



**HAL**  
open science

# Urban Planning in China Shanghai: City Planning "With a Human Face" The Case of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP): The Pedestrianisation of a Densely Populated Area

Brigitte Bertoncello, Lély Tan, Jian Zhuo

► **To cite this version:**

Brigitte Bertoncello, Lély Tan, Jian Zhuo. Urban Planning in China Shanghai: City Planning "With a Human Face" The Case of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP): The Pedestrianisation of a Densely Populated Area. China perspectives, 2017. hal-02088276

**HAL Id: hal-02088276**

**<https://amu.hal.science/hal-02088276>**

Submitted on 2 Apr 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



## Shanghai: City Planning “With a Human Face”

The Case of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP): The  
Pedestrianisation of a Densely Populated Area

**Brigitte Bertoncello, Lély Tan and Jian Zhuo**

Translator: Peter Brown

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/7225>  
ISSN: 1996-4617

**Publisher**

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 March 2017  
Number of pages: 87-96  
ISSN: 2070-3449

**Electronic reference**

Brigitte Bertoncello, Lély Tan and Jian Zhuo, « Shanghai: City Planning “With a Human Face” », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2017/1 | 2017, Online since 01 March 2018, connection on 01 March 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/7225>

---

# Shanghai: City Planning “With a Human Face”

The Case of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP): The Pedestrianisation of a Densely Populated Area

BRIGITTE BERTONCELLO, LÉLY TAN, AND JIAN ZHUO

**ABSTRACT:** Ever since Expo 2010 was held in Shanghai, the city has been trying to present an image of itself as having the capacity to offer amenities that are more environmentally friendly and that contribute to an improved quality of life. This article aims to show that a locally-enacted facility – far from the much-publicised monumental developments – can constitute a high point of urban activity, an example that contributes to cultivating the sought-after identity of a modern city concerned about the sustainability of its actions. Thanks to a singular grouping of actors from the public, semi-public, and private sectors, the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP) in the western district of Changning laid the principles of a sustainable urban planning programme ten years before the publication of Shanghai’s New City Plan, resetting the ways for building the city. From today’s perspective, this initiative could be seen as a manifestation of this new way of imagining the city.

**KEYWORDS:** public pedestrian space, urban design, urban renewal, public/private cooperation, Shanghai.

## Introduction

Shanghai is seen by many observers (and desired by the central authorities) as the window onto the Chinese world: a contemporary metropolis with a quite singular history. Ever since the preparations for Expo 2010,<sup>(1)</sup> Shanghai has been trying to show that China can also offer a quality of life and urban amenities that are respectful of nature and the environment.

Pudong and some international poster “objects” can seem to be symbols of modernity. However, the move away from such showcasing to focus attention on a more modest development, carried out on a local scale but still capable of bearing other references to modernity, especially in terms of sustainable development, offers something quite original. Taking an interest in a public pedestrian space in a city with a population of more than 24 million, at a time when density and mobility would appear to be guiding China’s urban planning, might seem like a gamble, but it is also about taking a look at where and how people actually live in the city.

Analysing the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade project in the western district of Changning, we could say that it is not a matter of selecting an experience that is representative (in the qualitative sense of the term) but rather of taking a case study that enables us to understand what it is, how it came about, and the actors involved.<sup>(2)</sup> This public pedestrian space constitutes an original configuration that breaks with the standard model. “Adopting a case-by-case approach”<sup>(3)</sup> has required nuanced and repeated observation, complemented by interviews and documentary analyses<sup>(4)</sup> in order to derive an understanding based on specific examples. Although our goal is not to produce generalisations as such, we will nonetheless spell out the conditions that allowed the operation to be carried out in order to better understand how they might be replicated.

This gives rise to a number of questions. What are the particular features of this public space? How were the district authorities able to shift their

approach to urban development by moving the scale from large to small? Which actors can bring this about or underpin the process? How can this development be interpreted? Does this other way of building a city constitute the basis for city-wide renewal?

The analysis of this singular and innovative pedestrian space (1<sup>st</sup> part) will enable us to examine the administrative and institutional systems set up by the municipality of Shanghai (2<sup>nd</sup> part) as well as the models influencing the *fabrique urbaine*, as posited by Hélène Noizet (3<sup>rd</sup> part). Our hypothesis is that the small *fabrique* constituted by our case study is able to feed into the large *fabrique*.

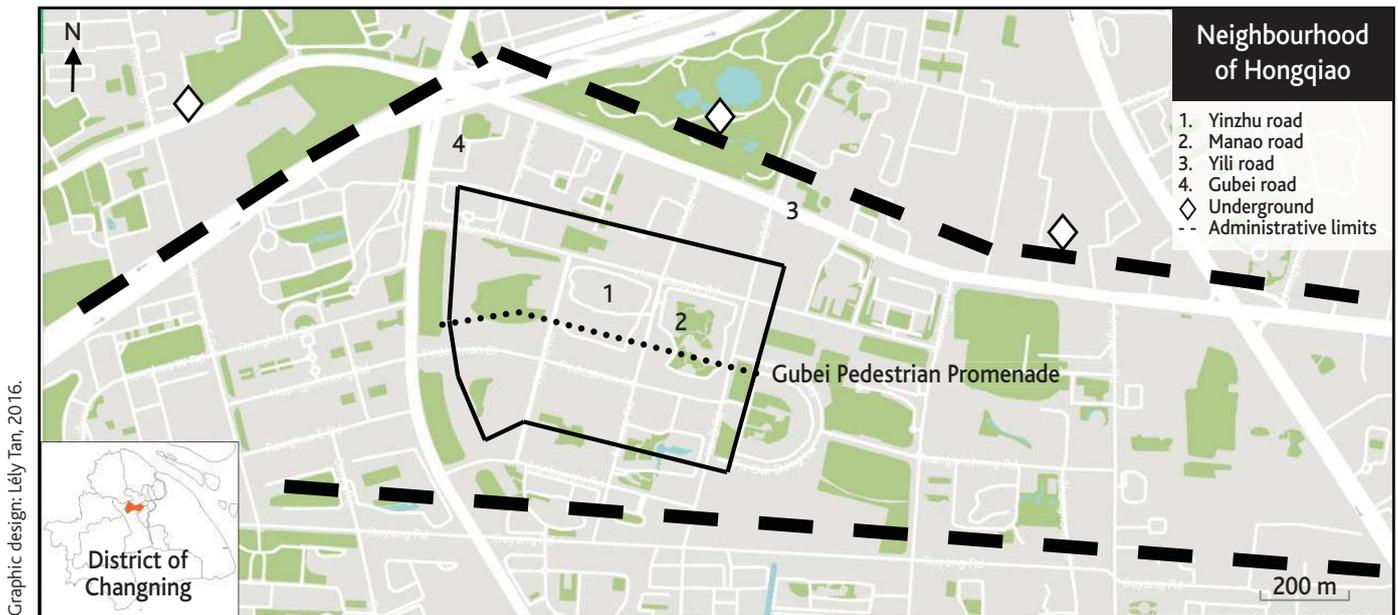
## The Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP), an operation on a human scale

The Gubei Pedestrian Promenade (GPP) in the western district of Changning (see Illustration 1) was developed in the well-off quarter of Gubei char-

Our title alludes to the speech given by Czech President Dubcek in 1968 in which he sought an interpretation of “socialism” (communism), calling for a “socialism with a human face.” We draw a parallel with the change expected in China in terms of urban planning towards greater consideration of the human factor. The majority of the documents dealing with Chinese urban planning mention the need to put people at the heart of considerations (*yiren weiben*). Beginning in 2014, the central government launched an appeal for a “new urbanism” (*xinxing chengzhenhua*), the main idea of which is to move from a concern with the physical dimension of urbanisation towards one centred on people.

1. Françoise Ged, “De la belle endormie des années 1980 à la belle épanouie de l’expo 2010?” (From the sleeping beauty of the 1980s to the fulfilled beauty of the 2010 Fair?), in Nicolas Idir (ed.), *Shanghai. Histoire, promenades, anthologie et dictionnaire* (Shanghai. History, walks, anthology and dictionary), Paris, Robert Laffont, 2015, pp. 134-161.
2. Yves-Chantal Gagnon, *The Case Study as Research Method: A Practical Handbook*, Québec, Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2010.
3. Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, *Penser par cas* (Thinking by case), Paris, éd. EHESS, 2005.
4. This analysis is the outcome of a mission to Shanghai financed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs/ Campus France in 2015. This mission, focused on the pedestrian public spaces, particularly enabled us to observe and analyse *in situ* the functioning of the GPP and to conduct interviews.

## Illustration 1 – The Gubei Pedestrian Promenade in the neighbourhood of Hongqiao, district of Changning, Shanghai



Graphic design: Lély Tan, 2016.

acterised by a strong presence of expatriates, for the most part executives who are primarily from other Asian countries (Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea).<sup>(5)</sup> This foreign presence has its origin in the history of Shanghai's economic development. The first foreign businesses invested mainly in electronics and became implanted in this part of the city. The local authorities provided the executives of these companies with housing that was constructed specifically for the purpose, close to their workplace. Gradually, a whole array of services, shops, and schools were set up to cater for the needs of this population. By dint of these amenities, it became quite natural that subsequent waves of workers moved into Gubei.

Formerly a street given over to cars lined with residential buildings 15-18 stories high, the 4.6-hectare pedestrian promenade was conceived by the American agency SWA Group and completed in 2009<sup>(6)</sup> at the request of the developer Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd., which specializes in real estate. The GPP is the fruit of a fully independent reconfiguration of the previous situation in terms of both use and production principles (see illustration 2).

### A multi-purpose pedestrian space

The 700-metre-long promenade, which forms part of the urban renewal programme, is bordered at the western end by Gubei Road (a boulevard-type thoroughfare) and in the east by *Yi-Li Road* (which is less expansive). It is intersected by two feeder streets for the neighbourhood, *Manao Road* and *Yin-Zhu Road*, which divide the promenade in an equidistant manner and connect it to the rest of the neighbourhood (see illustrations 3 and 4). At its centre, the promenade broadens out to make way for the Central Plaza with its water fountains in the summer and its amphitheatre that is used occasionally for shows and more routinely by children and teenagers for roller games, scooters, etc. (see illustrations 5 and 6). Three architectural "follies" that are occupied from west to east by a pub (Munich Beer Garden), a Japanese restaurant, and a bakery-pâtisserie (Bon matin Paris), respectively, create a surprise for passers-by and break up the otherwise largely leafy public space (see illustrations 7 and 8).

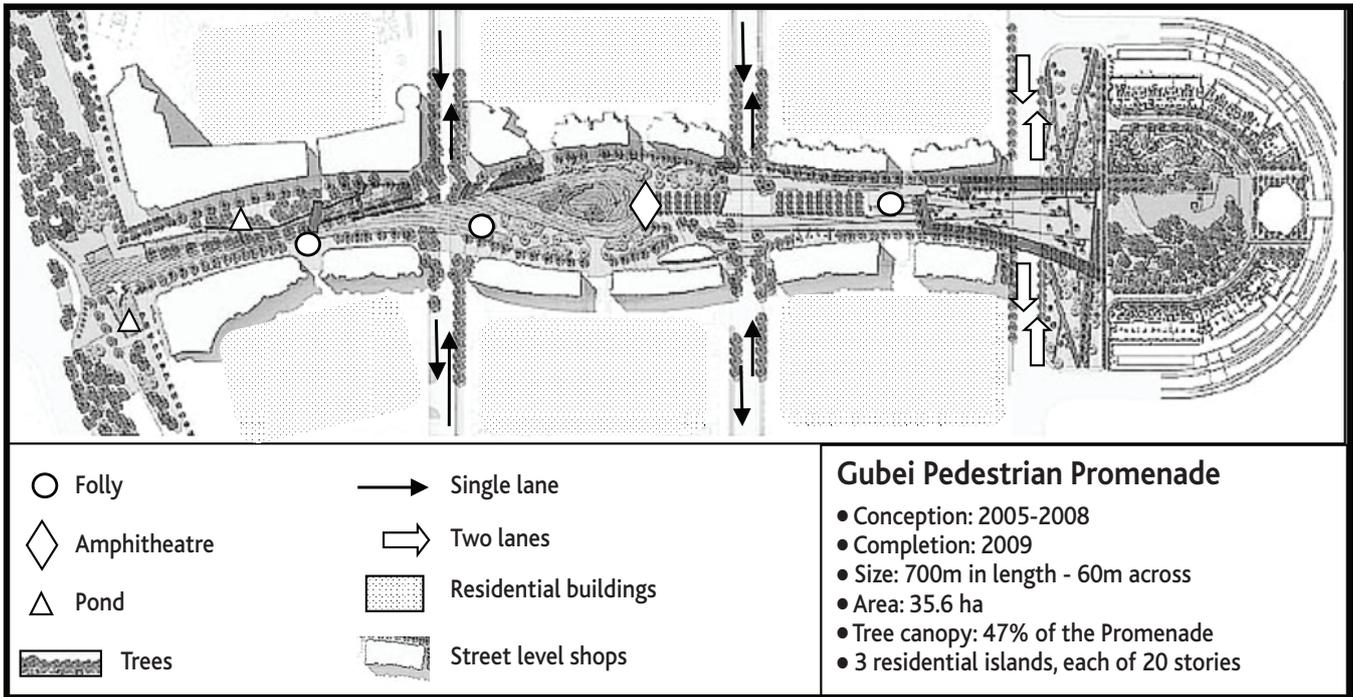
The collective residential buildings lining the promenade are enclosed by gates with an often monumental entrance under the watch of a guard, allowing movement towards the public space constituted by the GPP. Although each residence has a kind of landscaped garden as an intermediary space with ornamental statues, covered walkways, and ponds, etc., which mostly take their inspiration from the "Versailles style" or the romantic ornamentation of the Italian Renaissance, it is the GPP that remains the shared collective space.

The Promenade is thought of both as an extension of the apartments of the sector's residents and as a public space open to the outside. At different times of the day, it presents the scene of children and their baby-sitters, people walking their dogs, schoolchildren, people on their way to work, as well as shoppers and others doing exercise (jogging, roller blading, group dancing, tai chi, etc.). There seems to be an uninterrupted stream of users of the GPP, which complements the more restful practices of those sitting on benches.<sup>(7)</sup>

On the ground floor of the residential buildings, on either side of the promenade, there is an array of restaurants, cafés, shops, and personalised services (beauty salons, hairdressers, masseurs, as well as a sports centre) producing a constant hive of activity throughout the day and into the evening (see illustration 2). A few stalls in the public space complement the commercial offerings (scarves, parasols, hair accessories, flowers, etc.). Ambulant salesmen (fruit, fresh juice, etc.) come around on bikes mounted with a plate, and at the end of the day they set up shop at the entrance to the GPP, on the Gubei Road side; other sellers sometimes move through the promenade parading their goods (such as small traditional musical instruments).

5. Interview with a real estate agent on the GPP, 30 August 2015, complemented by several visits to apartments on the GPP, 31 August 2015.
6. In fact, the project was conceived much earlier, as early as 2005. Prior to the SWA Group, other designers had unsuccessfully tried to put forward proposals.
7. The descriptions are the result of various observations made *in situ* aimed at analysing the practices of the GPP at different times throughout August-September 2015 and October-November 2016.

Illustration 2 – Development and amenities of Gubei Pedestrian Promenade



Graphic design: Lély Tan, 2016.

In this way, people from different walks of life rub shoulders with each other and sometimes interact: inhabitants of the one neighbourhood, that is at the micro level, and a fraction of urban society, citizens functioning at the level of the city, the metropolis, that is at the macro level, attracted by the offer of leisure activities and the atmosphere of places strongly characterised by a quite exceptional natural setting.<sup>(8)</sup>

**Choices of layout and amenities underpinned by environmental concerns**

The GPP is indeed lined with trees (ginkgo bilobas, camphor laurels, cherry trees, etc.) and also with shrubs and flowers featuring a variety of species. From a sustainable development perspective, this vegetal presence was imagined not only to counterbalance the very mineral aspect of the sector, marked by the presence of a number of apartment blocks (17,000 residents live either side of the promenade), but also to mitigate temperature impact, counter air pollutants, and improve the health of the population. The vegetation here supposedly contributes to a local reduction of the effect of urban islands of heat by about 2 to 3° C.<sup>(9)</sup> Contrary to what one might expect from a classical tree-lined promenade, in some respects the GPP offers a park-like experience. The presence of a water feature through the various rectangular (at the western entrance) and slender ponds (along the trading areas on the northern side) enhances the sense of a break from the surrounding sector with its traffic flows.

This initiative, part of an environmental dynamic, reintroduces nature by juxtaposing a mineralised earth with in-ground portions of leafiness in a slightly declining space with streaming water. This intertwined network makes use of waterways for lush vegetation providing an attractive habitat for insects, birds, and amphibians.

The conception of vegetal spaces has been combined with a particular attitude to their management. After seven years in use, the GPP continues to present a fine quality of amenity. A whole team of people is mobilised

each day for the upkeep of the vegetation and water ponds as well as for the collection of rubbish.

An analysis of the project and its concrete realisation shows how those who conceived it called upon aspects of Chinese history: the green-hued filaments covering the ponds at the western entrance, which could refer to the celadon green used especially in Chinese porcelain; the wooden footbridges recalling the classical gardens of the city of Suzhou; and the design of the system for absorbing water from the soil, inspired by clay roof tiles of old.

The choice of materials, their composition, their reaction(s) to light as well as their ability to be colonised by the vegetal element undoubtedly contribute to a sense of spatial comfort. This feeling is enhanced by the thought that has gone into lighting the space. The outdoor furniture and accessories used for lighting serve as a reference point during the day, and generally contribute to people being able to find their bearings and to the overall sense of space. Although a few streetlights were planned, the lighting is mainly from the ground at the foot of trees and along the vegetation, but also at the base of the benches. The lighting, mostly diffuse and indirect, creates a gentle atmosphere without glare or reflection and seems to have an impact on the kind of activities that take place there in the evening.

The GPP can at first sight give the impression of being of a very commercial public space. It is nonetheless quite original and innovative in terms of layout and design. Both multidimensional and intended for a pedestrian purpose, it offers great flexibility of use with a whole series of open spaces devoted to day-to-day activities as well as to more seasonal events. The GPP is the fruit of urban planning designed for people and communicates with the ground floors of otherwise imposing residential buildings. Yet this scale of conception has not excluded a relation upwards to the sky or a sense of distance that takes in the rest of the city.

8. A two-hour focus group on 30 August 2015, with four couples, two men, and a woman, who were all users of the GPP without living there.  
 9. Silvia Gugu, "Gubei Promenade," *Igloo*, 1 February 2012, <https://www.igloo.ro/gubei-promenade/> (accessed on 19 December 2016).



**Illustration 3** – Entrance to the GPP from Gubei Road.

© Brigitte Bertoncetto and Lély Tan, 2016



**Illustration 4** – Entrance to the GPP from Yi Li Road.

© Brigitte Bertoncetto and Lély Tan, 2016

### *The GPP: An exceptional space in Shanghai*

In his work *Cities for People*,<sup>(10)</sup> Jan Gehl makes the observation that for decades little importance was given to public space or to the movement of pedestrians in cities that were especially concerned with traffic flow. The development of the GPP facility, influenced by the action principles articulated by Jan Gehl, enables us to show how the transformation of a street, as part of an overall approach to urban renewal, can be accompanied by a return to the idea of a city as a meeting place for people who live there.

The GPP is very much the result of particular attention being paid to the human factor, to small areas but also to the development of public spaces giving priority to pedestrians and making it easier for people to walk and do sports to the benefit of their health. The ensuing reduction in traffic flows contributes to a reduction in the emission of pollutants and brings about a calming ambiance for people.

Providing attractive public spaces for pedestrians and a diverse range of urban functions injects a new dynamic into neighbourhood life. Consideration of the connections between residential buildings and external spaces, and between residential buildings and the city, is accompanied by an increased frequenting of public spaces, which is related to security issues. Making a space secure involves users making it their own. A social control seems to favour the peace and quiet of this space. Little regulation of public use has been envisaged in spite of the presence of water and the dangers that this can represent for children. The GPP appears as a public space characterised by a regulated cohabitation. All these elements contribute to producing an "animated, secure, sustainable and healthy city," "a city that is at once attractive, functional and pleasant," such as that imagined by Jan Gehl.

Referring to the other pedestrian spaces of Shanghai,<sup>(11)</sup> which are more often than not associated with commercial functions such as a mall<sup>(12)</sup> or tourist spaces listed in guidebooks, enables us to gauge the originality of the GPP marked by its residential function, which may appear as a new type of pedestrian space: a neighbourhood pedestrian space that remains open to the outside. What then becomes important to understand is how the GPP fits in with the rest of the *fabrique urbaine*, particularly the provision for the flow of motorised traffic. There has been a real effort to think about connections in the east by extending, on the other side of Yi Li Road, a developed public space leading to the entrance of a residence while also of-

fering a stop for pedestrians. As for the west, on the Gubei Road side, the GPP alternates between a buffer zone facing directly out onto the very busy boulevard and a form of transition that allows at its extremity, before the footpath running along the boulevard, a pedestrian thoroughfare that runs parallel to the flow of vehicles. Gubei Road enables a sharing of pathways facilitating the coexistence of different means of transport, with a cycle path running alongside the lanes for motorised vehicles. The shift towards a more rational sharing of public space among all modes of mobility thus seems to be working.<sup>(13)</sup>

Admittedly, the potential for reproducing such an amenity is still to be determined, not only on account of the costs involved but also given the production and investment context for a developer attentive to the needs of residents comprised of expatriates, namely the executives of foreign companies that have set up not far from this well-off neighbourhood.

Implementing this other approach to urban renewal more generally remains linked to the administrative and institutional mechanisms set up to manage the city. The district in Shanghai that has authority for urban planning and development enjoys some autonomy in this regard, and by deciding to link its projects to sustainability, it is laying the groundwork for a change of direction. The GPP can be a simple case of opportunistic urban development that contributes to an array of projects without any particular coherence,<sup>(14)</sup> or become a "demonstration project" (*shifan xiangmu* 示范项目)<sup>(15)</sup> of urban renewal, the next stage of which would be for it to be taken up by the Municipality.

10. Jan Gehl, *Cities for People*, Washington, Island Press, 2010.

11. We have observed and catalogued other types of pedestrian public spaces (Nanjing Dong Lu, the Bund, the embankments of West Bund, Lujiazui, Damuzhi, Cham Time Plaza, Ferguson Lane, Tianzifang, Xintiandi, Hongmei Lu, M-town, etc.). It is with regard to an analysis of them that we have been able to determine the specific nature of the GPP.

12. Piper Gaubatz, "New Public Space in Urban China. Fewer Walls, More Malls in Beijing, Shanghai and Xining," *China Perspectives*, No. 4, 2008, pp. 72-83.

13. Jian Zhuo, "Chongfangongxiang de jiedao" (A return to sharing street space), *Mizhangzhi* (Minax), No. 2, 2010, pp. 84-88.

14. Tingwei Zhang, *Striving to be a Global City From Below: The Restructuring of Shanghai's Urban Districts*, Shanghai, Shanghai Rising, 2009.

15. In Shanghai's 2040 City Plan and other related documents, reference is made to pilot projects and model projects.



**Illustration 5 & 6** – Amenities fostering inter-generational meetings: the central circular space as a children’s playground and the amphitheatre. © Brigitte Bertonecello and Lély Tan, 2016

### Cooperation and division of tasks: Some tried and tested methods

It is not the actual operation that sets the GPP project apart. It falls under a classical procedure of urban renovation involving public, private, and semi-public actors. After more than 20 years of urban development, the roles and functions of each of these actors are now well established. A closer examination of this partnership will enable us to understand not only how it functions but also especially to identify “the harbingers of innovation” within this setting.

### District authorities with a strong background in urban planning

Confronted with the huge backlog of renovation work needed after 40 years of under-funding of cities, Shanghai adopted in the 1990s a system and an organisation that enabled it to restore its infrastructure and bring residential buildings up to an acceptable standard. This system is based on the principle of “two tiers of government, three tiers of management” (*liangji zhengfu, sanji guanli* 两级政府，三级管理). “Two tiers” refers to the two administrative levels: the municipality and the city district. The latter has important powers in terms of city planning.<sup>(16)</sup> While the municipality sets out the overall policy direction, draws up the principle planning documents for the city – a kind of grand design – and determines the technical regulations and follow-up procedures for major works projects, the district authorities are responsible for the day-to-day management of their locality. Thus, even prior to the start of any works that would have a significant impact on the area, a whole series of administrative steps need to be taken.

In the case of the GPP, as it concerned the development of a thoroughfare, the approval of the Municipal Urban Planning Administration Bureau was not required.<sup>(17)</sup> Nonetheless, turning over to pedestrians a large section of the GPP that had previously been available for vehicles was an issue. Indeed, as in any city, the GPP is managed by the Detailed Development Control Plan. This urban planning document has a strong legal status, as it is binding on third parties. In order to avoid going through the revision procedure of the DCP, which is difficult and time-consuming, the District Planning Office had recourse to a whole raft of measures, including reclassifying the thoroughfare as a pedestrian pathway and authorising the setting up of small

“temporary” residential buildings without the right of land use.

The other difficult task was to coordinate with other services, in particular the Office of Urban Infrastructure and the Municipal Police. The pedestrianisation of the thoroughfare has an impact on the public road system of the district as it does on the underground network. This kind of transformation is not encouraged by these two services, and all the experience and skill of the District Planning Office was needed to bring about this coordination.

Lastly, it was a matter of informing and consulting the population on the project via the website of the district’s Urban Planning Office. Such public consultation is an obligation that is stipulated in the management procedures for development projects. The consultation dimension is more or less important relative to the importance of the project itself. Regarded as being at the level of “management” (*guanli* 管理) rather than “government” (*guan zhi* 管制) in the manner of a municipal rung or the urban district, the local neighbourhood office (*jiedao banshichu* 街道办事处) plays a role with respect to large-scale projects in order to seek out the views of the residents concerned.<sup>(18)</sup> Its role is real, even if it is not an administrative level as such. In spite of this, its operation is modelled on the other two. Thus, each *jiedao* is composed of several residents committees (*juweihui* 居委会). They are, as it were, the “transmission belt” between the inhabitants and the authorities. The other public actor involved in the GPP is the contractor, Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd.

### The contractor, a semi-public actor

Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd. is a type of structure that one often finds in urban developments in China. Laurent Théry made the following comment in a roundtable on Chinese cities:

16. Anthony Gar-on Yeh and Fulong Wu, “The Transformation of the Urban Planning System in China from a Centrally-planned to a Transitional Economy,” *Progress in Planning*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1999, pp. 167-252.
17. Interviews with Gouyi Shen, Deputy-Director of the SUPDRI/subsidiary of the Municipal Urban Planning Administration Bureau, Yu Zou, SUPDRI project manager, and Wenqin Xi, Director of the Department of Urban Design, SUPDRI, Shanghai, 8 September 2015.
18. We provide the following note on the administrative rungs operating within a large city in China: *shi* is “municipality,” *qu* is “urban district,” *jiedao banshichu* is “neighbourhood office,” *jumin weiyuanhui* is “residents committee.”



**Illustration 7** – One of the three follies.

© Brigitte Bertoncetto and Lély Tan, 2016

There is in China both the political will and the means to undertake very significant public works. However, it is the same people (...) who are responsible for doing this and its implementation, and whom the administration or the state authorises to become developers (...) This sort of collusion between public administration and a traditional and classic form of capitalist development is peculiar to China, but it is done under the control of, if not in close partnership with, the central state bureaucracies and the local authorities.<sup>(19)</sup>

When the neighbourhood of Gubei was opened up to urban development, the municipality and the urban district proposed this entity by bringing together some of the city's public companies. Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd. was handed responsibility for several real estate projects, in particular for the housing of the executives of foreign companies that had recently been set up in the district as it was at the time (around 1990). This real estate development was carried out in several stages. The company had several missions: first, it served as a land and property organisation by taking responsibility for the resettlement of expelled residents and rural workers present in this area at the time by reallocating plots of land to various developers. It also drew up the development plan for the district, programming, and implementing infrastructure work and amenities. But it also acted just like a developer by investing in residential buildings and apartments in its own right or by acquiring holdings in other real estate companies. As such, it takes charge of property management and marketing. In the case of the GPP, one of its subsidiaries takes care of site maintenance.

It has, however, little experience in up-market real estate, and combined with its limited financial basis for such projects, the company felt obliged to call in the foreign capital of more seasoned external real estate developers, particularly in Hong Kong. It is especially in the area of property management that public enterprises such as Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd. will increase their skill base thanks to the input of capital from Hong Kong.<sup>(20)</sup> If Hong Kong developers have a reputation for know-how in the luxury real estate market, it is due to the maturity and highly competitive nature of their domestic market. They therefore have long experience behind them. Thanks to these skills and to new financing arrangements, Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd. was able to totally finance the GPP.



**Illustration 8** – Street level shops.

© Brigitte Bertoncetto and Lély Tan, 2016

This "mixed structure" partly explains the speed with which real estate developments in Shanghai have been instituted and realised. Through their well-established connections dating back some time, dealings with the various rungs and services of the bureaucracy are greatly facilitated and administrative procedures streamlined. The closeness, even permeability, between these public companies and the authorities sometimes allows for the resolution of problems through, for example, changes being made to urban planning rules or land and property transactions.

In terms of urban development, nothing can occur without the participation of public bodies. They are the ones that organise and control the regulatory and administrative aspects of urban projects. But they also play an operational role through public companies that ensure their presence throughout the various stages of projects. Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd. is a body that tells us a lot about the way in which influences and innovations in trends and methods become factors in the Chinese market. It is a structure that combines the skills and know-how that public players lack. This is not an insignificant element in a rapidly expanding real estate market.

### ***The project manager, SWA, vector and bearer of another kind of urbanism***

The client and contractor, Shanghai Gubei Group Co. Ltd., called on the American agency SWA after three earlier disappointments with other firms. SWA, a world leader in environmental landscaping, has been active in the Chinese market since 2000, having won the contract for several important projects (in Beijing, Hangzhou, Shenzhen, etc.).

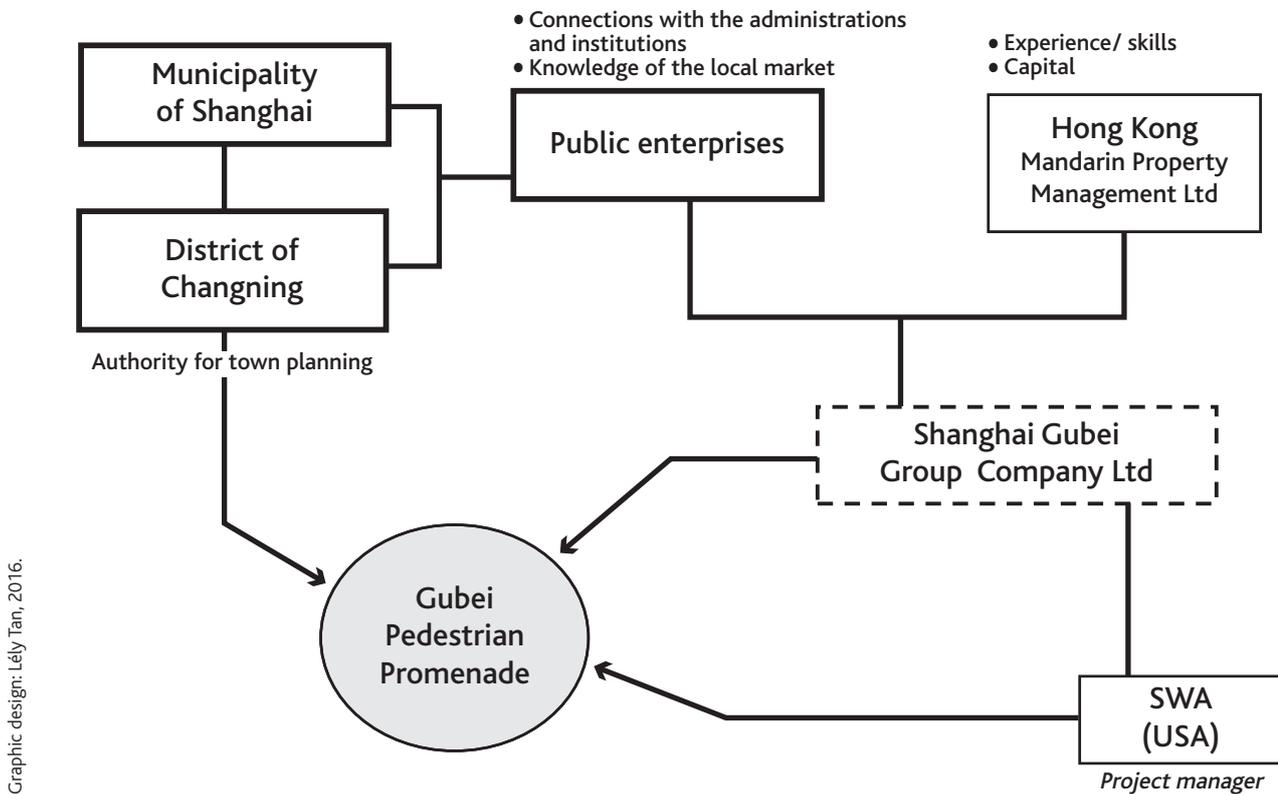
Clients have gotten into the habit of offering their most important projects to international agencies of standing.<sup>(21)</sup> On the one hand, this ensures that they are at the forefront of ideas, trends, and techniques in terms of design and construction, and furthermore that they will raise the profile of a project and improve its commercial quality. Lastly, the presence of an in-

19. French views of Chinese cities, Roundtable in the publication "Villes chinoises en mouvement" (Chinese cities on the move), *Urbanisme*, March-April 2005, No. 341, pp. 45-50.

20. Jun Wang and Stephen Siu Yu Lau, "Forming Foreign Enclaves in Shanghai: State Action in Globalization," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2008, pp. 103-118.

21. Fulong Wu, "Re-orientation of the City Plan: Strategic Planning and Design Competition in China," *Geoforum*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2007, pp. 379-392.

Diagramme 1 – Actors of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade



ternational agency enhances the client's ability to exert influence in negotiations with the public authorities.

In the case of the GPP, the agency first had to convince the client. The specifications included a whole programme featuring top-flight businesses, art galleries, a generous area in which people could relax, restaurants, and outdoor cafés. The other requirement was to respect the European style adopted at the time of the external refurbishment of the apartment blocks. But by 2005 this style was already passé in many places in China, and in particular in Shanghai. The conception of certain new urban spaces has accordingly had greater recourse to traditional Chinese materials and techniques, integrating environmental or ecological considerations. SWA was aware of these developments, and being made up of landscape specialists, architects, and urbanists, it tried to convince its client to abandon the “classical French garden” style. The outcome of a week-long workshop was that both parties reached an agreement on the idea of creating a contemporary space with a sense of discretion that harked back to the atmosphere of the old Shanghai quarters or to the gardens of the cultivated elite of Suzhou. The agency also managed to have its proposal of a “cultivar garden” accepted – that is, the idea of a garden of hybrid plants carefully selected for their properties.

SWA is more than a mere project manager or sub-contractor. The originality and singularity of the project derive from their vision and their proposal having a strong naturalist dimension. The GPP is a complete break with a certain form of urbanism, a “cosmetic urbanism,” that has been in vogue since the beginnings of China's urbanisation.

### Aligning the small and large *fabrique*

On a completely different scale and in another context entirely, the operation of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade can be seen as feeding into

thinking about these possible developments. Two research projects can help us examine the GPP through the lens of urban production. The first, undertaken by researchers involved in the transformation of a French city, refers to the concept of “*fabrique urbaine*.”<sup>(22)</sup> The second, by an American scholar, is a study of urbanism, its nature, and its relation to modernity.<sup>(23)</sup>

### Articulating the small and large “*fabrique urbaine*”

Researchers working on the programme launched by the *Plan Urbain Construction Architecture*<sup>(24)</sup> have looked into the articulation between a small and large *fabrique urbaine*,<sup>(25)</sup> both of which correspond to “particular urban transformations, that is structured, organised, publicised [...]. The small *fabrique* would be the ordinary one, with the large being the result of grand designs.” Accordingly, “the large *fabrique* is the one that their putative authors gladly talk about, including amongst themselves, between urban marketing and a good practice duly stamped.” Beginning with the identification of these two *fabriques*, the researcher's role would be to “show how much the large one owes the small one, and systematically.”<sup>(26)</sup> This analysis can

22. See the definition proposed by Hélène Noizet, “Fabrique urbaine,” in Jacques Lévyet Michel Lus-sault (eds.), *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés* (Dictionary of geography and space of societies), Paris, Éditions Belin, 2013, pp. 389-391; See also, by the same author, “Fabrique Urbaine: A New Concept in Urban History and Morphology,” *Urban Mythology*, 2009, Vol 13, No. 1, pp. 55-66.

23. Mary G. Padua, “New Cultures and Changing Urban Cultures,” in Maggie Roe and Ken Taylor (eds.), *New Cultural Landscapes*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2014, pp. 202-222.

24. The Project Observation Platform and Urban Strategies Program, PUCA/Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and National Development, <http://www.popsu.archi.fr/> (accessed on 20 December 2016).

25. “Introduction,” in Laurent Devisme (ed.), *Nantes. Petite et grande fabrique urbaine* (Nantes. Small and large fabrique urbaine), Marseille, Éditions Parenthèses, 2009.

26. *Ibid.*

be applied to the GPP and its relation to the urban production of a great metropolis, provided that there is a review of its contents. The operation of the GPP concerns only a small area, and in the first instance it can be understood as meeting the needs of a neighbourhood development open to all. But if we look more closely, we see that the references and the know-how underpinning the conception of this promenade find their sources in the West and tell us about another way of making a city. Although the GPP project has been particularly discussed in foreign online journals (Romanian architectural press;<sup>(27)</sup> websites such as *Architecture of Life*,<sup>(28)</sup> *Landscape Voice*,<sup>(29)</sup> etc.) emphasising its qualitative character and its balanced, human dimension, attentive to the surrounding environment, it has not been the subject of specific attention in the municipality of Shanghai itself.

This approach that focuses more on the human element (*yiren weiben* 以人为本) seems nonetheless to be one that seeks to contribute to the advent of a "new urbanism" (*xinxing chengzhenhua* 新型城镇化) such as that called for by Premier Li Keqiang in March 2013.<sup>(30)</sup> The publication in March 2014 by the central government of the "National New Urbanisation Plan 2014-2020" (*Guojia xinxing chengzhenhua guihua [2014-2020 nian]* 国家新型城镇化规划 [2014-2020] 年) confirms the new direction.<sup>(31)</sup>

Ten years after its creation, the GPP asks questions of those who conceived the City Plan for Shanghai, insofar as its founding principles already laid out the main lines of this planning document that were revisited in the course of its elaboration in 2015. The Master Plan 2040, designed to set the major direction of the urban strategy for the entire city of Shanghai, fully integrates quality of life objectives and calls for an improvement in the city's ability to deliver development mindful of ecological issues. It is presented as a document that would make of Shanghai "a liveable city with an ecological system, a harmonious society, and a smart transport system, with low carbon emissions, safe, and practical."<sup>(32)</sup> These objectives were applied during the conception phase of the GPP, which thus became a pioneer in the field.

The GPP, whose components and shape have been discussed above, is in a position to feed into the large *fabrique*. This is not a matter of indulging in the "copy and paste" exercise of the developer, as analysed by Jean-Paul Blais,<sup>(33)</sup> with a view to reproducing the initiative identically in other parts of Shanghai. At a time when some researchers and practitioners are raising the alarm about the return of the model either as an injunction or a fad,<sup>(34)</sup> the concern is not to advocate for the duplicability of this operation or to make it a model but rather to reflect on the approach itself and the principles underlying its conception. For it is very much the approach and the underlying principles that not only correspond to the goals of the new city plan but also allow for a different way of creating a city, with greater attention being paid to urban comfort, the people who live there, and their health, etc., that it would be worth spreading on a city-wide scale in the context of the development of other public spaces. The GPP could thus become a reference for Shanghai beyond the framework of the major national operations that are part of the new principles of sobriety, respect for social context, and improvement in the quality of the environment. Our speculation is that taking an interest in an approach and not in a finished object to be reproduced should allow greater respect for the identity of the areas under transformation.

### Chinese public spaces, from cosmetic urbanism to hybrid modernity

China's cities have carried out their physical metamorphosis in a little less than 20 years,<sup>(35)</sup> a situation that is very different from that of Western

cities, which took several centuries. This reinvention can be put down to three major changes, namely the economic reforms consisting of opening up the Chinese economy to the market, a local government with broader powers in terms of development and urbanism, and finally a clear influence from outside with regard to urban design. While no one questions the speed of these transformations, some people do wonder about the quality and the nature of these new urban landscapes. Kongjian Yu and Mary G. Padua, both researchers in architecture and landscape, have used the concept of "cosmetic cities" to characterise Chinese cities.<sup>(36)</sup>

The economic opening up of China has forced municipal authorities to elaborate a strategy or at least to implement policies with a view to attracting foreign capital. The local administration has generally opted for an embellishment of the city that consists of replicating the Western architectural elements that supposedly embody China's new modernity (skyline, business centres, malls, etc.). With the support and backing of their city and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), local officials went to major American and European cities. Once back from this "grand tour" that took in Las Vegas, Disneyland, Beverly Hills, Irvine, Washington DC, Paris, Versailles, and Rome, they asked their urbanism institute and their various offices and firms to construct plans by copying what they saw abroad. This internationally-inspired design has easily taken hold also by dint of the fact that a growing number of architects and designers have been trained in the United States and Europe.<sup>(37)</sup>

In Shanghai, this foreign influence in terms of architecture and urbanism is not new. In the wake of the so-called unequal treaties in the mid-nineteenth century, the French, American, and English legations set up their acquired concessions in the image of cities of their respective countries. Later, Soviet influences held sway: broad avenues, neo-classical architecture, a large public square, a circular road system,<sup>(38)</sup> all of which remained in place right up to the break with the USSR in 1961.

The 1990s, the first decade following the economic reforms, saw China's cities take on a frenzied consumption of Western trends involving, on the

27. Silvia Gugu, "Gubei Promenade," *art. cit.*
28. Begüm Tarakçı, "Gubei Pedestrian Promenade By SWA Group," *Architecture of Life*, 4 January 2012, <http://www.architectureoflife.net/en/gubei-pedestrian-promenade-by-swa-group/> (accessed on 19 December 2016).
29. "Gubei Gold Street," *Landscape Voice*, 3 March 2013, <http://landscapevoice.com/gubei-gold-street-%E9%BB%84%E9%87%91%E5%9F%8E%E9%81%93%E6%AD%A5%E8%A1%8C%E8%A1%97> (accessed on 19 December 2016).
30. At the 12th NPC (National People's Congress of the PRC) on 17 March 2013, China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang declared for the first time that this new urban planning had to have a human focus. "Li Keqiang: Xinchengzhenhua yi ren wei xin," *Xinhua*, 17 March 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013h/2013-03/17/c\\_115054227.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013h/2013-03/17/c_115054227.htm) (accessed on 20 December 2016).
31. State Council (Guowuyuan), "Guojia xinzhi chengzhenhua guihua (2014-2020 nian)" (National New Urbanisation Plan, 2014-2020), 16 March 2014, [http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2014/content\\_2644805.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2014/content_2644805.htm) (accessed on 20 December 2016).
32. Extracts from the panels of the Shanghai Museum of Urbanism – September 2015; author's own translation.
33. Jean-Paul Blais, "L'aménageur, roi du copier-coller? Réflexions d'un urbaniste à partir de ses derives professionnelles" (The developer, king of copy-paste? Reflections of a town planner from his professional derivatives), *Métropolitiques*, 26 November 2014, <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/L-amenageur-roi-du-copier-coller.html> (accessed 20 December 2016).
34. See the dossier coordinated by Claire Carriou and Olivier Ratouis, "Actualités des modèles urbanistiques" (News from urban planning), *Métropolitiques*, 18 June 2014, <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Actualite-des-modeles.html> (accessed on 20 December 2016).
35. John Friedmann, *China's Urban Transition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
36. Kongjian Yu and Mary G. Padua, "China's Cosmetic Cities: Urban Fever and Superficiality," *Landscape Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2007, pp. 255–272.
37. Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, Cambridge (MA), London, MIT Press, 2004.
38. Laurence J.C. Ma and Fulong Wu (eds.), "Restructuring the Chinese City," *Restructuring the Chinese City. Changing Society, Economy and Space*, London, New York, Routledge Curzon, 2005, p. 1.

one hand, the rejection of everything that could appear to be Chinese (and therefore “outmoded and retarded”), and on the other hand, the juxtaposition of architectural styles that clashed. Liberalising user rights offered municipalities the means to finance the modernisation of their city, mostly calling on Western architects in the process. In actual fact, these can do little more than sell their ideas, which are subsequently implemented by local firms. This separation between creation and construction explains why the finished product is different from the original plans. It is no doubt in this gap that we must look for the hybrid style of the urban landscapes of contemporary Chinese cities.

The other characteristics of these new urban settings are their incompatibility with their environment from both a functional and cultural point of view. All these elements have led Kongjian Yu and Mary G. Padua to develop the concept of cosmetic urbanism to show the vacuity and superficiality of these new urban arrangements.<sup>(39)</sup> It is probably in the treatment of public spaces that this type of urban conception is the most glaring. The names given to the major arteries, such as “Century Avenue” in Shanghai or “Olympic Avenue” in Beijing, are testimony to the ambitions of Chinese metropolises and to the size of their development harking back to a Communist legacy. It is about expressing the desire of the political leaders to show their power without concession to the environment and without worrying about the drawbacks of this kind of thoroughfare. Consequently, these broad urban corridors produce barriers and obstacles for pedestrians in the city, or present possible dangers stemming from their poor conception (lack of pedestrian passages, accident-prone intersections, etc.).<sup>(40)</sup> Their intensive lighting and the limited amount of space for trees or, conversely, the augmented space for them without thinking through how this can be managed,<sup>(41)</sup> are characteristic of cosmetic urbanism. Such examples illustrate the need to improve control of the processes and a certain inexperience on the part of service suppliers and clients alike.<sup>(42)</sup>

This stage-managed urbanism is especially visible in the new designation of green spaces for public use. These have mostly been enlarged, with many Western-style decorative elements that are frequently interpreted in a particular way and produced using various materials that are often costly. These new spaces are there to magnify local power, which underlies the works. The local inhabitants are seen as spectators rather than users of these public spaces.<sup>(43)</sup> The same fate befalls public parks. Here again there is a firm desire to show off these symbols of success of local politics. Native vegetation and plants are replaced by exotic varieties. These redesigned parks then become tourist attractions, but their very design cuts them off from their environment and causes a rupture in the urban and social fabric.

In opposition to this cosmetic urbanism, Mary G. Padua<sup>(44)</sup> proposes the concept of “hybrid modernity” providing a new frame of reference to understand the interaction of local and global dynamics and aspects of the identity of China as a nation. This writer takes up the approach of Arjun Appadurai,<sup>(45)</sup> who prefers to see in China’s development a singular trajectory that belongs to a particular civilisation rather than to analyse it in terms of an opposition between “developed country” and “developing country.” Thus the national narrative written by the political powers, in this case the CCP, finds expression in this hybrid modernity.

Public spaces that over the past decade or more have once again become the subject of study for Chinese researchers and practitioners<sup>(46)</sup> who defer in particular to Western, essentially American, references,<sup>(47)</sup> could serve as a laboratory. This interest in public spaces should be related to the consequences of rapid urbanisation, especially as they concern issues of mobil-

ity.<sup>(48)</sup> In a more sustainable city, where development reconsiders the scale of daily life, streets and other arteries for the movement of people are considered afresh. It then becomes a question of seeing how the new urban landscapes that result participate in the emergence of a different form of Chinese urban culture.

## Conclusion

Taking as a starting point the analysis of the particular features of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade, we have sought to understand if this operation was an epiphenomenon or whether it could be an advance in the *fabrique urbaine* imagined on a city-wide scale.

The GPP provides a concrete application of certain principles of sustainable development and shows the possible integration of the environmental question into the project from the moment of its conception, including an anticipation of management modalities. The reversibility of a development conceived by the project and linking thereby the issue of housing to external spaces and the immediate environment constitutes another strong aspect of the GPP that gives priority to actions aimed at producing a unified composition.<sup>(49)</sup> The creative designers have succeeded in making this automobile traffic artery a living space characterised by people meeting and engaging with each other on both a neighbourhood and city-wide scale.

Far from being an urbanism that is monumental and/or globalised/standardised, the treatment of this public space, conceived on a human scale in a densely populated neighbourhood with high-rise apartment blocks, has generated a new landscape whose components put residents first and speak about Chinese culture. The GPP then becomes a bearer of meaning and identity for those who use it, whatever their cultural background; it offers a sought-after urbanity in a city that has hitherto been built on functionalist principles that left scant space for the human dimension.

This really is a new form of habitation that is being created around this initiative, promoting, as Jean-Marc Besse suggests, “a silent conversation that is taking place right through our ordinary day-to-day lives with the place in which we live.”<sup>(50)</sup>

39. Kongjian Yu and Mary G. Padua, “China’s Cosmetic Cities: Urban Fever and Superficiality,” *art. cit.*

40. Hongbin Geng, “The Analysis of the Main Problems Came from the Urban Renewal of the Chinese Major Cities in the 1990s,” *City Planning Review*, Vol. 7, 1999, pp. 13–17.

41. The over-abundant foliage along the arteries of Beijing for the welcome of the Olympic Games brought about the clearing of many natural areas.

42. Kongjian Yu and Mary G. Padua, “China’s Cosmetic Cities: Urban Fever and Superficiality,” *art. cit.*

43. Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

44. Mary G. Padua, “New Cultures and Changing Urban Cultures,” *art. cit.*, pp. 202–222.

45. Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1990, pp. 295–310; Quoted in Mary G. Padua, “New Cultures and Changing Urban Cultures,” *art. cit.*

46. Zhen Yang and M. Xu, “Xifang shijiao de zhongguo chengshi gonggong kongjian yanjiu,” (Western research perspectives on the public spaces of Chinese cities), *Guoji chengshi guihua*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2008, pp. 35–40.

47. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Modern Town Planning*, London, Penguin Books, 1961 (6th edition in Chinese since 2005); Allan B. Jacobs, *Great Streets*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993 (Chinese translation 2009, currently 5th edition); Stephen Marshall, *Streets and Patterns: The Structure of Urban Geometry*, London, Spon Press, 2005 (Chinese translation 2011).

48. Jian Zhuo, “Urban Mobility, a New Vision for People-Oriented Urban Transport Development,” *Planners*, No. 7, 2014, pp. 5–12.

49. Serge Thibault, “Composition urbaine, projets et territoires” (Urban composition, projects and territories), in *Composition(s) urbaine(s)*, Proceedings of the CTHS Conference, Tours, 2012.

50. Jean-Marc Besse, *Habiter: Un monde à mon image* (Living: a world in my image), Paris, Flammarion, 2014.

In order to enable the re-imagining of this type of production put in place with an eye to sustainability, a set of conditions must first be satisfied. Beyond the required budget, it is vital to have the right actors, and in particular the ability of public officials to listen to other points of view and adopt new approaches. The permeability and the very closeness generated by semi-public entities such as the Shanghai Gubei Group Company Ltd. have undoubtedly facilitated the spread of a conception of urban planning that is more sensitive to the places and the users, even if the initial impetus for it came from a foreign agency.

In an article taking up the subject of "the harmonious urbanisation" that was promoted prior to the Shanghai World Fair in 2010, Nicolas Douay states:

*"Even though the traditional planning model is still largely present, strategic, collaborative and environmental influences help envisage the formulation of new practices for Chinese town planning."*<sup>51</sup>

An analysis of the Gubei Pedestrian Promenade can be seen in the context of the developments to which we have referred. While this project is on the scale of a city neighbourhood, it could also point to the future in terms of a new conception of urban planning, provided that the Municipality of Shanghai takes proper account of this other way of creating a city.

The next City Plan, which has been in the pipeline since 2015, will be a turning point in the city's development that has to move from an "expansive" model to one of urban renewal. As the spaces to be urbanised become increasingly scarce, urban development will consequently have to be based on a rational exploitation of what already exists. This is an opportunity to work on the scale of the plot and to practise a neighbourhood urban development that is part of an overall plan.

At the time of writing, we learned that the Municipal Urban Planning Office, in order to implement this new process of urban renewal and to get the district authorities involved, has selected 12 pilot projects across four categories: a neighbourhood that would be open and shared; a neighbourhood for innovation and creativity; a neighbourhood for culture and heritage; and networks of (gentle) modes of activity. The GPP figures among these projects for its exemplary nature in terms of gentle mobility. This is a pointer to urban planning that is more mindful of people and spaces in a way that we would like to think is not the sole reserve of the wealthiest neighbourhoods.

■ Translated by Peter Brown

■ Brigitte Bertoncetto is Professor and Director of the IUAR (Institut d'urbanisme et d'aménagement régional)/ Aix-Marseille Université. Laboratoire LIEU EA 889, 3 avenue R. Schuman - 13628 Aix-en-Provence (brigitte.bertoncello@univ-amu.fr).

■ Lély Tan is a doctoral research student, IUAR (Institut d'urbanisme et d'aménagement régional)/ Aix-Marseille Université. Laboratoire LIEU EA 889, 3 avenue R. Schuman - 13628 Aix-en-Provence (lelytan@yahoo.com).

■ Jian Zhuo, Co-author correspondent, is Professor and Deputy-Director, Department of Urban Planning, College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP). University of Tongji, Shanghai (jian.zhuo@tongji.edu.cn).

*Manuscript submitted on 21 June 2016. Accepted on 9 December 2016.*

51. Nicolas Douay, "Shanghai: Urban Planning Styles in Evolution. Emergence of a 'Harmonious Urbanisation'?", *China Perspectives*, No. 2008/4, p. 23.