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Special Issue Editorial

Social Structures, State Policies, and Negotiation in the Making of Urbanity: East and Southeast Asia in Comparative Historical Perspectives

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I

This special issue of the *Journal of East-Asian Urban History*, East-Asian Society for Urban History includes five articles which spread, in terms of time, from the fourteenth century to the twentieth, and in terms of space, from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia. They cover themes related to social structures, state policies and the negotiation process between the state and society, all in the process of making (and unmaking) of urbanity in the regions. The theoretical rationale behind these articles is grounded in intellectual development of the scholarship of the field “urban history.”

Urban history has generally focussed on the historical development of urbanity in modern “cities” where a high degree of concentration of population exists; various municipal functionaries coordinate with each other for daily operations and long-term development; and their population generates the social dynamics for continuity and survival. Particular focuses have been placed upon the spatial structures of the cities, demographic distribution, architectural styles, and urban planning in modern

history. Crucial to these studies was the impact of the state policy-makers as the masterminds of the development of urbanity, from the top down, affecting people all the way down to the bottom stratum of the social ladder.¹⁾

With the strong influence of Marxist scholarship in postwar East Asia, urban history was not a primary concern to the intellectual world of the time. Although social history was emphasized by historians of the postwar era, the focus had always been on the “classes,” a concept closely linked to income-distribution and power. For that reason, scholars studied more about the “peasants,” “workers,” and the “proletariats” than the “citizens.” Even with the concept of the “citizen,” the only closest concept related to urban history, the scholars’ focus in the postwar years was understood less in spatial terms than to political terms. Therefore, for example, instead of knowing how the people of the *jōkamachi* (castle town) lived in relation to the spatial and architectural structures of the town, the “exploitation” of the *jōnin* (town folk) and “class struggle,” were the focuses of academic discussion.²⁾ In contrast, the conservatives reconstructed history of the city by building their narratives on official documents on the regulations and rules governing the workings of the city.³⁾

Quite contrary to the emphasis on the “class struggle,” several other scholars adopted the economic geographic approach in the study of East Asian urban history in the postwar years. Rhoads Murphy’s classic work on modern Shanghai is a case in point.⁴⁾ Following the traces of the geographer, John E. Orchard, on “Shanghai’s economic position in China,”⁵⁾ Murphy emphasized the city’s economic success through its close economic linkage with the hinterland, especially the Lower Yangzi region.⁶⁾ The city of East Asia, such as Shanghai, therefore, can play a key role in bringing economic modernization to the region. Such an argument was followed by Gilbert Rozman, a sociologist with an interest in history, who neatly provided substantial comparisons between Qing (Ch’ing) China and Tokugawa Japan in terms of the degree of urban development and their relations to the “modernization” of the two countries. Although the “modernization theory” may not be

1) Mumford, Lewis (1966). *The City in History*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.; Lee, Andrew (2015). *The City: A World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2) For example, see Kitajima, Masamoto (北島正元) and Minami, Kazuo (南和男) (1991). *Edo Kyodai Toshikō* (An investigation of the megacity of Edo江戸巨大都市考). Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha朝日新聞社.

3) For example, see Murai, Masuo (村井益男) (1964). *Edojō: Shōgunke no Seikatsu* (Castle Edo: Life of the Shogun’s family江戸城：將軍家の生活). Tokyo東京: Chūō Kōronsha中央公論社.

4) Murphey, Rhoads (1953). *Shanghai: Key to Modern China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

5) Orchard, John E. (January 1936). Shanghai, *The Geographical Review*, .XXVI (1), 1-31.

6) Rhoads Murphey, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

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influential any longer, this economic geographic approach in the study of East Asian urban history has continued to dominate much of the scholarship to the present day.

Meanwhile, another stream of postwar scholarship related to the study of East Asian urban history in the postwar era came from the anthropological perspective. In particular, G. William Skinner, an anthropologist and historian, started in the 1960s to conceptualize the urban history of the Chinese empire by dividing it into six “macro- regions” within which trade was conducted more within the region than across regional boundaries.⁷⁾ He argued that each region possesses its internal market structures composed of “standard market towns,” “intermediate market towns,” “central market towns” and “regional cities,” all the way up to the “regional metropolis” and “central metropolis” along this hierarchy. To understand the “cities,” in the Chinese empire, according to Skinner, one has to understand the different levels of markets and market towns. To understand the markets and market towns, one has to understand the social structures of the Chinese empire. This research paradigm not only brought the individual into the spatial dimension but also put the spatial dimension into historical perspective.⁸⁾ Further, it urged the researchers to think not only at the grand historical level focusing mostly upon the central metropolis, but also on the regional and local levels to understand the structure of society down to its base. Such a paradigm called for the need to conduct fieldwork on the local level, and an establishment of the internal logic of the region in subsequent generations of scholarship.

In this respect, the historical studies on the Japanese castle towns in the post-1970s period marked as a different approach from Skinner. Instead of making broad comparisons and typology, the Japan specialist, James L. McClain, used the case study approach in the late 1970s to explore the history of the Japanese “castle towns,” in his study of Kanazawa.⁹⁾ Despite setting its timeframe in the

7) Skinner, G. William (1964). Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China Part I, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24 (1), 3-43; Skinner, G. William (1965a). Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China Part II, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24 (2), 195-228; Skinner, G. William (1965b). Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China Part III, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24 (3), 363-399; Skinner, G. William, “Urban Development in Imperial China,” “Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-century China,” “Urban and Rural in Chinese Society,” “Cities and the Hierarchy of Local Systems,” and “Urban Social Structure in Ch’ing China,” all in Skinner, G. William (ed.) (1977). *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 3-31, 211-249, 253-273, 275-351, 521-553; also see “Marketing Systems and Regional Economies: Their Structure and Development,” paper prepared for the Symposium on Social and Economic History in China from the Song Dynasty to 1900, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing, 26 Oct.-1 Nov. 1980).

8) Accordingly, two volumes of collective works by various scholars on China’s urban history were published in the 1970s, see Skinner, G. William (ed.) (1977). *Op. cit.*; Elvin, Mark and Skinner, G. William (eds.) (1974). *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

9) McClain, James L. (Summer 1980). Castle Towns and Daimyo Authority: Kanazawa in the Years 1583-1630, *Journal of*

seventeenth century, McClain exhausted the historical materials concerning the castle town to explore its life and people, and the feudal system behind the castle scene. Such an approach was possible because of both the preservation of local historical documents by private as well as public domains. The question that remained was what relevance could a single, in-depth study bring to the scholarly world. McClain later moved on to Osaka and Edo, and even attempted to compare Edo with Paris.¹⁰⁾ McClain was not alone in this field of research. Besides McClain's collaborators, by the 1980s and 1990s, more Japanese historians had ventured into the field of urban history, with different degrees of depth in their studies.

Similar to McClain and his collaborators, another group of China specialists also turned to the country's urban history and produced the anthology, *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*.¹¹⁾ They studied various cases across the Chinese empire, from commercial centres such as Shanghai and Suzhou, to local towns such as Nantong, Taiyuan, and those spread across the Pearl River Delta. Some followed Skinner's framework of local-regional paradigm, others formulated their own research agenda through research based on textual analysis of diaries and novels. This wide range of cases involved different methodologies, sources, and scopes. All of which explored various possibilities which related to the understanding of the meaning of "urbanity" at the "identity" level, and to the issue of "unity and diversity" in the cultural and social construct of "China."¹²⁾ The issue of "identity and perception" itself proved to be a novel perspective in the study of urban history, as it approached the subject of observation from within, exploring even the cultural constructs of the concept of "urbanity."

Japanese Studies, 6 (2), 267-299. McClain, James L. (1982). *Kanazawa: A Seventeenth-Century Japanese Castle Town*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

10) McClain, James L., Merriman, John M. and Ugawa, Kaoru (eds.) (1994). *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; McClain James L. and Wakita Osamu (eds.) (1999). *Osaka, the Merchant's Capital of Early Modern Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

11) Faure, David and Liu, Tao Tao (eds.) (2002). *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave.

12) Liu, Tao Tao and Faure, David (eds.) (1996). *Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

II

However, whether on the Chinese empire as a whole, or the castle town of Kanazawa in particular, the twentieth-century studies in East Asian urban history mostly remained confined to a particular state, whether an empire, a feudal state, or a nation-state. Indeed, the state as a framework cannot be ignored, and its nature must not be taken for granted as static. And yet, the history of the “city” or “urbanity” cannot be confined only to the business of the state. This is particularly true when it comes to the fact that many urban settlements, except perhaps the political capitals and military posts, have been involving in trade and commerce beyond the national or imperial boundaries for centuries. The inter-city linkage became an important element, whether these cities were involved in continental or in maritime trade. With the rise of the motto “globalization” among the world’s political leaders in the 1990s, a new wave of research and publications have also been produced to explore the histories of the world beyond borders. The “cities,” such as “colonial cities,” “port cities,” and “cosmopolitan cities,” have become the focal points of research, particularly in connection with “world trade.”

Such a linkage also went beyond the realm of East Asia. Earlier in the 1980s, Hamashita Takeshi had suggested that the study of China, Japan, Korea, and the Kingdom of Ryukyu can be put into the framework of the “tribute trade system” (of each country respectively) in which all East Asian countries interacted and traded within this framework.¹³⁾ This framework, especially the Chinese “tribute trade system,” also connected with South and Southeast Asian countries which also wanted to profit from the trade with the Chinese empire. Therefore, East Asian cities, such as Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), and Fuzhou could also build historical links with Malacca, Batavia, Naha and Nagasaki. During the nineteenth century, Hong Kong and Singapore emerged as “colonial cities” of the British Empire to connect Northeast Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, other East Asian port-cities, including Shanghai, Kobe, Yokohama and Icheon were also connected

13) Hamashita, Takeshi 濱下武志(1990). *Kindai Chūgoku no Kokusai teki Keiki --- Chōkō Bōeki Shisutemu to Kindai Ajia* (Turning point in International Relations of Modern China --- Tribute Trade System and Modern Asia 近代中國の國際的契機——朝貢貿易システムと近代アジア). Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shukpankai [Tokyo University Press 東京大學出版會]; Hamashita Takeshi (1989). *Chūgoku Kindai Keizaishi Kenkyū --- Shinmatsu Kaikan Zaisei to Kaikōjō Shijōken* (Economic History of Modern China – Maritime Customs Finance and Open Port Market Zones in Late Ch'ing China 中國近代經濟史研究——清末海關財政と開港場市場圈). Tokyo: University of Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture; Hamashita, Takeshi. Tribute and Treaties: Maritime Asia and Treaty Port Networks in the Era of Negotiation, 1800-1900, Arrighi, Giovanni, Hamashita, Takeshi and Selden, Mark (eds.) (2003) *The Resurgence of East Asia: 550, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives*, 17-50. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

with Southeast Asia via the “treaty port system.”¹⁴⁾

Whether it was the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries, these cities engaging with the world trade certainly cannot be studied as singular entities. It was in the background that a new generation of “East Asian urban history” had emerged, which was to expand the scope of investigation to include cities beyond East Asia. Here, the comparative study written by Leonard Blussé on three Asian maritime cities, namely Canton, Batavia, and Nagasaki has been a bold step to make a breakthrough between the limits of the regional “borders.”¹⁵⁾ In fact, these three cities were indeed connected together by trade, especially through the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the eighteenth century. From Batavia, the VOC sent ships to both Canton under the Qing Empire’s tribute trade system, while it traded at Nagasaki under the Tokugawa Shogunate’s “tribute trade system.” Through these connections, these three maritime cities experienced differences: political domination, languages, cultures, and material cultures but shared in common: in trade, shipping, commerce. Besides the ships and goods, these three cities were also connected by mixed marriages, mixed offspring, and those who were bold to experience the exoticism brought by the Dutch to the two other worlds. In a sense, East Asian port cities cannot be understood within the region, as they were not just in the region. The scope of investigation should, therefore, be extended to other regions connected to East Asia.

To execute this attempt to rethink the nature of and to extend the scope of “East Asian” urban history therefore, this special issue contains articles which approached their respective research questions by exploring cases not only within the realm of East Asia but also Southeast Asia. These articles adopt different strategies in research, including comparative study, long-term observations, and textual analysis. They explore three divergent themes in urban history studies as discussed above, namely the social structures, state policies, and the negotiation between the state and society. In doing so, we hope to have achieved the goal of exploring deeper into the idea of an East Asian urbanity from a historical perspective.

14) Besides Hamashita’s works on China, see also Hoare, J. E. (1994). *Japan’s Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements: The Uninvited Guests, 1858-1899*. Folkstone, Kent: Japan Library; Beasley, W. G.. *The Foreign Threat and the Opening of the Ports*, Marius B. Jansen (ed.) (1989). *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century*, 259-307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Ko, Byon Un (高秉雲) (1987). *Kindai Chōsen Sokaishi no Kenkyū* (A study of the history of the leased territories in modern Korea 近代朝鮮租界史の研究). Tokyo東京: Yuzankaku Shouppan雄山閣出版.

15) Blussé, Leonard (2008). *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

III

The following articles approach the issue of East Asian urban history very differently in terms of timeframe, scopes, and research question, and yet, all share some commonality. Through this issue, social structure of each urban settlement under investigation is the central subject of concern, though not explicitly elaborated in most of the cases. Within this structure, social groups interacted in relation to the issue of urbanity. Whether these groups worked in the favor of urbanity or against it, their actions, reactions, non-action, and interactions certainly would play a part in the historical process of development or un-development. In other words, most of the articles do not study a particular individual, focusing on the structuring and interactions of the social groups in a particular society within the context of an urban settlement.

Additionally all articles do not see the issue of urbanity as absolute and permanent. This is not only true for the cases from maritime Southeast Asia, where building materials are largely highly perishable in a relatively short period of time. Even in Northeast Asia where the long cold winter restricted outdoor economic activities for centuries, long-term settlements were equally limited by the scarcity of natural resources to sustain their population. Similarly, architectural styles or water supply arrangements were made and maintained but also altered and destroyed by interactions of the social groups involved. Interestingly, some of these social groups, whether the Bannermen in Manchuria or the samurai class in Japan, were originally set as the target of protection and privilege by the state policy, and ended up becoming the seeds of change in the social structure of urbanity.

Of course, the role of the state has been taken into consideration at varying degrees. Whether it was the colonial state of Hong Kong or the VOC's Batavia, the native Malay state of Johor, the feudal state of Edo or the imperial state of the Manchus, their decision-making certainly played a part in the development (and non-development) of urbanity in the settlements under review. And yet, it was more the unintended consequences of the state policies, or the unforeseeable forces that the states were incapable of resisting or solving, rather than the deliberate policy-making which directed the course of events. In other words, instead of seeing the state as the prime actor in the history of East Asian urbanity, it was the interaction and negotiation process between the state and society that played this role.

We organize the following articles in some degree of chronological order. Therefore, they begin with the history of the Newchwang fortress before the Treaty of Tientsin of 1858, which eventually led to the formation of another port city (as the treaty port) using the fortress's name, "Newchwang," but developed as present-day Yingkou. As reconstructed by Chan, the location of the Newchwang

fortress had a long history of engagement in maritime trade before the ascendancy of the Manchus but it failed to develop into a port city due to the social structure embedded in under the Qing-Manchu Empire. In particular, the Eight Banner System of the Manchus not only helped the building of an empire but also provided privileges to a particular social group, the “bannermen”, who manned the garrison forces in Newchwang and other fortresses in Manchuria. As the bannermen’s privileges were tied up with land, land development eventually silted up the fortress’s coastlines for grain fields in the two hundred years after the Manchus took the fortress. Ironically, the subsequently emerged treaty-port city of Newchwang actually benefited from the expanding grain fields for the well-known bean trade of the region.

If the case of the Newchwang fortress tells the story of non-development of a locale into a populous and prosperous port city in a relatively long period of time, the second article discusses the case of Batu Sawar as the capital of the Kingdom of Johor for a duration of three decades. As Borschberg discovers by studying rare European sources, the capital city flourished with the quantity of the trade that was conducted there, and it disappeared extremely soon after attacks and fire. Its quick rise and decline requires detailed investigation of the relevant historical sources, as Borschberg has carefully and neatly demonstrated, to locate the capital city and to locate it into its economic, social, political, and above all, physical environment. Batu Sawar’s location captured the trade in all directions, which eventually caused the city’s destruction by attracting fearful and strong enemies, including the Portuguese. Here, the whole environment typical of a tropical climate, particularly with the highly perishable and flammable building materials, as Borschberg argues, played the key role in explaining Batu Sawar’s rapid rise and fall. This implies that in the long-term perspective, the same factor must have affected the workings of Southeast Asian cities for centuries.

Indeed, the case of Batu Sawar depicted by Borschberg involves the political side of the story, concerning the ruler of Johor and his political confrontation with external threats, whether they were local, regional or from those far away. In fact even for those far away, their European holdings in Asian waters, political decisions or policies certainly had a bearing upon the future of these locales under European rules. The work of Dhont points to the direction that, by comparing four colonial settlements of the Dutch, the VOC’s policies actually gradually enhanced the importance of Batavia in detriment of others in the course of history. Therefore, all three other cities, Banten, Ambon and Malacca turned into weak or small spots of the VOC’s network in contrast to the ever-building reliance upon Batavia by the company. Malacca, formerly under the Portuguese but taken by the VOC in the seventeenth century, was even given up by the Dutch to the British in the nineteenth century. That choice of reliance upon Batavia, as Dhont argues, was made by the VOC not just for itself but to a considerable degree for the future Indonesia as well.

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Following the focus on building materials of the city and state policies on urban development in Southeast Asia, the article that follows turns to intra-municipal utilities: the water supply arrangements in Northeast Asia. With detailed archival sources, Fujimura has reconstructed the changes in water supply arrangements in the castle towns in Japan during the Edo period. These arrangements required compliance of all the local residents, including the vassal samurai of the daimyo, the senior samurai's vassals and their servants, and the ordinary folks, in the town. To maintain the water supply system of the castle town, each social group had to play a part in the maintenance of the system, and cooperate to avoid misuses or mistreatment of the water sources and flows. Contrast to the case of the Newchwang fortress which remained un-developed for over a century, the water supply arrangements made under the feudal, obligatory rules in early Tokugawa Japan eventually eroded to the extent that, as Fujimura remarked, "the reduction of status differences" happened in the daimyos' castle towns, though not quite in Edo. In a sense, water supply arrangement might not be the only factor of social change in Japan's urban environment, but it certainly was a reflection of the "creation of the modern urban dwellers."

From building materials to water supply arrangements, Borschberg and Fujimura have both shown how material culture set certain framework on the structure of urbanity in both Northeast and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Chan and Dhont also show us the intended and unintended consequences of the state policies directly and indirectly affecting the development of urbanity also in these two regions. What about those cities in between? Faure's investigation of Hong Kong's "verandah," the space of a building above the pedestrians' path and below the balcony but "upon or over Crown land," demonstrates the fact that it was the negotiation between the state and society that at last determined the course of events leading to the implementation of the structure among the buildings of the colonial city. Such a discussion reveals that the state did not have the full "authority" over how the people should use their house space, and neither did the people have the full power to ignore the law of the state. And yet, the phenomenon of negotiation between the state and society on the design of the verandah not only existed in Hong Kong but also in Guangzhou, Singapore, and other cities in South China and Southeast Asia. Therefore, as Faure argues, the dynamics of society and the negotiations between society and the state should be the keys for understanding the urban designs and the implementation of these designs of urban space in East and Southeast Asia.

IV

What are the implications of these articles to our understanding of East Asian urban history? Indeed, to include South East Asian cities into this consideration may just be a start. And although the articles have not brought the comparative perspective to the extent that Blussé did, comparison is still a common strategy of the authors: Newchwang the fortress vs. Newchwang the treaty port, Fukui vs. Edo, Hong Kong vs. Singapore and Guangzhou, Batu Sawar vs. other Malay cities, and so forth. The list can be extended in future publications with the *Journal of East-Asian Urban History* but the key is to make sense of a city by comparison and contrast with others. Nonetheless, such a perspective goes further than just for its own sake. East Asian cities, and cities in other parts of the world, have both their social structures unique to themselves and common features similar to others. Only by critical comparison and contrast can one distinguish uniqueness from things in common.

Meanwhile, these articles demonstrate the variables in places in the making of urbanity, physically and socially, in East and Southeast Asia. In particular, although state policies have been a heavily invested focus in historical investigation, the socio-economic structure as well as material culture and environmental factors all played a part in the process of negotiation between the state and society. What, how, and where to negotiate are therefore the key questions to document this process.

So far, most articles in this special issue belong to the kind of cities which can mostly fit into at least two categories of the following: maritime cities, capital cities, garrison cities, trading cities, and colonial cities. These cities linked up both East and Southeast Asia by trading networks, colonial commands, and military orders. And yet, these cities can only cover the “maritime Asia.” In contrast, the mountains, deserts, plain fields, terrains and hilly lands in “continental Asia” would certainly require further investigation in future, especially with a different depth in understanding of the social structure, culture, and physical life of the “land.” This relationship between the cities and the land, as in contrast to the cities and the sea, should be explored further in future.

In conclusion, the articles in this special issue have covered the timeframe from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century, from Northeast Asia, South China to Southeast Asia, crossing political boundaries in different periods of time to achieve a common ground for the dialogue of the articles. Besides the emphasis upon social structures, state policies, and negotiation process between the state and society, these articles compare and contrast cities versus cities. East Asian urban history can therefore break through the walls of strict economic geographical functions, or urban planning and architectural styles in the historical process of change in the cities. It can understand urbanity through contrasting social groups, settlements, and regions. All in all, East Asian urban history can be

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understood via exploring those connections and structures related to, connected with or overlapped with the cities, the region, and other regions as a whole.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues (including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy) have been completely observed by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interests to declare.

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