaw. When he collects 100 silver dollars and buys his own rickshaw, Xiangzi expresses such a high degree of emotional attachment to this device that he decides to make the day of purchase his actual birthday:

好吧，今天买上了新车，就算是生 H 吧，人的也是车的，好记，而且车既是自己的心血，简直没什么不可以把人与车算在一块的地方。

Well, today he had bought his own rickshaw, why not make it his birthday too? That would make it easier to remember; and anyway, since the rickshaw was the fruit of his sweat and blood why shouldn't they share the same birthday? (Lao She, 2006, p. 23)

Yet, if Xiangzi were indeed a homo economicus engaged in monetary calculation in a modern society based on capitalist economy, then his means of production as capital should not have such emotional and personal, that is, irrational attachments. Jameson points out that from a modern capitalist point of view the rational behaviour for Xiangzi would be “to evolve from the status of a possessor of an individual rickshaw to that of the head or manager of a rickshaw business”, yet “the novel explicitly dramatizes Xiangzi’s utter lack of interest in this possibility” (Jameson, 1984, p. 68). After Xiangzi loses his rickshaw to the soldiers who confiscate it, he starts to pull a rented rickshaw until he collects the sum enough to buy a new rickshaw. At Mr. Cao’s house (曹宅), Xiangzi’s sometime employer, works a maid-servant, Gao Ma (高妈). Gao Ma, since she became a widow, has been making money by loaning to others and taking at least three percent interest. Lao She presents Gao Ma as a much better capitalist whose worldview better fits the new capitalist economy of Beijing than that of Xiangzi. In fact, Lao She associates Gao Ma’s practice of loaning money with modern banking:

她比银行经理并不少费心血，因为她需要更多的小心谨慎。资本有大小，主义是一样，因为这是资本主义的社会。。。。

She was more scrupulous than a bank manager when it came to handling money; she had to be, lest if all disappear. Though the amount of capital as different, the principle was the same, because they lived in a capitalist society. (Lao She, 2006, p. 162-163)

Fully aware that they live in a capitalist society, Gao Ma tries to give economically sound advice to Xiangzi whose obsession with rickshaw pulling she regards as improper for this new world. She urges Xiangzi to start loaning money as she does.

However, Xiangzi, due to his archaic rural conception of monetary value and banking system, cannot agree with Gao Ma's sound advice despite not having a reasonable counter argument. Xiangzi, instead, displays a personal and emotional attachment to money, caring not so much about its exchange value as about its use value in the form of sensual materiality:

祥子用不着说什么，他的神气已足表示他很佩服高妈的话。及至独自一盘算，他觉得钱在自己手里比什么也稳当。不错，这么着是死的，钱不会下钱；可是丢不了也是真的。把这两三个月剩下的几块钱——都是现洋——轻轻的拿出来，一块一块的翻弄，怕出响声，现洋是那么白亮，厚实，起眼，他更觉得万不可撒手，除非是拿去买车。各人有各人的办法，他不便全随着高妈。

Xiangzi did not need to say anything; his expression showed his admiration. But when he got to thinking about it when he was by himself, he felt that his money was safer in his own pocket. True, in this way the amount would not increase, but there would be no danger of his losing any of it. Gingerly, he took out the handful of coins he had saved in the previous two or three months. They were all silver one yuan coins. He turned them over and over again, afraid to let them clink. They were so shiny and solid that he couldn't keep his eyes off them. No, he couldn't let them go. Not unless it was to buy a rickshaw. Everyone had his or her own way of handling money. He did not have to follow Gao Ma's advice. (Lao She, 2006, p. 164-167)

This contradictory attitude of on the one hand admiring and finding logical the capitalist advice for investment which accords with the new modern urban dynamics of the society in which he lives and on the other hand not following this advice through personal and emotional attachments to the physical object, be that a rickshaw or a silver coin, is the means by which Lao She shows the antinomy of modernity and archaicity through literary expression. Xiangzi is at once *homo economicus* and is obsessed with the practice of calculation and book-keeping together with the ideals of self-independence, resourcefulness, and freedom, like those characters of the French and English novels Lao She has studied closely, and is not because his frame of mind is still heavily shaped by the symbolic world of rural economy. He is modern and archaic at the same time. This contradiction comes again and again in

the novel with no resolution. In one instance, Xiangzi recounts one of his past experiences with modern banking, which demonstrates this discrepancy clearly:

祥子知道她是好心，而且知道厨子王六和奶妈子秦妈都有折子，他真想试一试。可是有一天方大小姐叫他去给放进十块钱，他细细看了看那个小折子，上面有字，有小红印；通共，哼，也就有一小打手纸那么沉吧。把钱交进去，人家又在折子上画了几个字，打上了个小印。他觉得这不是骗局，也得是骗局；白花花的现洋放进去，凭人家三画五画就算完事，祥子不上这个当。

Xiangzi knew that she meant well. He knew that the cook Wang Liu and the wet nurse Qing Ma had post office savings account books. He really wanted to go and get one. But one day, when Miss Fang sent him to deposit ten dollars in the post office he examined the book carefully. There were numerals and seal marks on it. Huh, it seemed to be no thicker than a piece of folded-up toilet paper! When he handed the money to the clerk, the latter then wrote something on the savings book, and stamped it with a seal. Xiangzi was convinced that this had to be some sort of swindle: Bright, shiny coins went over the counter, and were replaced by some scrawls on a piece of paper. He wasn't going to fall for a trick like that! (Lao She, 2006, p. 166-167)

Lydia Liu interprets this attitude of Xiangzi as a fundamental contradiction between the new and modern capitalist economy based on contractual relations and banking and the symbolic world of the rural economy that distrusts modern contractual relationships (Lydia, 1995, p. 115). The sensual materiality of silver, which can make sense from a premodern rural point of view, no longer makes sense in the new context of modern capitalist dynamics that Xiangzi is situated in. However, this is not to say that Xiangzi represents an archaic character with rural background who has no aspect of modernity. On the contrary, Xiangzi has a profoundly modern side to his character, which makes him share the ideals of self-reliance and freedom based on economic individualism, which would have been absent in a truly archaic rural character. The rural communal feelings are entirely absent in Xiangzi's worldview:

祥子怎能没看见这些呢。但是他没工夫为他们忧虑思索。他们的罪孽也就是他的，不过他正在年轻力壮，受得起辛苦，不怕冷，不怕风。。。他相信现在的优越可以保障将来的胜利。

How could Xiangzi not see all this? But he had no time to worry about other people. They were all in the same boat but he, being young and strong, could

stand hardships and feared neither cold nor wind. He believed that his present superiority guaranteed his future victory. (Lao She, 2006, p. 178-179)

Individualist, self-reliant, lacking in rural communal feelings like a modern homo economicus, yet for all his detachment from rural communality, due to still being heavily influenced by the symbolic world of the rural economy, sceptical of contractual relations and modern banking, on which a modern homo economicus must rely, Xiangzi is both modern and archaic at the same time, being a curious amalgam of tensions and contradictions that pull him in opposite directions.

In the course of the novel, Lao She shows the reader that the kind of individualism that Xiangzi's philosophy rests on is in fact a dead end. Xiangzi, after losing his first rickshaw, steals camels and sells them to buy a new rickshaw, which is the first moral compromise he makes in the story. Yet, still short of the requisite sum, Xiangzi keeps working until he gets his new rickshaw. Unfortunately, however, he ends up losing all of his money again. Detective Sun robs Xiangzi of his money. Meanwhile, Tigress (虎妞), the daughter of Fourth Master Liu, who rents rickshaw to Xiangzi until he buys his own, seduces him and gets pregnant. Upon disclosure, Master Liu disowns his daughter and chases Xiangzi out. Xiangzi after much quarrel with Tigress decides to continue rickshaw pulling. Tigress with her own money buys a new rickshaw. Yet, Xiangzi can never get used to this rickshaw, nicknamed "little widow" (小寡妇), and believes it is cursed, a radically different perception than his initial belief in the power of rickshaw as the future guarantee of his independence and freedom (Lao She, 2006, p. 380-381). This rickshaw, in the end, is also sold to pay for the funeral costs of Tigress who tragically dies with her baby while giving birth. Xiangzi's last hope in the novel is a young female character Joy (小福子), who represents the possibility of rebirth through love after the death of Tigress. However,

after leaving Joy for a brief period, Xiangzi cannot find her again. Some time later, he finds out that Joy chose to work in a brothel due to financial difficulties but, unable to bear the burden, hanged herself. Xiangzi now realises the meaninglessness of his ideals of individualism:

他是要强的，小福子是要强的，他只剩下些没有作用的泪，她已作了吊死鬼！一领席，埋在乱死岗子，这就是努力一世的下场头！

He had tried his best, so had she, yet all that remained to him were useless tears and she had hanged herself. A straw mat and a grave in this wasteland, that was where a life of toil led! (Lao She, 2006, p. 504-505)

However, Lao She is careful to link the tragic fate of Xiangzi who represents the antinomy of modernity and archaicity to the urban modern context in which he lives, that is, the city of Beijing:

人把自己从野兽中提拔出，可是到现在人还把自己的同类驱逐到野兽里去。祥子还在那文化之城，可是变成了走兽。一点也不是他自己的过错。他停止住思想，所以就是杀了人，他也不负什么责任。他不再有希望，就那么迷迷忽忽的往下坠，坠入那无底的深坑。他吃，他喝，他嫖，他赌，他懒，他狡猾，因为他没了心，他的心被人家摘了去。他只剩下那个高大的肉架子，等着溃烂，预备着到乱死岗子去。

Mankind has succeeded in rising above wild animals, and yet today men banish their own kind back into the ranks of animals. Xiangzi lived in this city of culture, but through no fault of his own, was now no better than an animal. He had ceased to think, so even if he were to kill someone, he was no longer accountable. He ate, drank, whored, gambled, lazed around and schemed because he no longer had a conscience. All that was left was his tall frame of flesh, waiting to rot away and be buried in that wasteland. (Lao She, 2006, p. 504-507)

The personal drama of Xiangzi in this passage is read against the urban modern background to avoid a moralistic reading of Xiangzi's life that ignores the importance of impersonal forces in personal life. Xiangzi is, in the end, not at fault: an honest and hard-working man who used to wish to gain his independence and freedom in the great city of Beijing has eventually been destroyed by the same city that does not allow him to realise his wish. The novel ends with the judgement that Xiangzi is "the ghost of individualism's blind alley [个人主义的末路鬼]" (Lao She,

2006, p. 540). However, Xiangzi, similar to Brecht as Jameson observes, does not provide an alternative solution to this problem in the text. In fact, the opposite of individualism, that is, collectivism in the form of political organisation against the social injustices that the urban modern structure of the city of Beijing subjects its residents to, is shown in the novel to be a dead end, as well. The novel explicitly showcases the failure of individualism as Xiangzi's dream of homo economicus leads to his downfall. Yet, the novel also contains passages where the reader gets a picture of what collective action and mass mobilisation for social justice as opposed to solitary individualism of self-reliance would look like. Lao She in these passages casts the opposite of individualism, collective action, in a highly negative light (Lydia, 1995, p. 125). Xiangzi in the novel starts to engage in collective action only after he loses all hope with the suicide of Joy. These collective struggles are clearly no solution, either:

三毛也好，两毛也好，他乐意去打一天旗子，随着人群乱走。他觉得这无论怎样也比拉车强，挣钱不多，可是不用卖力气呢。打着面小旗，他低着头，嘴里叨着烟卷，似笑非笑的随着大家走，一声也不出。

He didn't mind carrying a banner and marching about with the crowd. To him, this was better than pulling a rickshaw, the pay might be less, but it was less effort too. Holding a small flag, head bowed, a cigarette dangling from his lips, he followed the crowd silently, a half smile on his face. (Lao She, 2006, p. 512-515)

Lao She, however, is careful to present this attitude of Xiangzi towards collective action not as a personal failing on the part of Xiangzi but as a symptom of the larger social conditions of China. In the final chapter of the novel, Lao She describes an execution scene of Ruan Ming (阮明) whom Xiangzi betrays for money after they both engage in political activism for rickshaw pullers. A huge crowd gathers to witness the public execution of Ruan Ming. Lao She at this point gives possibly the worst picture of what mass mobilisation for collective action means:

历史中曾有过黄巢，张献忠，太平天国的民族，会挨杀，也爱看杀人。。。他们却爱看千刀万别他们的同类，像小儿割宰一只小狗那么残忍与痛快。一朝权到手，他们之中的任何人也会去屠城，把妇人的乳与脚割下堆成小山，这是他们的快举。他们没得到这个威权，就不妨先多看些杀猪宰羊与杀人，过一点瘾。

The nation that had produced Huang Cao, Zhang Xianzhong and the Taipings in the past not only had submitted to slaughter, it also enjoyed watching slaughter... Actually, what they really enjoy is watching a fellow human die a slow, lingering death, such cruelty giving them as much glee as a child gets from killing a puppy. Should any one of them have the power, he would put the city to the sword, and cut off women's breasts and feet and pile them into mounds. That's how they would get their pleasure. However, since none of them had this power, they could only satisfy their blood lust by watching animals being butchered, or a human execution. (Lao She, 2006, p. 522-525)

The manipulation of political activism on the part of Xiangzi, in light of this passage, cannot be dismissed as a symptom of his philosophy of individualism. Instead, Xiangzi, despite turning into a ghost of individualism, is still a product of the specific society and history he lives in. It is out of the Chinese society that has produced “Huang Cao, Zhang Xianzhong, and Taipings” that such figures emerge. Yet, if their individualism is a dead alley, neither is collectivism a solution, because, collectives, as they are made up of individuals, are no less futile. To believe in collectivism as a viable solution for the tensions and contradictions that Chinese modernity presents the Chinese people with is to expect bloodthirsty crowds that take great pleasure in execution and torture to create a decent and just world. This is the third textual strategy Lao She employs.

Lao She's third textual strategy, which consists in demonstrating the futility of binary solutions, would later be abandoned under the political pressure of the new regime established with the 1949 revolution in China. In the course of the 1950s, Lao She revised the original text several times, removing some chapters and passages. Perhaps most importantly, Lao She deletes the affair of Reng Ming and casts collective action in much more positive light (Lydia, 1995, p. 110-111), thereby

abandoning the third textual strategy that invites the readership into active participation. The readership is now much more passive and the text much more didactic. Literary work ceases to be a practice of expressing unresolved contradictions as antinomies but is subordinated to reconciliation and affirmation. Lao She now affirms the new system built after 1949 as he writes in the 1954 afterword to *Camel Xiangzi*:

在书里，虽然我同情劳苦人民，敬爱他们的好品质，我可是没有给他们找到出路；他们痛苦地活着，委屈地死去。这是因为我只看见了当时社会的黑暗的一面，而没看到革命的光明，不认识革命的真理。
[In the book, although I sympathised with the labouring poor and respected their good character, I didn't give them a way out; they lived with suffering and died with grievance. This was because back then I had only seen the dark side of society and not the bright side of revolution, not understanding the truth of revolution.] (Lao She, 2008, p. 668)

To summarise the case of Lao She, the original text of *Camel Xiangzi*, as it is situated within the historical and social conditions of Chinese urban modernity, expresses in literary form certain tensions and contradictions. The first antinomy of Chinese urban modernity, the unresolved contradiction between modernity and archaicity, is expressed in the novel as an antinomy between the new homo economicus ideals of independence and freedom through hard labour and the lingering symbolic world of rural economy. *Xiangzi*, who represents the contradictory unity of these two forces, cannot reach a resolution. However, as a product of his own urban modern environment, the irresolution of *Xiangzi*'s antinomy points towards the irresolution of Chinese urban modernity. In this regard, the novel invites the reader to engage with these antinomies that remain unresolved. Lao She employs certain textual strategies to turn the readership into an active participant for engagement. The first strategy is free indirect speech, which problematises the narrating voice and the character's voice. The second is the rapid use of inconsistent adjectives, making it difficult to reduce the text to one

interpretation. Thirdly, Lao She refuses to offer a positive solution for the antinomies the reader engages with: both sides of the dichotomy, individualism and collectivism, are shown to be futile, forcing the reader to reflect deeper on these antinomies without a ready-made solution.

4.4 The second antinomy: nativity and foreignness

The second antinomy of Chinese urban modernity materialised in rickshaws concerns the question of the self and the other-identity. In Chapter Three, the question of national identity and foreign influence was explored with regard to the city of Beijing and Shanghai. It was concluded that although these two cities were often conceived in a dichotomous way so that Beijing represented the authentic Chinese identity while Shanghai embodied the foreign encroachment in China, since national identity and foreign influence were both created within a global material context, they were intrinsically related and mutually constituted. National identity or foreign influence, the self and the other, exist in a state of co-existence in that the self contains the other as a constitutive element in its formation and maintenance. This unresolved contradiction, the unity of identity and non-identity, can be observed in rickshaw as a modern technology of transportation, too.

In Chapter Three, it was said that there was an association between the development and deployment of railways as a modern technology of transportation and the question of national identity and sovereignty. The changes that the new dynamics of urban modernisation were introducing into China were pictures as changes in different modes of movement (Flath, 2004, p. 175). The materiality of the modern technologies of transportation that people now could use to experience the

new modes of movement embodied the contradictions of the dynamics of urban modernisation. As a result, the question of national identity and sovereignty that was essential to China's becoming a modern nation was materialised in the iron and steel of the railways. Rickshaw as another modern technology of transportation which made a new mode of movement, that differed both from the traditional vehicles of transportation such as carts and sedan chairs as well as from the motorised modern technologies such as busses and trams, presents us with a similar case. Rickshaw as a highly visible part of urban life in China was never irrelevant to the question of what it meant to be Chinese.

Hu Shi was a prominent intellectual of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement. When Chen Duxiu, another prominent intellectual of these movements, was at the University of Beijing, he appointed Hu Shi as one of the first faculty members. Hu Shi had just been back from America after seven years of studying philosophy at Cornell and Columbia. Hu Shi, in accordance with the New Culture Movement's pursuit for a cultural revolution, advocated against the use of the classical literary language in favour of vernacular Chinese. Chen Duxiu agreed, and soon, the *New Youth* began being written in entirely in colloquial Chinese (Ebrey, 2010, p. 270). With the reform of the literary language, Hu Shi hoped to bring about a cultural transformation of Chinese society that could provide a solution for the problems China was suffering. China, on Hu Shi's view, was in urgent need of radical reform.

Hu Shi in *Roving Reflections* (漫游的感想) expresses a link between rickshaw and the question of China. In the first chapter, titled "the boundary between the western and the eastern culture (西东文化的界线)" he recounts his experience of travelling to Harbin (哈尔滨), a former Russian concession. When Russia assumed

control of a concession in Harbin, they were planning to make the city into a large house of two million people, so they brought so many new technologies to the city to make it modern. In a couple decades, the Russian controlled concession would come to be known as the “Shanghai of North China (北中国的上海)”. This concession area was called Daoli (道里) District. The development of Daoli, however, would affect a nearby village, turning it into a thriving and large area over time. This area was called Daowai District (道外) (Hu Shi, 2003, p. 34).

By the time Hu Shi was writing, Daoli was already under Chinese control, but the old customs and habits that developed under the impact of Russian people were still maintained in the area. One such custom that deeply struck Hu Shi was the prohibition of using rickshaws. Yet, although Daoli did not allow rickshaws there, the streets of Daowai on the contrary were full of them. Hu Shi takes this experience to be revealing the boundary between the western and eastern culture:

我到了哈尔滨，看了道里与道外的区别，忍不住叹口气，自己想道：这不是东方文明与西方文明的交界点吗？东西洋文明的界限只是人力车文明与摩托车文明的界线——这是我的一大发现。

When I came to Harbin and saw the difference between Daoli and Daowai, I couldn't but let out a sigh, thinking to myself, is this not the boundary that divides the Western and Eastern civilisation? The boundary between the Western and Eastern civilisation simply the line that separates between the rickshaw civilisation and the motor civilisation. This was my great realisation. (Hu Shi, 2003, p. 35)

Hu Shi, by identifying China with rickshaw, levies criticism against its inadequacy in the face of the modern western world whose civilisation is materialised in the use of motorised technology. On Hu Shi's view, China has failed to create a humane society that grants people the promises of modernity for freedom and independence the way the west has been able to. Instead, China as the rickshaw civilisation continues to reduce human beings to the status of animals: “人力车代表的文明就是那用人作牛

马的文明。摩托车代表的文明就是用人的心思才智制作出机械来代替人力的文明。[The civilisation rickshaw represents is that which makes beasts of burden out of humans. The civilisation that motorised vehicle represents is that which uses human ingenuity to manufacture machines that replaces human labour.]” (Hu Shi, 2003, p. 35).

The association of rickshaw with Chinese identity on Hu Shi’s part is correct in that rickshaw was both a popular modern technology of transportation in cities and a popular image in discourses, literary or not, in which many Chinese engaged to comprehend the dynamics of urban modernity they were experiencing and to discuss possible solutions for the problems they created. It was such an association that made it possible to regard rickshaw as “a symbol of Oriental backwardness” (Lu, 1999, p. 146) or “irrefutable proof of the backwardness of China’s material civilisation” (Strand, 1995, p. 36) on the part of those not really sympathetic to the practice and to discover in it a source of moral integrity under the influence of the sanctity of labour on the part of those May Fourth intellectuals. Whether sympathetic or not, the point is that rickshaw by most people was considered to belong to China’s urban modern conditions.

If rickshaw was a peculiar phenomenon, humans pulling other humans on streets, this was because Chinese urban modernity itself was peculiar. The increasing population of urban residents, the expanding territory of cities, the commercialisation of the economy and the increasing mobility of people, together with the inefficient traditional means of public transportation and the not-fully-fledged motorised vehicles of transportation, (Qiu Guosheng, 2004, p. 15) all in the context of the new city street systems that were still somewhat narrow and maze-like, (Strand, 1995, p. 2) and in the context of a rural crisis in the countryside (Lu, 1999, p. 7), all

contributed to rickshaw emerging as a prominent technology of transportation in the urban modern landscape in China. These conditions of China made rickshaw associated with the Chinese identity as it seemed to grow out of this peculiar soil.

However, the strict demarcation of two geographical areas in terms of the presence or absence of rickshaw pulling as Hu Shi does, conceals the highly complex nature of rickshaw in terms of native identity and foreign influence. Rickshaw, as Hu Shi and others might suggest, was not a purely Chinese or even a purely “Eastern” phenomenon. It may be the case that its use was confined to certain areas associated with Chinese culture and government, but this does not mean that the influence of other non-Chinese areas on China was not constitutive of the presence of rickshaws.

Fairbank makes a useful analogy in this regard. The group of unequal treaties, negotiated after fighting in 1858 and ratified after further fighting in 1860, provided the legal basis of the Sino-Western order in the treaty ports. In the context of Chinese history, the treaty system replaced the tribute system as a means of incorporating the foreigner into the universal realm of the state occupied by the Confucian monarchy of the Son of Heaven. The tribute system represented the Chinese superiority in which China received tribute whereas the treaty system initiated a new phase where this superiority, especially after 1842, was challenged (Fairbank, 1953, p. 464-465). Fairbank, though criticised by Perdue for overformalism (Perdue, 2009, p. 86), is correct to point out that the Sino-Western treaty port era was by no means a purely Western invention (Fairbank, 1953, p. 466). The treaty port was a curious amalgam of Chinese and foreign elements, which interrelated and mutually transformed each other. Given this, Fairbank makes the following analogy:

Eventually the treaty ports grew up as a dual society of a new type, neither wholly native nor wholly foreign, with a new ricksha-culture compounded of Chinese and Western elements (a ricksha combines bicycle wheels and coolie power). (Fairbank, 1953, p. 466)

Fairbank draws a parallel between the dual structure of the treaty port, which duality has in detail been examined in Chapter Three, and rickshaw. Just as treaty ports are neither wholly native due to the constitutive influence of foreign powers in their formation nor wholly foreign because of the inevitable and significant effects of local circumstances on foreign influence, so is a rickshaw. Rickshaw culture shares a similar duality as it consists of the native coolie labour power and foreign technology that makes use of bicycle wheels. Tan Chung criticises this analogy of Fairbank for underemphasising the imperialist undertone in dividing the rickshaw culture into two aspects, the bicycle wheel of the rickshaw that symbolises progressive western civilisation and the coolie power of the rickshaw puller representing resilient Chinese tradition (Tang Chung, 1981, p. 1-6). Although I agree with Fairbank's general description of rickshaw culture as a unity of both Chinese and foreign elements, making a pure description as in Hu Shi of rickshaw as representative of China impossible, his description indeed does suffer from underemphasising the antagonistic nature of this unity. That is, the unity of the self and the other that rickshaw represented was not a harmonious entity but an unreconciled contradiction, that is, an antinomy.

There are two main sources of the sense of antagonism in the other-identity aspect of rickshaw: the capital investment in rickshaw companies and the foreign invention of rickshaw.

Up to the early 20th century, foreign capital dominated the rickshaw business in Shanghai. The largest companies (e.g. Nanhe, Feixing, Huifang, Jicheng, and so on) were all familiar in Shanghai. The way these companies conducted rickshaw business was to rent rickshaws directly to Chinese contractors who then gave these rickshaws to rickshaw pullers. This way, the foreign owners of the rickshaw

companies did not have to deal directly with rickshaw pullers- the “dirty work” in their eyes. The contractors who would rent the rickshaws they had got from foreign owners were called baotou (包头) and often had a disreputable background such as gang membership. Baotou often did not directly deal with rickshaw pullers, either. Instead, they sublet their rickshaws to minor middlemen who themselves directly dealt with rickshaw pullers. This way, rickshaw business constituted a hierarchical organisation: at the top were the foreign owner, followed by baotou and other minor middlemen who were according to their rank called second bao (二包) or third bao (三包) and so on, all the way down to rickshaw pullers (Lu, 1999, p. 72).

Starting from the early 1920s, the Chinese contractors over time purchased the rickshaws owned by foreigners and took over rickshaw companies, although some foreigners still retained ownership status on paper. By the late 1920s, Chinese contractors had bought out most of Shanghai’s rickshaw companies. The Nanjing Decade was a peak in the history of rickshaws in Shanghai. However, by this time, the complex hierarchical pyramid of the rickshaw business was entirely Chinese. By the late 1930s, it was declared by the Chinese that “the rickshaw business is 100 percent ours”. Conversely, it was also in the 1920s and 1930s that the rickshaw business had become a notorious racket in Shanghai (Lu. 1999, p. 72-73).

In this regard, the rickshaw business was similar to the railway industry in that both sectors were dominated by foreign capital which created an antagonistic sense of alienation from these modern technologies of transportation. Railways, as explained in Chapter Three, could invoke nationalist sentiments demanding the control of railway companies by Chinese capital which, the reformists believed, could make railways truly Chinese. With regard to the rickshaw business, the business in Shanghai was initially dominated by foreign capital. Not only this, but

rickshaws were first introduced into the foreign concession areas in Shanghai. This gave the presence of rickshaw a sense of alienation as the business was controlled by foreigners. However, over time, especially in the course of the 1920s, the Chinese contractors, baotou, managed to take control of the rickshaw business, proudly declaring by the late 1930s that the business was now 100 percent Chinese.

However, this triumph of Chinese capital over foreign capital with regard to the rickshaw business did not end the sense of alienation. That is, this did not make the business or the use of rickshaws truly Chinese. This was due to two reasons. Firstly, although the rickshaw business was no longer foreign controlled, the degree of labour exploitation increased as Chinese contractors gained control of the business. It was in the course of the 1920s and 1930s when Chinese capital was replacing foreign capital that the rickshaw business had become a notorious racket. As explained in the earlier section, the struggle of the 1934 reform attempt was a failure in the face of the determined resistance of the rickshaw owners. This intensified the archaic aspect of the first antinomy, one cause of which is the reduction of rickshaw pullers to a bestial state that is unfit for human beings. Thus, a possible reduction in one aspect of an antinomy intensified one aspect of another antinomy. This, on its own, could have possibly eased or even eliminated the second antinomy but there was a second cause which prevented this. It is the fact that rickshaw was never a Chinese invention but had been imported from Japan.

Before the 19th century, Japan had been a part of the sphere of influence that China had led for centuries. The traditional understanding of foreign relations on the part of China was hierarchical, placing China at the centre that receives tribute from the peripheral states like Japan. Yet, with the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, this image was shattered completely. A formerly inferior member of China's zone of influence,

Japan was now successfully challenging China and driving it out of Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan based on the Treaty of Shimonoseki signed at the end of the Sino-Japanese war (Eroğlu, 2006, p. 260-261). The war demonstrated the success of the Japanese effort to transform into a modern society, which roughly began from the time of the Taiping Rebellion. By the 1890, Japan had achieved a considerable amount: it now had a constitutional monarchy; the old privileges had been largely curbed; new industries had been established; and so on. The Sino-Japanese war was provoked by Japan after sinking a steamer carrying Chinese troops to Korea to defend the region against Japan (Ebrey, 2010, p. 252-254). The defeat at the end of the war was humiliating to China and showed the unmistakeable superiority that Japan had achieved against its former master.

Given this historical background of the relationship between Japan and China, the appearance and later prevalence of rickshaw in China, which originated in Japan, carried an antagonistic sense of alienation and foreignness despite its central role in the Chinese urban modern transportation system. We can observe this in the use of terms that were used to describe rickshaws.

In the last century, many items that Chinese people used daily would begin carrying with them a character: yang (洋). Yang, which literally means ocean, designates the item that carries it as a foreign object, particularly as a Western object. Examples include Yang Deng/Western style oil lamp (洋灯), Yang Huo/Matches (洋火), Yang You/imported oil (洋油), Yang La/Candle (洋腊), Yang Yizi/Soap (洋胰子), Yang Wazi/Socks (洋袜子). In each case, the character yang marks the object as being of foreign origin. These objects could, though, still have other names. Such was the case with rickshaws. The term “rickshaw” was derived originally from the Japanese term *jinrikisha*, which means “man-power-vehicle”. This was translated

into Chinese as renliche (人力车). In 1913 in Shanghai, a regulation was issued that all public rickshaws be painted yellow to separate them from private rickshaws. This gave rickshaws another name, huang baoche (黄包车), meaning yellow vehicle (Lu, 1999, p. 68). Originally, however, rickshaws were called dongyang che (东洋车), which literally means “East (东)-Foreign (洋)-vehicle (车)”. One name for Rickshaws in Chinese was yang che (洋车). Yang che was the name commonly used as an abbreviation for yang dong che (洋东车). Yang dong in this context here refers to Japan as the foreigner in the East (Li Binsheng, 2005, p. 63).

This foreign origin of the vehicle, together with the intensification of the bestial conditions Chinese pullers were reduced to, was in tension with the sense of native identity the vehicle had. Lao She’s novel expresses this aspect of the second antinomy of rickshaw pullers in his novel at two points. The first point is the use of yang che to designate rickshaws while avoiding the use of renli che. The latter term assumes a more neutral attitude towards the object whereas the former emphasises its foreign origin despite its popularity in China. What Lydia Liu calls “interpretive surplus value” that is attached to the object by this term problematises its native identity. During the anti-imperialists struggle in the early decades of the 20th century, the coinages that made use of the character yang could be observed: a foreigner was not called waiguo ren (外国人), meaning “foreign country person” but yangren (洋人); imported cloth was yangbu (洋布), handgun yangqiang (洋枪) and artillery yangpao (洋炮) (Lydia, 1995, p. 118). The conscious use of yang both in social practice in China and in the literary practice of Lao She in his novel, by emphasising the foreign origin of rickshaw, problematises its association with Chinese identity. Rickshaw may have acquired a prominent place in urban modern transportation as

well as modern literature in China but it is, for all its prominence, a foreign invention of a formerly inferior country, that is, Japan, through which Chinese people are turned into beasts of burden.

In Lao She's novel, the association of rickshaw with foreignness is also realised by the geographical information that the novel begins with. Caitlin Vandertop points out that "the fact that the novel opens by invoking the fully modern, international space of the Legion Quarter shows how these so-called local realities are by no means purely "Chinese"" (Vandertop, 2019, p. 74). This second point that Lao She registers in his novel expresses the foreign aspect of the second antinomy by drawing the reader's attention to the global context in which both nativity and foreignness, the self and the other, are produced. Fairbank's analogy of rickshaw with treaty port captures this point in historical terms: rickshaw was a curious amalgam of both Chinese and foreign elements which could be produced in a global context that went well beyond either side of this dichotomy. What Rebecca Karl describes as "a global material and representational structure" (Karl, 2002, p. 4) within which identity and otherness exist prevents a purely Chinese or a purely foreign identity in that they are intrinsically interrelated and mutually constituted. Lao She, by drawing the reader's attention to the Legion Quarter, expresses in literary form this global material structure. Even the traditional capital city of China does not provide us with a pure national identity as foreign areas like the Legion Quarter contribute to creating its urban modern landscape in which rickshaw pullers like Xiangzi were highly visible labourers.

The uneasy unity of foreign encroachment on the one hand and the assertion of national identity on the other can be better explained by questioning the antithesis between abjection and empowerment. Jing Tsu in her examination of

Chinese national identity and modern literature argues that “that abjection might have a more promising potential for self-assertion than the absence of any kind of subjugation may disturb our usual sense of preferred social existence” (Jing Tsu, 2006, p. 21), yet Chinese national identity formation compels us to engage with these two seemingly opposite forces, subjugation and empowerment, foreign influence and national identity, as mutually interrelated and constituted. Because “at the core of nationalism lies a perpetual incitable sense of injury” in the context of Chinese history (Jing Tsu, 2006, p. 24), the intrinsic unity of two opposites in the form of the inclusion of the other (injury) as part of one’s own self identity (nation) is a contradiction that Chinese urban modernity contained. This contradiction was never resolved and an antagonistic sense of foreign influence haunted rickshaw, which was nevertheless widely associated with Chinese identity, whether positively as a form of sacred labour as will soon be examined or negatively as a symbol of backwardness. Hence follows the second antinomy.

4.5 The third antinomy: sanctity and profanity

Attitudes towards rickshaw pullers were various. The general historical context must take into account the notion of the sanctity of labour that was highly influential during the May Fourth Movement whose literary figures developed a strong interest in rickshaw pullers. The particular notion of labour and the idea of its sanctity provided a field in which Chinese intellectuals acquired a strong interest in the phenomenon of rickshaw pulling and its meaning for Chinese urban modernity. In order to understand this historical context, we must examine the 1911 revolution and its aftermath.

Although the 1911 revolution introduced a successful paradigmatic shift in political imagination, to the point that even Yuan Shikai for his attempted monarchist reign chose the title “the glorious constitution” (宏宪) (Dirlik and Prazniak, 2011, p. 220), the new republic began dying soon after it was founded in 1912. Yuan Shikai who was given the presidency of the republic by Sun Zhongshan was quick to strangle the emergent democratic institutions and in 1915 attempted to declare himself the new emperor. Died in 1916, those who succeeded him could not control the strong military men throughout China. With these strong military men no longer united by a central government, China entered a warlord period and would remain divided until the Communist revolution in 1949 (Glosser, 2003, p. 2-3). Communists, convincingly to many people after the massacre of the White Terror in 1927 by Chiang Kaishek, propagated against the nationalists that they were the true heirs of the unfinished 1911 revolution (Esherick, 1995, p. 3), unfinished because the aftermath of 1911 left many disappointed in the social and political turmoil it had introduced to China contrary to its promise for democracy.

It wasn't just the promise of democracy that failed to materialise. Effective sovereignty was also absent. China's national sovereignty constantly violated after 1911, from Yuan Shikai's acceptance of Japan's twenty one demands to the invocation of a secret agreement between Britain and Japan in the Treaty of Versailles, which transferred the control of Shandon from Germany to Japan, leading to a large scale protest over China on May 4 1919 (Glosser, 2003, p. 3), many disappointed intellectuals started searching for a way out of this catastrophe.

One movement provided an essential part of the historical background of the May Fourth Movement.

This was the New Culture Movement. The failure of the 1911 revolution had seemed obvious to many intellectuals even before the Treaty of Versailles causing popular eruption across China. The initial promise of republicanism soon degenerated into Yuan Shikai declaring himself the emperor in China in 1915. His death in 1916, however, ushered in more problems. With the increasing weakening of the central authority of the regime, local military leaders of Yuan's old army started vying for power, initiating the Warlord Period in China. This was a period of strife and disunity, a period that seemed to contradict the promise for progress of the revolution. Given this grim scene, many intellectuals turned their eyes from politics whose revolution failed to bring about the promised change towards culture. Although its actual historical commencement cannot be so clear-cut (Kuo, 2017, p. 52), the publication of a new magazine from 1915 on, initially called "The Youth Magazine" (青年杂志) but later retitled "The New Youth" (新青年), is often taken to mark the beginning of this new movement called The New Culture Movement (新文化运动). In the face of the failure of the political revolutionary transformation, the New Culture Movement in an anti-political vein placed the primary emphasis on cultural change (Dirlik, 1989, p. 21). This cultural change, however, was inseparably tied in the New Culture imagination with individual self-transformation.

Individualism, opposing itself to politics in this regard acquired crucial significance.

As an anti-political individualist movement aiming at a radical cultural transformation, the New Culture Movement attacked the old and the traditional and exalted the new and the modern. Li Yimin's (李毅民) article, "the soul purpose of human life" (人生唯一的目的), credits Europe for inventing materialist philosophy and determining the soul purpose of life: search for happiness and avoidance of

suffering (“欧西自唯物哲学发明，文人学士，大声疾呼，号召于众曰：人类之目的，幸福而已，快乐而已；人类之仇敌，痛苦而已。”) (Li Yimin, 2011, p. 78). Saxons with individualism could achieve self-confident and independent individuals, the source of their contemporary power and wealth (“撒格逊民族，以个人主义著闻于世。其为人也，富于独立自尊之心，用能发展民族精神，以臻今日之强盛。”) (Li Yimin, 2011, p. 78). Li’s contrast of this European materialist philosophical outlook with the traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, that fails to foster individualism and its fruits would become the dominant narrative in the New Culture Movement (Lydia, 1995, p. 92).

The two key social issues identified by the New Culture intellectuals were the traditional family structure and the inferior status of women (Dirlik, 1989, p. 75). The traditional family structure based on filial obligations stifled individual creativity and independence while teaching China’s youth “dependency, slavishness, and insularity” (Glosser, 2003, p. 3). Chen Duxiu, who in 1916 led the anti-Confucian tide, openly criticised Confucius and Confucianism along these lines in *The Way of Confucius and Modern Life* (孔子之道与现代生活). Confucius was a man who lived during a feudal age so his ethics was of necessity feudal, too (“孔子生长封建时代，所提倡之道德，封建时代之道德也”) (Chen Duxiu, 2011, p. 212). Citing the *Book of Rites*, Chen tries to show how the Confucian family structure with its emphasis on strict filial obligation was stifling individual independence (““坊记”曰：“父母在，不敢有其身，不敢私其财。”此甚非个人独立之道也”。) (Chen Duxiu, 2011, p. 210-211). Women are victims of the Confucian rules since they are deprived of their freedom and reduced to a state of wretchedness and spiritual

grotesquery (“不自由之名节，至凄惨之生涯，年年岁岁，使许多年富为之妇女，身体精神俱呈异态者，乃孔子礼教之赐也”) (Chen Duxiu, 2011, p. 211).

The New Culture Movement, though opposing itself to the political orientation of the 1911 revolution, still rested on a dichotomy between politics and culture that they both shared. The 1911 revolution aimed at a radical transformation of China by political means at the expense of cultural change. The New Culture Movement instead employed cultural means at the expense of political change. The former disregarded cultural transformation while the latter was anti-political and individualist. It was this dichotomy between the political and the cultural revolution that would erode in the course of the May Fourth Movement (Dirlik, 1989, p. 69). In this integrated view of the political and cultural revolution in the transformation of China, the category of labour came to acquire a significant place.

During World War 1, China sent to France, with the active contribution of the Chinese anarchists, about 200,000 labourers to help its labour shortage created due to the war (Dirlik, 1985, p. 266). Since these workers were officially counted as military aid (以工代兵), China was named among the victorious powers at the end of the war, giving rise to nationwide celebration (Li Shuang and Yang Lianfen, 2019, p. 125). Cai Yuanpei, a philosophical anarchist himself, who had been appointed as the Chancellor of the Beijing University and been heavily involved with the Paris Anarchists (Dirlik, 1985, p. 270), gave a celebratory speech at the Tiananmen Square. Here, Cai gave a vision of labour that would have a strong hold on the conception of labour among Chinese intellectuals:

此后的世界，全是劳工的世界啊！我说的劳工，不但是金工、木工等等，凡用自己的劳力作成有益他人的事业，不管他用的是体力，是脑力，都是劳工。所以农是种植的工，商是转运的工，学校职员、著述

家、发明家，是教育的工，我们都是劳工。我们要自己认识劳工的价值。劳工神圣！(Cai Yuanpei, 1984, p. 218)

[The future world is entirely the world of labour! The labourers that I speak of is not just metalworkers, carpenters, and so on, but all those who use their labour to benefit others, no matter it is manual or mental labour. Thus, peasant is the cultivating labourer, merchant is the transporting labourer, school teachers, writers, and inventors, are education labourer. We are all labourers. We all must acknowledge the value of labourers. Labourer is sacred!]

The rejoice at the conclusion of the war was, however, short lived. With the revelation during the Versailles Treaty in 1919 that Britain, France and Italy had secretly agreed to transfer the control of Shandong from Germany to Japan instead of China, nationalist protests broke out during the May of the same year in large areas of China (Saich, 2021, p. 43). The May Fourth Movement would emerge out of this burst of protests at the way China was treated by the great powers. As a result, China refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles at Paris Peace Conference (Li Shuang and Yang Lianfen, 2019, p. 125).

Although the May Fourth Movement produced a more integrated picture of cultural and political revolution, initially the question of labour did not occupy a central place among the May Fourth intellectuals. The central concerns for the New Culture Movement intellectuals were the traditional family structure and the inferior status of women in society. These of course would still hold their significance among the May Fourth intellectuals, as well. Mao Zedong, who was very enthusiastic about the movement at the time, writing in November 1919 about a local case of the suicide of a woman, Miss Zhao, defined the every day relationship of women to society as “a relationship of daily rape” (Karl, 2010, p. 16). However, over the course of the following year, the May Fourth Movement introduced a transformation of the problematic of the New Culture Movement. June 1919 was a watershed when Shanghai labourers went on a strike against foreign enterprises in support of the May

Fourth Movement (Dirlik, 1989, p. 63). Labour, thus, was no longer a passive material to be shaped by the cultural superiority of Chinese intellectuals who for all their talk about common people still regarded the condition of labour as a symptom of cultural backwardness, but an active agent with its own revolutionary potential to transform Chinese society (Dirlik, 1989, p. 67). The Chinese intellectuals now had to appreciate and understand this new player in the scene they had become aware of but ill prepared to deal with.

The popularity of the rickshaw image was due to this particular historical context, too. Under the influence of a notion of common people (平民), the May Fourth intellectuals and the literature it produced could make the rickshaw puller, who was a significant representative of the urban labouring poor, into a central image to perceive and discuss the contradictions of urban modernity in China. Common people, in this regard, included all those labourers who did not belong to the ruling elite in China (Kang Xin, 2022, p. 146). This focus on the common people, defined in terms of labour, gave the May Fourth Movement a sense of populism (平民主义) which sanctified labour (神圣劳工) (Rui Rong, 2021, p. 118).

Lu Xun's (鲁迅) *A Small Incident* (一件小事) displays the influence of the notion of sacred labour embodied in the urban common people (Wang Jinshuang, 2012, p. 146-147). In the story, there are two main figures: one is the narrator of the story who represents the middle class, the group that as said before frequently used rickshaws for transportation, and a rickshaw puller. The narrator begins his story by commenting on the paradoxical state of affairs in China. All those so called big affairs (大事), especially state affairs (国家大事), have produced a small effect on the middle-class passenger's worldview ("老实说, 倘要我寻出这些事的影响来

说，便只是增长了我的坏脾气，——老实说，便是教我一天比一天的看不起人。[If asked to define their influence on me, I can only say that they taught me to take a poorer view of people every day]”)(Lu Xun, 2006, p. 120-121). One small incident, however, has produced a huge impact on him. This is the incident in which the narrator encounters the rickshaw puller.

In the Winter of 1917, the narrator wishes to go to S——gate and hires a rickshaw puller to take him there. On his way to the destination, however, the rickshaw knocks into an old and grey-haired woman in ragged clothes after she suddenly steps in front of the rickshaw from the roadside. The narrator, sceptical of the old woman’s intentions and sure that she is not hurt at all, urges the puller to continue pulling, not to mind the old woman now huddling on the ground. Since no one has seen the incident, no police officer could punish the puller. Yet, the puller, instead, stops the rickshaw and tries to help the old woman without hesitation. The puller is now helping the old woman to go to the nearby police station. Surprised by this attitude, the narrator in his imagination feels that the rickshaw puller’s figure has started to grow bigger and bigger while exerting pressure to the point of overpowering his small self, hidden in the fur garment (“甚而至于要榨出皮袍下面藏着的“小”来”) (Lu Xun, 2006, p. 124-125).

Upon seeing that a police officer was approaching him, the narrator takes out a handful of coppers and hands them to the officer, telling him to give to the rickshaw puller. Was it to reward the puller? Or perhaps to judge him? The narrator has no answer for these questions he asks himself on his way away from the scene. However, at the end, he remarks that it was such a small incident, unlike those big incidents of state affairs, that still teaches him shame, spurs him on to reform, and

imbues him with fresh courage and hope (“教我惭愧，催我自新，并且增长我的勇气和希望”) (Lu Xun, 2006, p. 124-125).

This story demonstrates both the influence of the sanctity of labour and the notion of common people who embody sacred labour. The differentiation of great incidents of state affairs from the small incidents of daily life that common people like rickshaw pullers live through rests on the notion of a sacred labour that includes all those who do not belong to the ruling elite in China (Kang Xin, 2022, p. 146). By reversing the relationship between the perceived magnitude of an incident and its actual effect on life, Lu Xun can ascribe to the image of rickshaw puller a status of sanctity that is not corrupted by the political affairs and points the way out of China predicaments. It is important to note that Lu Xun wrote this story after the October Revolution when he was critical of those groups in China who held a negative attitude towards the labouring masses. Later on, Lu Xun was going to note: “it was only after the October Revolution that I understood the creators of this new society would be the proletariat [待到十月革命后，我才知道这‘新的’社会的创造者是无产阶级。]” (Chen Gensheng, 1981, p. 120).

However, not all intellectuals, even those of the May Fourth Movement, always shared such a sanguine view of rickshaw pullers in particular and labouring masses in general. Different perspectives on the image of rickshaw puller in the literature expressed the contradictory position that the rickshaw puller and the intellectuals occupied. The fundamental contradiction of the Chinese intellectuals with regard to rickshaw pullers in this regard was that on the one hand they identified rickshaw pulling as a form of labour with sanctity upon which they laid their cultural and political ideals and on the other this identification mostly rested on their lack of being familiar with the actual living conditions and ideas that rickshaw

pullers had (Wang Jinshuang, 2012, p. 147). Dong points out the lack of familiarity on the part of the new intellectuals with the concrete conditions of rickshaw pullers in particular and urban labourers in general:

The new intellectuals in Beijing were not flaneurs, or idlers, as was Baudelaire in the eyes of Walter Benjamin. They were not poets of the crowds, they were not even in the crowds. The closest they came to the locals were their usually unsuccessful efforts to start a conversation with the rickshaw pullers who transported them around the city, keeping them away from the dust and mud. They were clearly aware of this distance, but it was never a problem of serious concern, except in the failed efforts of communists, such as Deng Zhongxia, to revolutionize them. (Dong, 2003, p. 277)

The abstractly conceived view of “common people” (平民) became the icon of morality (道德偶像) and the object of honesty (忠诚的对象) but the actual common people in their concrete living conditions were conservative and ignorant in a way that contradicted the May Fourth Intellectual’s abstract image. May Fourth intellectuals are fundamentally trapped in this dilemma (Wang Jinshuang, 2014, p. 156).

If Lu Xun’s story represents one aspect of this contradiction, that is, the abstract conception of common people which the May Fourth intellectuals produced and upon which they projected positive qualities that they did not have in their concrete conditions, Lao She’s novel shows us the other aspect: the incompatibility of the concrete reality of rickshaw pullers and the ideals of the May Fourth Movement. In Lu Xun’s *A Small Incident*, the rickshaw puller is sacred; in Lao She’s novel, he becomes profane. Lu Xun’s rickshaw puller derives from the abstract image of common people in the May Fourth period; Lao She’s rickshaw puller, instead, emphasises the concrete conditions of these common people.

As argued before, Lao She was heavily influenced by the May Fourth Movement and shared similar concerns for scientific enlightenment and democratic

government for a new and modern China to be built upon. However, contrary to the figure of a rickshaw puller Lu Xun employs, Lao She demonstrates the unbridgeable gap between the reality of rickshaw pullers and the ideals that the urban modern dynamics create in people for independence and freedom. Rickshaw pullers, in the end, are nowhere near being the kind of moral and honest poor labourers that Lu Xun believes the narrator of his story, and the intellectuals at the time in the aftermath of the October Revolution, could draw on for reform. They are, instead, highly corrupt and frustrated people who are not allowed to be moral and honest by the peculiar conditions that Chinese urban modernity imposes on them. Since rickshaw pullers are a product of the conditions intellectuals wish to reform, they cannot provide a moral example to look up to as if they themselves were not affected by these conditions in a negative way.

In this regard, it is worth noting that when Lao She in 1945 reflected on the conditions of writing his novel, he stressed his concern for rickshaw puller's own experiences:

我所要观察的不仅是车夫的一点点的浮现在衣冠上的，表现在言语与姿态上的那些小事情了，而是要由车夫的内心状态观察到地狱究竟是什么样子。车夫的外表上的一切，都必有生活与生命上的根据。我必须找到这个根源，才能写出个劳苦社会。

[What I wanted to observe was not just such small matters that would appear on their clothes or reflected on their language and attitude, but, starting from the inner experience of rickshaw pullers, to see what hell was like.

Everything to do with the outside appearance of rickshaw pullers must have its root in their life. Only after I find this out I can write of the society of poor labourers.] (Lao She, 2008, p. 466)

Lao She, accordingly, bases the story of his novel on the real experience of rickshaw pullers. He recounts that the gist of his story was conceived in 1936 when he met a friend in Shanda and learned that he had pulled rickshaw for some time for a living. Through him, he learned of another rickshaw puller and then started to think about a story based on their experiences (Lao She, 2008, p. 465).

Between these two poles, there are different approaches towards the image of rickshaw puller in the May Fourth literature. Hu Shi, who advocates an expansion in the scope of literary material to include the lives of ordinary labourers, writes a poem, titled “人力车夫 [rickshaw puller]”, where he expresses in a sympathetic way the sufferings of a sixteen-year old rickshaw puller. When the passenger learns that the puller is at such a young age, he protests that if he rides his rickshaw he will feel heart-broken. The puller replies that he has not been able to find a customer for so long, so he has been feeling miserable. The puller’s reaction shows that for all the uneasiness the passenger might express at riding a rickshaw, still if he does not ride, then the puller cannot eat, which is a worse fate than pulling a rickshaw (Huang Zhixiong, 1984, p. 23-24). In contrast to Lu Xun’s story, however, Hu Shi’s poem does not ascribe moral superiority to the puller. The passenger does not feel an imposing figure when he looks at the puller. On the contrary, what he sees is tragic poverty and dehumanisation. Liu Bannong (刘半农) in *Car Blanket* (车毯) picks up a similar theme but this time focuses on the psychological tensions the rickshaw puller goes through. A puller after saving some money to buy a plush blanket cannot use it freely. Sometimes, after pulling rickshaw, winds from the north blow and make it ice-cold. The puller wants to put on the newly bought blanket but fears that his sweat will ruin it. Here, the puller is psychologically torn between protecting his body that he bought the blanket to put on and protecting the blanket that he used his body to buy. The puller, here, is presented as a poor urban labourer who displays neither moral integrity as in Lu Xun nor moral corruption as in Lao She but abject poverty as in Hu Shi (Huang Zhixiong, 1984, p. 24-25).

It is said that the May Fourth intellectuals had a general concern for rickshaw pullers under the influence of the ideas of sanctity of labour and common people.

They expressed this concern in various ways, sometimes giving pullers a holy image and sometimes a profane one. However, it is worth noting that the May Fourth intellectuals themselves did not always have a consistent attitude towards rickshaw pullers in that their actions betrayed their professed intentions. Hanchao Lu observes that the popular image of rickshaw pulling was that of “a ragged, sweat-soaked coolie pulling a corpulent, richly dressed customer”, disturbing many intellectuals, both Chinese and Western, who considered this whole practice a symbol of oriental backwardness. Yet, this inveighing against rickshaw pulling did not prevent them from profusely using and enjoying rickshaw rides. “When it came to concern for the poor rickshaw puller or saving a few cents, most people were not bothered about being a little hypocritical” (Lu, 1999, p. 92-93). The example of Yu Dafu, a highly prominent literary figure at the time, is rather telling. In one of his stories (薄奠), Yu Dafu writes about a highly moral rickshaw puller and a customer who feels sorry for him. The customer, compelled by his conscience, after a ride gives all of his 48 coins to him although he ought to give just 40. Some time later, he visits the puller’s house and, again, feels the need to help him. However, this time, he plans to give him his silver watch, but, thinking he might decline to take it, he drops it on a table (“顺手把表搁在一张半坡的桌上”). The next day, however, the puller brings back the watch, telling the customer that he dropped his watch. Mortified by this, the customer insists that the watch is not his and the puller in the end is forced to take it (Yu Dafu, 2013, p. 151-161). Yet, despite being the author of such a story and holding a prominent place among the Chinese intellectuals at the time, Yu Dafu’s wife, Wang Yingxia recounts:

Her frugal husband preferred to hire a human-drawn vehicle, either a rickshaw or a wheelbarrow, because they were cheap. Yu particularly liked to

hire aged pullers, believing that old men knew that they were physically weak and thus would not overcharge the passenger. (Lu, 1999, p. 93)

At this point, one can observe an interaction between the first and the third antinomies. As said before under the first antinomy, rickshaw pulling was a modern practice that emerged out of the urban modern dynamics of Chinese cities. They provided fast and cheap transportation in cities in historical context of expanding city territory, increasing urban population, and the peculiar maze-like street structures. The technical progress they displayed, however, came into conflict with the aspect of sanctity in the third antinomy. Under the influence of the notion of sacred labour, Chinese intellectuals would develop a strong concern for the plight of rickshaw pullers. However, for all their protest against this practice, they would still consistently rely on rickshaw pulling because it was, after all, a viable means of transportation under the urban modern conditions they had found themselves in. Their “hypocrisy” was more a symptom than a cause: it was the result of the clash of the tensions that Chinese cities were undergoing:

Without a real solution for the livelihood of the thousands of pullers, calls for abolishing rickshaws can only be regarded as cheap talk. In fact, in spite of the song and dance, the rickshaw competed with motorized vehicles and served as one of the major means of public transportation in Shanghai for well over half a century. (Lu, 1999, p. 93)

Another tension existed with regard to the concrete conditions of the rickshaw pullers. The image of rickshaw puller that the May Fourth intellectuals produced did not just contain an abstract aspect of sanctity. It also contained an abstract aspect of abjectness. The stereotypical image of a rickshaw puller that the May Fourth intellectuals widely employed was that of abject poverty and dehumanisation. As said before, the element of dehumanisation in the form of bestiality was a major cause of the sense of backwardness and archaicity that contrasted with its modernity. To a significant degree, this was true. Rickshaw pullers were highly illiterate, and

working in a sector that rested on unskilled and oversupplied labour, easily exploited by the rickshaw owners. Yet, this popular image was reductionist towards the actual life of rickshaw pullers. It is true that they were mostly illiterate and ignorant labourers, but the Confucian concern for education was part of the rickshaw culture, too. Rickshaw pullers often expressed deep regret for their lack of education and literacy but also hopeful that their children could avoid a similar fate and get into school. Cities as the sites of urban modernity exploited them, but also gave them hope and the opportunity for work (Lu, 1999, p. 88-89). Whether this hope was realised or not, poor people were still drawn into rickshaw pulling which was not as bleak as the stereotypical image of abject poverty and dehumanisation suggests.

In fact, dehumanisation could, paradoxically, become a source of masculine pride for rickshaw pullers: “To stereotype rickshaw men as paupers or beasts of burden ignored the flair for the dramatic they exhibited in the public performance of their job” (Strand, 1989, p. 38). The physical nature of their profession made rickshaw pullers into the visible athlete-like figures in the urban landscape. With a dandy and sleek appearance, wearing tailored jackets and trousers while pulling fast and speaking some foreign phrases to impress tourists, rickshaw pullers were not unfamiliar with public theatricality. Young pullers would challenge each other to race for the fun of it while defying traffic regulations and the police. They would flirt with ladies by pulling them for free and displaying their muscular prowess (Strand, 1989, p. 41). It is true that they were dehumanised, pulling rickshaws as if beasts of burden. However, even under such conditions of bestiality, rickshaw pullers could still undermine the negative image formed of them by the intellectuals by taking pride in their masculinity and demonstrating their physical prowess in defiance of laws and social customs. This phenomenon, I argue, again derives from the fundamental

contradiction between the abstract view of rickshaw pullers that the Chinese intellectuals relied on and their concrete reality. However, this time, the latter takes on a more positive hue. Whereas, earlier, this fundamental contradiction was between the abstract moral integrity of pullers and the concrete lack thereof; now the abstract state of poverty and bestiality gives way to the concrete state of masculinity and physical prowess. This relates to and problematises the sense of archaicity in the first antinomy that rests on a view of bestiality imposed on rickshaw pullers as human beings. Although the state of bestiality often engendered a sense of archaicity and backwardness, turning rickshaw pullers into victims, the latter could at times overturn this image by transforming bestiality into humanity, physical toil into masculine prowess.

In summary, the third antinomy is between sanctity and profanity. Rickshaw pullers were both sacred and profane in a complex image that the Chinese intellectuals, especially the May Fourth intellectuals, produced of them and the complex reality in which these intellectuals and the rickshaw pullers were caught up in. With the failure of the 1911 revolution, there emerged a new movement that would emphasise the role of culture in the social transformation that China needed: the New Culture Movement. For all their opposition, however, these two movements still rested on a common dichotomy between politics and culture. It was this dichotomy that started eroding in the following years. With the factor of labour playing an increasingly significant role in the modernisation of China, sometimes in accordance with the government policies as in being sent to France for war aid and sometimes against the government in the form of strikes, the May Fourth intellectuals were being increasingly drawn towards this new player in the scene. The historical and intellectual context in which they wrote of them rested on a general

notion of the sanctity of labour, praising rickshaw pullers and other urban labouring poor for the aid they provide through their labour for society. Under the influence of the sanctity of labour, writers such as Lu Xun and Yu Dafu would produce a sacred image of rickshaw pullers, giving them such qualities as simplicity and moral integrity. Yet, this image was not in accordance with the concrete reality that rickshaw pullers lived in. For all the praise the intellectuals bestowed on the pullers, the latter could be profane, too. Xiangzi in Lao She's novel is arguably the strongest literary image produced based on this concrete condition. The rickshaw pullers, thus, were also profane in that they did not in their concreteness possess the abstract sacredness the intellectuals associated them with. This fundamental contradiction between abstract image and concrete reality took the form of an antinomy between sanctity and profanity that could not be resolved under the conditions of urban modernity at the time. From another point of view, the contradiction between abstract image and concrete reality reversed this relationship: whereas the May Fourth intellectuals abstractly imagined rickshaw pullers as dehumanised beings into beasts of burden with no redemptive moral sanctity as in the poems of Hu Shi and Liu Bannong, the pullers concretely lived a more complex life, taking masculine pride in this state of bestiality, vaunting their physical prowess and flirting with ladies. This contradiction was not resolved, either, since neither the intellectuals who deplored the pullers' poor conditions of life nor some other agent like the state had the means to provide the pullers with another profession that could eliminate the rickshaw business. Thus, the intellectuals wrote about misery but kept riding on rickshaw. The pullers were written about abstractly but lived concretely. They were sacred and profane, dehumanised into bestiality and humanised into masculinity.

4.6 Conclusion

As a modern technology of transportation that reflected the new principles of mobility and accessibility in a changing urban landscape, rickshaw could express the tensions and contradictions of Chinese urban modernity. Since these tensions and contradictions could not be reconciled into a higher synthesis so long as rickshaws existed, based on the discussion in Chapter One, I call these antinomies. In this chapter, three antinomies of Chinese urban modernity through rickshaws have been examined: the antinomy of modernity and archaicity, the antinomy of identity and foreignness and the antinomy of sanctity and profanity. Each of these antinomies contained opposing forces in them, which, though existing in a unity, never lost their distinct identity. Rickshaw was perceived as a modern and progressive as well as an archaic and backward technology of urban transportation. It produced a sense of national identity as well as a sense of foreign encroachment. Finally, the practice of rickshaw pulling was implicated with the contradictory relations that the urban poor labourers and Chinese intellectuals held.

The modern aspect of the first antinomy was due to the technological progress that rickshaw introduced into Chinese urban transportation. Rickshaw over time became a highly popular means of transportation, displaying progressive features both against its traditional competitors such as sedan chair and mule cart and against its urban competitors such as streetcars, trams, and busses. Rickshaw was cheap and fast, available for destinations and schedules that no other vehicle could provide. Yet, rickshaw was also regarded as an archaic practice that did not really belong to the modern age. It was denounced, despite its popularity in use, as a sign of backwardness. This was due to two main causes. Firstly, the practice of rickshaw

pulling which used human beings like beasts of burden to carry other human beings was seen as a dehumanising profession that turned humanity into bestiality. Due to the lack of effective political organisations on the part of pullers, whether in the form of traditional guild system or that of labour union, rickshaw pullers could not fight effectively against their inhumane conditions. The second cause is that rickshaw pullers would prevent the development of motorised transportation in cities because of the threat these vehicles posed to their livelihood. Their resistance took various forms, including large scale use of violence as in the riot of 1929 in Beijing. Yet, despite the social disorder rickshaw pullers could cause, the authorities and companies most of the time followed a policy of reconciliation because they had no means of solving the plight of rickshaw pullers by providing them another profession. Due to these two opposing forces, rickshaw seemed both modern and archaic, both progressive and backward at the same time, with no decisive reconciliation towards one of the poles.

The second antinomy is that of identity and foreignness. Rickshaw became a popular means of transportation in China because of the peculiar conditions of urban modernisation that China was undergoing: the increasing population of urban residents, the expanding territory of cities, the commercialisation of the economy and the increasing mobility of people, together with the inefficient traditional means of public transportation and the not-fully-fledged motorised vehicles of transportation, all in the context of the new city street systems that were still somewhat narrow and maze-like, and in the context of a rural crisis in the countryside, marked these conditions. Given this, intellectuals such as Hu Shi identified rickshaw with Chinese national identity, arguing that the two were intrinsically related. However, although such association was in fact true, it was not the whole truth. Rickshaw was, at the

same time, the manifestation of foreign influence on China. Fairbank's analogy of treaty ports, though underemphasising the antagonistic sense of the foreign component, is useful. Rickshaw, like treaty port, is an amalgam of both Chinese and foreign elements. Its foreignness derives from two major reasons: the initial domination of the rickshaw business by foreign capital in Shanghai and the foreign place of origin. Although the former cause would in the course of the 1920s would disappear, the latter would continue to haunt the Chineseness of rickshaws. The second antinomy also shows that there is a complex interaction among different antinomies. Whereas the foreign capital investment decreased in the rickshaw business, the rate of exploitation increased, intensifying the first antinomy from the aspect of dehumanisation while possibly mitigating the second antinomy.

The final antinomy is that of sanctity and profanity. Under the influence of the notions of sacred labour and common people, many Chinese intellectuals in the course of the May Fourth Movement developed a strong interest in the lives of labouring people. Since rickshaw pullers were a highly visible group of urban labourers, whose usual passengers included intellectuals as part of the middle-class, many intellectuals wrote literary texts concerning rickshaw pullers, giving rise to a rickshaw genre. The literary texts in this genre engaged with the theme of rickshaw pulling from different and contradictory angles, expressing the tensions and contradictions of Chinese urban modernity. The intellectuals, though developing a strong interest in rickshaw pullers, were not sufficiently familiar with the concrete living conditions of these urban labourers. This gave rise to an abstract image of the rickshaw puller by which the intellectuals projected their own hopes and ideals on to this urban labourer. The concrete conditions of rickshaw pullers, however, were rather different, frustrating the projected hopes and ideals the intellectuals expected

them to be carriers of. Lu Xun's *A Small Incident* and Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi* respectively express the two sides of this contradiction: abstract sanctity on the one hand and concrete profanity on the other. The unfamiliarity of the intellectuals with the living conditions of rickshaw pullers engendered a second form of disparity between the abstract image of abject bestiality and the concrete reality of masculine humanity. Although many intellectuals portrayed rickshaw pullers as unfortunate victims that had been reduced to a state of oppression similar to the beasts of burden, rickshaw pullers in their concrete social practice could turn subjugation to physical labour into a flair of masculine prowess, this way creating the opportunity to resist against their own living conditions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, urban modernity in the context of Chinese history has been read through a practice of historiography that, drawing on Benjamin's dialectics of seeing, emphasises the tensions and contradictions in the historical dynamics under examination. Urban modernity in China designates the emergence and development of new socio-historical dynamics which established an interactive connection between urbanity and modernity as two interpenetrated categories. Under these new dynamics that Chinese cities were undergoing, radical transformations were taking place: the material morphology of the cities were being reshaped as the centuries-old walls were being demolished to make room for modern technologies of transportation in accordance with the new principles of accessibility and mobility; the cities were situated within a comparative framework out of which new senses of identity such as nationality and cosmopolitanism were emerging; the historical legacy of the cities was both being destroyed and preserved as the new both negated and still was a child of the old. Beijing and Shanghai occupied a central place within these new dynamics: Beijing as the perceived traditional capital of China and Shanghai as the cosmopolitan commercial centre. These cities were both so far apart in people's imagination and yet so close with the railways, print media, journalism and other modern means of transportation and communication which increasingly drew people together.

In order to explore these complex and radical transformations, a theoretically-informed approach is needed. In the first two chapters, mainly drawing on Benjamin's conception of cultural history and art, this approach is articulated.

Benjamin, with the influence of Romanticism, which he would later carry into Marxism and avant-garde, was opposed to the progressivist and linear narratives of history based upon the temporal scheme of homogeneous empty space, which creates the illusion that historical events can simply be added together in a temporal space ready to receive them. This illusion was present in the earlier thinkers such as Kant and Hegel, who, with their Enlightenment view of society and humanity, believed in the gradual progress of humanity towards a better future. “The infinite task” of Kant as well as the historical development of “Geist” in Hegel were based upon this notion of overarching progress in the course of human history. However, Benjamin observed the same illusion in his own time, as well. Neo-Kantians like Hermann Cohen legitimised Germany’s war on the eve of the First World War. Hegel, on the other hand, especially in the way Lukacs employed his thought, was positioned against Neo-Kantianism which Lukacs associated with the Second International. Yet, Lukacs’s thought shared the same illusion of historical overarching progress as his notion of social totality affirmed a sense of historical continuity which eventually would culminate in the Bolshevik Revolution. Along with progressive linear narratives, Benjamin also opposes such views of culture and art as the sites of reconciliation, as in Nietzsche and Warburg. History does not proceed along a linear temporal scheme; art and culture, on the other hand, do not reconcile the tensions and contradictions produced by history. For Benjamin, there is an intimate link between the rejection of linear narrative in history on the one hand and the criticism of the affirmative role given to culture and art on the other. The task of the cultural historian is to disrupt the sense of historical continuity that creates an illusion of progress and the method of doing this is to examine culture and art as sites of exposing and

intensifying tensions and contradictions produced by history without an eventual moment of reconciliation.

Antinomy is the concept that encampulates this conception of cultural history and art. Defined as irreconcilable contradiction, I designate those tensions and contradictions which are exposed and intensified through the practice of cultural history as antinomies. An antinomy, as employed in this study, unites opposing forces pulling in different directions without giving them a synthetic form. It lacks, that is to say, the positively rational moment of Hegelian dialectics. Benjamin's dialectics, instead, emphasises the negative moment: it is a form of negative dialectics.

Cities were places Benjamin was most of all interested in. Berlin and Paris play a crucial role in his thought. Baudelaire, whom he studied extensively, was the poet of urban modernity. This is no surprise because the dynamics Benjamin was interested in, emanating from the urban modernity of capitalism, were mostly located within cities. This raises the question of how to study cities as manifestations of urban modernity. To this end, the thesis has discussed Benjamin and Calvino together to create a theoretical approach that examines cities from three different angles: the invisible cultural imagination in the form of dream images embodied in the visible material morphology of the city, the invisible comparative counterpart of the visible city in question, and the invisible past of the visible present of the city. These three angles show us the imaginative aspect of material configuration, the comparative aspect of the object of focus, and the historical aspect of the present condition.

In addition to Benjamin and Calvino, the thesis has discussed a range of scholars specifically on Chinese history, such as Cohen, Skinner, Esherick, and so on, drawing on their insights to adapt the more abstract approach developed in the first two chapters to the specific conditions of Chinese history. Based on this approach,

Beijing and Shanghai have been analysed. Beijing, as the capital city of China until 1924 and the traditional centre throughout, Shanghai as the metropolitan centre of commerce, provide a rich comparative material to explore the transformations that Chinese cities underwent under the conditions of urban modernity. The transformations in the material morphologies of these cities in a comparative framework, which took the form of recycling the past for the present, defined the meaning of urban modernity for these cities. In this regard, the destruction of city walls in Beijing, the construction of new street systems in Beijing and Shanghai and the establishment of railways as a conspicuous expression of the new principles of accessibility and mobility across cities as well as within them, embody a significant part of urban modernisation. The city walls were significantly demolished due to the introduction of railways. This conflict between walls whose conception of movement was radically different than that of railways -one was based on rigid ethnic hierarchies while the other was the free flow of commodities and people-, showcases one essential and concrete meaning of urban modernisation: it was experienced as change in the mode of movement.

Rickshaw as a modern technology of urban transportation also displays this change in the mode of movement. As the cities were undergoing the processes of urban modernisation, rickshaw over time emerged as one, if not the most, conspicuous means of urban transportation in Shanghai and Beijing. Situated within this peculiar historical context, rickshaw both as a modern technology of urban transportation and as a popular genre of modern Chinese literature expressed the historical antinomies of Chinese urban modernity. Three antinomies are examined in this thesis: modernity and archaicity, nativity and foreignness, and sanctity and profanity. The first antinomy designates the curious amalgam of the apparently two

opposing forces: the new and the modern on the one hand and the backward and the traditional on the other. Rickshaws, on the one hand, were apparently a modern technology of urban transportation, providing passengers with more convenient, faster, and cheaper services than their traditional predecessors such as sedan-chair and mule cart as well as some other modern technologies of transportation such as cars and tramways. This accords with the new principles of mobility and accessibility that took down the city walls and reshaped the city street systems. Yet, rickshaw despite this modern aspect produced a sense of shock and uneasiness. It was regarded more as an unexpected twist of modernity than as its “genuine” manifestation. This new and modern technology carried with it a strong sense of archaicity and backwardness, making the vehicle belong not to the modern age, more precisely, to the modern age in the way it was imagined, than to a different world. The prevalent sight of human beings replacing beasts of burden to carry other human beings in the streets of Beijing and Shanghai, coupled with the tensions between the rickshaw pullers and the street car businesses, was the root of this shock. Yet, such was exactly Chinese urban modernity, which, never in a pure form, was a curious combination of contradictory forces produced in the course of Chinese history.

The literary expression of this antinomy can be found in Lao She's novel, *Camel Xiangzi*. Here, Lao She, employing the new techniques of modern literature such as indirect free speech, creates a literary image of a rickshaw puller who, caught up in the contradictory unity of modernity and archaicity, cannot but act in a way that pulls him in opposite directions. On the one hand, Xiangzi is a rational homo economicus, obsessed with money and self-independence, entirely free of the communal feelings of rural life; yet, on the other hand, he still perceives the modern city of Beijing from the perspective of the symbolic world of the archaic rural

economy. Confident in the power of the city, yet unable to realise his dreams through it, Xiangzi is in the end destroyed, degenerating into a ghost of individualism.

Collectivism as the other path towards salvation, is closed, too. No collective made up of such corrupt individuals can save itself. Yet, it is exactly the collective life, the urban modern landscape, that corrupts its individuals who start off with high hopes like Xiangzi himself.

The second antinomy, nativity and foreignness, unites the two opposing forces of national identity on the one hand and the encroaching foreign influence on the other. Hu Shi, the prominent intellectual of the New Culture Movement, was not alone in identifying rickshaw as a defining material artifact of Chinese civilisation as opposed to the West. Yet, the situation was never so simple. As Fairbank's useful analogy suggests, rickshaws were a combination of Chinese and foreign elements, similar to the treaty port model. The tension between nativity and foreign influence can, again, be observed in the literary expression of *Camel Xiangzi*. Both the novel's location choices and the use of terminology express this tension.

The third antinomy concerns the not-so-consistent image of rickshaw pullers created by the new Chinese intellectuals from the New Culture and May Fourth Movements. Rickshaw pulling as a popular theme for social commentary and literary production was associated with a sense of sanctity under the influence of the notion of sacred labour and common people from the May Fourth Movement. Lu Xun's story of *A Small Incident* epitomises this. Yet, under the concrete conditions of life, rickshaw pullers were never so sacred as the May Fourth intellectuals imagined them to be. Lao She, concerned with a more accurate representation of these labourers, would give a highly profane image instead. This contradiction was primarily the result of the contradiction that the May Fourth intellectuals were caught up in: on the

one hand, they were increasingly concerned with the labouring masses, yet on the other their own concrete conditions of living were rather different. Writing about people whose concrete conditions they were not familiar with, the May Fourth intellectuals created a sacred image of rickshaw puller whose reverse side was concrete profanity. On the other hand, many intellectuals presented rickshaw pullers as the unfortunate victims of larger social forces over which they had no control. These destitute labourers were, on their view, reduced to a state of bestiality that deprived them of their humanity. Yet, again, the concrete conditions of rickshaw pullers differed from this abstract image. Many pullers, though desperately poor, could still take pride in their job, using rickshaw pulling as an opportunity to demonstrate their masculine prowess. Bestiality was not necessarily a negation of humanity but a means of asserting masculinity. Rickshaw pullers, though deprived of the means of effective collective action through labour unions or traditional guild representation, still struggled against a historical period which attempted to reduce them to a state of misery. Miserable though they often were, yet they were strugglers against the cities that condemned them to a fate imposed by capitalist urban modernity. These struggles, however, in the end did not achieve their goal. Cities lured the likes of Xiangzi with the dream of capitalist urban modernity and destroyed them. "The reform of consciousness consists solely in . . . the awakening of the world from its dream about itself" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 456). To wake up from this long dream, but how? There is no answer, yet "there must, there must, there's got to be a way!" (Brecht, 1986).

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