THE NOBLE, THE TRADITIONAL AND THE COSMOPOLITE – READING BEIJING URBAN LANDSCAPE AND ITS GLOBAL MATERIALITIES

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Abstract

The noble, the traditional and the cosmopolite refer to some of the discourses and practices currently shaping Beijing urban landscapes. As the changing Chinese society is being 'spatialized' and materialized in a fast transforming urban landscape, changes in the built environment are often envisaged as the predictable outcome of economic reforms and globalization.

Yet, as Knox (1991) showed, urban transformations cannot be understood without taking into account a wide range of factors affecting the production and the consumption of built elements. Therefore, to make sense of Beijing new morphologies, we need to identify the relevant agencies and question how their actions are being materialized in particular urban forms.

Drawing on Knox's approach, this paper focuses on globalization as a way to account for the city's growing presence on the world scene and its inscription as a node by not only receiving, but also producing mobile flows of a different nature that shape the cityscapes.

We distinguish three different urban and architectural styles – the noble, the traditional and the cosmopolite – each of them embodying a particular way to conceive, practice and materialize the global link in the built environment. Specifically, we show how material and immaterial flows of images, professionals, discourses and consumers are being mobilized in different ways to produce residential spaces answering to Beijing's particular social and cultural context.

Introduction

"In parts of China, the structures of time are being recast by the rapid transition from socialism to a market economy and by the change of focus from production to consumption. In the practical shift from feeding the body to earning a living, different temporalities—old and new, socialist and capitalist, global and local—have collided [...] What is underway here is an immense project of spatializing time and arresting the future. Expressways, railways, bridges, airfields, elevators, assembly lines, infrastructure pipes, tunnels are rapidly being built or installed to speed up circulation of people and things." (Zhang 2000: 94-96).

In a very interesting paper addressing the issues of young Chinese women in this rapidly changing era, Zhang Zhen (2000) captures the complex and often conflicting link between the acceleration of time, characterizing contemporary Chinese society, and its spatial materialization in the city's restless urban landscape.

In Beijing, changes in the built environment have been particularly salient as the city follows its rapid path towards the Olympics and a new modern and global city status. For the urban flâneur, the city's constantly changing morphology offers an extremely wide variety of experiences. It encounters both the multiple times – imperial, socialist, post-socialist – shaping the urban structure and the multiple functionalities – consumption, leisure, business, residential – reflecting contemporary changes in the economical and political production of space.

The complexity of Beijing's urban built environment reminds us of what Amin and Graham (1997: 417) defined, in a very different context, as the "multiplex city." This idea refers to "the co-presence of multiple spaces, multiple times and multiple webs of relations, tying local sites, subjects and fragments into globalizing networks of economic, social and cultural change". Through their insightful description of what constitutes the 'contemporary urban', the authors point to the fact that the urban multiplicity of spaces is not only resulting from the different dynamics producing space, but also from their different insertion in the global space of flows.

While we may effectively observe the increasing diversity of the landscape in Chinese cities, we still need to make sense of these transformations on a different scale that would allow us to not only understand which are the agencies involved in the process, but also *how* the different agencies are producing different landscapes. Indeed, the process linking new temporalities and their spatial materialization is not straightforward but mediated and shaped by particular agencies and constraints that require further research.

The perspective adopted here explores urban landscapes from "the point of view of the city". To put in on a slightly different way, this suggests that rather than considering architecture as

an element giving the city its particular character, we consider that architecture and materiality are defined by the city. To understand these different points of view, we might think about them "in terms of a distinction between 'place' and 'space' (Abbas 1997: 442). Following Abbas' definition, 'place' refers to "definable physical characteristics and situatedness", while space is, by contrast, "a changing field of tensions and contradictions, where the physical is imbricated and competes with the social, political and cultural dimensions" (Abbas 1994: 442). As such, urban built environment can not be reduced to questions of art, technique and economics, but has to be considered as "mold and mirror" (Meinig in Knox 1991: 181) of the social, political and cultural values of its time (Ma 2002; Abbas 1997; Knox 1991). Studying new landscapes, in this perspective, seems to have much to say about the tensions and contradictions characterizing contemporary Beijing and, we may add, about the way the city positions itself and is positioned in the global space of flows.

In Western cities, transformations of urban landscapes have drawn considerable research attention. In his study on Washington D.C., Paul Knox (1991) interprets the restless urban landscape characterizing the city as an outcome of shifts in the production system and in the consumption patterns emerging in the context of a "broader, epochal change in the dynamics of contemporary capitalism" (1991: 181). He links this change to the transition of a fordist economy to a flexible regime of accumulation, and on a cultural and philosophical perspective, to the transition from modernism to postmodernism.

Knox emphasizes the need to take into consideration economic and cultural agencies to understand the emergence of new cityscape. Yet, what is also remarkable in his approach is his attention to consumption patterns and a detailed focus on what we may call the 'cultural organisation of production' – i.e. the educational background and the changing role of professionals working in the real estate industry. As he reveals, the emergence of a "new bourgeoisie" seeking distinction through consumption, leads to a strong demand of aesthetized and commodified built elements.

In China, a similar perspective has been adopted by Fulong Wu (1998) to account for the new urban landscapes in Guangzhou. In his paper, Wu goes beyond the general interpretation of urban landscape as a logical and predictable outcome of economic reforms and globalization. Questioning the agencies that are shaping the city's built environment, Wu chooses to focus on institutional factors and policies that have an important role, as he shows, in driving investments in particular locations and built forms. For example, he interprets the "landscapes of large peripherical residential communities" as the result of the recent shifts in the state-driven housing production, which is now being realized with semi-government real-estate companies and Hong Kong joint ventures to produce large,

comprehensive residential communities (Wu 1998: 279). Other landscapes identified by Wu such as the "development zones and subcentres", "new social areas", "new business districts" and others can be found in Beijing as well. As Wu concluded, however, we need further enquiring to identify the factors relevant and the different agencies that are shaping Chinese cities' landscapes (Wu 1998: 281).

Among those, globalization stands as an important factor. As Cartier (2002: 1518) pointed out, "forms of urbanism, as sets of institutions, practices and ideologies that constitute urban society and settlement, have broad reach in an era of globalization. What this means too is that urbanisms are locally and materially constituted, yet formed in the context of multiple and scaled globalising processes scales". Beijing is clearly engaged in a globalizing process, therefore studying its landscapes implies to consider both local and global scale, to encompass not only "local powers and imperatives, but also how they articulate with forces and flows emanating from the outside" (Yeoh and Chang 2001: 1026) and to take into account, as Olds suggests, that urban processes that can be found in cities are being increasingly influenced by agencies located in distant places (Olds 1997: 110).

Yet, simply talking about globalization as a comprehensive concept does not fully capture the multiplicity of ways through which this process contributes to transforming urban landscapes. We distinguish here two related processes: 'transnational urbanism' and 'worlding.' Both represent, in our view, a more appropriate way to grasp complexity. Moreover, using these concepts helps us to shed light on some of the elements that are actually 'shaping' globalization – namely the flows, the locations and the agencies.

The concept of transnational urbanism is based on two elements. First, it is constituted by the existence of what Appadurai (1996) described as different kind of material and immaterial flows of ideas, images, people, investments, circulating on a global scale. These flows contribute to shape the contemporary urban in the World, as they materialize in specific locations and help constitute what King calls – referring to Appadurai's concept of "scape" – "townscapes, builtscapes and landscapes, produced by the common adoption of ideas, techniques, standards, design ideologies and the worldwide diffusion of information, images, professional cultures and subcultures (of architecture, city planning, urban design and conservation), and supported by international capital flows" (King 2004: 32). All these flows and processes have an impact on the texture and the quality of urban landscapes but have not received enough attention yet (Smart and Smart 2003: 207).

The interest of talking about 'transnational' rather than 'global' urbanism has been well explained by Smith (2001). He points to the fact that using the term 'transnational' may be more appropriate to refer to processes that do not have the scale and the scope of global agencies such as transnational corporations, yet still actively contribute to the circulation of

flows. On a more general level, using the term 'transnational' allows us to have a broader, more flexible vision of the links and networks constituting the contemporary world. In addition it avoids the vision of phenomena as exclusively based on the local-global, inside-outside, culture-economy dichotomies. In particular, it considers globalization as a flexible, actor-driven process, as opposed to an inevitable and overwhelming phenomenon. As such, the idea of 'transnational' acknowledges the influence of the actors "who are not quite the other but also, are not entirely the same" (King 2004: 88). This is particularly important in China, where overseas Chinese have a particular importance in shaping urban processes but are yet not fully recognized as part of the globalization process.

On the other hand, the "worlding" process, as Cochrane and Passmore defined it (2001), looks at the globalization process from an 'insider' point of view that allows us to appreciate the active role of local agencies in inserting the city in global flows. In China this is particularly evident through "an increased contact with the international planning community and a strong interest in upgrading cities to perceived international standards" (Gaubatz 1998: 259). Yet the concept of worlding is also very useful to underscore the fact that globalization is not necessarily an imposed and inevitable process, but can also be thought as an intentional attempt to fit in the space of global flows. The idea of worlding, thus, may be apprehended as a dialectical relationship that "permits us to appreciate how different agencies [...] negotiate the world around them to insert the city into pre-existing ideas and realities, and in turn to influence them" (Cochrane and Passmore 2001: 351).

Even though the globalization concept often lacks accuracy, it is still very powerful, as it is a 'public' concept that is commonly used by a wide range of non-academic agencies. As such, globalization has a factual and symbolic value that we need to acknowledge. Notwithstanding the necessity to distinguish transnational and worlding processes, we will continue to talk about globalization in this paper.

Similarly, we are not fully adhering to the global-local distinction, but we consider the city as a "meeting ground of local and global forces" (Chang and Huang 2005: 270) where landscapes are shaped by the interaction of these different forces and their insertion in a particular context. In this paper, we intend to interpret the emergence of Beijing new urban landscapes as a "mold and mirror" of the city's inscription into the world and to show how global-local interaction occurs. Drawing on the richness of Knox's approach allows us to expand the limits of interpretation to encompass the different scales composing the built environment – function, shape/form and style – and to explore some of the ways different agencies are producing and consuming urban elements as well as contributing to the local-global interaction and its particular urban outcomes.

Some insights of Beijing urban landscape

In this paper, we have chosen to focus on what we might call the 'international residential and commercial spaces' that have appeared after the starting of the reforms in 1979 and have rapidly developed in recent years. These spaces, which are intended for an international clientele are very interesting for our analysis as their existence implies transnational agencies contributing to their production and consumption – real estate developers, investors, architects, customers – and more generally mobilize a wide range of global flows – human, financial, symbolic, cultural – that help us capture how the global is performed and perceived in a rapidly globalizing city like Beijing.

These spaces are defined by different characteristics. First, they can be distinguished by their institutional status, inherited from the socialist period. Until recently, real estate projects had to obtain a special permit to be sold or leased on the international market. Although this regulation was abolished in 2002, projects aiming to an international audience continue to be differentiated on the real estate market, as their price – generally higher than 10'000 yuan/sqm and often between 15'000 and 20'000 yuan – is much higher than the average, which is close to 6500 yuan (BMREO 2005). With the increasing presence of a foreign population, the number of housing unit has doubled from 22'000 in 2001 to 44'000 in 2005 (Chesterton Petty 2005).

A second element of distinction is the location of the projects. Mostly situated in the east part of the city, these spaces are closely located to the airport, the newly built CBD or the older embassy quarters, all of them being the hot spots of building activities in Beijing. The last element is related to the way the projects are commercialised. The important role played by real estate agencies in defining the international offer should not be overlooked, as they work as mediators driving the international costumers and investors to the projects they consider meet the international standards. In Beijing, there are several global agencies – such as FPD Savills, Jones Lang LaSalle – and a few local agencies that are operating on the international market. Naturally, the developers play an essential role in defining the clientele they are targeting, as evident in their marketing strategies.

This paper is based on an analysis of 31 residences (see table 1) that have mainly been built after the year 2000. This is not an exhaustive selection, but it is representative of the international oriented offer, as it was in 2005. The data considered for this paper draw on interviews conducted with real estate directors, architects, urban planners, but also on personal observations and mainly, on the analysis of the rich advertising material that is produced by the residences' marketing departments.

Project	Use	Year	Size	Loc.	Developer	Management	Architecture, landscape, interior design	Selling Price US$/sqm
Legend Garden	V	1992	389 units	SY	Beijing Garden Villa Development (nd)	Beijing Poly Property Hotel Management (nd)	Nd	990-1480
Dynasty Garden	V	2000	188 units	SY	New World China Land, Hong Kong New World Group (HK)	Kiu Lok Properties (HK)	Nd	1240-1550
Capital Paradise	V	1995-2001	1000 units	SY	Beijing Capital Properties Development (HK, PRC)	Beijing Gloria Properties Management (PRC)	Nd	1080-2040
Lane Bridge	V	2003-2006	150 units	SY	Beijing BeiChen Real Estate (PRC)	CB Richard Ellis	Design : Jiuyuan architect & design (PRC, HK)	1500-2000
Beijing RIviera	V	1996-2000	447v,64th, 124a	SY	Beijing Riviera Garden Property Development (SGP, HK, PRC)	FPD Savills	Design : Yang Design (PRC)	1450-1930
Eurovillage	V	1997-2005	90 units	SY	Beijing Euro Real Estate Development (PRC, Allemagne)	Beijing Euro Real Estate Management (nd)	Design : (D, PRC)	1420-1980
River Garden	V	1999	500 units	SY	River Garden Real Estate Development (nd)	River Garden Real Estate Management (nd)	Nd	1480-2230
Le Leman Lake	V	2000	608 units	SY	Beijing KangXinYuan Real Estate (nd)	Nd	Nd	1300-1670
Yosemite	V	2003-2006	200 (+ dans futur)	SY	LuNeng Real Estate (PRC)	PHG Management (nd)	Nd	1730-2290
Château Regalia	V	2003	300 units	SY	Hong Kong New World Group (HK)	Kiu Lok Properties (HK)	Design club : Robert Bilkey (USA)	2700
Grand Hills	V	2005	153 units	SY	Beijing JinLaiXin RE Development (nd)	GSN Prop. Man. (Suisse, PRC)	Nd	890000+ unit
Cathay View	V	2005-2006	320 units	SY	Bohwa & Thunis Real Estate (PRC)	FPD Savills	Design : Beijing Donghaifujing (PRC) Landscape: IPPR International (nd) Interior : Beixu (F)	2400-2800
Dragon Bay	V	2006	150 units	SY	Beijing Elite Real Estate Development (PRC)	Beijing Gloria Properties Management (PRC)	Design : R. Acton Senior (Canada)	325000-575000 (unit)
Forest Hills	V	2005-2008	155 units	Lido	Beijing Taihe Jiayuan Real Estate	Darwin C&A (PRC, Australia)	Design : Douglas Dahlin (USA), Yang Design (PRC) Landscape : St.Legere Int'l (HK) Interior : MKB (USA, CAN, PRC)	600000-1,1mio (unit)
East Lake	V/A/O	1989	36 + 212 units	2 RR	Capital Iron & Steel Corporation (PRC), East Asiatic Company (HK)	FPD Savills	Nd	2700+
Central Park	A	2004-2005	320000	CBD	Beijing Premium Real Estate (HK & PRC)	FPD Savills	Design : Wong & Tung Intl (HK), consultation de 6 architectes intl	1980-2230
Park Avenue	A	2004	253000	CP	Hines (USA)	Jones Lang LaSalle	Design : HOK (USA), CSCIC (PRC)	1870-2350
Palm Springs	A	2003-2004	300000	CP	Beijing Century Sun Real Estate Development (HK & PRC)	Hong Kong Metro Property Management (HK)	Design : Chen Shimin (PRC), Yakoben Architects Office, DP Architects (SGP), Beijing Victor Star (PRC) Landscape : Treescape Int'l (USA) Interior : Belt Collins Hong Kong (HK, USA). GIL Art Design Consultancy (J)	1920-2350

Project	Use	Year	Size	Loc.	Developer	Management	Architecture, landscape, interior design	Selling Price US$/sqm
China Central Place	MXD	2005	1mio	CBD	Guohua Property (PRC)	FPD Savills	Design : KPF (USA), Benoy (UK) Landscape : EDAW (USA)	1730-1980
Fortune Plaza	MXD	2005	728000	CBD	Beijing Hong Kong International development (HK)	Jones Lang LaSalle, Darwin Property Manag. (PRC, AUS)	Design : GMP (D), PB Asia (USA), ARUP (USA)	1980-2230
Windsor Avenue	A	2005	200000	CBD	Beijing YiHe Real Estate Development (PRC)	China World Property and Hotel Management (PRC)	Design : Liu Liangzhou (HK, UK) Interior : Danilo Beltrame (Italie, PRC)	2000
Cosmopolite	A	2007	212000	2ERR	Wong & Tung International (HK)	Jones Lang LaSalle	Design : Wong & Tung International, M.F Haverkamp, I.Wilms (D) Landscape : EDAW (USA)	2000
Global Trade Mansion	A	2004	176000	CBD	Beijing AoZhong Real Estate Development (PRC & Australia)	Joyful Property Management (PRC)	Design : Wang Zhen Mei (USA), Beijing Blueprint Construction Design (PRC) Landscape : TAM Region environment research institute (JAP)	1570-1930
Peking House	TH	2006	165000	CBD	Beijing Baihong RE Dev. (PRC, HK)	Shanghai Furui PM (PRC, HK)	Nd	Nd
Beijing Château	A	2006	70000	3RR	Beijing Shoulv Huayuan Property (PRC)	British Property Manag. (UK)	Design : GMP (D), Graft (USA), Bing Hu (PRC), BLD (USA)	3500
Phoenix	A	2005	250000	3 RR	CR Land (HK)	Jones Lang LaSalle	Nd	1200-1360
Jianwai Soho	A/O	2004-2005	700000	CBD	Hongshi Jianwai RE Dev. (PRC)	Scitech Int'l Prop. Manag. (HK)	(J)	1730-2230
Victoria's Garden	A	2006	50000	CP	Zhengxu Jingdian Property Development (PRC)	Ray White (Australie)	Design : Beats Smart and Denton Corker Marshall (Australie)	2000
Landgent International	A	2006	nd	CBD	Beijing Dayi Beifang Property (PRC)	Shenzhen Jindi Property Management (PRC)	Design : China Construction International Development (PRC) Landscape : EDAW (USA)	1500
Upper East Side	A/H	2005-2008	718000	Lido	Beijing Capital Land & Guangxi Super Shine (PRC)	Scitech International Property Management (HK), FPD Savills	Design : Gensler (USA), Obermeyer (D), Cox (Australia)	1500-2000
Château Glory	A	2005	180000	OV.	Beijing Glory Real Estate Development	Century Citadel Intl. Property Management (PRC)	Design : Wilson & Associates (USA) Interior : Arick Chan (CA), Kenneth Ko (SGP)	1800

A=Apartment; H=Hotel; MXD = mixed use development (residential, offices, shopping, hotels); O=Office; TH=Town House; V=Villa; Nd= non defined

Table 1: The Properties information list in 2005

Producers

On the production side, the presence of transnational actors on the Beijing real estate market has increased recently. As they carry their own practices, the Global Intelligence Corps (GIC) – the global elite professionals working on a global scale (Olds 1997) –have a tangible and intangible influence on the built environment and contribute to the world wide circulation of urban models (Olds 1997; Tasan-Kok 2007). Among those transnational actors, we find that real estate developers, in the projects considered, are mainly local developers. Hong Kong developers though, also play an important role as they constitute joint ventures with the major local players. In 2005 there were only two international companies not related to overseas Chinese: ING real estate and the American company Hines. As some interviewees suggested, the "grey situation" of Beijing real estate market and existing regulations discourage most of the international promoters to enter the market. However, in 2005 the government tried to improve the transparency and implemented several changes in the regulations to facilitate the internationalisation of the real estate sector.

International designers, being other type of transnational actors, play an increasingly important role in the production of the built environment. Not much involved in the residences built during the nineties, they have become almost inevitable, as they strongly contribute to the image-building of the projects. Following the trend established by Chinese municipalities collaborating with GIC and Starchitects to build their master plans, developers are now frequently working with foreign designers to guarantee an international image meeting the consumers' interest in aesthetics and design.

Among the GIC involved, there are global players such as the UK-founded ARUP or Gensler, an American company with more than 2000 collaborators world-wide. For such companies, working in Beijing is not only a matter of opportunity, but it also represents part of their globalizing strategy through the construction of a "global office networks to serve an increasingly complex market" (Knox and Taylor 2005: 23). Not all the companies are global players though. Most of them are small or medium companies that successfully managed to start working in China in addition to their home country activities. Others are constituted by foreign actors who opened their own office in China. For these companies, to build a strong reputation in China is essential to develop their activities. Arep for example, a French architectural company, has successfully managed to establish itself in China since 1999. Despite of their transportation-oriented architecture, which led them to build Beijing Xizhimen hub and the new marshalling yard in Shanghai, they also designed Tianjin financial center and the new Beijing historical museum. Local reputation seems to be sometimes even more important than the architectural quality. In turn, the majority of foreign architects that have been interviewed in this case study insist on the importance of gaining local knowledge

to be able to work in a satisfying way, as practices, formal and informal regulations, and the relationship between the designers and costumers vary considerably from their own cultural contexts. Foreign architects are also hardly used to the scales and speed of Chinese projects. They also complain that their role is often limited to a figurative one, as they only design the first sketches or secondary elements such as façades. This is part of the official regulation that compels foreign companies to jointly work with A-level local companies before getting approval. It is true that working with foreign designers is also part of the developer's strategy to improve their image and give an 'international touch' to their projects. As a journalist ironically noticed, this is like "placing a sheep's head in the window of a store that sells dog meat" (Hu 2001), as foreign designers, in reality, only have a very small role in the whole design. Although foreign designers might be very visible in the production of urban built elements, their role is strongly mediated by local practices.

A last foreign actor that we would like to mention here are the management companies. The companies operating in Beijing are in charge of the software aspects of the real estate, as they offer services to the residents and work as mediators between the requirements of the international clientele and the existing offer. As an interviewed real estate agent said, management is an extremely important criteria determining the quality of a residence. Developers, thus, frequently work with global companies like Jones Lang LaSalle, CR Ellis, to guarantee a high international standard. This phenomenon has far-reaching consequences, as it contributes to the global branding of residential spaces and establishes the criteria to be met in major world cities.

Residences styles

In the next section, we identify three different architectural styles – the noble, the traditional and the cosmopolite – that characterize the spaces put under examination. Focusing on architecture here is a pretext to highlight the different discourses and practices currently shaping Beijing urban landscapes. Each style reveals distinctive aspects of what might be considered as the globalization process.

Luxury and classical lifestyle

"The overall architectural design is contemporary, luxurious and glorious. Contemporary and classical spirits of luxury and glory are merged on the superstructure […] The design of the superstructure is inspired by the Gothic style of classical Europe." (Palm Springs, ad).

Figure 1: Palm Springs residence

This advertisement for Palm Springs residence offers an interesting insight on the elements that are being used by the promoters to build the image of their projects. The physical appearance of the buildings, inspired by classical western-style architecture, contributes to create a particular image of luxury and distinction. What is considered as 'classic', though, is a rather flexible category including ancient Greco-roman elements, gothic style and neo-classic references. This suggests that the accuracy of references is less important than the symbolic imaginary it offers. For example, when considering the advertising material that is being produced around such residences, the castle stands as a recurrent and successful image that is even used in the naming process as is the case for Chateau Regalia, or Chateau Glory. The castle is indeed a very rich element that allows advertisers to suggest a full range of values which can be physical – as a monumental building, the castle stands for distinction and visibility in the urban landscape – but also symbolic, recalling nobleness, richness and distinction. Another recurrent theme is the one of a-temporality, suggesting that the architectural style is enduring as is apparent in Beijing Chateau that compares itself to a famous castle in Germany: "the design of this exceptional building is orientated along the principles of classic architecture and the inherent aesthetics, thereby aiming to outlive short-term trends and endure into the future [...] and thus becomes an unmistakable landmark generating an identity" (Beijing chateau, ad.). As Dovey (1992: 178) notices, this is also a

subtle way to suggest to investors that the project is not going to lose its value in the future. Using the castle as an image to create a distinctive landmark reveals the contradictions characterizing the production of the built environment, where the market puts pressure on promoters to develop new and original projects that end up using the same, banal images. From an architectural point of view, classic references materialize in very diverse ways. This may be sometimes limited at small building details or, on the contrary, be expressed through an ostentatious post-modern style in the façade or in the interior design. Chateau Glory has, for example, a "breathtaking domed Caesars Hall lobby lounge glad in chiselled Italian marble", and is composed by "six crown-style 80-meters towers scattered in the shape of a hexagon". Other projects, such as Beijing Château, have a more simple style, where classicism is more symbolic than material and where architecture offers a "modern feeling" not better defined.

For the villas, references to classic and western imagery are physically much more evident. With a shape allowing easily originality, villa's style is clearly inspired from European and north-American models which range between "classic European and Mediterranean with a roman style portico" (Chateau Regalia), "tastefully designed in an American style" (River Garden), "classical and modern flavours" to "suburban American style villas designed for western convenience". Notwithstanding the diversity of references and with few exceptions, the residences look very similar. When we turn to the promotional discourses, the values that are being advertised refer, again, to the noble and rich imagery mentioned earlier.

Figure 2: Le Leman Lake villas

The link between the images and the values that are being used to attract costumers, and the way they materialize in the built environment is not straightforward, as the style barely matches what is being referred to. This link may be better understood as an attempt to build connections between the residence and a set of elements corresponding to the places it refers to. This is particularly evident in the residences' names, linking them to well-known places: Palm Springs, Le Leman Lake, Upper East Side, etc. Other projects, such as Windsor Avenue, establish a symbolic connection through the comparison with prestigious world cities: "The Fifth Avenue is the original place of New York; Champs Elysees is the original place of Paris; Ginza Street is the original place of Japan; the Windsor Avenue is the original place of CBD life" (ad). Thus, the process is not only concerned in reproducing the form of the connected place, but also in borrowing its spirit, which is meant to be transmitted through the equivalence created between the residences and the places they invoke. This mechanism is similar to the one constituting all kind of advertisements, that "work by transferring (or trying to transfer) visual and textual signifieds on to their product. Thus the signs in an ad's image and writing usually signify notions of taste, luxury, health, happiness and so on, and adverts attempt to shift the signifiers from the signs in the image and text to their own product" (Rose 2001 : 83). Hence, this profusion of classic images may be interpreted as an attempt by the developers to transfer the referred meanings on to their residence and to suggest that this meaning may be transferred to the consumer through the acquisition of the advertised residence.

As Knox (1991) pointed out in his studies, the sense of distinction conveyed by architecture is appealing to consumers – who were identified as the 'new bourgeoisie' – trying to distinguish them- selves through the consumption of aesthetized and commodified landscapes. In Beijing, we may identify some similarities with the emergence of a new middle class or what has been also referred to as the "white collars" (Huang 2000). This part of the population who has taken advantage of the economic reforms to increase its own status (Wu 2004) has a demand for distinction and for "a new lifestyle" (Wu 2004: 230). The response of the developers is the creation of the "mythical aura" consumers with whom new middle class are invited to identify with. This provides the material expression of their new status, as suggested in this ad: "Owning something rare, special and priceless makes you a person respected and glorious. A life cannot be copied. The longer you are in and enjoy Forest Hills, the more you will appreciate Forest Hills" (ad). Thus, the ads insist on the key role of housing in the constitution of a prestigious lifestyle. In this particular context, all the western images and references used by the developers provide material and immaterial support to convey richness, noblesse and elitism, values that consumers are looking for. While acknowledging this mechanism, we may still ask why the developers use those particular western, classical images to promote their projects. As Wu (2004: 232) convincingly argued, "the

conceptualization of the good life […] is lacking in the late-socialist era". As communist values are becoming obsolete in recent times, global images and styles "provide a new source of imagination to foster suppressed desires" (Wu 2004: 232).

What this interpretation understates, though, is the importance of another important global factor involved in the existence of such kind of spaces: transnational elites understood as highly-skilled professionals circulating on a global scale. The residential compounds we are taking into consideration are indeed targeting to an international audience as well. The way promoters appeal to this particular clientele is sometimes evident in the promotional discourse, which claims to offer "suburban American style villas designed for western convenience", or to recreate a western environment: "Yosemite creates an American living place of exceeding beauty", "A place where residents can truly feel is their home away from home". As this last sentence reveals, advertisers clearly call on the expatriate's need to build a familiar environment they feel comfortable in. These aspects include not only the architectural style and layout but also community amenities and proximity to other foreigners that in turn allow expatriates to preserve their home lifestyle and life quality. The way those particular needs materialize in the urban environment of a globalizing city like Beijing needs to be addressed through an analysis of the social and spatial practices of the expatriates.

As Beaverstock (2002) has shown in his study of the English expatriate community in Singapore, the re-constitution of social networks takes place both in the domestic sphere – where social activities are organized in residential enclaves and club houses – and in work and leisure related places like business associations, bars and sports clubs. Except for the work place, most of those places are disembedded from the local, since they are mostly frequented by other expats and there are very few interactions with locals (Beaverstock 2002: 534). Such "translocalities" (Beaverstock 2002: 536) used by expatriates to constitute and maintain transnational networks exist in other globalizing cities: "Within the Chinese cities studied, it is clear that there are physical and social spaces that are occupied by members of the transnational elite; while local Chinese may be present (for example as work colleagues or domestic staff), the spaces are clearly not 'Chinese' and social networks are not embedded within local social practices and norms." (Willis and Yeoh 2002: 558). Although expatriates act in spaces that are disembedded from the local, their practices do not take place in a global space either. In fact, we might interpret the 'local' both in its spatial sense signifying proximity but also in its 'emotional' sense, as Ley (2004: 155) argued: "locality should not be regarded as static and contained but as fluid and dispersed" which means that "emotional sites may be in geographically distant places, so that people live in a kind of polycentredness". The mobility of the transnational elites may be very high, yet their social geography is very localized and restricted to particular territories and translocalities: "As they are despatched internationally from city to city, the transnational capitalist class are

island hopping from one expatriate enclave to another" (Ley 2004 : 157). The spatial outcome of those practices is perceptible in the urban landscape through the reproduction of familiar forms, styles and images that allow expats to constitute 'local' emotional links with 'home'. This does not mean that those spaces are the perfect reproduction of the original version: as for social spaces, whose reproduction implies "a feeling of dislocation or displacement on the part of the participants" (Willis, Yeoh 2002: 558), the reproduction of residential spaces is mediated by the particular context where it takes place and a full range of actors and conditions that help to shape this process. As we will show with the next styles put under examination in this paper, the modernisation process characterizing Beijing has also a big influence on the way developers interpret and respond to these perceived needs.

Chinese-style villas

Chinese style villas represent an interesting example to illustrate how globalization is embedded in the *process* rather than in the *outcome*, and therefore can be considered as a local product. Since they first appeared 15 years ago on the real estate market, Beijing villas have been built according to perceived western characteristics. But in recent years, developers have been particularly keen in using traditional inspired architecture to build new residences. Cathay View is the project that perhaps best illustrates a new tendency concerning, at different degrees, an increasing number of recently built residences.

The originality of Cathay View lies in its concept featuring both traditional Chinese and Western characteristics: "Cathay View embarks on the cultural renaissance of Chinese traditional architecture and combines it with a Western interior design optimizing the spatial and structural layout. The concept blends the traditional with the contemporary, allows the East to mingle with the West" (Cathay View, ad). According to the developer, "the true challenge is not constructing one like an ancient building, but combining local demand, ancient spirit of culture and modern technology" (China Business Weekly 2005). The villas architectural style consequently reproduces the shape of a siheyuan, the local traditional courtyard house, which is advertised as the quintessence of Beijing's ancient urban planning. The layout of the residence follows fengshui traditions and its landscape is modelled according to these principles. The master plan, however, reproduces the usual features characterizing such kind of gated community: highly controlled access, leisure amenities and shopping spaces. In 2005, Cathay View was one of the most expensive residences on the market, with a price over 2500$/sqm (Jones Lang LaSalle 2005).
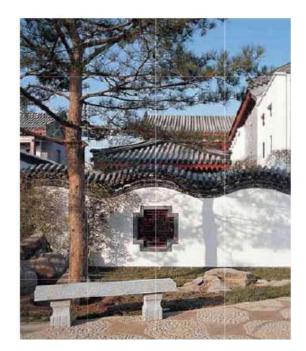
Figure 3: Cathay View (Cathay View website)

In the promotional discourse, tradition is represented as an evidence of the costumer's good taste. As suggested by Lu Da Long, the development's director: "All of the products in the local market have been copying the architectural layout of Western houses. We believe that architectural products should meet the culture and climate of the local market. A lot of people will buy Western-style homes as a symbol of their status. But the buyers of our properties are wealthy, and they also have culture. That's the difference" (Macintosh 2005). Invoking tradition appears as a way to convey a sense of historicity, identity and a-temporality able to satisfy expatriate's desire of exotism, overseas Chinese search of an idealised tradition and a growing part of Chinese consumers that consider western developments as *yongsu* – literally revealing bad taste. This 'traditional turn' seems to be no more than another strategy used by developers to capture niche market in a highly competitive environment. Nevertheless, to fully appreciate what the existence of such a residential project drawing on traditional concepts means in a context like Beijing, we first have to address two particular issues. First, what is the 'local' character we are talking about? Which local elements are effectively being used in the production of new projects, and what are the values that are being attached to? Second, how can we link the construction of such a project with the gentrification process occurring in Beijing's historical areas?

Residences embarking on a reproduction of traditional shapes are still very few, but a growing number of compounds have integrated various 'local' concepts – which usually refer to an undetermined 'Asian flavour' – in their general design. Those local characteristics are usually limited to secondary aspects such as the garden layout or the inner design, but may also refer to a 'local feeling' that must be created: "No matter to the application of the hard

material or to the soft material, every person, who getting here, can feel sharply this is in Peking instead of in New York, […] Different from a lot of cities, the people in Peking are more peaceful, more composed, and not open. The buildings of Peking are cordial too. This requires that scenery can not be simple confused blatancy and provoking to vision, but should possess cordial quality" (China Central Place, ad)

Adopting a different point of view, Dragon Bay project exemplifies a recent trend that consists in offering a contemporary architecture that integrates traditional concepts. On the contrary of nationalist architecture – that seeks to reproduce traditional shapes in a modern way – contemporary architecture seeks the immaterial characteristics and the spirit of the tradition and tries to integrate them in a contemporary design signifying its Chinese identity. Dragon Bay creates references to tradition in different ways: in the location, based on geomancy principles; in the green layout, reproducing traditional Chinese garden characteristics; and in the villas design, offering a contemporary shape that integrates the courtyard concept. "Triple approach and strides which traditional residence can only realize are integrated into a modern villa; Dragon Bay is a creation integrated with Chinese traditional courtyard spirit...On the design of Dragon Bay Villa, Russel [the Canadian architect] has made the greatest efforts to create the real exquisite and deluxe modern villas with Chinese appeals […] Dragon Bay Villa contribute to the new generation of classic villa integrated with features of Chinese and western world." (Dragon Bay, ad.)

Although the historical reference is local, the discourse that is being produced around such residences still conveys such 'noble' and 'rich' values we mentioned before. While the project is designed by a foreign architect for an international clientele, we should not overlook such architectural production, as it reflects the current debates that are being held in the Chinese architectural milieu which seeks a modern Chinese identity. The question here is the one expressed in this ad: "Here we perfectly integrate Chinese courtyard spirit of more 3000 years with detail quality of rich and noble residence. To absorb tradition completely or artistically, shall we to be hostile to imports or take over selectively?" (Dragon Bay, ad). This is a very interesting issue that should be further discussed; however, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 4: Dragon Bay (Dragon Bay website)

A second point that we would like to mention here is the relation between the use of traditional concepts and the premises of gentrification processes happening in Beijing. The emergence of Cathay View also has to be related with an increasing interest of the investors for the traditional courtyard houses situated in Beijing's historical areas. In May 2004, the Municipal government allowed companies, governmental organisations and private investors to buy, sell and rent the siheyuan. The new regulations, that facilitate transactions, have opened the market for the first time to foreign buyers (Zhang 2006). Since then, the courtyard houses have become a very profitable investment that has seen its value increase by 10 to 20% every year (Areddy 2005; China Business Weekly 2005) and now have reached very high selling prices that ranged between 3100 and 4500$/sqm in 2005. With only 3000 houses left in the whole city, traditional siheyuan have become a symbol of exclusivity for the local and foreign elites. Therefore, Cathay View must also be interpreted as a response to this increasing interest for history and tradition, offering a more accessible, modern and secure experience to the costumers: "An authentic cultural experience: truly Chinese courtyard living experience while offering safety, security and convenience of a sub-urban villa property" (Cathay View, ad).

What does the building of traditional houses tell us about the general production of the built environment in Beijing? The fierce competition on the high-end residential market stimulates the promoters to create distinctive projects. As Knox (1991) showed, this is part of the postmodern process, where traditional, exotic or global references provide a pool of images and models able to capture de niche market. Notwithstanding this process, using traditional images has to be noticed as it would have been unimaginable until recently to convey distinction with local values. Articles published in House Focus (2005) – a website dedicated to real estate issues – show a general scepticism toward projects such as Cathay View as

they do appreciate the respect that the designers show for traditional principles, yet they consider that the project has good chances to fail because of a clientele that is not accustomed to such kind of aesthetics. In reality, we might consider that the developers have not taken such a big risk, as they draw both on a clientele appreciating exotism and identity, but also on a recent re-evaluation of the local historical heritage as shown by the increasing success met by the siheyuan. As Cathay View developers argue, it also the way heritage is considered that has recently changed: "as China's economy continues to grow rapidly, an increasing number of Chinese feel proud to be Chinese, and they want to keep their roots and have traditional dwellings" (China Business Weekly 2005). This view seems to be shared among the architects and urban planners who have been interviewed. As one urban planner suggested, there is an increasing confidence in the own local history and heritage which may be materialized in housing, but also in the preservation of historical quarters.

What we see, here again, is the intertwining of different logics resulting both from local trajectory and globalization process, which has direct but also indirect effects on the built environment; for example, through tourism and gentrification. This process is important to acknowledge, as it gives us another tool to understand how globalization is performed in urban landscapes.

Cosmopolite and Design

In 2004, Jianwai Soho appeared on Beijing's real estate market as a small revolution. The project, which advertises itself as a 'breach' in urban landscape, owes its success mainly because of its new design concept and the trendy figure of its developers.

Located in Guomao, close to the CBD, Jianwai SOHO comprises 20 towers and 700'000sqm; the project stands as original because of its multifunctionality – which not only includes the small office/home office concept, but also mixes residential, office and commercial activities – and because it offers open and accessible spaces rather than being built around a central garden and enclosed in the gated community model, which characterizes most of the other Beijing projects.

This is a 'city into the city' model characterizing an increasing number of projects that have been built during the years following the realization of the CBD. Projects like Fortune Plaza or China Central Place, with a volume approximating one million sqm, match what Knox (1991: 186) defined as "mixed use developments", comprising residential and office spaces, but also international high standard hotels and leisure and shopping facilities. Such important projects, that advertise themselves as lifestyle choices, are also the result of an increasing interest raised by international investors looking for high quality spaces to expand fast developing activities such as luxury brands shops (CB Richard Ellis 2006).

Figure 5: Jianwai SOHO

The success of Jianwai SOHO also relies on its original design and architecture: "an avant-garde design, a design free of the norm, a design conducive to investment" (ad) which seems to be a key point in the construction of its symbolic image. Indeed, all 'city into the city' projects aim at becoming new urban landmarks. The architectural style is not only more modern and fashionable but also simpler: The style is "smooth and plane, and harmonize with CCTV headquarters. Glass curtain wall has reflected concise and rational characters of modern commercial high buildings in connection to building image, building material and building technology, and become first choice for super high buildings" (Fortune Plaza ad) or "concise, clear, modern and stylish" (Cosmopolite, ad). We are facing here a semantic change, where values such as luxury and classicism are being replaced by fashion and design, and where architectural style is following a modern rather than post-modern path: *"Time has come for technical aesthetics to challenge traditional aesthetics. Rationality can be defined as a force that controls our actions, a desirable trend, or a lively state of mind"* (Vanguard, ad). In this context, to involve a foreign architect in the project seems essential to guarantee an international, high end and trendy image to the project. Indeed, the developers of Jianwai SOHO worked with a Japanese architect; and China Central Place worked with the American KPF, a world well-known company that designed the World Trade Centre in Shanghai. The multiplication of such "signature projects" (Dovey, 1999: 159) is certainly also

related to the recent tendency of Beijing municipal authorities to rely on starchitects to design the city's new symbols such as Beijing's national theatre or CCTV.

Figure 6: "Together, we are the Nation's economy" From left:: China World Center, Kerry Center, Fortune Plaza, Jingguang Center, at 300m and 1km distance (Fortune Plaza website)

The emergence of new urban landmarks in the real estate market reveals new perceptions of globalization. On the one hand, it shows the necessity to adopt the 'global architecture language' to define its belonging to the exclusive 'global cities club'. On the other hand, the promotional discourses do not refer exclusively to the "dominant urban centers of the capitalist economic and cultural ecumene" (King and Kusno 2000: 44), but also refer to Beijing's own landmarks, suggesting that the city already offers enough symbols of modernity and globality. This self-referencing process is particularly evident in a project such as Jianwai SOHO, which shows through its style and the discourse that is being produced around it, that Beijing is not simply *following* the trend but has become a *producer* of style; that it is not about importing and reproducing the world anymore, but simply about being part of it. This change is very important and should not be overlooked, as it is the result of intensive modernisation processes occurring in the city.

The 'identity discourse' offered to customers changes as well, substituting the noble imagery with a fashionable imagery. The developers are calling to an international and local clientele that distinguishes itself through fashionable consumption: "top talents who have strong consumption abilities, and belong to guider and creator of fashion consumption", "white collar workers who are chaser of fashion, and have strong consumption ability and enthusiasm; especially top-grade white-collar females, the businessmen are fascinated in their consumption ways and strengths" (Fortune Plaza, ad*)*. This is the "young crowd of internationalization" (Landgent International, ad), a young, cosmopolite and ideally mobile clientele, who likes to spend time at trendy places and buy famous and expensive brands, whose sales has been increasing very fast in the whole country (Windle 2005). Again, Jianwai SOHO developers managed to perfectly capture the *zeitgeist* and offer a new concept to young urban, independent, yet well-off professionals. As shown on the residence's website, the various interior design choices represent an art gallery, a dj's home, a lawyers' home and other such 'liberal' and creative professions. The residence is part of the international real

estate market, yet according to a real estate professional, local residents account for more than 75% of all dwellers. What this shows too are the shifts in both income and consumption style characterizing Chinese society, and its increasing integration in the world. The status gained by consumption styles as a distinction strategy is materialized through signed architecture but also through an increased involvement of international designers in the production process. As the big success encountered by Ikea suggests, design has recently become very popular reflecting the consumers' increasing interest in aspects that had been evacuated by the socialism uniformity (Davis 2000; Fraser 2000). Furthermore residences have an active role in encouraging this trend and often publish their own lifestyle magazine. As a new style that recently appeared on the market, the cosmopolitan style suggests the emergence of a new configuration of globalisation in Beijing implying both a new vision of globalization's content and the way it is put into practice. The appearance of this style – which is adding but not replacing the other styles we mentioned earlier in this paper – may be interpreted as a response to transnational elites for whom the cosmopolitan evokes the reproduction of familiar elements: "What it comes closest to is a conception of cosmopolitanism in terms of attitudes, tastes, on the one hand, and a competence for travels and the navigation in 'foreign waters', on the other. These places are, in their promoters' discourse, 'oases': they propose an 'international' (read 'Western with an exotic flavour') milieu to expatriates and are conceived as havens or 'transitional objects' for temporary dwellers in this foreign country." (Söderström 2006: 556). Although the issue of familiarity has been mentioned earlier in the analysis of the 'noble style', we refer here to a less 'local' familiarity: the cosmopolite aura surrounding the residences, replaces the copy/paste type of taste with a global image that is not (de)-localized anymore, but universal. What this means too is that this image may not only be reproduced but also created and appropriated.

If we adopt a local clientele perspective, the cosmopolitan imagery is meant to evoke an ideal version of globalization that offers local elites an "imagined cosmopolitanism" (Schein 1999: 345) where they can consume the world through the products, the images and the mobility. Cosmopolitan spaces give the opportunity to "transgress the constraints of locality and nation" (Schein 1999: 345) and to synchronize with a particular world, the 'world of global cities', and to define its own identity as part of such world community.

Conclusion

To conclude this concise exploration of Beijing new urban landscapes, we wish to recapitulate a few significant points. In this paper, we have chosen to adopt two main perspectives to approach the changes in the built environment. First, we consider that these changes cannot be understood without taking into account the broader economic, political, social and cultural environment. Apart from the necessity to identify the relevant factors implicated in the production and consumption of built elements, we also need to question the link between the agencies' actions and the way they materialize in the city's urban landscape, considering this is not a straightforward and unmediated relationship.

Secondly, we have put a strong emphasis on globalization as an important factor shaping the city's materialities. This is not to say that globalization is an overwhelming factor. Rather, we consider globalization as a set of complex processes describing the city's inscription as a node receiving, but also producing mobile flows of different natures. As buildings are "mold and mirror" of society, we can similarly state that built environment is not only reflecting globalization, but also actively contributing to its constitution. Consequently, the issue was to appreciate the connotation of a city that is increasingly opened to the World, voluntarily or not, and the material changes this new situation implies.

What emerges from our analysis is that the existence of various architectural styles, the noble, the traditional and the cosmopolite, do not simply involve a 'physical' distinction between the residences. Each of these styles, in reality, epitomises a particular way to conceive, practice and materialise globalisation. Although these are not fixed categories or mutually exclusive styles, each of them can help us to highlight particular aspects of this process.

In the noble style, globalisation is essentially conceived as and constituted by images. Importing and reproducing (life)styles, mainly inspired from a Western repertoire, is considered as a way to respond both to a new consumer class and an international clientele used to upscale living standards. As it is practiced, though, this style essentially engages local developers and Hong Kong joint-ventures, but not international real estate managers or designers.

On the contrary, the cosmopolitan style goes beyond the Western imagery and refers to the 'world of global cities', to which Beijing claims its membership. Globalisation is not simply envisaged as a set of images, but also performed through a wider range of professionals that are increasingly involved in the production process. This suggests that different material and immaterial flows have different fluidities. While images might be circulating easily, people

and professionals still need to manage local constraints, as the absence of major international real estate developers illustrates.

Although the different styles we identified here are overlapping in Beijing's urban landscape and are all still being produced, we might nevertheless consider that the appearance of the cosmopolite style is strongly embedded in the deeper changes recently experienced in Beijing. Through this style, we can observe the influence of the modernisation process characterising the city, as well as the frequent practice of authorities to work with global professionals to design the new landmarks and master plans. Therefore, globalisation is not delocalized, but shaped by the context where it takes place. This is particularly evident in the traditional style, which constitutes a indirect material answer to both the need to create local differences for international customers and tourists and to broaden reflexive process concerned with identity and heritage.

Studying Beijing's new urban landscapes suggests the need to reformulate globalisation as a non homogeneous process which is performed in material and immaterial ways, and whose urban outcomes might be more or less visible. In this paper, we have focused on Beijing's international spaces, mainly because those are the landscapes where globalization is 'mostly performed' – implying the widest range of agencies – but also because they contribute to define the global image of the city. Accordingly, what we have highlighted are only some of the processes characterizing Beijing. To get a deeper picture of the urban transformations, this study should be extended to the whole city. Like Wu (1998) did for Guangzhou, we still need to identify and describe the new landscapes constituting Beijing and analyse the various ways these spaces are constituted by and connected with processes. Studying a fast changing city like Beijing may help to shed light on the ways cities are increasingly shaped as part of the world and, in turn, how the world is increasingly becoming urbanised.

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