Introduction:
Before 1840, most of the public activities of Shanghai occurred in the alleyways. The inhabitants got on with their daily lives, the million trivial tasks that constitute a rich street life. During the period of the establishment of foreign settlements, various forms of public open space emerged in the city such as gardens, parks and recreation grounds as a result of initiatives by the foreign administrations. The importation of the Western concept of public parks not only left an imprint on the urban design of Shanghai, but also imported a modern way of life. In Shanghai, most of these parks are successful and important locus of urban lives. Although the parks have changed the spatial configuration in Shanghai history, they are already part of the historical continuity in a larger chronological scale.

The Shanghai Old Chinese Town in this paper is the traditional walled area in the city center. In 1553 during the Ming Dynasty, Shanghai built a city wall to defend itself against Japanese pirates. Although the wall has been destroyed at 1820s, the territory is still clear in nowadays urban. At present, the effects of globalization have permeated every aspect of Shanghai, including urban design. However, the local culture and the inhabitants’ life have not been considered during the urban design process of Shanghai. Some of Shanghai’s new public places are simply ‘left-over’ spaces, not designed for use, especially the places in front of the skyscraper. How can we deal with the differences between Western and Chinese concepts of public space? How can we estimate historical transformations that public space is undergoing?

A plenty of research has been done on the subject of Shanghai’s public space. Domestic researchers focus on two main aspects: one is on the macro-dimension, studying the general design policy in urban planning process; another one is on the landscape design of the public space. Foreign researchers are interested in the underlying social, cultural and political factors which affect the design and the use of public space in Shanghai. However, little research pays attention on the relationship between the public space and the urban configuration.

This paper proposes a spatial analysis of urban public space in Shanghai through history to present. Started with the introduction of Shanghai urban development, this paper intends to show the role of public space in the city transformation process. It also tries to study the Western concept and its reception locally. Finally, by analyzing the form of the public space, the study derives qualitative characteristics to assess contemporary public places. The historical materials which are composed of historical photographs, detailed maps of public space design and city maps are collected. Through literature review and mapping analysis, the spatial distribution, the use and the form of public space in Shanghai Old Town is analyzed.
In the first section of this paper, I try to outline the traditional context and pattern of Chinese public space. The second section analyses the public space during the colonial period - the first “east meets west” time of Shanghai, from 1840 to 1949. The third section is devoted to the public space from 1949 to 1978. The fourth section is focused on the most dramatically urban development period - the second “east meets west” time, from 1978 to present. In the conclusion, through the comparison and classification of the public space at various historical times, this paper rationally defines qualitative characteristics of public space which could achieve the balance between local environment and global standard.

**Historic Period ( -1840):**
Chang’an, the capital of China at Tang dynasty, was a city of wall. The checkerboard layout of Chang’an was formed by fourteen latitudinal (E-W) and eleven longitudinal streets (N-S) dividing the city into an axially symmetrical plan of more than a hundred wards, large and small. All the wards were surrounded by thick earthen walls, subdivided into quarters by two crisscrossing roads about five to six meters wide, and further organized into sixteen sectors by a set of intersection alleys. The population of Chang’an lived in walled wards which were closed off at night. Unless a permit was issued by the county officials or the ward headman’s office as in the case of an emergency, illness or marriage, no one was allowed out in the avenues at night. Within the wards, however, people were allowed to move around freely. Depending on the size of the post, five or thirty guards might be stationed. Little activities went on within the wards in the evening. A poem written by Quan Deyu has a line that says “A thousand doors were quiet when the ward gates were opened and closed.”\(^1\) (Figure: cities of **P18,Chang’an)

The commercial activities were assembled at two markets, East Market and West Market. Although they were known as markets, they were by no means as monofunctional as present-day markets. Instead, the East and West Markets were really the “downtowns” of Tang Chang’an. The markets were also the entertainment centers of city offering an entire range of amusements.

When strict regulations against the proliferation of trade broke down during the late Tang period, small-scale commercial activities appeared within the wards. Commercial activities were no longer confined to well demarcate markets. Walled boundaries, critical to the ward system, lost their significance since the bustling market street became a connector. Sops and houses, instead of walls, were strung together along the street or canal front. (Figure: cities of **, P81)

The breakdown of the residential wards and their walls and the proliferation of multi-functional streets turned the Kaifeng, the capital of Song dynasty at the beginning of the twelfth century, into an “open city”. Three major commercial streets together with four imperial avenues constituted the primary structure to which the other secondary and tertiary streets and alleys attached to form a closely knit road network in the city. Kaifeng reduced the physical width of the streets, making them even more congested. The new

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urban center was crisscrossed by streets lined with establishments of all kinds including shops, taverns, ateliers, entertainment facilities, religious institutions, government edifices, and residences. Free to move, shops and entertainment facilities congregated at bridges and important intersections of major land and water routes.²

Shanghai was built on delta land formed in ancient days by the silt from the Yangtze River. Just when the city was first founded it is impossible to say, but it is mentioned in history 2,150 years ago. Judging from its old name "Hu," it probably first came into importance as a fishing town. Owing to its excellent anchorage, it was destined to become a commercial port, and in A.D. 1280 it was re-named Shanghai, meaning "above the sea," or "Upper Sea." Shanghai, from the historical point of view, is insignificant compared with other large Chinese cities.

**Colonial period (1840-1949):**
Shanghai has been occupied and forced to open since 1840. The city is extended to the outside of the Old Town along the Yangze River. The old city wall was destroyed at 1820s for commercial convenience; however, the territory still existed. The center has transformed to the settlement has moved to the outside.

The canals inside the Old Town have been demolished to built the motor way (Figure, txu-oclc-6567312-1).

Before 1949 various forms of public open space emerged in the city such as gardens, parks and recreation grounds. The theory and practice of organized public space has been imported to China’s urban design at the first time. Although most of these new public spaces were built at colonial settlements, the new public life style has been introduced to native people. The large number of visitors clearly indicated an appreciation of and desire for additional recreation and breathing space on the part of the public.

**Maoist period (1949-1978):**
The socialist command structure and planned economy of the Maoist era created a context for urban development which was notably distinct from its market-driven counterpart in the West. Although much of this has since been dismantled on a policy level, its physical legacy remains, with the consequence that development patterns in the post-reform era have taken place upon foundations and infrastructure laid in the pre-reform era.

In order to facilitate the transformation of the pre-1949 market economy into a soviet-style planned economy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) nationalized all urban institutions and enterprises and reorganized them into administrative work units call *danwei*. Although the different *danwei* performed different functions they were organized in a similar manner. The work-unit compound became a miniature city within its own walls, offering residents spaces of work and for play, for home life and for neighborhood life. Within the gate, orderly rows of residential structures commonly consist of three- to

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five-story brick or cement buildings. Common areas between the buildings serve as bicycle parking lots, children’s play areas, recreation places for volley ball and other sports, and green areas. Other facilities within the walled compound very but ideally include dining halls, provision shops, medical facilities, recreation facilities, meeting rooms, and administrative offices. Thus the work-unit compound provided for their workers was not just the assurance of work but also organized living space, leisure, health-care, food provision, education, entertainment etc.

The central government, under the guidance of Soviet advisors, undertook the transformation of old city into a new administrative and productive center. They issued clear directives to danwei to build new constructions inside the old city. The urban development principle is “to expand from near to far, from inside to outside.” In 1952 the Bureau of National Political Affairs issued a directive stating new constructions must not affect the livelihood of existing citizens. But it is impossible for the demolition of old neighborhoods not to affect ordinary citizens.

With its walled compounds that brought together workers’ residences with their places of work, the danwei recalled the regimented order of ancient Chang’an, which turned away from the street as a public space. In urban administration the old favorite model of Chinese boxes within boxes is thus alive and well. It seems a logical enough system, so long as the intention is to control the daily behavior of urban residents and to maintain an outward appearance of orderly calm.

**Reform period (1978- ):**

Since 1978, the following decades came to be known as the reform period. As China opened its borders to the outside world, and gradually introduced a market economy, life began to change dramatically.

Over the past three decades, some reforms have affected everyday life in Shanghai Old Town. The work unit system, which had held all workers captive in walled compounds, provided for their daily needs was abandoned. Danwei continued as an organizational form, but they were no longer required to assume responsibility for the lives of their workers. As for cities, they would be “opened up” and become more like Kaifeng, leaving the walls of the danwei to crumble from benign neglect. The prominence of the streets would be reclaimed.

Because in Maoist era, most of the danwei are reluctant to spend the money, time and effort to deal with the demolition problem and preferred to build on the periphery of the city, the old neighborhoods were mostly free of demolishment. However in 1992, China government opened the trade of land use rights to profitable real estate venture, thus the Old Town was forced into an increasingly precarious position: firstly, the aging houses of poor quality were commonly regarded by local officials as backward; furthermore, they were occupying land of great potential profit. In the name of solving the poor state of

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existing housing, commercial developers were invited in, essentially to remove the former families and start building more profitable program, like commercial spaces, high-rise office buildings and modern apartment buildings.

It was reasoned that building within the old city would minimize expenditure by utilizing existing infrastructure. However, given that complications around building in the old city led to the widespread dispersion of new construction, the actual demand for new infrastructure proved to be massive. The main streets or avenues were wide expanse of no man’s land devoid of the hustle and bustle of daily activities. Hence, the public function of streets are mostly disappeared.

Existing traditional settlements are fractals in the urban pattern.

**Conclusion:**
Shanghai is not only the center of China’s slow awakening to modernity, but also the most cosmopolitan city in China. Meanwhile, the city didn’t abandon its traditional culture and interior identity wholly. The urban pattern of Shanghai Old Town is a hybrid of China and West, tradition and modernism. Public spaces of various types, functions, forms and scales constitute a flexible and complex system which successfully inspires the public life and urban development of Shanghai Old Town.

In traditional era, the public space is formed by people needs and self-organized activities. The nowadays public space is designed from top to down without regarding citizens’ needs. The role of public space in Old Town: recreation, integration of urban fabrics, draws people back to the old area, and inspires the development of the old town.

In the course of developments, the functions and properties of historic public spaces inevitably change. It is unrealistic to demand the residents of Old Town that they should retain traditional ways of life. Their need for modern ways of life must be respected.

For the future development, the hybrid Old Town needs a complex system of public space with different scales, functions, types.

Traditional Chinese city is much more a complex reticulation of courtyards, gates and axes than an expression of built volumes. The key interest is the capture, division and rationalization of external space. Identity. People have started to wonder whether it is really a good idea to throw all of our history away, and only look forward.

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